



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
(2020-2022) 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*

41ST Sitting

Friday, 4TH February, 2022

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

Assembly convened at 10.24 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair.]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers were laid:

- (1) Value-Added Tax (Amendment of Schedule II) Order 2022 – No. 1 of 2022.
- (2) Excise Tax (Amendment of Schedules) Regulations 2022 – No. 4 of 2022.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read for the first time:

(1) Fiscal Enactments (Amendment) Bill 2022 – No. 2/2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Income Tax Act and the Customs Act.”

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

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2022

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

Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly, an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2022 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 26, 2022, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2022 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2022, of a total sum of five hundred and one billion, six hundred and seventy-eight million, two hundred and ninety-eight thousand dollars (\$501,678,298,000) excluding fifty one

billion, two hundred and fifty-five million, and four hundred and twenty thousand dollars (\$51,255,420,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lump sum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2022 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of eleven billion, seven hundred and twenty-nine million, eight hundred and forty thousand dollars (\$11,729,840,000) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2022.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$126,694,310,000, equivalent to US \$607,646,570.98, to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2022 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now resume the debate on the 2022 Budget presentation by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Our first speaker today is the Hon. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman, you may proceed.

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank my cheerleading friends on the opposite side for the warm welcome. The year 2022 started off and will no doubt be a fantastic year for Guyana, and as a sign as to the trajectory of where we are headed. I first want to take this opportunity to commend my friend and colleague across the aisle, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, and the hard-working staff of the Ministry of Finance, and all the Ministries, for putting together not one, not two, but three Budgets before the conclusion of their second year in Office.

I would say this: Before I use any names in my budget speech, I have solicited the requisite permission, and I have been granted same by the persons of whom I will speak. The country's trajectory into the abyss was paused and halted on a faithful day in December of 2018 by none other than, now, His Excellency Mr. Charrandass Persaud. Had it not been for his actions, I think we would have seen a completely different society in Guyana, one that would have seen us, maybe, not only come to the brink of collapse, but we would have been firmly in the grip of a dictatorship. I think that the nation owes my friend, I would say, a resounding gratitude and a round of applause. I quiver every time I think of where we would have been had it not been for his actions. I remember in 2016, the then Government proposed what is now known as the Cybercrime Bill. I do recall that the Government said that it had a plan for a forward-looking Guyana, a 'Green' Guyana, save for the paint of course.

I think one thing that may paraphrase the trajectory upon which Guyana was headed would be tremendous employment in this country. When I say employment, I think that a lot of Guyanese... I say this as I said earlier, I quiver every time I think of where we were headed. A tremendous number of Guyanese would have been employed in building State penitentiaries and prisons. Why do I say that? Looking at the economic performance of the previous Administration and looking at the legislative agenda that was put forth in that very Cybercrime Bill, one would see that they had injected a phrase to not only silence dissent but also to lock up the people who were dissenting. In that Bill contained a small phrase whereby, if one disagreed with the Government of the day, it was considered sedition. I was the Vice-Chairman of the National Toshias Council (NTC), and my honourable colleague here who was the Minister of Home Affairs came under fire from us at the NTC. Now, imagine if the country was on that trajectory, going downhill into the abyss, and one spoke out and said that we should find a way to correct this Government, then half of this country would have been in jail. When I say I quiver to think of where we would have gone, I do not say that with a light heart. I say that because I understand, and I would have seen the trajectory that we were on.

I want to thank the Hon. Mr. Charles Ramson, at least, for giving me a segue into where we are and, at least, how I go forward. I think I will borrow a part of his speech from yesterday about the old maxim. *He who comes into equity must come with clean hands*. I will tell you that these hands are clean. Whether I wash dishes or I bleach them I will tell you that these hands are clean. Let me

also say that I am not going to regale you with a sonnet or a poem or a fantastic dream of whatever, nor will I sing you a song. I will save that torture of singing for some of my friends who could appreciate and, more so, tolerate my singing.

I think many of my colleagues on both sides speak about the numbers, and I want to ensure that we understand the context of *Budget 2022*. I will use a childhood tale. I did not say that I would not tell you a tale. When I was growing up in our little community of Pakuri, in the 1970's, we never had cars; we only had one tractor. Vehicles used to come far and few in between and we used to go and hide. In fact, we could hear the vehicle about 12 miles before they come in, but, when the vehicle started to get closer to the community, we would all go and hide because we were not sure what their motives and intentions were. Then the vehicles would get into the community, and we would all come out to, at least, see who was there. When the vehicle started to drive, we would chase it. When the vehicle stopped, we would all stand there and watch in aw, gazing. We never knew how to drive. I would tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there is a fantastic thing about evolution. Not only could I drive a car, ride a bike, drive a boat, but I could also fly a plane, and times have most definitely changed. There is also another best friend, man's best friend, they term it, that does the same thing. They chase after a car and when the car stops – they cannot drive it, they will never learn how to drive – they simply stand there and watch it, create a lot of noise around it and then, when it starts to drive, they go the same way again.

I do not want to besmudge the characters of my colleagues on this side, but I would say this much: Akin to that behaviour, not necessarily all of it, was a political party that chased that car for 23 years, and when they were finally given the car, they could not drive it. If there is anything that I said that is not factual, the interesting thing is that the people themselves would have seen that. **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible).]** Hon. Member, I said no such thing. Just to clarify, I am simply contextualising a pattern of behavior.

10.39 a.m.

I sat on my chair and listened to the Hon. Bishop Edghill. I may not be a Theologian like he is nor like any of my colleagues who regularly quote the *Bible*, but I know one thing and I think it is a common phrase which states where the leader or leaders are visionless, the people are lost. I will take corrections if I would have misquoted. There is one thing that is so acutely absent in that

phrase that one never cares to look at or to analyse. What is completely absent from that phrase is what happens when a people have no leader. I will tell you what happen, Mr. Speaker. What happens is what happened at the Budget debate last year in this very House and also repeated in December, 2021, in this very House. It is a listless, rudderless, ... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I would not use that term, my honourable friend. It was a lot less of anything that one would expect from Parliamentarians in this House. I said it before, and I will say it again. As Parliamentarians, we have a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that we stand in the highest repute because the public, at the end of the day, looks at us for guidance. I have with me a copy of the *Hansard* from 2020. One of the things I said in that speech in 2020 was:

“Whether it is the People’s National Congress (PNC) or People’s Progressive Party/Civic in Office, regardless of who sits in the big House, the government at the end of the day is still the government. It is a superstructure that needs urgent recalibration in order to offer meaningful support to the Indigenous peoples and all Guyanese.”

Whether I take credit or not, let us just say I would not, what I will say is that I am happy to know that my words have not gone on unheard; that the Government took that initiative to recalibrate that super structure and plan a delivery for the people as represented in *Budget 2022*. One of the things that people often say, Mr. Speaker... and I cannot really name a single authority on this quote, but I know in Guyanese parlance it is said that *you have to give Jack he jacket*. I cannot say that I am an authority on economics either. I merely took a couple of years course when I did my business diploma. I remember reading about a quasi-Philosopher/Economist named Thomas Malthus, I think it was around 1796. Malthus is known for a variety of things. One of them is the finite growth of population and the strife that humankind will endure to control that population. In one of his papers, I cannot recall the exact name, he also spoke, and this was in the midst of the industrial revolution, about a development of infrastructure to send the working class to work in workhouses.

In today’s society, that is the equivalent of driving massive infrastructural development towards industrialisation, towards a productive sector. Here we are, some more than 200 years after that learned gentleman put together that paper, still struggling to see come to life in Guyana... I said that *we have to give Jack he jacket*, and, at this juncture, I compliment the Government for putting forth a very robust infrastructural development plan for Guyana. I say that because I understand,

and my colleagues understand. I say ‘my colleagues’ even though they sit on this side and they may look at me with, I would say, some apprehension. We all understand that, in order to drive economic development in any country, one needs a strong and vibrant infrastructural plan. Without roads, the largest economy in this world, the United States of America (USA), would not have been that economic superpower. Without infrastructure, one would find many European countries and many developed countries not driving their economies. It is important that we contextualise the Budget and its needs for today’s society and for future growth for what Guyana will be.

Many times, I hear Guyana referred to as the Dubai of South America or that it has the potential. Dubai did not transform overnight nor by the flip of a switch. It required responsible and responsive fiscal management, infrastructural development and planning, human capital and economic plans. All of these things go hand in hand. When people talk about us suffering today... the new Dubai, it did not happen overnight. It takes time. When I look at what it states on this Budget proposal, at least the name, *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*, I look at it, once again, contextually, where we started off. I remembered last year, during the Budget debate, I think the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, had laid the groundwork for pulling the country back from the abyss and levelling it off. Now, we have an opportunity to build upwards.

That, Mr. Speaker, when we say that *we have to give Jack he jacket*, is the direction we have to look. Maybe my colleagues will say I make a terrible Opposition politician. I would not disagree with that. I also remember, during our campaign and politicking prior to 2020, one of the things that I said is that we practice adversarial politics instead of co-operational politics. If we look at what it states, and Mr. Speaker it is just behind you:

“The Cooperative Republic of Guyana”.

It does not say the combative Republic of Guyana. When I stand here, and I am *giving Jack he jacket* it is because Guyana needs all hands-on deck. I cannot say that I came here to build a ‘One Guyana’ or to help this country grow but then I take those very same hands onwards to use to tear the structures down. We have to operate from a position of logic. Also accredited to the Economist Thomas Malthus... Mr. Speaker, I hear some things in this House that ... I think before you could repaint a car, sometimes you have to use acid to strip away the paint. Sometimes that acid burns, but it is necessary, and it is needed because of logic. Malthus also spoke about ... Well, I would

not say he spoke, but there is also a theory about the Malthusian trap, about how human growth, if not managed properly, will outstrip its productive sector. This, in modern day term and context is now known, I guess since we have oil, as the Dutch Disease to a certain extent. Part of his advice of the day was to ensure Governments understood that, if the productive sector cannot function, the population will suffer. When we look, once again, to contextualise *Budget 2022*, it is framed in such a manner to avoid this country slipping into the Malthusian trap of what is now commonly known as the Dutch Disease.

I recall the Hon. Mr. Vickram Bharrat and the Hon. Ms. Manickchand saying what they on that side would look forward to are recommendations. At my inaugural Budget presentation, I quoted an authority on Indigenous issues – Ms. Minnie Degawan. I remember having this conversation with the Hon. Dr. Singh and the Hon. Ms. Manickchand about finding a way to ensure that the cultural and identity loss of Indigenous peoples’ is arrested.

In doing so, I quoted her as saying:

“For Indigenous peoples, languages not only identify their origin or membership in a community, they also carry the ethical values of their ancestors -. The Indigenous knowledge systems that make them one with the land and are crucial to their survival and to the hopes and aspirations of their youth”.

Those are some very touching and, I would say, profound words. At previous discussions, I had engaged the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, and the Hon. Minister of Education. I will say to my two colleagues across the hall that I look forward to furthering that dialogue.

10.54 a.m.

I look forward to finding a way where we can work together to ensure that the cultural and traditional loss of Indigenous peoples do not go unnoticed and that we find a way to address it.

I remember my honourable colleague, the Hon. Bishop Edghill, speaking about infrastructure. What I will say is that I also saw in the *Stabroek News* this morning and it is online... It is a public document, so I hope I do not have to lay it over, Mr. Speaker. It is a public document. I saw that the Linden to Mabura link was rewarded to the Brazilians for construction. Added to that, there

are some other billions allocated to the Mabura/Lethem Road. I do not think that a lot of people appreciate the importance of these structures to these communities that are close to that roadway. I go back to my 2020 speech once again where I said, according to the *Hansard*:

“Indigenous peoples also want access to a global marketplace in accordance with article 14(1)(e) and (f) of the Amerindian Act 2006.”

Once again, I am happy... I will not necessarily take credit for it, but I am happy to know that that critical link in this country is being looked at. It may not be everything that we want, it may not be all that we want, but it is a very critical and important start to giving those communities close to that roadway access to the marketplace.

I also recall the Hon. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai speaking about boats... correction... tractors and implements that were given. Slip of the tongue, not really a fault of the brain, but I remember the five ‘Bs’. I cannot remember them all, but I know boats and bicycles and bracelets or something of the sort. I do not see the opposing minister of boats and bicycles on the other side, but I want to impart that the material support in terms of the tractors, trailers, ploughs and implements are critical to the economies of Indigenous communities. They are critical. We may stand here or sit wherever we do and find ways to disagree with some of these initiatives, but they are critical. When those roads are built, our people have to be empowered. As my colleague would have also stated, one plants in the summer. Right now, it is the summer in those communities. What I would like to do, given this opportunity, is to appeal to all my Indigenous sisters and brothers in those communities to use the equipment given to them in a very responsible and forward-looking manner, that they learn to cultivate now because, when those road accesses come, they will have access to market.

I remember during the debate when we were talking about the integrity of the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). In that debate, I said that, in order to hold the Government accountable, we must conduct ourselves in a responsible manner and with integrity. What I have seen transpired... I am sorry that my colleagues on this side of the House seldom ever heed these words. It may seem like I go to great lengths to disassociate myself from my colleagues on this side. I do that with deliberate intent. I say that because I remember the Hon. Dr. Singh speaking about *ethos*. The *ethos*...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker, you will need an extension to conclude.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: I move that the honourable gentleman be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Opposition Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue and conclude in five minutes.

Mr. Shuman: Thank you, Hon. Opposition Chief Whip. As I said, *you have to give Jack he jacket* and when the jacket is dirty, one has to wear it.

I now go back to the disassociation. At this juncture, they are probably some very well-paid, taxpayers-paid hecklers. I remember in this very House, when we went through the process of evaluating those estimates... This is why one has to draw the line. In this very House, I stood in my seat... That is why I had to move upwards from the Hon. Mr. Devin Sears. It was because a Member of this very House threatened me. Mr. Speaker, that was reported to you, that was reported to the Clerk of the National Assembly, that was reported to the Hon. Chief Whip, to the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs and that was also reported to the police. I still await any degree of action or a report from the police. In that position, instead of sanctioning that individual, the party sought to promote him as Vice-Chairman of the People's National Congress/Reform. That is the extent. [Mr. Mahipaul: That is imputing.] That report was filed whether the Hon. Member wants to understand that.

I stand here and I hear from persons who said that I have failed Indigenous peoples. I remember in the previous Administration there was a Minister of State, which was arguably one of the most powerful positions of that Administration. When I say that portfolio was hallowed out and given to that individual, they laughed, and they scoffed. There was a Vice-President, a Minister within the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, there was a Minister of Public Health who later became a Minister of Social Cohesion – all of them are Indigenous. One of the things that I heard uttered previously is the issue of the Upper Mazaruni land case. Not a single one of those four Ministers thought it fit to bring it to Cabinet or to the House to have that addressed. Once again,

ya got to give Jack he jacket and when the jacket is dirty and one puts dirt on it, one has to wear it with pride.

I want to take my final closing minutes... and I do not want to speak about the numbers because once again, there are the entire 64 other Members who will do that. I want to inform my Indigenous brothers and sisters that, yes, there will be a National Toshaos' Council (NTC) this year. Yes, there is money in the Budget for the construction of the NTC secretariat. I will say that I have had a discussion with the Hon. Attorney General and the Hon. Minister of Labour about examining if Guyana is in a position to ratify International Labour Organisation (ILO) 169. Those are discussions that are happening. We cannot go out in public and fight public battles. If not, what do we achieve? We have to work in the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, not the combative Republic of Guyana. With those remarks, I want to, once again, thank the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, and his hardworking staff, for a Budget that is prepared looking at the future of Guyana. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Members, I now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Hugh Todd, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, to make his contribution.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation [Mr. Todd]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am extremely pleased to join my colleagues on this side of the Assembly to lend my full support to *Budget 2022*. It is my pleasure to also welcome and invite the Hon. Members on the Opposite side of this Assembly, after five long days of debating this landmark and historic budget... **[Ms. Ferguson: Landmark?]** Landmark. ...to give their unwavering support to *Budget 2022*. It is the people's budget. It is a budget that is people-centred and people-driven. This Budget is the largest budget in our nation's post-independent history. It is a culmination of the solid leadership provided by successive People's Progressive Party/Civic Administrations since taking Office in 1992. It is the only party that is pro-people. It is the only party that is consistent in practising democratic rule. It is the only party that is consistent in practising good governance. Most importantly, it is the only party that has consistently transformed the lives of the people of this great nation of ours. The People's Progressive Party/Civic is the only party in Guyana's history that has consistently crafted national budgets, always. It is always putting the people of Guyana first and improving their lives in ways that matter most. The evidence is clear.

In 1992, the People's Progressive Party/Civic inherited an economy that was bankrupt, an economy with broken infrastructure everywhere and, even more disastrous, an economy with extremely low human development. With successive budgets since 1992, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Governments improved and strengthened Guyana's economic health, built and modernised Guyana's infrastructure and, more critically, progressively improved Guyana's human development.

11.09 a.m.

Recent history shows that the People's National Congress (PNC) dominated Coalition is at the opposite end of the spectrum. If you recall the budgets of the Coalition, between 2015 and 2018, all were pro-Congress Place, pro-friends and pro-families; national budgets that were economically extractive, repressive and counter to economic and social development in Guyana. Those were national budgets that were designed to take us back to the dark and scary days of regression of the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. It is very clear that the PNC-dominated Coalition has never and will never craft or design a national budget putting the wellbeing of the hardworking and dedicated citizens of this country first.

The people have spoken at the 2020 polls. The People's Progressive Party/Civic has a solid mandate from the electorate to lead the transformation and the modernisation of this economy. The *Budget 2022* has been meticulously crafted to achieve this. We have had the privilege of hearing the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, during the 36th Sitting of the Twelfth Parliament, outline the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government's Budget for 2022. Thank you, very much. This Budget is an articulation of His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali's commitment to the people of Guyana, providing opportunities for Guyanese to pursue healthy, happy, and prosperous lives. While every People's Progressive Party/Civic budget has responded to the era in which it was presented, this Budget has been crafted at a time when Guyana has been propelled into a leading oil producing nation. This Budget has taken on the needed challenge to transform our economy, responding to the needs of the people and transforming every sector of the economy.

Budget 2022 embraces the 'One Guyana' concept; a concept that has been well articulated by President Irfaan Ali and his response to the needs of each and every single Guyanese. This *Budget*

2022 has been crafted at a time when we could begin to reap huge gains for our people. It is not only responsive to such needs, it is rising to seize the opportunities that this new epoch of Guyana is bringing. This is in sharp contrast to what the PNC-dominated Coalition Regime offered the Guyanese people between 2015 and 2018. It would not be a mischaracterisation to describe their time in Office and their attempts to govern as delusional and despotic. Economic development under the People's National Congress-dominated Administration was filled with delusional ideals and failed promises. Who could forget the green economy? The failed Coalition Government claimed that by 2025 Guyana would be fully green. This was a great delusion of the Granger Administration. In 2015, the Granger Administration inherited the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS); a Strategy that was recognised for its innovative approach to development. That, again, they could have taken and move our developments forward. The only green development they know was to paint our public buildings green. From 2015 to 2020, the PNC-led Coalition Government's green strategy was painting everything and anything.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration is responding to the adverse impact of climate change. Our Administration has issued a consultative document, our expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy. We want all our Guyanese citizens to be part of this effort in saving our planet. In this document, we continue to build on the work of the former President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo; we will be focusing on new economic incentives making our forest worth more standing. Under the Dr. Irfaan Ali Administration, Guyana will be accessing market-based mechanisms for foreign climate services, which includes private as well as international public sector financing. We will continue to align and allow for the development of our country and our people in an environmentally sustainable manner and will continue being a net carbon sink.

How about the 'good life'? The 'good life' was promised and delivered to the Coalition elites, friends and cronies. The working-class Guyanese, including those who voted for the Coalition, did not benefit from the 'good life' promised. The PNC-led Coalition Regime introduced a miserable and bleak life. That is why, in 2020, the people of Guyana returned the People's Progressive Party/Civic to Government.

When the People's Progressive Party/Civic left Office in 2015, we left a legacy of homeownership that the Granger-led Administration could have built on. Unfortunately, this was not something that they were interested in. The PNC has never, in its history, displayed interest in helping the

ordinary Guyanese people. This is fundamental: Homeownership creates housing security, allows our people to build equity, and families to build their net worth – net worth which is intergenerational. What I am saying here is known all over the world. Yet, the hugely incompetent PNC refused to offer basic housing security to Guyanese. Instead of providing housing development, instead of recognising that developing housing allows for the opening up of more and more areas for urbanisation across Guyana, the PNC elites enjoy speaking about an abundance of land, but in reality, are devoid of a creative and developmental vision. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration is the only Party committed to delivering development, betterment and advancement that the people of Guyana deserve.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic returned to Office and fulfilled its promise to the Guyanese people. Our manifesto promise, to build on the past record and continue to provide housing to the Guyanese people, as my Hon. Colleague, the Minister of Housing and Water will speak on, we have succeeded in this task. At the end of 2021, we provided Guyanese all over this country with over 10,000 house lots. In one year, we surpassed the paltry 7,000 house lots which the PNC-led Coalition barely delivered in 2015 and 2020. Unlike the past Administration, that could never think about solutions to issues, this Administration has recognised that our citizens with allocated house lots may have been facing some other challenges. To this end, we are doing more than providing house lots. We have been building homes, for the first time, for low income and middle-income earners. We have been focusing on mortgage rates; negotiating those at the lowest level ever seen. We will be increasing the low-income mortgage loan ceiling from \$12 million to \$15 million. This is how we have been responsive to the housing needs of the Guyanese people.

The PNC-led Coalition at its core, believes in dominancy and control of the entire economy. They treat the ordinary Guyanese person with scorn and contempt. Their time in Office shows that instead of providing the good life, they were providing a stagnant life. Yes, the Coalition was all about overregulation of our freedoms and burdensome taxes. The Coalition never seemed to understand that by extracting taxes from Guyanese, the private sector and citizens as a country, we were being taxed into economic despair. This is exactly why under the Coalition Government the Ministers did not visit communities across this country. They stayed in their posh offices and enjoyed a lavish social life at the expense of the taxpayer. There was absolutely no representation provided to the citizens of Guyana. Since the People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration

assumed Office in 2020, the President and Ministers have been taking Government to the people on a regular and consistent basis. In fact, I have visited Linden, in Region 10, more often in 18 months than the former President Granger and his Cabinet, combined, visited across Guyana between 2015 and 2020. The Coalition abandoned the people of Linden and Region 10. The people of Linden and Region 10 benefit from better living standards and regional developments under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. That is a fact.

I have a list, too long to go through, of my visits to Linden. Hello Malali! Hello Moblissa! Hello Victory Valley, Green Valley, Three Friends, Maria Elizabeth, Old England, Dalliwala, Amelia's Ward, Wisroc and Bamia! And the list goes on and on. One Minister on this side of the House has visited one community in 18 months than the entire past Administration. We have several Ministers on this side of the House visiting communities on a daily and weekly basis. Think about the representation that the people of Guyana deserve. They are getting that under a People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. The *Budget 2022*, like other budgets presented since 1992, is about opening. It is about opening the economy, freeing the people from over-regulation and protecting the most vulnerable. This Budget is about the modernisation of every sector of this economy and allowing for greater prosperity for each and every single Guyanese. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation...[*Interruption*]

11.24 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please. I am trying to hear the Hon. Member. Go ahead Hon. Minister.

Mr. Todd: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation is essential to the President's vision for a 21st Century Guyana. More than \$6 million has been allocated to the foreign Ministry in *Budget 2022*, aiding the continuity and bolstering of the advancement of Guyana's foreign policy initiatives and priorities. We live in a time of unprecedented change. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and migration, are just a few challenges that have impacted both the world and our country in recent years. As a small developing country, our place in the global economy and multilateral clinical order requires strategic action if we are able to capably represent the interests of the Guyanese people.

Budget 2022 will provide adequate financial support for the foreign Ministry in this regard. The Government's foreign policy objectives are very clear: the preservation of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity; advancing bilateral relations; conducting economic diplomacy through the promotion of trade and investment; projecting a positive image of Guyana through sensitisation and awareness of policies and programs being undertaken by the Government in fulfilment of bilateral and multilateral agreements; engaging our diaspora in national development efforts; and maintaining a proactive role in international affairs. We place great value on the unique and impactful role that our nationals around the world could play in our nation's future. As such, we are unwaveringly committed to harnessing, in a structured manner, the skills, expertise and other resources of the Guyanese diaspora. The People's Progressive Party /Civic Government, since assuming office in August, 2020, has dedicated great efforts in re-establishing Guyana's standing and presence as a stable and peaceful nation in the Western Hemisphere and global system. Our Government is committed to protecting and defending our democracy, respecting human rights and the rule of law, and ensuring our international co-operation is clearly represented in fora around the world.

Guyana's bond with our international partners is today stronger than it has ever been before. I recall the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, in her presentation, mentioned that the PNC Government – this is according to her – ‘punched above its weight’ in the international system. For clarity, that is during the period when the PNC Government ruined this economy – the entire economy. This is during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. Permit me to remind the Hon. Member that in their 1990 Budget, the PNC Government spent more money on the so-called ‘punching above their weight’ on education. I have the facts to prove it, Mr. Speaker. In the 1991 and 1992 Budgets, the very PNC Government spent more ‘punching above their weight’ on education and health. They were fat cats. Imagine, they had no national policies that they could have advanced at the international level, and there they were, spending more money on a foreign policy agenda, that was no good, than providing education and healthcare for the people. That is what the Hon. Member was proud about. That is disastrous. That is why the PNC will never, never be good for this country.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic Government's commitment to our foreign policy agenda is driven by a cadre of trained diplomats and qualified staff at headquarters, as well as those stationed

at our embassies, high commissions and consulates abroad. *Budget 2022* will provide valuable support for the implementation of the Ministry's policy guidelines in a systematic manner regarding postings and cross postings.

Hon. Member Ms. Walton-Desir appears to be disinterested in her role at best, or, at worse, unaware of how to effectively carry out her duties as a shadow minister. If the Hon. Member were an effective shadow Minister, she would have been reliably informed that the Foreign Service Officers overwhelmingly support our current human resource management model for professional and human capital development. While we work on enhancing our presence abroad, we are equally committed to building capacity here at home. We will continue, as we did in 2020 and 2021, to build on our team of dedicated staff and provide a range of training opportunities, thus enhancing their skill set in several areas. In this regard, the sum of \$20 million has been budgeted for staffing of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) and training in international trade policy and law, language training, diplomatic training programs and workshops. In addition, an amount of \$2.7 million has been allocated for language training of our diplomatic staff at the missions. This Government will ensure that the Guyanese people are represented by a team that reflects its dynamism.

In addition to expanding our diplomatic footprint, the Ministry will also work towards enhancing capacity in capitals where our presence has already been established. For the postings of staff around the world, we have allocated a total of \$130 million. This also includes the appointments of heads of missions in several capitals where we need to continue to strengthen our presence. The sum of \$3.6 billion is included in the Ministry's 2022 *Budget* for our foreign policy program. Another critical component of the work of the Ministry is the maintenance of Guyana's bilateral relations. This includes not just our closest allies but also expanding our interaction with non-traditional partners.

The sum of \$140 million has been budgeted to enhance our bilateral relations. Of vital importance is the relationship with our frontier states. The Government is committed to seeking closer relations with all its neighbours. Since we returned to Office, our relations with Suriname have improved significantly. In this regard, we have had regular exchanges at the highest levels that have resulted in agreements that further co-operation in a multiplicity of areas, one of these being the bridging of the Corentyne River, which will enhance the movement of our people and provide great opportunities for trade and business. We intend to work towards maintaining the momentum in

our relations with Suriname. It is also our intention to further advance our relations with Brazil. Our commitment to closer relations with our neighbours is aptly demonstrated by the recently concluded bilateral summit involving President Ali and his Surinamese and Brazilian counterparts.

We will not rest in our efforts to preserve our sovereignty and territorial integrity. Following the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the jurisdiction in the case on the Guyana-Venezuelan controversy, we have been putting all of our efforts in preparing to submit our memorial on the merits of our case by 8th March, 2022. Equally, we will continue to be a responsible member of the international community, enhancing our profile at the regional and bilateral levels. In 2021, we will be able to negotiate and conclude a number of bilateral co-operation agreements in areas including education, technical and scientific co-operation, security and defence, petroleum, investment and air services. In the months ahead, the Ministry will continue to propose, negotiate and conclude bilateral agreements that will produce benefits for our country. I believe that the Budget put forward by the Hon. Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance has adequate allocations to ensure that we will carry out all of the Ministry's activities. We have earmarked the sum of \$110 million for the opening of a mission in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and also to have a presence in the joint Caribbean Community (CARICOM) mission in Nairobi, Kenya.

Over the past year, Guyana had been honoured to host several visiting high-ranking government officials, thereby facilitating discussions on important developmental issues. These included an August, 2021 visit by the President of Suriname and a December, 2021 visit by the Vice-President of the Republic of Ghana. In 2022, the Ministry will continue to pursue reciprocal visits between Guyana and its allies. These include high-level visits to the UAE, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Morocco, along with follow-up discussions and exchange visits with Antigua and Barbuda, the Republic of Barbados, Saint Lucia, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Republic of Colombia, to enhance our bilateral relationships.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, to enhance this presentation you will need an extension.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. You have five minutes to continue and conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Todd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2021, the vital nature of strong bilateral partnerships was illustrated by the vast support that was received in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Guyana, through our bilateral co-operation, was able to receive hundreds of thousands of doses of life-saving COVID-19 vaccines, ensuring that we will be able to emerge from this difficult period. In the year ahead, we will continue to co-operate in this regard and in further enhancing our preparedness to face future global health challenges. As I mentioned before, the Ministry will continue to maintain, nurture, and strengthen our traditional partnerships. We see these relations as not only being historical and mutually beneficial over the years, but also practical and aligning with our philosophy that strong bilateral relations are the bedrock of a country's international relations, and we are no exception in this regard. At this time, we remain committed to pursuing and cementing relations with other nations for the benefit of our countries and peoples.

While we are committed to expanding and further enhancing Guyana's bilateral partnerships with critically important partner states, the Government also believes that regional integration, both in the Caribbean and Latin America, must be a vital component of a comprehensive, strategic, foreign policy agenda. The Ministry, over the last year, was keenly focused on strengthening our role in regional organisations. Given that these organisations are composed of our neighbours, we believe that these relationships will be invaluable in addressing a range of issues. These regional blocks provide avenues for debate and collaboration on issues such as health, energy, security, disaster, risk management, agriculture, and food and nutrition security, to name a few. The Caribbean Community, CARICOM, as we know, is among our most important avenues for development of our country. Our commitment to ensuring the successful advancement of this regional community and integration has not waned. The Government will focus on deepening relations with member states of the Caribbean Community.

11.39 a.m.

We will continue in 2022 to give priority to expanding trade, maintaining our commitments to CARICOM, accessing new markets, and ensuring that external trade negotiations rebound to the benefit of the country and the people. Further demonstrating our commitment to Caribbean

integration and CARICOM, we have also allocated a sum of \$150 million for the construction of a new building to be used as the official residence of the CARICOM Secretary-General. The Government renewed Guyana's leadership on agriculture and food security and focused communities' intentions on related maritime transport through His Excellency the President's presentation on, *Advancing the CARICOM Agri-Food Systems Agenda*.

Prioritising regional food and nutrition security: His Excellency the President, in his capacity as Lead Head of Government in the CARICOM Quasi-Cabinet with responsibility for Agriculture, Food Security, and Agricultural Diversification, and the Hon. Minister of Agriculture in his capacity as Chairman of the special Ministerial Taskforce on Food Production and Food Security, are advancing the implementation of the community decisions on improving the region's food and nutrition security. The sum of \$5 million is budgeted for these activities.

In closing, I would like to also mention that this year we will be launching our campaign for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the period 2024–2025. A sufficient allocation of \$5 million was allocated to this initiative. For the preparation for the Government-led stakeholder process regarding the Voluntary National Review, an initial sum of \$3 million is included, also, in our budget in this regard. The Ministry would also continue to support initiatives at the cost of \$3 million towards the implementation of the Government's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). International trade will receive a sum of \$52.7 million. Last but not least, in revitalising our country's strategies for diaspora engagement, \$50 million was allocated towards a range of activities to connect the Government and Guyanese around the world as an illustration of our commitment to fulfilling our promise to serve all Guyanese.

With these few words, Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again thank the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance for his hard work and stewardship in preparing and presenting *Budget 2022*. It is a budget that is for the people. It is a budget that is people-centred, people-focused and people-driven. With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the successful passage of this Budget, *Steadfast Against all Challenges, Resolute in Building our One Guyana*, to this House. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, the Hon. Member, Mr. Hugh Todd. Now, I call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, to make her presentation.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning, I start by saluting and giving thanks to the nurses, doctors, and support staff of every hospital, clinic, and medical institution, who have woken up every morning and have gone out to work to face the challenges of this COVID-19 pandemic. I want to say thank you to our teachers, who have laboured tirelessly and continue to give our children some form of education. I know personally of your struggle as, last August, I found 34 children, in a South Georgetown depressed community, who had no formal education from March, 2020 to September, 2021. There was nothing. These are the poorest of the poor who were not fortunate to attend a private school or one of the better-resourced public schools. These are the forgotten ones, the ones with no devices – no tablets, no computers – and no internet package. Mommy goes to work with the only phone with a data plan. There is no access to online learning. The result – in that group of seven eight-year-olds, I found four of them who could not read in the heart of Georgetown.

There is a huge disparity in the educational fortunes of those who cannot afford to pay for private education, those who attend the very small list of leading public institutions, and those who are condemned for the rest of their lives to menial jobs. This is because their opportunities for a better quality of education and tutorship, particularly at the primary level, were denied to them due to the absence of technology in the schools where they were forced to attend. This disparity has now reached the status of a virtual apartheid in education between the well-resourced and privileged and those who are condemned to attend schools with little or no internet. We all know that there is a direct correlation between access to the internet and the prospects of improved results and better matriculation. That is why the provisions of this Budget for the expansion of the telecommunications sector are critical. Children who have little or no access to the internet will not access educational material and resources which are essential to improving their opportunities to secure better grades. Although the improvement for the Guyana Learning Channel (GLC) is very useful and necessary, I want to say that children watching a blank screen on the learning channel with no one around or at the other end – to say, I am sorry. Did you get that? Let me go over it – puts them at a tremendous disadvantage.

In order to reverse the virtual apartheid in education between the better resourced, the connected, and the ‘haves and the have nots’, a targeted allocation of financial resources to the most disadvantaged and underprivileged sections of our society is required. A marshal plan for the underprivileged schools, teachers’ training facilities, educational research facilities, devices – like laptops, tablets, and connectivity – are critical. All of these cannot be found in sufficient quantities in *Budget 2022*. Whether urban, rural or in the hinterland, the schools without access, or limited access, should be allocated greater resources to afford the children of the underprivileged a chance of real participation in the bounty Guyana has to offer. This will not happen by way of handouts but by affording them the opportunity of being properly qualified at the highest level in order to benefit from the local content framework that has been established.

Some interesting figures have emerged amongst the D grade theatrical performances that we have been drowning in. The last presentation was just a testimony of that. The 11,000 laptops to be provided for approximately 200,000 children and students receiving education, just does not cut it. We are the fastest growing oil-producing nation in the world but the best we can do is 11,000 laptops. Surely now with access to US\$607 million from the oil reserves, every Guyanese child should have been given a laptop.

Mr. Speaker, too often the Hon. Members on the other side of the House forget – also, I want to remind the general public – that prior to 2015, the PPP/C was in power for 23 years. It is ludicrous. In fact, it is sad that they come to this House screaming and shouting about what was not done in five years and have not acknowledged their failures in the previous 23 years that have placed us today in perpetual backwardness.

I am proud of the rich legacy and foundation we have left to facilitate the expansion of Guyana’s digital economy in just four short years. You will recall that in 2015 it was the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition that operationalised the Government’s e-Government fibre-optic network. It was built by the Chinese in 2014 but was never put into operation by the PPP/C Government. It was through the use of this cable that we were able to provide: secure internet access to 116 Government agencies, with state-of-the-art video conferencing facilities; 79 access points; free internet connections to over 250 schools; access to the free internet at 173 community hubs from Orealla to Aranaputa, where the women were able to take online orders for their peanut butter; and to locations in Berbice and Essequibo.

None of the provisions in the Budget, sufficiently, make these things and a proper expansion possible.

We started with the huge advantage of having this infrastructure in place when COVID-19 hit us. It is sad that it has not been, in fact, expanded. In fact, we are heading in the opposite direction, the typical PPP/C *modus operandi*, where Government towers are being used to facilitate the expansion of a private network which, more than likely in a few years, the Government will be buying service from as opposed to developing our own national network. Let me explain, an expanded Government-owned network is how we could provide free internet access to our children, along with those laptops. We could also provide, free of charge, the little MyFi – the portable internet devices – so in all the poor and depressed areas, children would be able to access the internet. What we have seen in this Budget is limited and poor from this, ‘we care’, Government. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we want to hear this contribution from the Hon. Member, please.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would all recall the US\$200 million of taxpayers’ moneys that was stolen by the offspring of the highest representative of the land. There is a fibre-optic cable that has never been seen, and the battalion on the other side has the temerity to talk about clean hands. Of course, the empty vessel, the tiny empty vessel on the other side of the House, with his useless comments about sticky fingers, I say to you, those were some big sticky fingers.

11.54 a.m.

We are not stupid. We recall the massive sticky hands, the laptop scam, the gold scam, the Charity Wharf falling and the Amaila road to nowhere. I have no more time to list the rest. The most unfortunate is this. The Office of the Prime Minister purchases \$790 million in hampers but provided bills for \$213 million in the Report of the Auditor General. Am I lying, because this is the Report of the Auditor General? Talk about sticky fingers.

The National Data Management Authority (NDMA) has moved from a group of highly trained team of qualified Guyanese professionals who started the digitisation of our records in all sorts of registries and places. What did we do? We fired them. Today, they are busy inputting information

for the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) voucher programme. When it comes to the Budget provision, I know that the honourable Prime Minister is an honourable man and I am hoping that he would shed some light on some of these issues. We observed \$2.6 billion in the capital programme for the National Data Management Authority but appendix T shows that the recurrent budget has remained the same from last year. The burning question that must be asked is, how could the NDMA carry out such a huge capital programme with the same recurrent budget as last year, which was less than \$60 million as compared to \$2.6 billion this year? Then, we see a massive increase in recurrent charges in programme 024 – Telecommunications and Innovation – and that has moved from \$76.8 million in 2020 to \$774.3 million in 2022. I hope that this would be explained, Mr. Prime Minister.

We know that from a long time now, the Government likes to spend money under the recurrent expenditure because, of course, their consumable like training programmes, scholarships or whatever. I want to remind this honourable House of the theft of over \$639 million belonging to the Government of Guyana, between October 19th, 2011, and April 28th, 2015, when the moneys from the Ministry of Public Service was not spent by the Ministry, but was sent to the Office of the President and without any accountability those funds were expended. What worries me the most about this Budget is the total lack of a strategic plan. We do not see a philosophy or policy. I may have missed it and I am happy to be informed. What does *Budget 2022* offer as it claims, “*Steadfast Against All Challenges*”, specifically to those eight-year-old boys I told you about and still cannot read.

I want to talk about telecommunications. What is most revealing in *Budget 2022* is the fact of what it does not say; what it does not show; the projects and resources that should be and must be there; and if we are to ensure that every young Guyanese, be it boy or girl regardless of where they live will have a slice of this big, fantastic pie we are convincing ourselves we are baking. The telecommunications liberalisation was brought into being with great fanfare. Here are a couple of facts that I want to share. One would recall that assuming Office in 2015 and with the establishment with of the Ministry of Public Telecommunications in 2016, in a matter of months we brought to this National Assembly the Telecommunications legislation and passed the Telecommunications Act, the first drafts of which emerged in 2001, 2011 in Parliamentary Special Select Committee

and, in a matter of a few months, we brought that legislation to the National Assembly and passed it.

The issue is, what really is liberalisation? I want to say that liberalisation is the creation of an environment that would allow more people to come into the market; improving the volume of service, internet and telecommunications services; competition between these Information Communications Technology (ICT) service providers; most importantly, improving the quality of service; and ensuring a reduction in price. Where is the flood of new participants coming into this sector? Let me take this opportunity as I have done many times to acknowledge the contributions of Guyana Telephone & Telegraph Company Limited (GTT) to the development of our communication landscape and for its continued support to Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, I want to raise a very thorny issue. As you know, an important part of liberalisation is ending the monopoly agreement that GTT and Atlantic Tele-Network, Incorporated (ATNI) which is a United States of America (USA) based company had in place and, as you know, as the lawyers in this room would know, a contract is a legitimate document so, A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government proceeded to enter into negotiations to amicably settle this issue. You cannot have liberalisation and continue with the same thing if GTT and ATNI still have a monopoly. There are a couple important questions that I want to ask. We were near to completing the settlement agreement. I want to ask the most Hon. Prime Minister, was the final settlement agreement concluded between the Government of Guyana and the ATNI? If no, we want to know if ATNI and GTT have withdrawn their claims for compensation and, if they have, what was the settlement date? Where is the agreement posted for transparency and accountably, so that the citizens of this country could be informed? What agreements were made on the large amount of outstanding taxes owed by the company based on Guyana's Revenue Authority (GRA) assessment? Was a cash payment made to the GRA as a settlement of the tax issues, if it was made, where is it? What is the total income accumulated to date in the universal service fund?

We are speaking about figures that range in the vicinity of \$2.5 billion at a minimum and Guyanese must be informed and must know. I have perused *Budgets 2021 and 2022* and there is not one single reference to this issue and I expect some disclose, at some time, from the most Hon. Prime Minister and Member of this House.

I have to admit that I have come to this Parliament today with a very heavy heart and trepidation. I know that we will be recorded as part of history making time in my beloved Guyana but with the annals of Guyana and with all its bounty that we have received, record these moments as the worst of times. I feel it will if we do not do something fast. Let us be honest, what have we done; what have we seen in these budget debates? The vilest and lowest shows that could ever be performed. We have all been drawn into a useless tit for tat; a lot about the APNU, the AFC and the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), what they did, what they did not do, five days of verbal abuse that we call a debate, shouts of the most derogatory statements and insults to women from across this way. What is sad too is that the fake news, the fake information peddled in this House have been at an all-time high and I must correct some of them. Imagine the Minister of Education came to this honourable House ranting and raving that we on this side were not supporting and telling Guyanese to get vaccinated. How unfamiliar is the hon. Member with the truth? Clearly, the Member does not read her own newspaper because if she went to the *Guyana Times* September 27th, 2021, the headline of one of the articles read:

“AFC executive hosts programme encouraging persons to take COVID vaccines.”

Guess what? Three weeks ago, I was very thankful to see almost a full-page report on a discussion from an Alliance on the Move programme with Dr. Somar that has been reproduced in *Guyana Times*. Give credit where it is due; thank you, *Guyana Times*. People do not get carried away with the wagging finger and the shouts. Take what she says not with a grain of salt but with a pound of salt. When she shouts and the Colleagues on the other side of the House shout about conflict of interest, remember this book where we have the design and layout by her friend and former Member of Parliament (MP) Mr. Harry Gill. I hope that the proper procurement procedures were held and took place in this. I hope that the tender was published somewhere. Mr. Speaker, I know that you have had a difficult time but the words “corruption” and “rigging” must be the most overused words that we have heard from this other side of the House. Overused to the extent... [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)]. You need to listen to this part. ...that the poor Vice-President had to host a press conference yesterday afternoon and, what was he saying? Let me quote him, he said, “unfortunately, what we had anticipated which would have been a contest of ideas and vision through all the rhetoric that this does not become very evident to the people what we are hoping to achieve.” His own Members of Parliament in their Budget speeches have not

delivered the message and the poor Vice-President had to host a press conference to rescue the message or the lack of messages. I said “sad” and I do not use my words just like that. This is where the Honourable, Member of Parliament, Ms. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, is absolutely correct. The numbers do not lie. Check the National Communications Network (NCN) page on the livestream of this press conference and there were only 109 persons watching. They were watching at 27 minutes, 59 seconds into the conference. Go to the Vice-President’s page and, thankfully, he had only 870 persons watching.

12.09 p.m.

I want to ask Mr. Duncan, how did you get more than 9,000 persons to watch in the first hour after you were arrested? I want to tell the Vice-President a little secret. This is what you have to say: “share the live, share the live, share the link”. Now, this is sad but true because the honourable empty vessel on the other side of the House, the Hon. Minister, Mr. McCoy, is responsible for public information. The Hon. Member came to this honourable House and told us about the 100 staff he has and we saw in the Budget all the new equipment he will get. Yet, he is not delivering because the people are not watching.

Then, there was a Member on the other side who I had the pleasure of working with in the past. She talked about corruption, that nothing was done in the previous Administration and she talked about the success of tourism. You know that tourism is my little baby and I am happy that Member of Parliament Mr. Rajkumar mentioned and reminded us of that in our short five but productive years that for the first time, Guyana got six international awards – never heard of before. I say thank you to those in the private sector who have been the ones, like the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana (THAG), who have struggled with the product for years and years. They deserve the accolades.

On a serious note, the high visitor arrivals we are experiencing today is the direct result of one single factor: increased airlift. We delivered that to the people of Guyana, two reputable airlines, American Airlines and JetBlue, which have brought competition, quality service and lower prices to the market – never achieved in the 23 years of one knows what. The absolutely staggering number of new airlines that have signed up to come to Guyana since the expansion of the new airport under this new Administration is perhaps an indicative of the success of the Minister of

Tourism, Industry and Commerce, and her ability to attract new business and investment in the airline industry. Guess what, my Friends? We know that the investment in the airline industries and the new airlines that we heard were coming, like Emirates... What have we seen? Zero. Nil. None. Naught. She could even choose in Russia; it is still zero. My Friend's relationship with truth and accuracy is very strained and seeks refuge in the creative imaginings of a pedestrian approach to tourism. Unlike the Barbadian tag line, "beyond your imagination," my Friend may wish to consider the more accurate and descriptive tag line, "simply no imagination".

I want to remind all of us that *you should not throw stones if you live in a glass house*. The Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce was clearly under pressure from the bad behaved Colleagues I have on this side, so I apologise for that. You cannot come to this honourable House, forget you are a United States of America (USA) citizen, get sworn in, remember a few days later, renounce it, come back, get sworn in again, then, lecture us about integrity and honesty. I want to make a simple observation...

Mr. Speaker: Before you make that observation, Hon. Member, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue and conclude in five minutes.

Ms. Hughes: As I was saying, I want to make a simple observation that even Jesus had a Judas. This 'One Guyana' concept that has been touted; I want everybody to know that it is just a simple public relations campaign sold to the highest bidder. If one goes back, because anybody could go online... In fact, the Department of Public Information (DPI) has an Info Hub programme on the Inaugural Guyana International Petroleum Business Summit & Exhibition (GIPEX 2018), if you remember it was the the first oil and gas conference organised by the former Minister, Mr. Raphael Trotman, with over 600 people – you will know that there was a beautiful video played there. It was in 2018. Go back and watch that video which is online and, at the end of it, you will see the One Guyana logo. It is just a matter of who is willing to pay for what. We have to question it.

I want to know if this ‘One Guyana’ concept has replaced the National Motto: *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*, as we are hearing that it is going to be on the \$2,000 bill. That would be a shame. ‘One Guyana’, like the Safe City Project, like the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) access...

Mr. Speaker: We are going to withdraw the word “shame”. We are going to withdraw “shame”.

Ms. Ferguson: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: We are going to get the record. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I said the word “safe”. I think you might have misheard it. Like the ‘One Guyana’ concept, the Safe City Project, the ICT access and eServices for hinterland, poor and remote communities, and the Linden Call Centre project are all projects developed by us in 2016 and 2017. I want to make the point that those projects are good projects and they should be continued. We cannot have a country where when it changes a government, everything must stop.

These debates are testimony of how damaged we all are today, of the precarious state Guyana finds herself in. Is this the best we can do? We are at an all-time low. I recall when this National Assembly had a women’s caucus, we could agree to respectfully disagree, I could snap a photograph of the Honourable Member of Parliament, Ms. Gail Teixeira, waltzing with former MP, Mr. Michael Carrington, at a social that allowed us to better understand where we all came from, our challenges and our resulting positions. It was a time when we realised that over 217,000 votes meant nearly 50% of the voting population. We realised that it meant that consultation, civility and development were necessary, not talking about developing the People’s National Congress (PNC), the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), the Alliance For Change (AFC) or the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), but developing Guyana – a word and concept hardly called and heard in these debates. It was a time when we understood that all sides of this massive divide have a right and privilege to shape a future based on consultation with the all the people of Guyana who we represent. I say that it is my country too; I say that it is our country too.

Mr. Speaker, I recently heard the Speaker of the British Parliament reprimanding an overly exuberant parliamentarian by saying: “Order, order. The people of this great nation deserve to hear these proceedings.” I thought of how sad it is that 90% of what is shouted in this Parliament is

useless noise, insults and inaccuracies. Do the people of this great nation not deserve better? We have all gone *so far up a one-way street*, heading in the wrong direction, that I dare say that the only result this nation will reap is bitterness, strife and who knows what else.

It is my hope that, at the end of this process, some recommendations proposed to enhance this Budget might be taken on board in good faith and what appears to be massive borrowing, growing inflation, and billions of dollars into a failing sugar industry has failed to meet any targets can be addressed with the many questions and concerns answered. I hope too that healing and reconciliation might be proposed so we can build a prosperous Guyana for the benefit of all Her most deserving citizens. *An eye for an eye* has led us to a place of darkness where none of us can now see. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call for the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Mr. Speaker, just before.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister Mr. Nigel Dharamlall, please give me one second. Hon. Minister Manickchand, proceed.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, there was mention of a person in this House in a derogatory manner who is not here to defend himself.

Mr. Speaker: Are you raising on a point of order?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, please, Your Honour.

Mr. Speaker: What is your point of order?

Ms. Manickchand: It is that someone who is not in the House... It would be Standing Order 40 (b), under Elucidation. ... has been mentioned in a way that could bring him into disrepute and he is not here to defend himself. I could defend him in one sentence and I am asking for that opportunity. Mr. Harry Gill was employed by...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I did not say that I was upholding that point of order. I am not. You wanted to give an explanation and, at this stage, I am not. Hon. Member Minister Dharamlall, please.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, you ruled yesterday...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira.

Ms. Teixeira: ...that we could not call people who are not in this House, Sir. You ruled that yesterday.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall, just one second. I do not know if I heard incorrectly. The Hon. Member raised a publication and mentioned who and she asked a question. We could get the transcript, which I am asking for. If it is derogatory, I will allow a Member, Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand. Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall, I am starting your clock at 12.23.06 p.m. Go ahead.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened attentively. There is a fancy word called “caitiff”. I will not say who caitiff is, but I will look in the direction of Ms. Cathy Hughes. The diatribe that was expressed over the last 35 minutes came from someone who proclaims to be an element of the greater society, but all we have listened to is a rogue – a rogue – in our society. That is what we listened to. We have listened to someone who came to the Parliament, prancing around, puffing his/her chest and sounding very sophisticated, but in fact is a pseudo-intellectual. That is what the person is. The person has no place in a moral society, because all of his/her acts, when in Government, was more based on moral perversion.

12.24 p.m.

That is the same person who till to this day, cannot find the fourth Russian, that is the same person who has come here to denigrate public servants. Mr. Harry Gill was a staff at the Ministry of Education, prior 2015, when that document was compiled or produced. They speak glowingly of their track records but that is the same person who gave millions of dollars from her own Ministry to her own private company. That is corruption to the highest order and there is evidence of it. Of

course, they would speak of the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company's (GTT) monopoly, but what they have refused to tell the people is that under Mr. Desmond Hoyte in the People's National Congress, that is when that monopoly was birthed. When the People's Progressive Party/Civic came back in Office, when Dr. Ali came back in Office, that monopoly was broken and two months after we took Office in 2020, liberalisation took place in our country. That is how democracy works. Coming here and speaking as though no one knows what took place during your time, I must say, Ms. Hughes is a caitiff. That is the same person whose family's address was used during the signing of the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) between ExxonMobil and the Government. It is the same person. That is the same person whose Government had a signing bonus of US\$18 million, that on to this day we have no clue where it is. That is the same person in whose party one of its former leader's wife was the witness to that PSA. They speak about corruption in our country just moments after. That is one of the persons who went publicly to say that 33 is not the majority of 65. Those are the sort of people who come here and make all these glib statements but, in fact, they are all – I do not know if this a parliamentary term – crooks in suits.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, please withdraw that. If you have any doubts about a word, do not use it.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Speaker, I was asking if I could have said so, but thank you very much for saying that. I will move forward. Why is it that we have this massive Budget? We are actually very proud of this massive Budget. Do you know why? It is because we went around this country meeting thousands of people. The last record in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, just between the last Budget to the presentation of Dr. Singh, we did over 2,000 meetings across this country. The Minister, Mr. Todd, spoke about himself alone doing more meetings in Region 10 than the entire combined Opposition, except Mr. Shuman, of course. We are here to represent the ambition of the people of this country. We are not here to hold back and deny people of opportunities. More money is going to be spent and more people are going to make money. There will be more money in the pockets of poor people of this country and that is what the APNU/AFC is scared of. Every village in this country will have interventions from *Budget 2022* put together by Dr. Ashni Singh. The 31 Members over there are denying the integrity of these public servants who put this Budget together. When you came here, you never contributed

to it. As a matter of fact, some of you represented that you were not consulted and some of you represented that the Regional Chairman of Region 4 was not consulted. Do you know when we were doing the Budget consultation for our sector where the Chairman of Region 4 was? He was cursing the United States of America's (USA) Ambassador and the USA's Government in Brooklyn, New York. That is where he was. That is why they could not participate because they were somewhere else discussing other people's business. They were not discussing their own business.

As a matter of fact, [inaudible] in 2020 and 2021, in her own village, when the PNC and APNU/AFC could not do a single street, we did three streets in Mocha Arcadia, including – and tell them Ms. Nima-Flue Bess – Burnham Boulevard. They could not even do Burnham Boulevard but we did it. Then they come here but, they are not representing the people of Region 4. This year the budget of Region 4 is the biggest ever even when they were in Government. It is almost a billion dollars more, but do you know what they come here to say that the Regional Chairman does not have \$3 million. That is what they are representing. There are leaders of your party who called me to say that the Chairman of Region 4 was not doing justice to the people of Region 4. They said, Mr. Dharamlall, you focus on working in the villages. The sum of \$3 million that they were fighting for was for a conference that they put together. Do you know who got the catering and the hosting for the conference? It was one of their cronies in the media. That is what they are fighting for, the \$3 million budget of the Regional Chairman of Region 4 rather than supporting the \$1 billion increase we have given to the people of Region 4. The word 'shame' is probably an unparliamentary term, but I think the word 'shameless' is not. That is what the people of the APNU/AFC...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, it is unparliamentary, again. You are going good without trying to use those adjectives.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Speaker, sorry that I used that word. Could I use a synonym? Could I say it is Ms. Annette Ferguson? Could I say Ms. Annette Ferguson, Mr. Speaker? The reason we are at this point is because people trust us. This very amphitheatre is one of the tools where that process of trust-building began. This is also one of the places where people totally lost trust in the APNU/AFC. This here is where the recount was done; this here is where the results were tabulated; and the PPP/C won the elections handsomely. This is where President Ali was also sworn in and

our Attorney General, our Vice-President and, of course, our Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance – as a matter of fact, all of the Members of the Cabinet. This here is the symbol of democracy in our country. I am happy that our Speaker has here as Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, trust is very important but, how could people trust the APNU/AFC when all they did was fibbing for five years? What have they done? How could you be trustworthy when you are not competent? What have they done in five years to prove that they are competent? If they were competent, they would be in Government. I say no more. If they were competent, they would be in Government. If someone is competent, they would not be moving from ministry to ministry like Ms. Annette Ferguson. They would not be hopscotching from ministry to ministry. Do you know why? The former President, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger had no confidence in Ms. Annette Ferguson. How could one be confident in someone who is campaigning in a cemetery? How could you be confident?

There is also this issue of credibility. The mere fact that we are standing here, as a Government and presenting a budget on behalf of the people of this country, shows that people see us as credible leaders. How could one accept the 31 APNU/AFC Members of Parliament as credible leaders? [Mr. Ramson: It is 30 now.] Well, it is 30 now because...As we are on that, Hon. Member Mr. Ramson, this same sanctified body called the Dome of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) is also the place where the Leader of the Opposition of the PNC was driven out. This same place. Do you know why? Here is where the divine things happen and not the sanctimonious things that you do across there and the sanctimonious people who all of you pretend to be. You are all a set of pretentious people – a set of pretentious people. You listen to no one, but you come here and make all sorts of false pronouncements. This old mantra that you have of corruption and discrimination, let us go into your history. It was globally documented that the PNC is a racist party. Since 1973, it has been documented. It was in *WikiLeaks*. The PNC is a racist party and naturally you will have nothing else to say. You cannot go into the villages and speak about development, because you did nothing. You cannot go into the villages and speak about your track record, because you did nothing. Of course, the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, could go to a cemetery in Charity and speak of her track record. That is what Ms. Ferguson did. For the people of Guyana, the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson went to Charity on the Essequibo Coast, spoke at a funeral and asked a dead man to vote for APNU/AFC and forgot his name too. She

turned up to Brother Raymond's funeral and called him Brother James. [**Mr. Ramson:** Brother Raymond.] Yes, Brother Raymond.

I do not understand that 31 rabblers are trying to change the course of this country. No. We are not going to allow it. We will never be bullied again. This is the wrong team you are trying to bully. We are not going to be bullied. Please, let that sink in. We are not going to be bullied. The person who is coming after me is fighting to be the Leader of the Opposition. That person is a Senior Counsel (SC) in this country and is fighting to be the Leader of the Opposition. Guess what? He contested to be the Chairman of the PNC and he got more than 200 votes, while a guy who works at a mortuary, got more than 500 or 400 votes. I went to President's College in the first batch. They like to speak about how it is Mr. Burnham's school. I had the personal satisfaction of meeting Mr. Burnham, but many of them never did. I met him in person. I always remember his posture. The Hon. Prime Minister was sitting in the common room and I think then his Aid-De-Camp (ADC) was Mr. Walton. All I remember Mr. Burnham was platting his feet and he made a sign like this to Mr. Walton.

[The Hon. Member displayed a sign.]

Then, Mr. Walton turned up with a pack, opened it and lit a cigar in front of all of us. We were 11 years old at President's College. He is held in such esteem by some people but look what his party has come to. The Chairman of his party used to work at a mortuary. The Vice-Chairman of Burnham's party, as the regional engineer of Region 5 at the Guyana Water Authority (GWA), built an office that was estimated at \$12 million. When we count it, it was \$72 million and still not yet completed. I cannot say shame again; I have to say Ms. Annette Ferguson again. Look at the...

Mr. Speaker: In spite of what we may think of, you still have to use the word 'honourable'.

12.39 p.m.

Mr. Dharamlall: All right Sir, the honourable Annette Ferguson. To use a phrase from my colleague, Dr. Ashni Singh, which is the high point, peace and resistance of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government in community development, is the construction of a Tennessee in the middle of Georgetown for \$1.6 billion. That is its peace and its resistance. This is what it has to show the people of Georgetown. Do you know what we are

doing? Last year, President Ali decided that he was going to put money in our budget to rebuild the City Hall. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is restoring the City Hall. This year, we are spending an additional \$400 million towards the restoration of City Hall. Then, the Opposition tells us that we are not putting money into the city. Actually, the last Government gave the city \$65 million, and it used \$11 million to buy a vehicle for Mr. Ubraj Narine. **[Mr. Ramson:** What!]

Yes, that is what it used the money for. It did not put it towards restoration and cleaning of Georgetown. As a matter of fact, I have in my office, two documents sent to me by lawyers. The APNU/AFC owe—I would give it to you Mr. Speaker, so you would call the name—Chung's Global Enterprise \$580 million in Georgetown for the clean-up. Do you know what else it did? I do not know if I could also use this word, but there is a vulgar attempt that it has done...

Mr. Speaker: No, one cannot use that word.

Mr. Dharamlall: It politicised the deaths of some people. The Hon. Geeta Chandan, who use to be a Progressive Youth Organisation of Guyana (PYO), then AFC, now People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) creature, Vice-Chairman, General Secretary, then back to the PPP/C. There is always space. We are a very loving party, and we forgive.

The last government owes the family of Crum Ewing, \$40 million and everyday those people badger me about the disservice that the last Government did to them. Those people come to our National Assembly preaching, but as the Barbadian Ambassador John Beale said 'sanctimonious gangsters' and that is who they are. I am terrified that Burnham's party is now run by a Mortician and not by a Senior Counsel (SC). A brilliant man like Burnham, a Senior Counsel in his... Guess what, the man who is now leading his party is probably the most racist person in this country, or he is the most racist person in this country. The Hon. Sherod Duncan told me that Mr. Norton was going to come to the National Assembly yesterday, so I brought a turkey feather, but I did not see him turn up because I wanted to give him my turkey feather. I agree with Mr. Granger, Mr. Norton is a disservice to Burnham, and he should not be the leader of the PNCR. It is so confused. Someone from Golden Grove, the village that I spent five years of my life —and where the Hon. Ferguson has not been there for a long time— said it went there whilst we were having the debates here and Mr. Norton was in Golden Grove sharing flyers. The flyer stated that the PNCR wanted \$125,000 as the minimum wage. Look, brother James is saying the same thing, but guess what,

Mr. Ramjattan from the AFC came here and said \$100,000, but it is no longer the coalition, it is the APNU/AFC collision. That is what it is the collision.

A lot of people would like for me to say that we believe in democracy and in people's choices. We believe that for our country to continue to evolve and for development to come flowingly to our people, we must have Local Government Elections (LGE). We are going to have Local Government elections this year. We have budgeted billions of dollars for Local Government Elections, and we are going to have it this year. However, two days ago, I read in the news online that the APNU/AFC Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) commissioners, have put forward efforts towards stymieing the conduct of Local Government Elections this year. Do you know why it does not want Local Government Elections? It is because it is not sure if it is going to contest as APNU/AFC or PNCR. The PNCR is in a quandary right now and it is threatening the conduct of Local Government Elections. Madam Teixeira will speak more about that. We have budgeted in excess of \$4.1 billion for GECOM and Local Government Elections is on the card for the Government during the course of this year.

I was asked a question on Local Government Elections and I want to make some revelations. One of its leaders, an Exco member of the PNCR, called me and said, we are happy that *yall* did not have elections for Chairman and Vice-Chairman at the end of the year, and is grateful for the directive of the Attorney General. I asked why, and the person said there are some constituencies that it is fearful of losing and so it wants to remain that way for the next few months. It was scared of losing some of its Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDC). Do you know what? Come Local Government Elections, *yall gonna* lose a lot of NDCs and more constituencies. Hear what, it is accustomed because losing became legendary in the APNU/AFC. It lost the no confidence motion. It lost the 2016 Local Government Elections. It lost the 2018 and it lost the 2020. By the way the person who is speaking after me, is supposed to be its legal guru, but every single case on the Constitution—Mr. Speaker, could I ask the Hon. Attorney General, if a person is supposed to be a Constitutional Lawyer, is he/she not supposed to know the Constitution? – the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, lost to the Hon. Attorney General. Also, the former Attorney General, the wise Mr. Basil Williams.

Corruption stalked our land for too long. I could go one by one. One of them stole \$5 million under the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED). Do you know what he

bought? A White Bayerische Motoren Werke AG (BMW) in Linden, not pigs but a BMW. I do not have to repeat, I just hope the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) is listening. Imagine, nearly \$5 million in barber chairs. There is one – I would not call Vincent Henry's name, but the one in Region 9, \$163 million passed through his hands and he bought a ranch. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, it is [*inaudible*] \$163 million. Then, there is my good friend, who has a house lot, and when she started to build the house, she realised that the house is bigger than the land, so she gave herself three more house lots in Eccles. The second biggest building in Eccles belongs to her, after the mall. Then, the person comes here and preach about the bible, but God do not sleep, and I know they know that. Some people think that they are going to come and lie.

Whilst one of them was speaking the other day, he realised that he was running out of things to say, so he started to mash brakes. That person is a billionaire. Five thousand firearm licences at \$1 million is \$5 billion, that is US \$25 million. Do the Hon. Members remember the story of the \$5 million which was transferred to a city bank account in the United States. Do you know what else? It started a security firm and was giving that security firm almost twice as much as -the daily rate as the other security firms. Do you know what else it invested the money in? A private hospital, and I will tell you the name later, but I would not look in Mr. Ramjattan's direction, I would not look. I cannot speak about the [*inaudible*]. I just spoke about her pseudo intellectualism, but the ruckus way that it stole money Do you know why it is scared and upset of this big budget? It is because it cannot get any money to thief.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, reference to thieving, stealing and stolen are all unparliamentary.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Chairman, I withdraw the word thief. The APNU/AFC *tour de force*. *Tour de force* means skill, right brother James. Its pilfering in five years has been legendary. Over a trillion dollars cannot be converted into public development in our country. It spent over \$1.3 trillion [**Mr. Ramson:** \$1.4 trillion] I stand corrected, \$1.4 trillion. What does it have to show for it? These are the 31 persons who come to the National Assembly and try to preach to us about what we must do. There is one of them who would not speak today, but he signed away all ... Do you know the amount of money that he has? Only a few days ago, I was driving up the East Coast of Demerara (ECD) by Golden Grove, and in a few months, a monstrosity just grew out of the ground. He cannot give evidence anymore because he cannot talk, but I would not call name again,

but Members know what I am saying. Every village is going to be in this budget, and you should not be ashamed because, again, that is who you are. Its *tour de force* is pilfering, taking other people's money and converting it to its own use. That is what it has done for five years in our country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, we would need an extension for you. Again, we cannot accuse Hon. Members of pilfering, thieving and those things.

Mr. Dharamlall: There are matters in court.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I still need to get the motion for the extension.

Ms. Ferguson: He is talking nonsense.

Mr. Speaker: That is unparliamentary too. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, if you are going to insist, we are going to have to ask you to leave the Chamber.

12.54 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay.

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude. Maybe, the Hon. Member could say sticky fingers instead of pilfering.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Dharamlall: There are Members of the Opposition who are members of the upper echelon, who are before the court for corruption. Some are also before the court for stealing the elections. There is one who has not yet reach to court but that one converted a bed sheet for its own use and probably gave it to Mr. Mingo to prepare the spreadsheet. Mr. Mingo is before the court as well. A former Minister of Government is before the court for billions of dollars in corruption. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker, because of state capture. It had two *modus operandi* in its pursuit of governance – state capture and client politics. That is the *modus operandi* of the last Government.

We have a lot of work to do in the Local Government and Regional Development sector. In addition to the overseeing responsibilities that we have, we also have over \$71 billion that we have to spend in our villages. We have to clean up our country. Unfortunately, the Mayor of Georgetown

and the Leader of the People's National Congress/Reform do not want us to clean up Guyana. I can report that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Linden came out in support. The people in Perth, Mahaicony are cleaning with us. Every single area of our country we are cleaning and we are going to put more money to transform this country. We are putting \$5 billion to community infrastructure. We are putting \$714 million to provide greater support to our Local Democratic Organs (LDO) all across our country, something that the last Government never did and it speaks about how it was working. By the way, do you know what the staff of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, told me? They have never seen the former Minister in five years. He never even went down to the back of the building in five years. What do you think will happen on the ground? That is why the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change lost. It has no relations with poor people on the ground. I was shocked that the Hon. Member, of course, my Friend, the Hon. Member Roysdale Forde whom I know since the 1990s on the tarmac of the University of Guyana, only got 200 plus votes in this big People's National Congress Reform Party that has 217,000 voters. I was shocked for him. He is not here but I was also very shocked for him and disappointed that a Mortician beat him to the Chairmanship.

We have a lot of work to do. We are going to be converting our villages. We have a lot of investments to make, and thousands of people are going to be employed. As a matter of fact, within our sector alone in the last 18 months, we have had over 7,000 persons employed and this year we are going to employ more people. As the Member of Parliament (MP) responsible for Region 2, I am happy the Hon. Senior in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance did mention that we are going to have some shrewd investments in Region 2, to employ hundreds of young people. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture also has a plethora of investments. The public works that we are going to be doing is not just about spending money, but people are going to get jobs. In the housing development, people are going to get jobs. Hon. Minister Rodrigues, when I was in Port Maurant, my friend Pandit Dinesh Jaiprashad across there, commended our Government, and you specifically for the work that you have done by giving them streetlights and doing roads in his constituency. Then, they come here in the National Assembly, and you know what, they have to bite their tongues.

Finally, before I close, when I listened to the Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes speak, I was wondering... Some of them were saying there is a problem of fish catch in our country. The moment that person

was speaking, and one listened to the noise, one would have thought that all the fishes out of the Atlantic Ocean – the Banga Mary, the Kwakwari and the Catfish –were all over that side. I am very happy to be a part of this process of contributing to the successful passage of *Budget 2022*. The ambition of the people of our country could be finally realised. In 2020, President Ali chartered the course, in 2021 the platform was laid and in 2022 we are launching. We would like all Guyana to be on board with us as we continue to work towards the development and prosperity of our country. I thank you very much and I do look forward to the free passage of this budget. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member, Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Mr. Dharamlall. Hon. Members, this is a good time for us to take the suspension.

[Sitting suspended at 1.00 p.m.]

[Sitting resumed at 2.20 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we resume with the next contributor, during the first session today we had the use of a lot of unparliamentary language. I just want to read about four lines from this document which I circulated at almost every budget debate. It states:

“Unparliamentary expressions”

“Propriety, decency and good taste require that member should not use ironical, derogatory or unbecoming words or expression while speaking. There are certain word and expressions that have been held to be unparliamentary or objectionable or otherwise not in good taste. Some such words are: “black-mailers”, “black marketers”, “goondas”, “bullies”, “cheats”, “monkeys”, “monsters”, “scoundrel”, rouges,...”

I do not want to go on and on. Please, could we follow the example set by the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security earlier in this debate. She seems to have brought back a lot of respect in the House and for the House. With this said, our Hansard Division is still looking at the transcript for the last few minutes of the speech by the Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes. As soon as I get that I will deal with it. There are two issues we are looking at there – ashamed and the type of reference used to a former member of staff of the Ministry of Education. With this Hon.

Members, I now invite the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, Senior Counsel, to make his contribution at 2.23 p.m.

Mr. Forde: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for permitting me this afternoon to make my contribution to this debate. I rise to join the Members, of the National Assembly, on this side of the House in the examination and dissection of the 2022 Estimates of Expenditure.

The last presentation before we broke for lunch was delivered by the Hon. Member, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall. His presentation epitomises the problems of this Government. Like a broken pencil his presentation is without a point. Whilst his presentation was being delivered by the Hon. Member, on social media one Kurt Campbell commented on its content. I will just say four words from it, *'you make me sick'*. The budget presentation by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Singh is a budget that will make this nation sick. The Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall spent some time speaking about credible leaders and credible leadership. The track record of this Government and the track record of that Hon. Member has been one that made parents in the hinterland region children and daughters sick.

The budget presentation, delivered by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance is entitled *"Steadfast against all Challenges, Resolute in Building our One Guyana"*. This budget fails to provide a blueprint for a better Guyana, an equitable distribution of the resources and is short on substance. The budget unashamedly skews the opportunity to few and increases the burden on many. The citizens have witnessed and experienced a rapid deterioration of the social and economic conditions over the last year. Propelling or significantly worsening the economic and social decay of the country, has been the inept, abysmal handling of the worse public health crisis our country has experienced in a century. The evidence of the incompetence and the degree of risk that the People's Progressive Party/Civic constitutes in relation to the welfare and well-being of the Guyanese people, could be gleaned from the dreadful reports of poor care of Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) patients at medical institutions, the acquisition of vaccines not approved by the World Health Organization (WHO), the alarming spread of the virus throughout the country, the lax enforcement of Covid-19 guidelines, and most of all the staggering number of deaths, the pain and loss, grief and broken families left in its way. Whilst the Guyanese people were left to meander this dreadful existence, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Party and my friends on the other side feted and exhaled in Dubai.

The mismanagement of the Covid-19 crisis affected the educational sector. Over 1,000 pupils according to the Ministry of Education, dropped out of school by August, 2021. The cost of living, according to the Bureau of Statistics, has increased by 14 % for the first seven months of 2021. The Bureau of Statistics have also informed that general living costs increased by 5.4 %. This increase in food prices has affected poverty levels, household income and children's schooling. This has increased the burden on the family, particularly many single parent families led by women. Women and children are therefore disproportionately affected by the high cost of living.

These are the challenges that the Guyanese people face. These are the challenges that the Guyanese people will face after this budget. There are no solutions to these challenges in this budget. Like the previous budgets presented by the Senior Minister in this 12th Parliament, this budget goes further in ensuring, guaranteeing and cementing the building of One Guyana of the haves and One Guyana of the have nots. Perhaps, the single, most pervasive and devastating hardship which has been imposed on the Guyanese people since the installation of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, has been the backward, offensive, harsh and cruel economic policies, and the consequences of such policies. The consequences of the incompetent policies of the People's Progressive Party/Civic and the refusal to adopt the Village Renewal Programme as proposed by the Guyana Trade Union Congress (GTUC), will be the inability of the population in the villages and rural areas to cope with the ever-increasing high cost of living, rising inflation rising unemployment levels, hunger and social ills, increased use of alcohol, drugs, more crime and suicide, unstable families and the vulnerabilities of the aged women and children.

2.28 p.m.

The Guyana Trade Union Congress recommended to this Regime that \$25 million be set aside for 70 villages, for job creation, poultry rearing, cash crops, cattle rearing, computer training, dress making and similar activities. This would have cost about one-third of one *per cent* of the budget. We in the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) support this call and as a Government, we would have made this disbursement to the benefit of the people of Guyana. The Government is oppressive, heartless and insensitive. The reality is that the Guyanese people are punishing. The People's Progressive Party/Civic and Mr. Irfaan Ali are cruel and insensitive.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will have to withdraw that comment about His Excellency, the President.

Mr. Forde: [*Inaudible*]. Let us examine what was the real income of the Guyanese Labour Force in 2021. The nominal monthly income can be gleaned from the Guyanese Labour Force Survey which is published quarterly by the Bureau of Statistics. At the end of the second quarter of 2021, the salaried workers whether public or private sector received around \$94,810 monthly and that of the self-employed was reported as \$71,681. The pre-budget figures were adjusted for the seven *per cent* increase of the last quarter of 2021 which would be for salaried workers in the public sector, raising it to \$101,446.70. The Government gave a seven *per cent* increase to the salaried public servants, but the net effect was a five *per cent* increase in disposable income after National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions and taxes. This increase was applied to all incomes on the assumption that the Government and the private sector pay the same wages. I am being generous because the private sector wages are not necessarily better than the public sector wages. Before the 2022 budget, the salaried workers had about \$1,168 per month to live on after buying food and paying to keep a roof over their heads. For a household of four, that meant that each person had a real income of \$9.73 or US\$0.05 to live on each day. The circumstances of the self-employed were more desperate for they did not even have enough money to buy food or keep a roof over their heads.

The 2022 budget has changed nothing. The increase in the tax exemption rates to \$75,000 per month in the 2022 budget has resulted in a monthly disposable income of \$90,574 for the salaried worker. It does not change for the self-employed. This meant that salaried workers got an increase in real income of \$2,617. This translates into \$21.29 or about US\$0.06 cents per day for each member of a family of four. The net change from the pre-budget income is \$10. The sum of \$10 or US\$0.02 per day. Again, the self-employed is left in a horrible position. This is therefore nothing more than a \$10 budget or a US\$0.02 budget. This is nothing more than a US\$0.02 budget for a household of four. This economy is not working for the ordinary people of Guyana.

Despite the Regime's effort to place its hand on the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) and to spend moneys from the Natural Resource Fund without identifying its specific purpose, it is clear that it is not meant to improve the lives of the Guyanese people. It is also manifest that it is not being spent to reduce poverty. In a budget of \$556 billion, of which \$126 billion came from the Natural

Resource Fund. All the average family received is a \$10 coin which is equivalent US\$0.02 per day. Is this the family that is now in possession of this \$10 coin that can buy a car to drive on the highways, to which this budget alludes? Is it this family that is now in possession of a \$10 coin that must benefit from the \$15 million mortgage arrangement that this budget alludes? These families, with the extra \$10, are left behind and left out. These families are unable to comfortably pay basic bills and purchase basic food items. They are unable to live a basic lifestyle. They are unable to provide basic amenities for their children. They are unable to save for the future. This budget leaves these families to stand steadfastly alone against these challenges. These families are left to fend for themselves. This budget is wholly anti-family. This budget has given nothing to the small man. Nothing to survive on. Nothing to live on. Nothing to hope for.

I spoke earlier of how disconnected these people are from reality. I have had occasion to draw to this House's attention in paragraph 6.7 of the budget speech, the Minister stated, and I quote:

“...we gave a commitment to reverse the punitive taxes that were implemented by the APNU/AFC once we return to office. One such tax that was implemented was a 2 percent withholding tax on resident contractors.”

Even though he used the word implemented, this would potentially convey the impression by this statement that the tax was the creation of the APNU/AFC. I want the people of this country to know that this issue came into being in 1996. To emphasise their intentions, the PPP/C updated it in 2003. It is also behaving as if the also onerous value-added tax (VAT) was the creation of the APNU/AFC. The PPP/C created the 16% VAT, the APNU/AFC reduced it to 14%. Let me make it clear that we of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change will remove the personal income tax all together. We want the Guyanese people to be in control of their lives and not the Government. The proper way one can invest and take care of one's family in the context of this country today is by the removal of the personal income tax. The proper way to control inflation is to remove the personal income tax to allow the Guyanese people to invest and produce more goods and services for this country.

Last year, the Guyana Trade Union Congress specifically requested that careful attention be paid to the National Insurance Scheme. This year it repeated that request. Again, no attention has been paid to the National Insurance Scheme. The Regime has failed to invest in the National Insurance

Scheme over the years it had previously been in Office. As a matter of priority, the moneys in the Natural Resource Fund should have been allocated to a truly national institution, the National Insurance Scheme. The Senior Minister was a Chairman of the Co-operate Finance Administration which had to approve investments made by the National Insurance Scheme and did improve those investments, investments of over \$6 billion in the Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO). The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance was the Minister of Finance who had responsibility for the National Insurance Scheme and he allowed funds of the National Insurance Scheme to be plundered. The investment failed. Leaving beneficiaries of the National Insurance Scheme suffering terribly.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are now imputing that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance who presented this budget allowed the plundering of the National Insurance Scheme. I will not allow that.

Mr. Forde: He presided over it, Mr. Speaker. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance should consider it his moral and legal responsibility to ensure that the National Insurance Scheme receives the necessary and required funds from the Natural Resource Fund which would guarantee the long-term viability of the National Insurance Scheme. The National Insurance Scheme is critical to the long-term welfare of the Guyanese people. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance himself, at paragraph 4.216 of the budget speech stated, and I quote:

“...the Scheme faces serious challenges regarding its long-term viability.”

This budget is styled ‘Steadfast Against All Challenges’ but the budget has provided absolutely no solution to this challenge. We of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change understand that among the challenges facing the Guyanese people and the working people of Guyana, is the weakened National Insurance Scheme as weakened and plundered by this Government. Under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change, the funds in the Natural Resource Fund would have been used to eliminate the deficiencies in the Scheme, to strengthen the Scheme and to provide improved benefits for the Guyanese people. The strengthening of the NIS by our Party would have represented a continuation of our commitment to the working people of Guyana as evidenced by our signing, in September 2016, of a debenture

of over \$5.6 billion to repay the National Insurance Scheme for the losses suffered in 2009, under the PPP/C when the Colonial Life Insurance Company collapsed. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, at paragraph 4.214 of the budget speech stated that:

“...at the end of 2020...”

The Regime...

“...mandated the Board to address the longstanding administrative problems.”

And that...

“Much has been achieved since then.”

What has been achieved since then is the continuation of the plunder of the Scheme. What has been achieved since then has been the allocation of resources to mothers and families of Members of the PPP/C’s sitting Government who would have been entitled and receiving moneys for which they do not have the necessary contributions.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, am I hearing you correctly that people are getting contributions that they are not qualified for?

Mr. Forde: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: Could you kindly produce the evidence for me?

Mr. Forde: Mr. Speaker, I undertake, by Monday morning the latest, to produce the documentation which would indicate that \$1.5 million, almost \$2 million, have been paid to the mother of a Member of the Government. She did not have the necessary contributions. The NIS Board met and decided – illegally in my view – to still make that payment. I will produce it.

Mr. Speaker: Again, illegally in your view, and now the action of the board who cannot represent themselves here is called into question. On Monday you will kindly present that reference for me.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Speaker, the statement that the governance architecture of the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance's Regime is, as stated in paragraph 4.199 of the budget speech:

“...is based firmly on inclusivity, participation, transparency and accountability, and the rule of law...”

This is a glaring example of the fundamental diversion from reality and truth. Since the installation of the People's Progressive Party/Civic on 2nd August, 2020, Guyana has descended into a state of disarray. Guyana is currently an undemocratic, oppressive, petrol republic. While the Regime has, clearly for propaganda purposes, dubbed and referred to this country as the Dubai of the Caribbean, it has publicly embraced Kazakhstan as the model of governance. This budget is designed to replicate the Kazakhstan model. Like in Kazakhstan, the People's Progressive Party/Civic's governance and economic policies have seen accelerated inflation, poor access to public services, a small wealthy elite, income inequality and economic hardships. The Guyanese people are under attack by a series of labour violations which are aimed at the working people – who have been perceived to be supporters of the Opposition – and trade unions that represent these workers. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance Regime has a sordid track record of failing to engage in consultations and in rejecting inclusivity and accountability. Whilst the failure to consult is a characteristic of this Regime, this budget is seminal. It is seminal in its signification of a lack of consultation both in its process and its content. I say this because this budget is being financed by funds in the Natural Resource Fund. The Natural Resource Fund has been raided and looted by this Regime as a result of a bill...

Mr. Speaker: I cannot allow the words raided and looted. They are unparliamentary.

2.43 p.m.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Speaker, the Natural Resource Fund has been pillaged. The Funds have been acquired, depleted and taken under acquisition by a process that is unacceptable, as a result of the Bill, purportedly passed, with virtually no notice and no consultation. The Regime has refused to meet with the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) as required by the extant Collective Labour Agreement between the Union and the Government. This Regime has refused to grant liveable wages and salaries for the public service and attendant agencies and organisations. They refused

to engage in consultations with the Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU). They refused to grant liveable wages for the teachers and allowances for additional qualifications for teachers. They refused to constitute the Police Service Commission, Public Service Commission, Judicial Service Commission and the Teaching Service Commission. The life of the Teaching Service Commission has expired in February, 2021. The consequence of this is that no teacher can be promoted, and the legitimate expectations of promotions are dashed.

After the most recent industrial action undertaken by teachers in response to the oppressive Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) guidelines imposed by the Regime, the Regime unilaterally withdrew from a provision in the Collective Labour Agreement, which established a committee comprising of representatives from the Guyana Teachers' Union and the Ministry of Education to identify suitable teachers to be recipients of scholarships and duty-free concessions. This Regime has promoted and encouraged the partisan functioning of the Trade Union's Recognition and Certification Board. In respect to the Trade Union's Recognition and Certification Board, the Regime has supported an illegal election and the subsequent issuance of a certificate of recognition from the Union of Agricultural Allied Workers to the Regime associated with the Guyana Agricultural and Workers' Union. They have terminated the recognition agreement between Cyril's Transportation Service and the Guyana Bauxite and General Workers Union.

This Regime refuses to cause the Minister of Labour, *cococo Joe*, to bring the bauxite company and the Guyana Bauxite and General Workers Union together to address the issue of the incorrect calculation of workers' termination payments. The rule of law is itself under attack by the Regime. One of the major features of any People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) party governance in this country has always been extra-judicial killings. Whilst the President, in September last year, denied that extra-judicial killings had ever taken place under any PPP/C...

Mr. Speaker: I will cut you again there with references to His Excellency the President.

Mr. Forde: Whilst the President, the former Minister of Housing and Water, in September last year, would have denied that extra-judicial killings had ever occurred under a PPP/C Regime, the facts are well known, well documented and point to the contrary. Between August, 2020 and the present time, the following persons were extra-judicially killed; Mr. Sherwin Filley – 29th January, 2021; Mr. Peter Headley – 11th May, 2021; and Mr. Orin Boston – 15th September, 2021. The very

act of extra-judicial killings would be contrary to the Constitution of Guyana, its spirit and ethos. Article 197(A) (4) of the Constitution states:

“The Police Force establish under the Police Act shall function in accordance with the law as the law enforcement agency of the State responding to the daily need to maintain law and order by suppressing crime to ensure that citizens are safe in their homes, the streets and in other places.”

Rather than the Guyana Police Force protecting Mr. Orin Boston safely in his house, the Guyana Police Force, by its officers, shot and killed him in his home ...

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Mr. Speaker, the Member is speaking of a matter that is *sub judice*. The matter is in court. There are proceedings filed in relation to ... [Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Senior Counsel, the observation made by the Hon. Attorney General to me is in order. The matter is in the court, and I urge that you not pronounce on it at this time.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Speaker, the objection by the Attorney General is without merit. I bow to the ruling of the court, I bow to the ruling of the Speaker, but I wish to say that the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has charged for manslaughter...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Senior Counsel and I bow to you; a charge is not a conviction. If you say ...

Mr. Forde: Mr. Speaker, I did not say that anyone was convicted. I said that a policeman shot Mr. Boston. The DPP has done the same [inaudible].

Mr. Speaker: Please, let us stay away from the case in court. Thank you.

Mr. Forde: Rather than the Guyana Police Force protecting Mr. Orin Boston safely in his home, he was shot in his home, on his bed, next to his wife. Without explanation, months rolled by without a word from the Guyana Police Force. Maybe the Hon. Attorney General wishes to object to that also. The eventual institution of a charge of manslaughter against the policeman, who allegedly would have shot and killed this man, is not only an insult to the Boston family, but it is

a national embarrassment and disgrace. What they want me not to say is what I have to say – that we have returned to the dark days under the PPP/Civic Regime. Guyanese under the PPP/Civic Government have experienced not only the return of execution-style killings, but the rise of execution-style killings. This evidence is the collapse of law and order and the rule of law.

Between the 2nd August, 2020, to the 1st September, 2021, 12 persons were killed in execution-style killings. Still unresolved to the satisfaction of the Guyanese people, and to the satisfaction of the families, are the gruesome killings of the Henry boys and Haresh Singh. Despite the statements by the head of that Administration sitting in front of us that he will leave no stone unturned to find the killers or bring them to justice, to date this has not effectively happened to the satisfaction of all concerned. The Regime's utter disregard for the Constitution is manifested in its strident refusal to engage in the necessary consultations to ensure the confirmation of the Chancellor and Chief Justice of the Judiciary of Guyana. Despite calls from judges of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), including its President, the Regime refused to consult on the ground that it must be recognised. They said that they need to be recognised, but the international community has begun to recognise and realise that this is the same dictatorial bunch from times past. Any consideration, and I say this clearly, on the Constitution of the Judicial Service Commission must commence with consultations, which lead to the confirmation of the Chancellor and the Chief Justice. They say that they have the highest respect for the constitutional independence of the judiciary. This was in the Budget Speech of the distinguished Senior Minister.

The Regime has sought to undermine the constitutional independence of the judiciary by seeking to control their financial independence and autonomy. By Article 198 of the Constitution, both the Chancellor and the Chief Justice are members of the Judicial Service Commission with the Chancellor being the Chairman. The Regime's assault on the constitutional agencies and bodies, whether by seeking to demolish their financial independence as guaranteed by the Constitution on one hand or on the other hand to stultify the work of the commissions, particularly in the case of the Police Service Commission, was stoutly rebuffed by courts in judgments delivered by the courts. These attacks on the constitutional agencies represented serious attacks on the rule of law. I am happy to see that the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, has returned to the House. But I recall him voting, according to the *Hansard*, in support of the Fiscal Management and Accountability

(Amendment) Act of 2021, that is because they were trounced in court by yours truly. Thank you, very much.

It certainly appears that the case to be, that the removal of the Police Service Commission, the increased political interventions by the Regime and the maintenance of an acting and not confirmed Commissioner of Police, is to promote the use of the Police Force as an instrument of oppression against the Guyanese people. We call for the immediate confirmation of a commissioner of police. The High Court has ruled that the efforts to subjugate the Supreme Court, the judiciary and other constitutional agencies to the People's Progressive Party/Civic, by taking away their constitutionally guaranteed independence, was unconstitutional.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. We will need an extension for you to continue.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you can continue and conclude.

Mr. Forde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Ali Government, the current Government, seems incapable of operating and executing the criminal justice sector reform programme. Under the criminal justice sector reform programme, the guidelines, rules, and procedures for the implementation of a programme of restorative justice had already been developed. The Restorative Justice Bill of 2019 drafted by our side has been laid in this National Assembly.

For two years, the Hon. Attorney General has done nothing – squat, zero, zilch – to implement the system of restorative justice. The Attorney General is doing his best to ensure that the benefits of the Restorative Justice Programme are denied to the Guyanese people; benefits that will see defendants and victims being protected from bureaucratic oppression and insensitivity, to ensure that defendants and victims are heard, and both are treated fairly. I urge the Attorney General to cease providing to his Government unconstitutional advice, cease to avoid being embarrassed in court and to focus on implementing the projects for which billions of dollars are assigned to his Ministry and nothing is done. The country would be better off if we have less Tuesday nights activities and more work at the Ministry.

The budget speeches by the Senior Minister, year after year, offer nothing insightful on the Regime's plans for the justice sector reform. The result is that billions of dollars are being spent purportedly on the justice sector reform and there is no result, and this is indicative of the lack of imagination or incompetence on the part of the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs. The courts continue to be overwhelmed and incapable of addressing the mentally ill. Year after year, the Attorney General has abdicated his responsibility to introduce appropriate legislation supported by the necessary mechanisms to address this issue. We, of the APNU/AFC will ensure that mental health courts are established.

The Budget Speech fails to offer any solution to deal with the low levels of public confidence in the legal system. There has been no system or plan in place, revealed by the Senior Minister to address any structured public access to legal information and legal access to civil and criminal representation. [**Mr. Nandlall:** *Bai shut yuh mouth.*] I will shut my mouth if you would never ever ask me for my notes from law school again, so that you could be educated today. You are an ingrate. In last year's Budget Speech, the Senior Minister stated that \$1.2 billion was made available for courts at Port Kaituma, Mabaruma and Vigilance. One year later, these courts are yet to be completed.

2.58 p.m.

There is no evidence that economic freedom is being allowed to take hold in this country. What we see are attempts to keep Guyanese locked in a pattern of economic dependency, discrimination, and marginalisation. Many local investors are being harassed and prevented from enjoying unbiased services from the Government. The country is at a difficult and problematic place. The resources of this country can indeed be used for economic and social transformation. The small man in the towns, in the hinterlands, in the villages are simply left to defend themselves. The greatest challenges to the economic and social transformation of this country lie in the Regime's reluctance to embrace a culture of inclusivity and consultation and in the commitment to trickledown economics that support income inequality and poverty.

In conclusion, as Francis Bacon said in *Novum Organum*;

“It would be an unsound fancy and self-contradictory to expect that things which have never yet been done can be done except by means which have never yet been tried.”

This Budget is anti-family. It is giving the small man nothing, nothing to survive on, nothing to live on, nothing to hope for. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Minister of Housing [Mr. Croal]: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in support of *Budget 2022* crafted under the theme, *Steadfast Against all Challenges, Resolute in Building our One Guyana*. The *Budget 2022* was presented by one of the best minds in Guyana - Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and articulates the vision of the PPP/C Government and President Irfaan Ali for all of the people of Guyana. It includes tangible measures for the poor, the elderly, students and the future for among others and sets out a clear path as to the legacy that we are creating and the steps to a future that is bright for every one of us.

Before I continue, I want to comment on the previous speaker from the other side, not the last one, the previous one – the Hon. Catherine Hughes – who referred to our Member on this side, the Hon. Oneidge Walrond, as ‘judas’. Her attack on the integrity of a distinguished Member who served the Bar, a Member who has returned to this country to serve our country, a Member who has renounced her citizenship to serve this country, we must respect and ask for an apology.

Ms. Hughes: Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Croal: The fact remains, the Hon. Member submitted her document...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Hughes, you have the floor.

Ms. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order, Standing Order 40 (b), I never called any particular person a ‘judas’. I would like the Parliament to review that *Hansard* and clarify that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we will. Hon. Minister, please continue.

Mr. Croal: The previous Member referred to disregard for the Constitution. May I remind the Hon. Roysdale Forde who appointed the former Elections Commission’s (GECOM’s) Chairman, a very fit and proper Justice Patterson, breaching the Constitution; who ignored the Constitution, squatting in Government; who refused to abide by the no-confidence motion; who, after rounding up and checking which bottle is larger and which is smaller, could not determine that 33 was all that was required to be a majority in 65, and comes here to speak about breach of the Constitution?

Budget 2022 will allow the Ministry of Housing and Water to provide more house lots and more houses to more citizens who are waiting to build their own homes. The banks will, for the very first time, offer the lowest mortgage interest rates in the history of the country, and potable water will become accessible to more communities for the first-time, including hinterland communities. Sadly, the aspirations of *Budget 2022* are getting muddled because the Members on the other side continue to come to this House unprepared, ill-informed, making wild accusations of corruption, and, quite frankly, seem disconnected from the realities that are confronting this country. Realities that they do not have the knowledge, expertise or experience to confront. Imagine the Hon. Ms. Ferguson came to this House and said that housing is a major issue in our country. I agree. Housing is indeed a challenge that is confronting us. Yet, under the stewardship of her Government, this sector had no clear structure or focus. Yesterday, the Hon. Member said that the housing and water sector is dear to her heart. Indeed, it is probably dear to her heart. This is because when we took over, we found no documents in the computer system. We found no reports in the office, even the Christmas tree that was purchased for the Minister's office could not be found.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, you have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand on Standing Order 40 (b). The Hon. Member is accusing me of stealing a Christmas tree. I would like for him to ensure that an investigation is done.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, he never accused you.

Ms. Ferguson: That is what he is trying to do.

Mr. Speaker: Continue Hon. Minister.

Mr. Croal: If the cap fits you, pull the string. The housing sector was starved of funds, actual investments, which included budgetary allocations. The housing fund and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) loan funds, over the five-year period, totalled only \$17 billion. Compare that to the 18 months in Office where we have already injected over \$24 billion in this sector. The PPP/C Government has injected billions in dollars into this sector and, therefore, we will return viability to this sector. A measly 7,534 house lots obviously did not dent the backlog of 70,000 we

met when we entered office. They did not spearhead any innovative project. They did not introduce any transformative intervention in the housing sector. These Members come here with these lame ramblings and, at every budget, offer nothing constructive. The points of these debates should not be lost on us or should not be taken for granted. This is a great opportunity to bring awareness to the plans and policies that we will inform the nation on the work of our Ministry. It also demonstrates that the PPP/C Government has a clear plan for development for this country. We will execute the plan without fear, not COVID-19, floods or rising prices, or the absence of a credible Opposition Leader will stop us. We have a country to build. The dreams of our citizens to help come through and a legacy of this nation to create and there is nothing our friends across the floor could do to stop us.

Sometimes I think some of the Members on the other side play too much, spend too much time in the ring, singing *tra la la la* and not even enough time familiarising themselves with the policies of our Government. Why else would the Hon. Member Fernandes asked about the plan for children who are squatting? It is public information that we have more than a plan. Even through Parliamentary questions it is not enough for them, you still have *Google* as your friend. We have a plan. It is called the Guyana Strategy for Informal Settlements Upgrading and Prevention. It was the PPP/C Government that started the comprehensive housing programme, after taking Office in 1992. That programme included interventions for squatting. We have created a database that captures information on the squatter settlements across the country so that investments could be done, and interventions could be done targeted and impactful as a result. We have regularised over 750 informal settlers in Regions 4 and 5 over the last year. We have relocated 59 persons squatting on Government reserves. In some cases and instances, when it was necessary, we even compensated. In the five years of the Coalition Government, they relocated only 20 families from Broad Street. *Google* is your friend, Hon. Member, try it.

When we left Office in 2015, the construction and... I am going to use the East Bank corridor as just one example of our vision in terms of the housing sector and the plans for Guyana. When we left Office in 2015, the construction and the upgrading of the interlinked road from Mocha to Great Diamond, the construction of the four-lane highway from Mandela to Eccles, the development works from Prospect to Great Diamond had begun, more than \$10 billion was already expended on new housing areas in Eccles, Herstelling, Farm, Coven Garden, Perseverance, Peters Hall,

Diamond and Mocha. At a time when Guyana had discovered oil, and the citizens and investors were hungry for land, for residential, commercial, and the industrial purposes. The Coalition was, as we have proven all week, like headless chickens. They played musical chairs with the stewardship of the Ministry, practically downgrading it to a department and were indecisive, they were vacuous, they were vapid, they were insipid, they stopped the progress. Imagine they were handed a fully conceptualised project, lands that were earmarked and acquired and infrastructure works that had started, yet, they could not complete the implementation of a single one of these projects.

3.13 p.m.

This lack of vision, this lack of leadership resulted in years of delay, higher developmental cost due to inflation, exasperated the demand for house lots and commercial and industrial lands and was overall just appalling management of a critical sector of this country. These are the facts and, therefore, it pains me when our friends across this House come here and nit-pick and denigrate the work that we are now doing. We were left with a *basket to fetch water*, but we took on the challenge and we have breathed new life into the stagnation left behind by the Coalition.

We restarted the very construction and upgrade of the interlink road from Mocha/Arcadia to Great Diamond. We are constructing right now, which will be completed by the end of this month, the Mandela to Eccles four-lane highway. There is the construction of the four-lane highway from Eccles to Great Diamond which we consider as Phase 2. We have already paid the mobilisation advance. There are infrastructure development works from Prospect to Great Diamond. There is the construction of more than 500 young professional houses at Prospect and Providence, and more than 200 low-income houses at Prospect. Mr. Speaker, I only gave you the examples from the East Bank. This is because if I am going to speak about the entire housing sector and the intervention relating to all areas in this country, we will be here all afternoon. This reminds me that the Hon. Member, Ms. Flue-Bess, highlighted through pictures a number of communities, which according to her, required the urgent attention of the Government. I am baffled by this call because Cde. Flue-Bess is the Opposition Member of Parliament (MP) for that East Bank corridor, as well as a resident of Mocha Arcadia, so she should be more *au fait* with what is happening there. By that, I mean, beyond merely waving around some pictures. So, allow me to brief this House.

Herstelling is also known as the area Cane View or an extension of Mocha Arcadia. It is a rural informal settlement situated on a portion of reserved land. The settlement is bounded by the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) canal to the West and a drainage trench to the East. No physical infrastructure, electricity, or water distribution network had been installed in the area. Additionally, this portion of land that the residents occupy is a reserve which has to be absorbed in the construction of the Eccles to Great Diamond four-lane highway. I went there with the team from the Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA). We met with the residents – 35 households to be exact – and discussed the situation with a view to arriving at a mutually satisfactory solution. We identified housing areas to which the settlers will be relocated – Plantation Herstelling and Farm. I am happy to report that these residents have been allocated house lots at no cost to them. The Valuation Department provided valuations for their structures which reflected the current market value of each property. So far, 21 households have been fully compensated and 20 house lots have been allocated – 15 at Plantation Herstelling and 5 at Farm. Each household will receive financial compensation in full, based on that valuation.

These citizens are expected to relocate within three months of receiving their compensation and as of 1st February, 13 of the allottees began construction of their new homes. I do not need to show you, but this is an example at Farm. It is a house under construction. This is at Plantation Herstelling, the very area that the Hon. Member condemned.

[Hon. Member displayed documents.]

Mr. Speaker, this is what happens when you have a Government that will reach out to its citizens, listen to their concerns and work together to find solutions. We will very soon issue them with their land titles free of cost. I am happy that now they will be resettled in a more cohesive, sustainable, and safe community; safely so that they could legally access electricity and water, experience an improved quality of life, and, perhaps, more importantly, be proud owners of their own homes. I rather suspect the Hon. Member, Ms. Flue Bess, is not happy that her party's attempts to derail the resettlement of these poor citizens did not succeed. I can say this too. The Hon. Member was even annoyed that I went to the area and did not even inform her of our attempts to engage the villagers.

Let me get back to the highlights that we took on since coming back in Government. The financial investments on the East Bank alone are more than \$15 billion. We have completed the acquisition of more than 2,000 acres of land east of the Diamond Housing Scheme. We have completed the design and layout of new housing areas within this zone. We have begun infrastructure development works for the construction of 1000 young professional units. This does not include the young professional houses to be constructed at La Bonne Intention (LBI) or the moderate-income houses currently being constructed at Cummings Lodge. We have not shied away from the challenges that were thrown our way. We committed to allocating a total of 50,000 house lots within our first term and we are well on track to do so. The \$12.4 billion allocated this year will allow us to continue to develop the infrastructure of the targeted areas through the upgrading of roads; constructing drains; installing light-emitting diode (LED) streetlamps and completing distribution networks for electricity and water. Compare that on the very East Bank to the five years that they were in Office. Two small developments were attempted by the Coalition – those were at Peter’s Hall-Phase 3 and Providence-Phase 4.

We have already surpassed the house lot targets set for the first 18 months by allocating more than 10,000 to date. We have handed out 1500 land titles and transports. We have built 50 low-income houses at Prospect; 133 moderate-income houses at Cummings Lodge, Onderneeming, and Amelia’s Ward; and 100 houses for young professionals at Providence. These are all completed. We have distributed 228 Home Improvement Subsidies to the tune of \$114 million and significantly upgraded the infrastructure in housing developments in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10. The combined totality of our achievements in under two years far outweighs those of the Members on the other side during their five-year reign of taxes. The past 18 months have not only seen us resuscitate the housing sector, but we have also sought to make the services offered at the agencies connected to the Ministry of Housing and Water more accessible to citizens. We recognised that meeting the demands of our citizens for approvals by local and international investors and customers of the CH&PA require a faster and more efficient solution. Our Government has committed to making doing business much easier and reducing the red tape involved in Government transactions.

The present system for approvals for permits is paper-based, cumbersome, and time-consuming. As a result, critical transactions can take months in many cases to be completed. In this regard, the

Ministry has already begun the process of implementing the single window electronic processing system. Technicians are conducting an analysis of the existing system and its infrastructure, and a new system is being designed. Meanwhile, the anticipated recommendations on legislative and governmental changes to enhance the efficacy of the system, are being advanced. When the full implementation of the electronic single window system is completed this year, we can expect a more integrated agency approach to services, more efficiency, and a significant reduction of processing time for planning and building permits.

Mr. Speaker, we have already created an online portal that allows house lot applicants to upload their applications from the comfort of their homes, or in the comfort of Eccles Block DD. This allows you to use smartphones, tablets, laptops, or similar devices. Once these documents are uploaded, the CH&PA will issue an electronic mail (e-mail) acknowledging receipt. I hasten to point out though that we know that not everyone has access to computers, so for those applications and applicants, we can have them verified at the office. I hope that the Hon. Member, Ms. Flue Bess, will share this information with her constituents.

Not only are we strengthening the systems at the Ministry, but we are also cognizant of the challenges that the allottees encounter. We are ensuring that they are able to find financing for the construction of their homes. Since 2020, there have been incremental increases in the low-income mortgage loan ceiling. In 2020, it was raised from \$8 million to \$10 million and in 2021, from \$10 million to \$12 million. In *Budget 2022*, it is further raised from \$12 million to \$15 million dollars. This increase will allow the banks to approve a higher number of mortgages annually, thereby making homeownership even more attainable. This coupled with the reinstatement of the \$30 million mortgage interest relief, will put more disposable income in the hands of our citizens which they can now use for renovations and refurbishments or even savings. The reinstatement of the mortgage interest relief ceiling has seen a significant increase in applications to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). In 2019, the GRA paid out \$354 billion; in 2020, \$419 million; and in 2021 there was a further increase of over \$552 million.

When the Hon. Member, Ms. McDonald, spoke to this House, she said that the Budget should have provided for subsidised mortgages, free handouts, free vouchers, and free housing for Guyanese. I am not sure which budget she is referring to because those interventions that I have just explained are in the very ways being addressed in this Budget. The very subsidies that she is asking for – the

Home Improvement Subsidies and Core Home Support – are also subsidies. Similarly, the support for dialysis patients to the tune of \$600,000 per year is also a subsidy. The School Uniform Grant for children is also a subsidy. The Because We Care Cash Grant is also a subsidy. Hon. McDonald, you asked for subsidies and *Budget 2022* gives you subsidies.

The water sector that we inherited was overstaffed. Its management was reckless with its financial resources. There was a high-water loss and access to potable water seemed an impossible dream for many communities. Hard as it was, we immediately set about crafting a strategic plan for the sector; establishing a National Water Council (NWC); introduced new water supply systems in the hinterland; enhanced the water quality; dug new wells across the country; expanded the water treatment coverage; and returned the water subsidy as well to the very poor and vulnerable. We did not complain, we just went to work. These are the real benefits of having a budget such as this one. This is why I am a proud member of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, to be here to support this Budget. We want to ensure that all Guyanese are provided with high-quality water service. The new strategic plans that are articulated by clear objectives and targets.

3.28 p.m.

They are focused on our vision for the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI). These goals are in alignment with the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government's manifesto and our mandate towards the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development (SDG) Goal 6, which is to ensure access to water and sanitation for all. We have reduced the financial burden for citizens by removing the Value Added Tax (VAT) on potable water for all categories and this is at a cost of \$644 million annually. We reinstated the water subsidy for pensioners. Here is another subsidy for you, Cde. McDonald. We further reduced water tariffs across all categories of customers by 5%, to ensure that we have equitable economic relief, to the value of \$202 million annually to GWI. This PPP/C Government expended over \$3.4 billion to restore the potable water subsector. In this regard, we have completed the construction of new wells at Wakenaam and Lusignan. We have significantly advanced the drilling and construction of new wells at Providence, Diamond and Parika Backdam, which will provide improved water service to more than 80,000 residents by the first quarter of this year.

The GWI has already completed the identification of areas for the construction of a number of new water treatment plants. These include Walton Hall to Charity in Region 2; Wakenaam and Leguan in Region 3; Bush Lot in Region 5; and Tain to Number 50 Village in Region 6. This will increase the treated water coverage to approximately 63% by the end of this year on the coastal population. We have committed to mobilising funding for the construction and installation of water treatment facilities in Taymouth Manor to Good Hope in Region 2; Wales, Canal No. 2 to Free and Easy, and La Parfaite Harmonie in Region 3; Providence and Coldingen Region 4...

Mr. Speaker: Hon, Minister, before you reach to Region 5, you will need an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be given five more minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Teixeira. Hon. Minister, you may continue and conclude in five minutes.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Speaker, this will ensure that 90% of treated water coverage reaches our coastland households within the next three years, which includes the expansion of our distribution networks.

Under the hinterland programme we have successfully completed drilling of a number of new wells and, therefore, by the end of this year, we will increase our hinterland water coverage to over 80%. The Hon. Member, Mr. Sinclair, stood before the House to boast of the deliverables of the previous Administration, but could have only named one – the Mahdia Water Supply System. At the same time, he called on the PPP/C Administration to establish more potable water wells for remote communities of Region 8. Like his colleagues, he, too, seems blissfully unaware of the developments that are taking place in his backyard. I wish to inform the Hon. Member of Parliament (MP), who claims to represent Region 8, that a water supply system and distribution network that serves the people of Princeville, via standpipes, existed prior to the Coalition's tenure. In the North Pakaraimas, for example, there are water supply systems and distribution networks in Kato, Kuru Kurukabaru, Kamana, Kanapang, Kopinang and Waipa. There are provisions in this Budget for a water supply system for Itabac, while works are ongoing at Kaibarupai, and GWI has already made proposals for water systems in Maikwak and Sand Hills.

Over the next three years, our Government intends to close the gap to the potable water system in the hinterland. To achieve this, Government is committed to financing some \$3.5 billion in capital investment during this period and ensure that we maximise the use of surface water and water harvesting which will benefit more than 49,000 hinterland and riverain residents. We are committed to providing access to potable water supply services to the population, not only as a personal target but as a support to the UN Sustainable Development Goal.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on about what *Budget 2022* will bring us, but time is catching up and I would like to give an update on the pace of development of Silica City. The idea of this city, which was born out of the need for Guyana to have an urban centre that is complementary to the existing capital city of Georgetown, was conceptualised in 2013. The vision for Silica City is the creation of a vibrant, sustainable, resilient and modern city. This vision is in keeping with our Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), Guyana's international commitment to the Paris Agreement and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The smart city is proposed for creating a new city that will compact and will have pedestrian-oriented, energy-efficient, interconnected, sustainable, comfortable, attractive and secure environment. It is envisaged that over the next 20 years, the projected population for this new city will be approximately 50,000 occupants or over 12,500 households. Therefore, within the first five years, it is expected that this city would be developed to cater for at least 3,125 households, approximately 625 units annually. Consultations are ongoing with the utility companies, as I speak, to coordinate the development of their infrastructure since it is anticipated that a shared utility corridor will cater for all utilities to be routed and underground.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, in light of the facts I have highlighted over these past few minutes, I am convinced that *Budget 2022* is good for our country, and I am proud to support it. It has no new taxes, it includes more benefits for ordinary citizens, it projects that the construction sector will grow to 40.3 %, and it presents a clear and cohesive plan for Guyana's development trajectory. Therefore, I would like to call on the Opposition Members to embrace *Budget 2022*, share it, and support it. We want the same thing – a united Guyana, a developed Guyana, and 'One Guyana'. With that, Mr. Speaker, I pledge my support to *Budget 2022*. [Applause]

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I am in support of *Budget 2022*, which lays the foundation and establishes the framework through which the development of our country can move forward.

Budget 2022 is designed to enhance the welfare of all Guyanese. *Budget 2022* creates the linkages between our people, citizens, and the transformation of our country.

I want to reflect a minute. I have listened from Monday to today. Today, we heard probably some of the worst things in this Parliament, and I have to ground myself and think in a different way. We have to remind ourselves as Guyanese of how blessed we are. We are blessed with many diverse resources that few countries in the world have. We have a landmass the size of the United Kingdom (UK). We have bauxite, gold, diamond, uranium, manganese and many others not discovered as yet. We have fertile land for agriculture, not just on the coast, with the potential for agro-processing, shade farming and a range of production in the agricultural area. We have fisheries, ocean, river and aquaculture. We have water. Many countries do not have supplies of water. We have forest and timber. We have the potential for value added wood products, and we have undiscovered and untapped scientific potential for rainforest products. We have an intact rainforest – one of the six left in the world. Our most important asset is people – the diversity of the ethnicities of our people. We are a country of minorities. All of us are minorities. Not one ethnic group comprises 50% of the population. We are a country of diverse religions and nine Indigenous languages. We have cultural artists, musicians and craftsmen and we have one of the most progressive legislation in the entire world with regard to the ownership of Amerindian or Indigenous people's land titling.

When you listen in this House, you wonder: do we not remember this? Do we not? When our Government and our President talk about 'One Guyana', it is recognising and celebrating oneness as a nation, our diversity. Mr. Speaker, I had to remind us about how blessed we are, after listening to the speeches on the other side that threatened to drag us into the abyss of division, nothingness and no future, just the same as the last 65 years. I had to remind us that Guyana now stands on the cusp of an opportunity to propel us all forward, to reach our dreams of a modern, democratic developed nation. Are we to be held back in a vicious whirlpool of nauseating small mindedness, intolerance, division and hopelessness? The choice is clear. In this House, we see the two views are like the sun and the moon. We refuse to be dragged into a nauseating, small minded whirlpool of nihilism. After 56 years of nationhood, finally, after the violence of the 1960s, the repeated rigged elections from 1968-1985, the years of indebtedness and Inter Monetary Fund (IMF) Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) and the conditions of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries

(HIPIC), the onerous debts repayments accumulated pre-1992, poverty and geographic disparities, the March, 2020 General and Regional Elections demonstrated, in the face of extreme corruption and a threat to our democracy, that the Guyanese people wanted democracy, first and foremost. They wanted to choose the Government of their choice and they exhibited a level of maturity and resilience to ensure that this right was guarded, and that democracy prevailed.

Despite extreme provocation by election officials and senior officials in the former Government, we remained resilient as a people, and I speak for all, whether the voters supported the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) or the voters supported us. It is noteworthy that many of those who were involved in the most terrible crimes of all...the worst crime of corruption is in attempting to steal the people's votes and reverse democracy and reverse the will of the people of an entire nation. And you are telling us here, sanctimoniously, about corruption. Seriously? Guyana was not alone. The PPP/C and the democratic forces of this country were not alone in those five months. The world stood in defence and support. No matter what some Opposition Members have said in this House that they won, the world knows otherwise. They continue to be delusional, and they continue to be isolated from reality. The APNU/AFC has no moral compass. It is delusional, it is immoral, and it has no conscience to come to this House and say the things that have been said in this House.

3.43 p.m.

One speaker said, just a few moments ago, that Guyana is an undemocratic, oppressive, petroleum dictatorship. Mr. Speaker, I think the Member was looking in the mirror and, therefore, what he saw was not the PPP/C, but a reflection of the APNU/AFC when it was in Government. We heard another speaker, just before me, talk about virtual apartheid. We say that the word corruption is not allowed in this House, but the word apartheid should not be allowed in this House. Do you know why? It is because apartheid is the institutional, racial segregation of people. That is what that Member was saying in this House, and we sat here and accepted it. Is this what is acceptable? For those of us who fought in the anti-apartheid movement long years ago, it sticks like a dagger in our throats to call this country the PPP/C's virtual apartheid in relation to online education, when the person who spoke was in charge of the telecommunications sector of this country, had 100 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) hubs built and ready to be connected, and did nothing, and who cannot answer for where much of the money has gone. We should not

be surprised that the Hon. Member said that, really, because the Hon. Member has a *penchant*, as a friend of mine says, to say these kinds of catchphrases. But she is also reflecting the former Leader of the Opposition, pre-2015, who spoke about education apartheid. This is now the new catchphrase, the issue of race and corruption.

Finally, we can breathe. We have come out of August, 2020 and we can breathe. Finally, after five years, we can work as a nation to build a new Guyana, a ‘One Guyana’ built on inclusivity, participation, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. I have listened in aghast at persons in this House casting shade on ‘One Guyana’, saying that ‘One Guyana’ is for one ethnic group and that it is for the PPP/C. The depth of mental and intellectual depravity of someone saying that is hard to conceive. I cannot conceive of anybody taking a phrase of ‘One Guyana’ and turning it upside down into this level of madness. It is a level of insanity on the other side of this House to talk about the *ethnicised* ‘One Guyana’. Do you comprehend how contradictory that is? Do you comprehend? Again, they are isolated. They are all alone, just like they were between March and August, 2020. They were alone; they are alone again. The people of this country want a ‘One Guyana’, the youth of this country want a ‘One Guyana’, and yet, as I said, the Opposition Members seem to be devoid of understanding this concept as a pathway to building unity and a harmonious society. [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*) united Guyana.] You see, the catchphrases. You have to work. If we want to build a harmonious society, we have to work at it. Maybe, this can be explained by the 2018 People’s National Congress/Reform’s (PNC/R’s) Region 4 District Conference at Congress Place, where the then Chairman of the PNC/R made it clear that her priority is to give jobs to her friends, who are evidently party supporters. The quote that was on *Demerara Waves* of 29th November, 2018 states:

“The only friends I got is PNC so the only people I gon give wuk to is PNC and right now I looking for a doctor who can talk Spanish or Portuguese and ah want one that is PNC...”

That was said by the former Chairman of the PNC/R, Ms. Volda Lawrence, who, by the way, is before the court as well. The PNC, as a political party, has consistently put our country on the map, in the last 65 years, for ethnic violence in the 60s, for rigged elections over 28 years, for selling large tracts of land to the people called the Jonestown cult, where 900 people were murdered – we were on the world map until 2001 for the largest number of people killed in a non-war situation – for the assassination of Dr. Walter Rodney, for the most violent crime wave in this country’s

history, and the longest wait for an election after a no confidence motion. We reached global notoriety for waiting 14 months for an election after a no confidence motion. Then, again, the PNC/R was not satisfied with that. We reached global notoriety for having had the longest wait after an election to have the declaration of the results. We were on the precipice of a dictatorship, and we were resilient. Mr. Shuman was right about what he reminded us of this morning. I am not telling lies. This is the legacy of the People's National Congress, the People's National Congress/Reform, the APNU/AFC Coalition and any other name they come up with. The PNC, with whatever name, has been consistently anti-national and anti-patriotic. Its stance has been that if it is not in Government, nothing must work. If it is in Government, still nothing works. But when they are out of Government, obstructionism is the name of the game. They must make sure to try to destabilise and destroy things. As an earlier speaker, my Colleague, Mr. Collin Croal, said, not this time. It *ain't* happening this time.

Ironically, it is the PPP/C, each time in Government, precolonial and post-independence, that has taken Guyana forward; never backwards. The PPP/C has always had to rescue our country from the abyss of economic decline and bring in progressive, pro-growth, pro-poor policies and programmes. By 1964, Guyana was one of the fastest growing countries in the Commonwealth. By 1992, we were the third poorest in this hemisphere. This is not a Gail Teixeira thing; it is the World Bank and the IMF. By 2014, we were climbing out of the economic abyss that was caused by the indebtedness of the PNC in the pre-1992 period. Then, they went into Government in 2015. Its tax-based development approach, *squandermania* and anti-people policies are what dragged us down again as a country. Again, we, the PPP/C, are here, and this time, *we ain't backing down*. We shall transform our country with the oil revenues, as a platform of the means to improve the quality of lives of our people, expand and diversify our economy and transform the landscape of our nation.

I have heard a lot of people talk about the budget, and I just thought that, maybe, it might be useful to refer to the last budget of the APNU/AFC, just as a reference, because I have heard a lot of “forked tongues” speaking here. I am not using a curse word, Mr. Speaker. You know what a forked tongue is. The APNU/AFC Government inherited, in 2015, US\$780 million in foreign reserves and \$13 billion in gold reserves. What did they do with the money? Where did it go? They started out on a good wicket. The \$14 billion was reduced to \$2 billion by 2018 and to \$635 million

in 2020. This is from the Bank of Guyana's (BoG's) statistical abstract. So, they had a good inning with gold. They sold the gold at some of the lowest prices on the world market at the time. If that is not stupidity, God help us. The APNU/AFC had international reserves, as I said, and they had also left us, at the end, with a small amount of approximately \$528 million in 2019. So, they had money that they used. In fact, they had money of US\$780 million. They dropped our foreign reserves to the lowest it has been in years and years. This is not only an issue of fiscal mismanagement. It is difficult for our country and the former Government of this country to have mismanaged to such levels or proportions that one wonders what and how they were governing this country. After the no confidence motion, there was a decline of \$3 billion in the total assets held by the Bank of Guyana, from \$220 billion in 2018 to \$217 billion in September, 2019. That is what we took over.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the overdraft at the Bank, this is all data supported by the Bank of Guyana and its own statistics. As I said, the APNU/AFC was dipping into our foreign currency reserves, thereby putting us at greater risk for external and internal shocks. The IMF warned you, over and over again, not to do it and to stop it. But you know, the APNU/AFC does not listen to anybody. It never has, and it never will. After the no-confidence motion, the APNU/AFC continued to give away State assets and spend money as if there was no tomorrow, as if it was still legitimately in Government, although the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) had said that it was a caretaker Government. When I said that this APNU/AFC is anti-national... Look at what it did with the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. It is now 2022. If the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project had gone through in 2014, we would be enjoying cheap, affordable, reliable electricity. Do you have any concept of what that would mean for this country, for manufacturing, for the people who are purchasing power and for the cost of running business? Do you have any idea of this? And yet, you sat there and smashed the project. Even after we left Government, the Norwegian independent company came and told you that it was the most viable, ready hydropower project in the entire country, and you smashed it down and left it. This is a level of anti-nationalism unheard of.

The APNU/AFC brought 200 new taxes in. What did this mean? I hear people talking about Guyanese people suffering. Based on the 2019 tax revenues, what did the impact of collecting \$25 billion more in tax revenue mean to families? Each family of Guyana was paying an additional \$152,000 in taxes in 2019 when compared to 2018. In 2018, we had already seen increased prices

in food, clothing, medical and personal care by approximately 4.6%, 4.3% and 4%. If they do not believe me, they can check Appendix G of the 2019 Budget Estimates, Volume 1, which shows that the Minister of Finance actually expected a reduction in private consumption in 2019, pre-COVID-19, by approximately \$10 billion. In other words, people did not have money to spend. The purchasing power of our people, on average, was reduced by \$462,000 at the household level. Why was this? You dismissed 7,000 people and you dismissed 2,000 Community Service Officers (CSOs). Your foolish policies and taxations led to 30,000 people being unemployed. There are, again, figures and surveys to show that what I am saying is correct.

This APNU/AFC comes to this House – and as I said, they are immoral. They have no conscience – to talk about these issues when the facts and the documents show what was going on in this country by 2019 on the eve of the elections and after the no confidence motion. All the indicators in 2018 pointed to an economy that was deteriorating and required urgent countercyclical policies. Instead, *Budget 2019* projected increases in tax collection, further burdening the people of Guyana, and proposed to collect taxes by \$31 billion more than in 2018. This represented an \$88 billion increase in tax collection per annum based on the 2014 levels. There were more taxes and no moves to cut down on the extravagant, wasteful spending on things that did not bring benefit to our people. There is a fundamental, philosophical and ideological difference between the PNC and its Coalition partners and with us on this side of the House as to how to develop Guyana.

3.58 p.m.

Theirs is based on the taxpayer consumer-driven expenditure with party paramountcy, ethnic division, and opportunistic *cavalier* use of the Constitution. I hear the Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, talking about the Constitution. On 27th February, 2020, *the Stabroek News* had a letter to the editor by Mr. Christopher Ram. He stated the following:

“...In fact... from the first year of his election as President, Granger set about violating his Oath, bending the Constitution to his personal, previously unsuspected agenda. It was only the alertness of a few lawyers and the astuteness of the Courts that the Constitution and the rule of law have not so far been rendered completely meaningless.

The cases number more than three dozen... that number has no parallel in Guyana or indeed in any country of the Caribbean, of constitutional violations by an executive or head of state...”

I heard about corruption. We have seen and witnessed scandal after scandal, in which some former Members are now before the court for misappropriating the patrimony of the Guyanese people. We must not forget the \$30 billion loan they took for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) from which they took out \$15 billion, gave GuySuCo about \$8 billion and the rest cannot be explained. What happened to the \$30 billion loan that you took out under very strange circumstances? Mr. Speaker, I am not going to go on. I will just leave these as facts. These are the Report of the Auditor General for the year 2016, the Report of the Auditor General for the year 2017, the Report of the Auditor General for the year 2018, the Report of the Auditor General for the year 2019, and the Report of the Auditor General for the year 2020 coming up, of which you were in Office for eight months. Every single one of these Reports is a witness and indicates and demonstrates what you did when you were in Office.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

The Demerara Harbour Bridge; the Asphalt Plant; the scales...Is that what you call it, Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill? There is the issue regarding \$800 million that cannot be accounted for by the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. I can go on and on. There is the issue regarding \$600 million worth of drugs bought from a company when the National Procurement and Tender Administration (NPTAB) said they did not have the waiver to single source. These Reports of the Auditor General for the years 2016 to 2020 are interesting read to see how a government refused to obey the Procurement Act of this country and violated, over and over, the fiscal transactions of this country.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

In contrast, the PPP/C’s philosophy is one of pro-growth and pro-poor, with a people-centred development agenda with a climate resilient policy of an expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy, rule of law and ‘One Guyana’.

Mr. Speaker, let me give a light moment before I go into some heavier stuff and before I conclude. One is that I heard people talk about poverty. I am not good with cars. I never get cars right and I never get the licence plates right. I am known to walk into the wrong car because it is the same colour of a car I have. I have no interest in cars. However, remember, the APNU/AFC also brought some restrictions on the purchasing of cars. It could not have been older than 8 years; one could not have bought used tyres, *et cetera*, and they placed taxes on it. Since the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and this Government restored the taxes of 2006 and 2008, let us look at what has happened. The PAB series was finished in seven months. Some 9,999 cars were bought in seven months with the removal of the APNU/AFC's stranglehold, by tax, on people. Now, we are starting the PAC series after seven months. If that is not a social and economic indicator of this breathing of freedom to do things...you held us down and you suffocated the people in this country for all of the five years.

This Government has a different style of governance. Our Ministers are visible and accessible across the communities in the country. I want to say this about the region I represent as the geographic MP. I went there three years before...the Ministers, some of them arrived. The Upper Mazaruni never saw a Minister. Not even the one who was the former Minister and who is sitting over there. She would go to Kamarang, see her village and come back. There were no meetings and no communication. No Minister went to Upper Mazaruni or Middle Mazaruni. The Minister would go to Bartica, go to the hotel there called Aruwai White H20 Resort and then fly off. There were no meetings with the people and there were no walkabouts with the people to see what their problems were. They abandoned Region 7 because they thought Region 7 was their property and their entitlement. Let me tell you, we almost won, and we will win. In 2025, we will be coming back to win Region 7. Do you all think it is an entitlement?

The PPP/C, since coming into Office, with the 2020 and 2021 Budgets, has been fixing the damage done by the five years of the PNC-led APNU/AFC Coalition Government. It is time now to transform Guyana. It is not business as usual. The PPP/C has managed to increase spending from \$69 billion in capital expenditure in 2019, to \$103 billion in 2020, and some of our friends on the other side do not quite understand what that means. We have a golden opportunity. We have gone through so many interesting, challenging, and traumatic times as a nation since independence. This is the one golden opportunity for Guyana. It is our moment, and we must grasp it and seize it. It

does not always come. Oil would not last here forever and we are not going to go down the road you went about monoculture. When the Hon. Member talked about the petroleum dictatorship, I said that he was looking in the mirror because you dismantled agriculture. You had no time for any other industry, except petroleum, and even then, you were not prepared for that.

Even the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), which approved the Linden/Mabura road, yesterday stated...and this was stated by the CDB's President, Dr Leon:

“...Irrespective of how much Guyana has now, the oil and gas will deplete at some point...
...As such, Guyana should be prioritising efforts geared at sustaining development in the country. And infrastructural development...”

Dr Leon believes:

“...is a crucial component in facilitating this...”

This road, the Linden/Mabura road, is a corridor that is expected to facilitate a massive increase in trade between Guyana and bordering members in Brazil. We have to move out of this suffocation of always being held back by this small mindedness and this narrowmindedness. Our people want to dream. We want to see a Guyana with roads, highways and bridges, jobs and houses that can match any other country in the Caribbean, South America and even in Canada. Why must we not dream that? Why must we not believe we could do it? Why do we not believe that? This is a golden opportunity and, basically, we have the opportunity with the oil revenues. The Budget, if my math is right, is \$592 billion, and the money that we took from the Natural Resource Fund is approximately \$126 billion. Still, the rest of the money is not all from oil – a large chunk of it. That money allows us to do things we could not have done a year ago and which we could not have done ten years ago because you did not have the money or the fiscal space, as Mr. Jordan said.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will need to get more time to deal with the rest of the issues.

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I seek an extra five minutes for the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Minister, you have five minutes to continue and to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: As the Vice-President, Dr. Jagdeo, stated in a press interview yesterday... [**Mr.**

Mahipaul: The Hon. Jagdeo]. Yes, the Hon. Vice-President. Thank you. He stated that:

“...while current spending has increased, capital spending will grow to \$218 billion, a 110% increase of the \$552.9 budget this year ...”

This, he stated:

“...That is us building for the future...”

“...That’s where we are spending our money, investing in things that the country will be able to feel and touch not all this spending we had on things that just disappear...”

There are overarching challenges we have to face and address as a nation. We have to deal with climate change. We are a country that is a zero-carbon emitter, but we also have gas. We also have to deal with the reality of our environment and climate change. We have to learn to balance all our needs and our priorities, and still protect the environment. The overarching challenges, such as climate change and reliable, affordable energy, were spoken to by a number of Hon. Members.

The third issue is communication, which includes transportation; Information Communication Technology (ICT) connectivity; communication, whether by road, by plane, by water, all of it; and all the areas that can connect our country not just with technology but with human movement, goods movement, and investment.

The fourth one is probably the most difficult one of all and it is the issue of trust and confidence at the political level. This will be determined by a number of things. We know that the people of Guyana will trust those who deliver and so we have a pact. We have a social pact with the people of Guyana, and not only those who voted for us, but all the people of Guyana, that we will deliver. We have a document, our *manifesto*, and we have committed...and we are not, 14 months later, saying that we are going to do more studies. No, Mr. Speaker. We are all around and people are seeing, physically, in front of their eyes, things are changing – roads, bridges, housing, water, and electricity. You can go as far as you want into the interior, you are seeing.

The pact and the social contract we have with the people is one that is built on trust and confidence, and we intend to honour that pact by delivering a Guyana that is transformed. We have to also work on having resilient and effective democratic institutions that will uphold the Constitution as part of the governance architecture of our nation. *Budget 2022* puts us on the path to addressing these with clearcut priorities, programmes and projects to do so. The country is alive. There is an energy and vitality in the country that is palpable. Guyana is back on track to choose. To quote from Dave Martin, one of the songs he brought out in 1992:

“...Guyana back on track...”

Guyana is on the move, and there is nothing stopping us now from achieving the transformation of our country. Those who wish to remain narrow minded and small minded will be left behind. Our people want development. They want water, reliable and affordable electricity, clean and safe houses and communities. They want to see Guyana go forward. They are tired of being held back because every time something positive happens, there is somebody coming and naysaying it and putting shade on it. They are tired of that. They want to move forward and so the Opposition has a choice. Join the whole process of transforming our country or be left out in the woodworks by yourself, because history will judge you. History has judged you already for your role in the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and in 2020. So, you now have a chance to clear your conscience and to join the transformative agenda of Guyana. If you do not, really, I, personally, would not lose sleep a bit because I know that we, in the PPP/C, will continue to do what the people want us to do. They want this country to move forward. I am a firm believer and I have great faith in the people of our country. We are a resilient people.

4.13 p.m.

We have showed our resilience with floods, with rigged elections, and the greatest challenge and litmus tests we had in 2020 with the post 2020 elections. The lost 28 years from 1965 to 1992 are over. The lost five years from 2015 to 2020 are over; we can breathe. As a people, we could transform this nation to be the Singapore or the Dubai model of the Caribbean region.

Mr. Speaker, could you imagine that we in Guyana may, not in the far future, sit as one of the members of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEG)? Could we have talked about that several years ago? I doubt that. Guyana has arrived, as we say in creole, *we have arrived*, and

now it is time to take our rightful place globally, regionally and, most of all, to show our people that we can move this country forward. We can be proud dignified Guyanese and not to hold our heads in shame like we were forced to in the 70's and 80's where, when we went to the immigration offices in other neighbouring countries, we were treated like second class citizens. We are not second-class citizens, we are proud, and we have a lot of work to do as a nation. If the Opposition wants to join, welcome. If you do not, sorry; we have work to do. The rest of the nation is watching you; the rest of the people are watching you, and they will join. They have a choice to go down into the dustbin or to be part of the partnership to transform our nation.

Budget 2022 lays a foundation for the transformation of our nation. Will there be many challenges on the way? Yes, there will be many challenges, but we on this side of the House, and we the Guyanese people have the will to make this happen, and we shall do it. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance. Hon. Members, before I take the next contributor, in relation to the issue to do with the gentleman's, name, Mr. Harry Gill, being mentioned, I think my ruling was correct. This is what the Hon. Member said:

“...remember this book where we have the design and layout by her friend and former Member of Parliament (M.P.) Mr. Harry Gill. I hope that the proper procurement procedures were held and took place in this.”

The second issue was...

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I raised the objection not to that question in isolation, but to that question being juxtaposed next to, I think, the sentence before or the sentence after which suggested that there was a conflict of interest. In fact, those three words were used.

Mr. Speaker: I have the transcript here, Hon. Minister. In this House, we are blessed with 69 Hon. Members who are excellent with words. I call them words smiths. It states here:

“I hope that the tender was published somewhere. And I know that you have had a difficult time with the words ‘corruption’ and ‘rigging’.”

Those are the words. The second issue is that I did hear the Hon. Member Ms. Hughes wrongly. She did say, like the safe city project, but I heard the word ‘shame’ so often that I thought that was what I heard. I apologise to the Hon. Member.

With regard to the objection the Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes, raised with respect to the Hon. Member, Minister Croal, saying that she called a Member a judas, I will uphold her objection because she did not mention any name, she said:

“Even Jesus had a judas”

I dispose of those matters. I now call on the Hon. Member, the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Anil Nandlall, to make his presentation. As he gets to the podium, let me say that we will take a break after the Hon. Attorney General because we have to conclude the business sub-committee. Today, we will take a break to conclude the consideration of the allocation of times for the estimates. Hon. Attorney General, at 4.19.16 p.m., the floor is yours.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The privilege is now mine to offer my contributions to this year’s Budget debate. I want to begin by extending to my brother, the distinguished Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and his competent team, my warmest congratulations for all the hard work they endured in compiling one of the greatest budgets in our country’s history.

I was here for the past few days listening to this debate, and there have been highs and there have been lows. Today, we were visited with many lows. We have responsibilities in this House to the people of our country. All of us, we were elected. We have to be careful what we say, how we say it, and the way we conduct ourselves. It appears as though we are oblivious of those responsibilities. I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, this afternoon. This is an Hon. Member who I have known for half of my life. What I saw transformed was a completely different human being. I saw the hate, I saw the venom, I saw the vituperation, and I saw the anger. Why? I listened to the personal attacks. Why? Is it that we are vacuous? Is it that we are inefficient? Is it that we are incompetent, so we have to supplement that with hate, diatribe and anger? I pity those who have to seek refuge in those facilities. He placed on the record a few comments that I feel compelled that I must respond to. I am very cognisant of the fact that I stand here speaking on behalf of the great party of Dr. Cheddi Jagan, that I am the chief legal officer of this land, that I

am the Attorney-General of this country, and that I am the principal legal advisor of the Government of Guyana. I am cognisant of those responsibilities. I will never allow disrespect to be taken against me or any of my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I am a Queens's College old boy. Let me say proudly that a Queen's College old boy would never borrow notes from a St. Roses student. Let me say that I was never short of toilet paper in the law school, so I do not understand how an Hon. Member could stand there with a straight face and fabricate a story that I borrowed notes from him. You have to be steeping to a level, which is unspeakable, to resort to that. I could say much more, since he has taken the debate to the law school. I could speak to the unspeakable violence which was meted out to a female student in that school which threatened suspension from that law school. I could speak about that. The Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, is here, and he could testify to what I am saying. But, I would not go into those details; I will not. The Hon. Member spoke about us being an unlawful *petrorepublic*. Long before we became involved, long before we became a petroleum producer, the Hon. Member was a major player in the oil and gas sector. The Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) has the long records, and he comes here to speak about an unlawful *petrorepublic*.

The Hon. Member invoked that old hackneyed argument, that discredited diatribe about extra judicial killings. A few years ago, the *Stabroek News*, in an article, outlined all the persons whom they claimed were extra judicially killed. On that list were policemen and innocent people who died for different causes, but they were placed on a list, and they bandied that list about, arguing that it was extra judicial killings. I thought that they had graduated from such ignorance but, here again, it is fresh before us through the mouth of the Hon. Member, Mr. Forde. What is his logic? **[Mr. Mahipaul: (Inaudible)]** The mental bill is coming for you; relax. What is he calling extra judicial killings? Apparently, any person who died at the hands of the police is extra judicial killings and, by some somersault of logic, the Government is responsible. Anywhere in the world, there are police excesses; no one could dispute that, but a government is not responsible for that.

While he was speaking, I called the members of the police force and they provided me with the statistics of the persons who died in the police force from May 2015 to March 2020. Forty-one Guyanese died at the hands of the police force while you were in Government. Did any one of us accuse you of extra judicial killings? There were two persons, I have their names here: Mr. Lallbachan Bachan who was killed in Suddie lockup on the 1st July, 2019 and then there was Mr.

Kalicharran Saywak who was killed in Sparendam lockup on the 28th January, 2019. I represented their families. I went to the High Court, and I sued the Attorney General for compensation. I did not jump on a housetop and try to make political mileage and treat their tragedy like a political football. I did what the law said. I never accused them of extra judicial killings. That is how responsible politicians and leaders behave.

The Hon. Member spoke about attack of the rule of law when the PPP/C is in Government. Almost all the Hon. Members, as they take the podium, described this Government as installed, implying that we are here unlawfully. Well, as the Attorney General, again, it is my duty to traverse, if not verbatim, seriatim to those false narratives for the purpose of correcting the record. They spent two decades in Opposition, and as soon as they returned to Government in 2015... The people gave them a chance, the people felt that they may have changed because they came from a history of rigging elections, killing Dr. Walter Rodney and taking away the rights and freedoms of the people of this country. In 2015, the people baptised them and gave them another opportunity.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, ‘they’ should be the Hon. Members. Is the Hon. Deputy Speaker included?

4.28 p.m.

Mr. Nandlall: Dr. Anthony, we really have to get this mental health bill quickly. There was a litany of abrogation of the Constitution and violations of the rule of law. I made some notes. The President himself, Mr. Granger, led from the front, confiscating rice lands from the farmers in Region 5; seizing the Red House from the Cheddi Jagan Research Institute in the face of 999 year lease; the Attorney General threatening to kill a judge in open court; the President directing the Police Service Commission (PSC) and the Public Service Commission (PSC) to halt promotions in violations of the Constitution; the President threatening the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, who was a Member of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), to resign or there would be blood on the carpet; Ms. Volda Lawrence announcing that they would only hire People’s National Congress (PNC) Members; the President unilaterally appointing the Chairman of the Elections Commission (GECOM); the President and Cabinet refusing to resign after a no confidence motion was passed against them in the National Assembly and they refused to hold

elections within three months as directed by the Constitution; and then they remained in Office, unconstitutionally, for over a year, illegally plundering the Treasury.

I just take a pause there because I have another litany. They are accusing us. Just imagine that. This sitting is being streamed live on television. Guyana endured this. The people of Guyana lived through this. These Hon. Members are coming here with a straight face to accuse us violation of the rule of law. Then the elections came on 2nd March, 2020. Election day was incident-free. At the end of the day, they claimed that they won the elections. The Carter Center, the European Union (EU), the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States (OAS), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the entire diplomatic community, the Guyana Bar Association, the Private Sector Commission, and numerous other local bodies observed those elections and certified them to be free, fair and credible. It was when the count was completed and they realised that they had lost that all hell broke loose. For five long months the nation stood still while the region and the world watched in anguish, agony and in trepidation as attempts after attempts were being made to rig those elections results.

Guyanese condemned them. Every major organisation in Guyana condemned their actions. The diplomatic community condemned their actions. Every major organisation in this hemisphere condemned their actions. One hundred governments across the globe condemned their actions. Yet, they persisted with their fraudulent designs. They tried with Mingo and they failed; they tried with Uilita Moore and they failed; they tried with the recount and they failed; they tried with the CARICOM high level team that observed the recount and they failed; they tried with Lowenfield and they failed; they tried with Misenga Jones and they failed; they tried with Eslyn David and they failed; and they tried with the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and they failed. For five months the world heard the mumbling incoherent submissions of the Hon. Mr. Forde, and he wants people to believe that I borrowed his notes. Oh my God! In the end, the CCJ, the highest court, interrogated their allegations and pronounced against them. In the end, as required by the Constitution, the Chairperson of the Elections Commissions declared the results as per the ballots counted and declared Dr. Mohamed Irfan Ali as President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

During that five months, they were so desperate, they became so degenerate that they went to the Seven Ponds to their Cde. Leader's tomb and they bent on their knees and they begged Cde. Leader, saying oh, Cde. Leader, save us; Cde. Leader, save us. The madness has not stopped. [An

Hon. Member (Government): Oh, ‘Kabaka’] Oh, ‘Kabaka’. That is why we need the mental health bill. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the shouting... Please.

Mr. Nandlall: The history of the Guyanese people is a history of struggle for a better life starting with the arrival of our Amerindian brothers and sisters to slavery and then indentureship, colonialism, political dictatorship and then to current time. The life of a majority of Guyanese was one engulfed in poverty, a battle for freedom and justice and the yearning for a better tomorrow. I am proud to say that that tomorrow is here, the foundation and framework of which is contained in *Budget 2022*. This generation is blessed to be alive during this period. I feel blessed, indeed. We are all blessed not only to be alive during this period, but to participate in this historic process and be part of this historic Budget.

Despite the pessimistic cacophony emanating from the other side, sensible Guyanese recognise that this Budget creates the foundation and structure upon which the edifice of a modern Guyana will be constructed. It is a Budget that reflects our newfound wealth and enviable status as one of the largest oil-producing nations in this hemisphere, though only in its embryonic stages. We will be recorded on the positive side of history. Future generations will salute our contributions in this Budget. The aggregate budgeted sum of a mammoth \$552 billion constitutes, by far, the largest financial injection ever in the Guyanese economy. I have said elsewhere that it is like injecting racehorse with a huge dose of steroid before the race begins. Without the gigantic spinoff benefits destined to flow from this Budget, the mere expenditure of this massive sum will invigorate every corner of this nation with a level of commercial, economic and social activities never witnessed before.

I hear the vacuous argument that this Budget lacks job creation. The real question is: do we have the capacity to meet the demands of the tens of thousands of jobs that are likely to be created by the mere expenditure of the moneys in this Budget? Do we have the capacity to access the construction and building materials that will be required for the successful execution of this Budget? Do we have the level of skilled personnel and the type of equipment, plant and machinery and requisite skillset that will be needed for the transformational projects embraced by this Budget? These are the pertinent questions that right-thinking Guyanese are asking. These relate

only to Government spending. They do not include the explosion that will take place in the private sector. For example, the multiple branded hotels that are already under construction and the several more which will be constructed this year. These are fundamental issues that we in the Government have to grapple with and find solutions.

We have to spend our energy and time engaging our people, and part as overseas, to advance the developmental agenda of our country, while those on the other side are battling to select a leader while they preach doom, racism and sow the seeds of discorded unity. Right there lies the difference between the two sides. They do not even have a leader. The Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, spoke about the lack of agreement to appoint the Chancellor, but with whom would our President agree? There is no Leader of the Opposition. What he omitted to say is that, for five years, while his Government was in power, not a single attempt was made to enlist the then Leader of the Opposition in any engagement to broker an agreement. In fact, what they were trying to do was to import, from the Caribbean, someone who they wanted to impose as Chancellor so as to demote the current incumbent and to defeat the Chief Justice. That is what they want to do. They wanted to pervert the Judiciary as well after perverting the political system.

On this side, we work, and we build. On that side, they criticise, and they destroy. However, it is a burden which we will proudly bear. The historical truth is that, from 1950 to now, whenever the PPP/C is in Government, there is economic development, social progress and the rule of law. When the PPP/C is out of Government, there is economic stagnation, social decay, and authoritarianism. To demonstrate my point, after 28 years of the PNC/R misrule, we were a bankrupt economy. The 1991 Budget was a mere \$29.4 billion. Our total foreign debt was US\$2.1 billion. Our debt repayment rate was 120% of our gross domestic product (GDP). The entire infrastructure of our country was destroyed. That is what we inherited when they left Government in 1992. Just quickly ahead, when I entered this Parliament in 2006, the national Budget was \$102 billion. In 2022, this year, a \$101 billion is allocated for infrastructure alone. That is how we have grown this economy. That is how we have grown this country.

A lot has been said about our Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) and the Natural Resource Fund Act. As I was preparing for this Budget speech, I stumbled upon an article which was written, well to an interview done with a gentleman by the name of Andrew Bauer. Let me read who Andrew Bauer is. Andrew Bauer is one of the most reputable, academic and consultant in the area of oil

and gas across this globe. He advises on the GH Summit, he advises on the G20 Summit, and he advises the governments of Lebanon, Libya, Ghana, Mexico, Mongolia, Uganda, Vietnam and Senegal. He spoke on our Natural Resource Fund Act. He described the one before its predecessor as haphazard. This is what he said of our Bill. *Kaieteur News* Newspaper of 3rd February, 2022.

It is very:

“It is so detailed and innovative and it will really help Guyana not invest in some of the crazy derivative instruments or art or commodities or whatever that a lot of the funds around the world speculate in. The Guyanese fund will not be allowed to do that.”

“There is also a very, very high degree of transparency in the fund. All of the assets in the fund will be made publicly available through annual reports and financial statements.”

I continue. This is not Hon. Member Mr. Duncan speaking. This is Andrew Bauer, a world known expert. This is what he says, and I continue:

“Guyana is already a resource rich country, but it will be even more resource rich and the huge amount of foreign currency that is going to come into the economy and is already starting to come into the economy will have some important economic impact.”

“Clearly Guyana needed a fund. It made sense to create a fund to stabilise fiscal expenditures, and to smooth the spending over a longer period of time just than when the oil money is collected.”

This is one of the greatest minds, who is a trained in the area of oil and gas management, paying a tribute to our Natural Resource Fund Act.

4.43 p.m.

I thought that I would put that on the record because of the distortion that has come from the other side. Much has been said about the withdrawal of moneys from our Sovereign Wealth Fund. That money belongs to the people of Guyana. A sum of \$126 billion will be withdrawn from the fund this year. Every cent is reflected in this Budget to be spent on, and for the people of Guyana. We have no apologies for that. Mr. Speaker, every cent of that money will be deposited into the Consolidated Fund and appropriated in this National Assembly before you. Every cent will be

interrogated and explained in the Committee of Supply which will be streamed live. Every Guyanese and, indeed, the world, will view those proceedings and will hear how the money will be spent. That should immediately halt the baseless and reckless allegations of thievery and corruption.

Education and health, two of the most people-centred sectors in this country, are to receive nearly \$80 billion each. These two allocations alone constitute more than \$36 billion that will be withdrawn from the Sovereign Wealth Fund. Two sectors alone will draw a sum of \$36 billion more from that fund. Who will benefit from these two sectors, if not every Guyanese and our students? Yet, one hears from the hopeless bunch of Hon. Members on that side the recurring rhetoric that the Budget produces nothing for the Guyanese people. I heard the disgusting assertion that this Government is salivating at the oil money. This statement must come from the mind of a *come to see, never see*. We on this side are not so disposed. Ironically, this is the very bunch that ate out \$2 billion of food in one year, and they speak about salivating.

Though this point has been repeatedly made, I must emphasise that despite, its magnitude, this Budget imposes no new taxes. On the contrary, not only does it reverse tax imposed by the APNU/AFC but it confers a regime of liberal tax concessions for the ordinary citizens as well as those in the commercial sector. That is prudent fiscal management. We were able to move our revenue collection from about \$160 billion in 2016 to \$255 billion in 2021 without any new taxes, largely because of growth in economic activities. The economy is scheduled to grow in 2022 by nearly 50% which will rank among the highest growth rates in the world. The non-oil sector is scheduled to grow by some 7%. This will surpass the growth rate in the entire Caribbean. We have heard about trickle-down economics from the other side. This is trickle-over economics. From the oil sector, we are trickling it over to the other sectors so that every sector of the country can benefit from the oil money. That is prudent fiscal management. In short, this Budget lays a solid foundation for a modern Guyana.

I will not spend much time replying to the rambling from the other side. Their track record in Government is well-known. Their style of politics is well-known. Their criticisms and pessimisms are expected. One may recall when we were building the Guyana National Stadium at Providence, they labelled it a 'white elephant'. When we were building the Berbice River Bridge, they said that it was a waste of money. They were opposed to the Guyana Marriot Hotel, labelling it a bastion of

corruption. When they got into Government, it was not enough for them to wine and dine. They killed the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. They killed the specialty hospital. This was all while they were in Opposition. While they were in Opposition, they were destructive. In Government, they built nothing of worth. But, they squandered, discriminated, destroyed the productive sectors and caused over 30,000 Guyanese to lose their jobs while they trampled upon the Constitution. From their presentations in this House, nothing has changed. Nothing has changed. There is one erratum; they built a roundabout. As the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, said, that was built wrong. They got a circle wrong. All one had to do was draw a 'round' circle. That is what they got wrong.

I now move to the legal sector. Our Government recognises that there cannot be economic development nor social progress in the absence of the rule of law, constitutional compliance and an independent and efficient Judiciary. Law and order are the twin pillars upon which modern civilisation rests. The Judiciary has received an allocation of \$3.5 billion in the 2022 Budget. Mr. Speaker, as you know, starting from the year 2021, we have partnered with the Judiciary in the establishment of 28 virtual courts right across the prison centres of our country so that we do not have to take prisoners, during this pandemic, to the various magistrate's courts. They go into those virtual courts, and they have their cases heard. That was a \$200 million investment. Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General (AG)...

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I kindly ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister of Education. Hon. Attorney General, you have five minutes to continue and conclude your presentation.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, the Mahdia Magistrates' Court will be completed this year. The Port Kaituma Magistrates' Court will be completed this year. The Mabaruma Magistrates' Court will be concluded this year. The Vigilance Magistrates' Court will be concluded this year. The extension of the Court of Appeal's building in Kingston will be completed next year. The rewiring of the Supreme Court Registry, in Essequibo, will be completed this year. Also, this year, we are completing phase two of the Bartica Magistrates' Court to build parking places, storage bond and a waiting area for members of the public. We will also complete the Mahdia Magistrates' Court. We will begin the construction of the Cove and John Magistrates' Court, the Mahaicony

Magistrates' Court, the extension of a bailiff bond and the construction of a storage bond at Diamond. We will also begin the construction of a Magistrates' Court at Timehri with living quarters, a Magistrates' Court at Friendship, a Magistrates' Court at Anna Regina and we will build a storage bond at the Leonora Magistrates' Court. Also, this year, the Judiciary will invest some US\$1.5 million in accessing and Integrated Electronic Litigation System (eLitigation) programme which will help them to manage litigation in the system.

Our legislative agenda for 2022 – Expectedly, new developmental trajectory in which our nation is heading will require a new and modern statutory foundation. In this regard, we have a packed legislative agenda for this year. We already have the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) (Amendment) Bill in a select committee. We have a Hire-Purchase Bill in a select committee. In the pipeline are the juvenile justice, evidence, suicide prevention, border patrol, wills, restorative justice, combatting of trafficking in persons, a bail bill, a condominium bill, mental health bill, leave with pay bill, electronic communication transaction bill, anti-dumping bill, engineer's bill, securities bill, public service appellate tribunal (amendment) bill, national intelligence security agency bill, Representation of the People Act bill, national registration (amendment) bill, election laws (amendment) bill, surveillance devices bill, an arbitration bill, a hemp bill, a public health bill, a medical practitioners (amendment) bill, nurses and midwives bill, solid waste management (amendment) bill, a foreign judgement reciprocal enforcement bill, a fire arms bill, a domestic violence bill, radiation safety and protection bill, legislative amendments to our laws to allow for judge alone trials and many, many more. **[Mr. Dharamlall: Mental health.]** Of course, mental health is top on our priorities. It is at the top of the agenda.

We also have the Law Reform Commission that will come on. This year will be its first year in force, and we expect to get some recommendations for law reform from that agency. The Deeds and Commercial Registries Authority falls under the supervisory authority of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. This is a very important institution in our State apparatus. This is where our transports are filed, all business names are registered, all companies are registered, and all deeds are registered. Patents, trademarks, copyrights, *et cetera*, are all registered there. With the increase in commercial activities and with the developmental trajectory of our country expanding, this agency has to play an improved and increased role. They are pursuing several digital platforms to convert all their hardcopy records into electronic copies (e-copies) in almost every area so that members of the

public may obtain e-copies of documents requested. We are also digitising the property records and we are building a new edifice at Suddie on the Essequibo Coast. A four-story edifice to the value of about \$500 million that will house a new facility, a new branch of this office, for Essequibo.

The Hon. Mr. Forde spoke at length about the criminal justice project. Clearly, this fellow does not understand. He does not know about the project. When we took Government, I was summoned to an emergency meeting by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which is the funding agency. I was told that if this project does not get a kickstart and if it is not invigorated with energy, it will shut it down because it was suffering from inertia and inactivity. It was a dormant project under their Government. We took it... and if one looks at the newspapers today one will see, advertised by the University of Guyana, an invitation for persons who possess a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) degree to make an application to join a prosecutorial course that will be done at the University of Guyana. The graduates of that programme will be infused into our Magistrates' Court, and they will be prosecuting in the Magistrates' Court along with our police prosecutors.

We intend, under this programme, to also donate a quantity of computers and printers to the Guyana Police Force (GPF) with a view of them being used to type statements which are required to be served in criminal proceedings. Right now, those statements are served in handwriting. We intend to change that. There are a host of important initiatives that I will have to speak on at a different forum in relation to this project. Importantly, this year, the Government will kickstart the constitutional reform process. The Budget has some \$125 million. My Hon. Member and friend, Mr. Ramjattan, is in the committee with me. The committee has started to work, and we are looking at a model, a workplan, that we will use to push the agenda of that process.

In conclusion, this is a visionary Budget. This is a Budget, as I said, that will lay the foundation for a better Guyana. This is a Budget that I feel blessed to be part of. This is a Budget that future generations will salute as the foundational pillar of modern Guyana. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Attorney General. Hon. Members, as I mentioned, we are going to take a break after the Hon. Attorney General concluded. We have to conclude

consideration of the time allocated for the estimates in the Business Sub-committee of the Committee of Supply. Hon. Members, I now take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 4.57 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.03 p.m.

6.04 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. Kindly be seated. Hon. Members, we now proceed with the Budget debate 2022. The next speaker is His Excellency, former President and now Vice President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo and Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall...

Hon. Members, I am seeing a note here, from the Chief Whip for the Government, advising that the Hon. Member will not be speaking. Hon. Members, just let me check online before I move on. Hon. Member and former Leader of the Opposition, Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Joseph Harmon, you have the floor.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, give me one second to start your clock at 6.05.30 p.m. Hon. Member, you may proceed with your contribution.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to the Budget debate 2022, on a budget which is titled: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. The title of this Budget says it all – the PPP/ Administration is unrealistic, delusional and confused.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon just give me two seconds. I will start back your clock. You might be a little way from your microphone, so we are not getting a good audio feed. And, in order to help us, Hon. Members, I am asking that we reduce the excess noise so that we can hear and for the technicians to see if they could do something with the internet volume. Hon. Member, you may proceed. I am starting back the clock at 6.07 p.m. Go ahead.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: I rise to make my contribution to the Budget debate 2022, on a budget which is titled: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*. The title

of this Budget says it all – the PPP/C Administration is unrealistic, delusional and confused. The only challenge the Administration needs to be steadfast against are the many among them with an anti-Guyanese mentality and who appear to have been baptised in contaminated waters and filled with crassness. Therein lies the reason that the Budget is titled with a statement like “Resolute in Building Our One Guyana”, not ‘in building one Guyana for all Guyanese’ but “Our One Guyana.” We do not have to ask who the “Our” is referred to in this Budget title. Since this Administration went into Office, it was evident that it is ‘our Guyana’ which they have created and embraced for themselves, their families and friends. Then, there is the ‘other Guyana’ which has been treated with scant regard and punitive disdain. We have some very strong signals of who is not a part of their ‘One Guyana’ – the working class, the poor, the sons and daughters of slaves, the sons and daughters of indentured servants, our Indigenous population and everyone who opposes their style of governance.

At this point, let me commend my Colleague Members of Parliament (MPs) for their professional and clear treatment of this Budget so that the Guyanese people can understand the true meaning of these figures, that were thrown into this Budget, to finance what I would consider to be a visionless plan. From the first speaker on the Opposition side, who described the Budget as disrespectful, discriminatory and deceitful, to the very last speaker on the Opposition, in my view, we have successfully dismantled and pierced the veil of opaqueness that surrounds the presentation by Dr. Ashni Singh. I, like most Guyanese, am extremely proud of my Colleague Members of Parliament, like Ms. Juretha Fernandes, who exposed the Government’s poor record on the non-oil economy. This basically was what Ms. Juretha spoke to: in 2020, the non-oil Gross Domestic Production (GDP) was down by 7.3%; in 2021, the non-oil GDP was projected to grow by 6.1% but only grew only by 4.6%. The non-oil economy is worse today than it was in 2019.

Then, of course, there was the MP, Ms. Natasha Flu-Bess, who outlined a food basket or the way in which \$28,000 will be spent by a pensioner. This is what she said: if the cost for a dinner is \$300 *per* 30 days in a month, that would be \$9,000 spent by a pensioner; if the cost for a lunch is \$500 *per* 30 days, that is \$15,000; if a pensioner allocates \$2,000 a month to pay his/her Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) bill, along with a phone bill of \$2,000, that will basically bring him/her to a total of \$28,000. There is nothing left after that. He/she cannot even afford to deal with breakfast. These are the challenges that we are faced with as the poor people in this

country. I would like to say that these contributions have excellently brought home the reality of what this Budget means to the ordinary man and woman. Let me also take this opportunity to thank Dr. Nicolette Henry for her sterling service in this honourable House and wish her well in her future endeavours.

Hon. Member Dr. Singh, I am aware that the Budget is a painstaking operation in which you allocate moneys in a given year to the Government's priorities. I commend you for seeking to accomplish the impossible. Before I go much further, please permit me to address a few issues which were raised by the two previous speakers: the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, and the Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall, the Attorney General. First of all, the Hon. Gail Teixeira spoke to the fact that Guyana was in a very bad state when the PPP/C took Office in 2020. But I need to remind the Hon. Member that in 2014, and when the APNU/AFC took Office in 2015, Guyana was in the throes of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) conditionalities. We were about to be blacklisted. It took the efforts of the Administration of Mr. David Granger, and the untiring efforts of Mr. Basil Williams as the Attorney General, to bring us out of that condition. Certainly, the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, and the Attorney General were well aware of that. They are the ones who attended the Financial Action Task Force meetings in Paris and other parts of the world. They were well aware of that.

We also have to recall that during that period before 2015, Guyana was described internationally as a narcotic State. It was what was described in some international magazine as a tattered legacy of bad infrastructure; a tattered legacy of a people with little or no hope; a demoralised public service; and, as one writer in the *Stabroek Newspapers*, Mr. Ralph Ramkarran, said at that time, corruption had assumed an industrial scale. That is what we had – an industry scale corruption and a tattered legacy. We were in the throes of being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force. We had a demoralised public service. That is what the PPP/C gave to us after 23 years in Office. They like to say that this is a continuing Administration that started in 1992. So, what we are seeing now is a continuation of that same failed policy that produced that type of environment in Guyana. I would just like to remind the Hon. Member, Mdm. Gail Teixeira, of these issues. There are many others, but I cannot spend all of my time dealing with that today.

Then, of course, it was this crassness, which I call it, of the Attorney General, who, apart from trying to explain that he went to Queen's College and, therefore, has a certain pedigree, and that

the Hon. Member on the Opposition side went to St. Rose's High School and, therefore, he has a different pedigree, is what we are talking about. The Hon. Member made a statement which, I believe, was very dishonourable, and one for which I believe that the PNC should call upon him to make an apology. Every year, the People's Progressive Party/Civic goes to Babu John where they celebrate the life and the legacy of Dr. Cheddi Jagan. The country recognises that, and the country treats it with the respect that it requires. But the Hon. Attorney General this afternoon, basically, denigrated such an activity by the People's National Congress, to go to the Botanical Gardens on an annual basis to celebrate the life and legacy of two former presidents – President Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham and President Hugh Desmond Hoyte. He likened it as to going to raise up the 'Kabaka' to help us in our elections. That is disrespectful. I believe the Hon. Member, in his exuberant outburst, must understand the consequences of statements like that made by a senior member of the PPP/C. He is a senior member. He is not just any ordinary member. When one sees photographs of the five top persons in the Government, he is one of them. So, it is disrespectful for him to basically treat an activity that we revere on an annual basis as going to beg the 'Kabaka.'

6.19 p.m.

The Hon. Anil Nandlall also went on, in his usual tirade, about the 2020 elections and said that *all hell broke loose* after the results started to come on. The Hon. Member must know, and it cannot escape him, that on the 6th March, when he spoke about *all hell broke loose* that it was his Party and his Party's leadership that had been engaged in activities at the Elections Commission's office in Georgetown. The Hon. Member must know that.

Finally, as some of these matters are the subject for elections petitions, let me say that the *acid test* of the 2020 General and Regional Elections would be what comes out of the process of the recount which took place at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC). It will not be determined by how many people recognised you and all of that. It is what the electors decided that will be the *acid test*. When these matters come before the court, we will determine, in fact, who was right and who was wrong. The reality is that the Hon. Dr. Singh, who I consider to be an honourable man and I respect him, has been asked to present a budget to this country based on a plan by his bosses at the Ministry of the Presidency, a plan which is visionless. Just as you were unable to sign the \$2,000 Bill, Dr. Singh, this is the same reason why you have to now face the ire and the criticism

of this country based on a budget that has no vision. It is no secret that after four days of debating, and after a marathon presentation by Dr. Ashni Singh, that the Vice President and Hon. Member Mr. Jagdeo, had to take to the television yesterday to explain this vision. What I am saying, if after four days all of your Ministers cannot explain the vision on which this Budget is based and it requires the Vice President himself to go in what he considers to be a calm atmosphere to explain to the people of Guyana what are the philosophical underpinnings of this Budget, then certainly, if they cannot explain it, the people will not understand it. This is the critical point.

My Colleagues have asked me to deal with the governance mechanism and the government structure that impact this Budget which we are dealing with. As is known, every budget brought to this House by this Administration reflects this “Our One Guyana” theme. None of the previous budgets catered directly to the development of the poor and the working class. The average Guyanese have not benefited from the two budgets presented thus far in this House. Yet, again, miniscule benefits are being offered to the working class and the unemployed. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance should redo this anti-Guyanese Budget and come again. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, has a budget title that is longer than the benefits in the Budget for the poor and the working-class citizens of this country. In fact, if you add the Budget title to the title that has been given to the Hon. Minister, you will see how long that is. Of course, these names are sometimes meant to create a smoke screen, so one does not really see what is behind it. Rather than calling Dr. Ashni Singh the Minister of Finance, you give him a long name, just to say he is not the Minister of Finance. In like manner, this Budget, it gives a long title just to say it is not what it intends or what it portends to be.

This 2022 Budget is prepared to utilise the funds from the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) which is a patrimony of all Guyanese. Most Guyanese, to them, their lives have not seen good days under any PPP/C Administration. The fact remains that, yet another PPP/C Administration has failed to deliver a good or a better life for all Guyanese through its plans, its programs, and its policies. It is little wonder that the new oil finds that are announced by ExxonMobil and lately by CGX have not generated excitement and interest by the Guyanese people. It is because they cannot see the benefit of all of these oil finds and this Petro-state that we are creating; they do not see the benefits trickling down to them that affects their livelihoods. There is no doubt that the policies and plans of *Budget 2022* will create a great life for a select few in their version of ‘our Guyana.’ Building

‘One Guyana’ must include equity, it must include justice, it must include fairness, it must include transparency, it must include inclusionary democracy, it must include opportunities for our young people, it must include a better quality of life for pensioners, it must include respect for our public servants, it must include freedom of speech and, most importantly, it must include benefits for women who are predominately the head of households in this country. It must, of course, too, include opportunities for the creation of wealth for the ‘other Guyana’ – the economically disadvantaged. This Budget does not provide access to opportunities and a better quality of life. A national budget has to speak to development at an individual level, at the community level and at a national level. The impact of that budget has to be felt by vendors in the market, professionals, engineers, doctors, plumbers, *et cetera*. Instead, this Budget caters for the friends and families of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

We will see many letters in the press and interviews of the Hon. Members and Ministers from the PPP/C speaking of how good the Budget is for Guyana. As the saying goes, *he who feels it, knows it*. If you want to know *where the shoe pinches*, put it on. In *Budget 2022* the vast majority of the people of Guyana are made to settle for pittance at the bottom, while those at the top continue to create an environment for themselves to continue the pilferage of the public coffers. As an Opposition, we will not stand by and see that happen. Along with the mobilised citizenry, we will fight this scourge before it takes hold in this country.

One of the trends we have become accustomed to in every PPP/C Administration’s budget is the investment of billions of dollars into failed projects and plans. Remember the famous fibre optic cable project which was managed by the son of a former President, which caused the people of Guyana over \$1.3 billion. It was on the 2nd November, 2018, that the then PPP/C Opposition leader, at that time, flayed the PPP/C over this failed project. One media outlet – the *Guyana Chronicle* – published an article, and I quote:

“Jagdeo blasts failed PPP \$1.3B fibre optic cable”

In that same article, the Hon. Member was quoted as saying:

““It was a failure, the design parameters were all wrong,””

I want to use those very words to say to Dr. Ashni Singh that this Budget is a failure. Its design parameters are all wrong as it does not uplift the lives of the poor and working class in our society. I will give you another example to illustrate my point. In 2013, under the PPP/C, a bridge was built at Moruka for \$43 million by a contractor. The work was poor and even after it was completed the bridge could not be used. The contractor was paid all the money, but when he was questioned by *Stabroek News* about the poor work, he said, it was not me, it was the Government that gave me an inadequate design to build the bridge. When the APNU/AFC came into Office in 2015, we had to rebuild that bridge. According to the contractor, the design parameters that he received from the PPP/C Government was wrong. That was the problem with the bridge. The design was bad. That also is the problem with this Budget. The design is bad, Dr. Singh. I know you know how to put together a budget. If you get bad design, bad parameters, you could only expect failure. Speaking of bad designs, we have the return of the famous Amelia Falls hydro project. It is ludicrous for any Government to be obsessed with funding failed projects. It is the nature of the PPP/C that drives this style of governance – failed projects that translate as success to the PPP/C because their friends get the contracts and benefits are filtered down to them and their families – what they call trickle-down corruption. I heard this word used quite often during the course of this debate. It is what we call *new wine in old skin* or as the Americans call it, *pork barrel* politics.

Then we have the issue of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). This Corporation has been continuously used as a political tool by the PPP/C. The PPP/C does not care about the sugar workers or the industry, what they do know is that it is necessary to have the sugar workers and their families be dependent on GuySuCo, so as to ensure that this single voting block remains beholden to them. The GuySuCo will continue to make less than it costs to produce sugar year after year. It will continue to deprive projects in other sectors of billions of much needed budgetary allocations that could bring short, medium, and long-term relief to citizens, especially during this time of COVID-19. The billions given to GuySuCo could have gone towards providing free education at the University of Guyana. Education is not as important as re-opening estates of a failed industry.

6.34 p.m.

To date, GuySuCo has received over \$30 billion from the previous two budgets and supplementals. It is said to receive another \$6 billion in this Budget. We are yet to see the reopening of any estate.

While the Administration continues to fund its failures, Guyanese must wait until after the next elections – according to this Administration – to have access to free tertiary education. Let me say this to the PPP/C Administration: on this issue they are right. I agree with them because the next Administration will be the APNU/AFC. We will certainly make tertiary education a reality and a priority as a part of our education and as part of us providing what is called an educated nation. That is part of our plan. The PPP/C is right on that. You are right on that.

The APNU/AFC made sure that its policies, plans and projects catered to all Guyanese during its time in Office. Over time, we have put more disposable income in the pockets of our citizens through a number of measures. These included, but were not limited to, increases in the minimum wage from \$39,000 to \$65,000 while increasing the income tax threshold simultaneously. This allowed the public service to have more discretionary income after covering the necessities. That was done without the oil money. That is how a caring Government caters to its citizens. Of this, the Hon. Members on the Government's side should take note. The small increase of the income tax threshold and the invisible and intangible disposable income that you are talking about is all swallowed up even before it reaches the pockets of our public servants and citizens. It is all eaten up by a cost of living that is increasing daily. It seems to me that the PPP/C does not clearly understand the times in which we are living. What we have in this Budget are pittance being paraded as life-changing measures. The PPP/C Administration is one whose policy is to make our people a nation of mendicants. The cash grants that they have placed in the budget are enough to have citizens look for another handout next year. It is not enough to put them in a position where they are able to build sustainable livelihoods. Those on the Government's side spend no time addressing measures and policies that would have lasting, positive impacts because they do not want an independent populace. They rely on a dependent population.

As we reflect on how the cash grants, last year, were distributed to our citizens, one cannot help but liken the *modus operandi* to exactly how drug lords operate. When attempting to gain control over people and communities, they go into communities with large bags of money, along with their security, with big guns, to share out money and buy over communities to increase their interest. It is interesting that, in 2021, the PPP/C used this same method to get money to the people. Here again, I iterate our call for the auditing of the disbursement of all those cash grants. I call again on the Hon. President, His Excellency Dr. Irfaan Ali, to demand that the Auditor General

produces that audit which he instructed him to do. Why is he not doing it? Is he so disrespectful of the Office? Or does he feel so comfortable that when the President gives him an instruction, he does not have to follow it because he is probably following the directions of some other power in the Office of the President?

Another continuing trend of the PPP/C budgets is the lack of foresight which is a general characteristic of its governance. Mr. Speaker, when the APNU/AFC was in Office, we placed restrictions on the importation of used tyres and aged vehicles in order to protect our environment and to save lives. We implemented measures for the easy importation of electric vehicles and the setting up of charging stations. Our Administration was forward-thinking. It appears as though we were too forward-thinking for the PPP/C which decided to reverse our tyres and vehicle policy. Now, in *Budget 2022*, they are offering tax measures to benefit the importation of vehicles for industrial and commercial purposes. Not one thought was given to the fact that we are still in a pandemic and to provide incentives and a fleet of vehicles for school children. Not a single thought was given for the importation of better vehicles for public transportation to aid in safer travel. There is no tax reduction or concession for frontline workers who want to purchase a vehicle to travel to work safely during this pandemic, so that they could continue to serve the country and fellow citizens. According to the Ministry of Health, there is no end in sight to this particular COVID-19 pandemic. Ever so often we hear of a new variant. So, we have to adopt lifestyles for what is called this ‘new normal.’ In the consideration of this Budget, this Government ought to have taken into consideration this ‘new normal’ and, therefore, provide vehicles for those frontline workers.

Another very obvious trend in this PPP/C Budget is that it focuses heavily on measures to benefit the private sector, while little to no attention is placed on developing a strong, productive public sector, to cater for the needs of this country. It is as if the Government expects the private sector to deliver public service to the citizens. This Administration boasts about implementing measures that see the private sector saving some \$6 billion which it hopes would be passed on to citizens. Instead, the citizens got an increase in the prices of most products, with no measures being implemented for a direct benefit to them. The PPP/C has turned to the private sector with the hope that profit will no longer guide its decision making. It must be clear to all that the Administration is incompetent.

When we spoke about the public sector and went through the entire budget speech of the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, we saw a reference to the public sector one time – once. In my contribution to the 2021 debate, the Opposition posited eight issues on which there was a need to find common ground. These issues, in our view, would contribute to good governance in Guyana. These issues were that our Government, or any government for that matter, cannot function in a country like Guyana by just seeing red or green communities. Our communities are made up of people who provide the resources of this country. Therefore, the State must provide resources to those communities in an equitable manner.

Secondly, we should agree that constructive engagement, based on clear principles and broadening stakeholder engagement at the national and regional community level, is a *sine qua non* for our economic development. On this point, let me speak a little about these consultations and the fact that the Attorney General in his address to the National Assembly, not so long ago, said there was no consultation with the Leader of the Opposition on judicial appointments. I do not know whether the Hon. Member, maybe when he looks back at the *Hansard*, will recognise that a mistake has been made. I can say that the Hon. Member, along with the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President Granger and I consulted not only once, but more than once on the appointment of judicial officers. There is a record, I believe, in the public domain in which, at the end of one of those meetings, the Leader of the Opposition, as soon as he left the meeting, went to the media and said that he did not agree with the proposal made by President Granger. So, if we do not call that consultation, I do not know what your understanding is, Hon. Attorney General, a Queen's College student, as to what consultation means. I think it is a very simple matter.

The third issue, Mr. Speaker, that we raised, at that time, was that we should immediately shift from this ethnic marginalisation and vindictiveness. The Hon. Ms. Gail Teixeira almost moved my heart this afternoon when she spoke. It was about: what our One Guyana should be; how we should work together to benefit from what is happening to our country since a huge amount of resources are coming; and why we should work together as a people to ensure that the benefit goes to all. That was our third issue – we should try to remove vindictiveness and marginalisation. Maybe in the PPP/C's head, it is not being vindictive, and it is not marginalising people, but the general

public outside there sees it differently. Even if it is a question of perception, then we should work to deal with that.

On the fourth issue, we said that we should agree to meet to cause a redress of imbalances in this country. This is most palpable in the distribution of these grants, in the way in which we go to communities and skip some that are perceived to have supported the APNU/AFC. These things are very clear. The citizens speak about it. You do not have to go on Mr. Sherod Duncan's programme to hear that. On all the other stations you will hear that, but some, of course, cannot carry it because they serve different masters.

The fifth issue that we spoke about was collectively focusing on poverty and the plight of our poor citizens. This issue I believe has received some attention, during the course of our debate and the course of my presentation. The poor citizens must feel that they have a place in this country and that they are not just to be consulted when it is time for elections to get their votes and they are left behind thereafter; or, if they are not part of the ruling party's apparatus nothing can happen for them. We have to work that out. They have to get rid of that. They believe that is important enough.

The sixth issue, of course, was the need for us to work together to protect our sovereignty and national patrimony. I think we have started some work together on this Venezuelan issue and I trust that that can continue. Certainly, on our national patrimony, there is significant disagreement on the approach that the Government has taken to deal with the resources which come from the oil and gas sector.

The seventh issue we raised was the question of the National COVID-19 Task Force which we felt should be expanded to have an inclusive representation at meaningful levels. This continues to go on and on and on and on.

6.49 p.m.

It seems to me as if our Minister of Health and the National COVID-19 Task Force itself has probably just given up and decided that we will just count the number of persons who are infected on a daily basis and those who passed away. It is just like death announcement.

The eighth issue was that we should agree that there is an urgent need to update our electoral laws to ensure that there is a list of electors who reflects the reality of Guyana. I was happy to hear the

Hon. Attorney General, in his list of legal issues or his list of matters that will be the subject of legislation, speaks towards the electoral laws. We believe that it is an urgent priority that the voters list or the electoral list be cleansed to represent the true reality of what Guyana is. We cannot move forward unless that issue is taken care of.

One year later, these conditions remain unmet but that is the pattern of behaviour of the PPP/C. If I could go to 2014, I addressed the National Assembly in 2014 on some of the similar conditions which we had asked the Administration, under President Ramotar, to look at. Basically, we said that the Government refused to engage in any meaningful budget talks at the tripartite level.

Secondly, the Government refused to reduce the toll at the Berbice River Bridge; thirdly, the Government refused to reduce the value-added tax (VAT) by, at least, a single percentage, with a promise by His Excellency the President to look at the tax structure and to establish a tax committee; fourthly, the Government refused to increase old age pension to \$15,000 which we were asking for in 2012; fifthly, the Government refused a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) into the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) as a precondition to any further subvention to these entities; sixthly, the Government refused to guarantee the independence of Constitutional entities, even after a motion was passed in the National Assembly, they continue to refuse to do so; seventhly, the Government refused to give presidential assent to any Bills passed in the National Assembly which the PPP/C did not support; eighthly, the Government refused to address the issues affecting the National Insurance Scheme (NIS); ninthly, it refused to have the moneys in National Industrial & Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL), the lotto fund that the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission transferred into the Consolidated Fund; and tenthly, the Government refused to take action on the National Communications Network (NCN) and the Government Information Agency (GINA). It is important to note that we continue to have these situations on to now.

Only yesterday, the People's National Congress issued a statement about the biased coverage of the NCN in the debate that is taking place in the National Assembly. This was a continual issue. Then, the eleventh matter that we spoke about was the Government's refusal at that time to establish a Public Procurement Commission (PPC). It is a pattern by the PPP/C that even if one raises these issues, they will find all sorts of excuses as to why they should not consult, why they should not do this. It is a pattern. Mr. Speaker, what has happened in last year's budget – no action

has been taken? I am showing you that in 2013 and 2014, it was the same behaviour by this Administration. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, during this Budget speech spoke *ad nauseum* about the PPP/C's Administration of governance architecture using descriptive that are contradictory to the nature of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. The Hon. Member said on page 67, paragraph 4.199 of his Speech:

“...the governance architecture of this Government is based firmly on inclusivity, participation, transparency and accountability, and the rule of law.”

Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. It would appear to me that the PPP/C does not possess the political maturity to be inclusive, let alone, be transparent and accountable. The Hon. Member should have said that the PPP/C's governance architecture is based firmly on exclusion, selective participation, opacity and unaccountability of lawlessness. Those are the pillars on which the concept and policy trust of our “One Guyana” they are creating are based. This Administration which boasts of inclusivity and participation continues to define the Constitution by failing to have consultation with critical stakeholders in this country. There is yet to be consultation on key constitutional appointments. They refuse to consult with the Opposition on *Budget 2022* and they shut out the regions that are managed by the Coalition from the Budget preparation process.

The unions are being ignored when requests are made for meetings and they are left out of meetings and are directly related to matters affecting those that they represent. Mr. Speaker, in November, 2021, when the Government announced the meager seven per cent salary increase there was no consultation in the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU). In fact, in a *Stabroek News* article dated 20th November, 2021, the Minister of the Public Service was reported as saying that they were “pressed for time” and that “did not allow for consultation with union”. Mr. Speaker, this is not that the Coalition is saying that they did not consult but it is the Minister telling the Guyanese people that the Government had no time to consult with leave in representatives on matters that directly affect your livelihood. The article went on to say that:

““This unlawful action was taken during ongoing representation by the GPSU, which was vigorously pursuing the need for negotiations with the Ministry of Public Service and had legitimate expectations that that would take place. The copies of all correspondence were

copied to you with the hope of presidential intervention, but sadly this has not been the case,””

This is the ‘One Guyana’ and inclusivity that the Government speaks of. This is not the Coalition telling the Government that they are not inclusive and that they are lawless. The Union said that. It was also published in the *Kaieteur News* article that the Guyana Trade Union Congress wrote the President of our “One Guyana” to have a meeting on salary increases issue and there was no response from the President. When we say this Administration is exclusive and does not seek to have meaningful consultation with all stakeholders, we are doing so clearly from a strong position. Their actions speak louder than their words.

The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, mentioned the establishment of a one Guyana commission in 2022. Mr. Speaker, we have said it before and we continue to say it, the PPP/C is visionless. They continue to dismantle every good thing created by the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change Administration. Then, they rebrand it and pitch it as if it is a new idea. They dismantled the Ministry of Social Cohesion and now seeks to create a One Guyana commission. The Hon. Member, on the opening, sought to suggest that we promised and they delivered, please, be advised Hon. Member that we created and you *bruk-up*. The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh went on to talk about the administration’s anti-corruption framework for Guyana. It is the same thing that is based on commitments to our treaty obligations to the InterAmerican convention against corruption and the United Nations (UN) Convention against corruption as well.

The APNU/AFC Coalition Government passed the State Asset Recovery Bill (SARA) of 2017 giving life to the State Asset Recovery Act and the establishment of the State Asset Recovery Agency in keeping with Guyana’s commitment to the same treaty obligations mentioned by the Hon. Member. I must iterate that the Government’s actions speak louder than their words. When they came into Office, they dismantled the State Asset Recovery Agency and the Director who they claimed had too much power, they fired him. That is not the reason. They are masters of equivocation; they love to conceal the truth, but we will continue to bring the truth to the Guyanese people. The truth of the matter is that they could have amended the Act. They could have removed the so-called powers that they were referring to, but that would have meant that the more than 19 cases that SARA had against some of their friends and families of the PPP/C that will worth billions of Guyana dollars would have had to be carried on in the course of the court. In fact, the

same week that the Government closed the Agency, there were matters to be heard in the court. The only way to annul all those court cases was to shut the Agency down and repeal the Act. They like to say that SARA did nothing. They should have allowed those cases to take their due course and prove to the nation that we were witch hunting. I say again, actions speak louder than words.

They made sure that they removed any legislation that sought to hold them transparent and accountable. This is the true nature of the PPP/C. On the subject of accountability and transparency, the PPP/C has demonstrated overtime that they are accountable to no one, not even themselves. They came to this House and forced the passage of the Natural Resources Fund Bill which the majority of Guyanese agreed that it was passed illegally. There are numerous letters to the editor calling for consultation on the bid. One such letter came from a Dr. Jerry Jailall in the *Kaiteur News* dated 29th December, 2021. It was titled: *PPP/C Natural Resources Bill (NRF) seek more power and less accountability of oversight*. This is not the Coalition that said this but it is the citizens of this country. This is how the letter started:

“There is a saying, “The more you watch, the less you see; the less you watch, the better for me.” The PPP seems bent on using its one-seat majority to railroad the repeal of the Original NRF Act approved by the Coalition, replacing it with its own bill, and reducing the Public Accountability and Oversight committee from 22 to 9 persons. They want us to watch less, and the better for them.”

Dr. Jailall went on to talk about their lack of consultation stakeholders on critical national matters and a number of failed projects. Again I say, their actions speak louder than their words. The people of Guyana see the PPP/C for who they really are. In another letter, Mr. Surendra Dhanpaul in the same edition of the newspaper pleaded with the President not to ascend to the Bill. This is what he said:

“President Ali is in a uniquely advantageous position to listen to the people and organisations who do not support passage of the Bill but ask for further consultation before the Bill is law. LISTEN and HEAR the people, many of whom voted for you.”

This is what he is saying.

“...This is not giving into the opposition; this LISTENING to the people and telling them, “I HEAR you”.

This is what he said again.

Finally, I call on President Ali to show us INTEGRITY. This is the one quality that He explicitly specified that He would require of Board members.”

7.04 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will have to ask you to withdraw that reference to His Excellency, the President.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: I withdraw it, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Please, proceed.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: All I will say to the Members on the Government’s side of the House is to show us what integrity means to them. That is what the people of Guyana want to see. Again, I say, your actions speak louder than your words.

Civil society groups spoke about the poor governance structure of the Bill and the fact it lacks the key ingredients of accountability and transparency. Citizens even submitted a petition to this Assembly, seeking to halt the passage of the Bill. The petitioners respectfully requested that the National Assembly pauses the motion to debate the repeal of the Natural Resources Fund Act to provide an opportunity for the proposed amendments to be made available to the citizens of Guyana. This is what the Policy Forum Guyana had to say in a press statement in the *Stabroek News*, dated 31st December, 2021, that since assuming Office in 2020, avenues for influencing decision making in Guyanese politics have been progressively closed off by the ruling party.

“Independent voices are being silenced and professionals replaced by compliant camp-followers. As a result, institutions such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Guyana Police Force and the State Media, while ostensibly still performing their roles, have become arms of the ruling party.

In the same vein, the “dismissive parliamentary treatment” of the formal Petition signed by 64 citizens calling for a pause in the consideration of the Natural Resources Fund Bill 20 of 2021 and said it is a microcosm of what politics in Guyana has become.”

An entirely transparent process making a modest demand for time to consult was ignored by the ruling party without explanation. This is not a Coalition statement; this is what the citizens of Guyana are saying. There are more statements like these, too many for me to deal with today because of time. Amidst this national outcry, this Administration decided to ignore the Guyanese people, understandably so because they needed the money to prop up this so-called “biggest budget”. The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh needs to inform this Assembly of the intended expenditure for the money being withdrawn. It is not enough to say that the money will go into the Consolidated Fund. Even before the money is withdrawn, it is our contention that the Act, that is, the new Act, provides at section 16 (2) (a) and (b), which deals withdrawals from the Fund. It outlines that the funds are to be used for the national development priorities and essential projects that are directly related to natural disasters.

However, the Fund is in the Budget merely as budgetary support. The Government was in such a hurry to force the Bill through the Assembly that they failed to realise that the Act, which is now law, requires that they should state what the money is to be used for to satisfy the requirement for withdrawal. It is not enough to say that it will be withdrawn and put into the Consolidated Fund and while it is there, we will then come to the Parliament. Before you draw it, you should state what the funds are to be used for. Just a few days ago, the Chartered Accountant and Attorney at Law, Mr. Christopher Ram, in an article carried by the *Kaieteur News*, raised the very concern as it relates to the withdrawal from the Fund in defiance of what is stated in the Act at section 16. Then, there is section 19, which deals with approvals of withdrawals from the Fund. Section 19 reads:

“The amount that the Minister shall request the National Assembly to approve as the withdrawal from the Fund for the next ensuing fiscal year shall be included in the annual budget proposal...”

I was looking among my Budget documents to see if there was any statement of request for withdrawal from the Fund and I could not find any. It is as if the PPP/C believes that they must

answer to no one. The rule of law means nothing to them. They forced the Bill through the Assembly, and in less than a month they are in defiance of the very Act, because all they want to do is to get their hands on the money. The former Auditor General, Mr. Anand Goolsarran, in his weekly *Accountability Watch* column, in the *Stabroek News* on 31st January, 2022, stated that he observed:

“Section 16 of the NRF Act provides for the approval of the Assembly before any withdrawals are made from the Fund.”

He contends:

“This raises question as to whether the Assembly’s specific approval is not required before the amounts involved are incorporated in the Estimates. This is not a Member of the Opposition questioning the possible illegal act of the Government.”

The people are watching and, again I say, to those on the Government’s side of the House, your actions speak louder than your words. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, needs to inform this nation as to whether or not the various boards, as required under the new Natural Resources Fund Act, were established prior to the withdrawal of this Fund. If so, who are these board members and when were they appointed? In looking at the governance structure of the PPP/C, Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh should also inform the nation as to the status of the many commissions and boards that are to safeguard the nation’s wealth and aid in good governance. Are those boards and commissions constituted? I heard the Vice-President, yesterday, in his press conference, speak to a number of boards and a number of commissions that will be established by the end of February. What has been happening all along? What is this magical date at the end of February?

For example, there is the Public Procurement Commission, after this Administration came into Office, they dismantled the PPC. For those persons whose contracts came to an end, they allowed them to run out and they were never reappointed. What this did was it allowed the issuing of contracts to friends and families without the necessary oversight and scrutiny, which is provided by the Commission. Billions of dollars in contracts...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I listened so that I could have heard what you concluded on the PPC. As far as I know, the Public Procurement Commission expired and I have a long letter from the

former Chairperson addressing the issue of not having legal authority to extend peoples' contracts. The records of the Parliament, in my office, state differently.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I thank you, for that clarity, Mr. Speaker. What I am saying is that it is a pattern that we are seeing that the Public Procurement Commission Tribunal Act came into being while the PPP/C was in Government before 2015 and they refused to bring that Commission into establishment. Again, they are back in Office. We did it while we were in Office and ensured that the Commission was functioning. Again, they are back in Office and it is not.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Former Leader of the Opposition, there is a process and I have been seeing the issue of the Public Procurement Commission's nominations and so in terms of the Minutes of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and these discussions. It is not a single entity's responsibility. I think, this requires some amount of consensus with respect to the names.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I understand that Mr. Speaker. I thank you, for that intervention too and I am sure that you may recognise at the end that I may need some additional time. The point is that we are at least into one year and months since this new Administration came into Office. To say that it is now before the Public Accounts Committee does not sit well with the Guyanese people. Mr. Speaker, I will leave this matter there and I will not go any further on it.

The point I want to make, however, is that the absence of these agencies or these oversight bodies, allows for the granting of contracts without the necessary oversights and without the protections that are issued or that are provided by these guardrails of democracy for those things to function. The fancy talk about Government architecture that is based firmly on inclusivity, participation, transparency and accountability, and the rule of law are not something that can be taken seriously. That fact is that one cannot have good governance where there is no scrutiny on proper checks and balances. No checks and balances mean that space is allowed for major acts of corruption in the expenditure of this \$552 billion Budget. There is no doubt as to why Guyana has declined in its standing on the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) over the last year. On this, I understand that the Hon. Vice-President is now blaming that on the APNU/AFC. He blames us for everything, so that is nothing new. It is simply because the PPP/C's governance structure is weak at its very core. Again, I say to the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, actions speak louder than words.

Do not talk about good governance, show it. Although cases have been made from ministries and agencies to drive developmental programmes that should better the lives of the people, the glue that holds it all together and makes sure that the people benefit and that those programmes are successful, is the way in which the governance structures function. It is not something that sometimes one can put a dollar value on when the governance structure is as porous as the one, this Administration is resting its budget on. One can allot \$20 billion for roads and bridges, but because corruption is ever-present and the safeguards and guardrails are non-existent, the roads and infrastructure will crumble as the posts on Vlissengen Road that were recently erected, and the many road works across this country that had to be remedied in a matter of weeks after they were completed. What I am saying, because I know that many on the Government's side will take a while to understand it, is that you can boast about the biggest budget, how much money you allocated to a specific project or programme, but when your governance structure is based firmly on exclusion, selective participation, opacity, unaccountability, lawlessness and corruption, the majority of the populace will not directly benefit from your budget. That is the harsh reality.

Good governance entails, I will posit also, how institutions conduct their public affairs and how a government manages public resources, ensuring that there is equity, fairness and accountability. Good governance guarantees a realisation of human rights in a manner which is essentially free of abuse and corruption and with due regard for the rule of law. In a 31st January *Kaieteur News* article titled: "*Tax reliefs in budget are for the rich*". Economist, Tarron Khemraj urged direct cash transfers from the NRF to help ordinary citizens. The article states:

"The tax reduction measures announced in this year's budget will not benefit the ordinary citizens of this country and government instead should focus on ensuring that Guyanese benefit directly from the proceeds of the oil resources, Professor of Economics, Tarron Khemraj said.

7.19 p.m.

Khemraj was among the panellist of the Moray House Trust discussion on Guyana's Natural Resource Fund (NRF) Act, a virtual consultation held on Saturday. In his presentation, Khemraj, a Professor of Economics and International Studies at the new College of Florida said, "It's an interesting Budget. It has certainly, bright spots, but the

most worrying spot of the 2022 Budget is how much it mollycoddles people who are already well-off.”

He reasoned that the Vice President, Bharrat Jagdeo recently said that he came up with an estimate that local content law alone will provide the business community with over US\$600 million a year, but even with local content and “the wonderful tax breaks” Khemraj said he does not see the rationale. For example, in this year’s Budget, government has announced measures to reduce the excise tax on double cab pick-up vehicles between 2000 and 3000 cc from 110 percent...”

It has gone down.

“...to 75 percent. A similar reduction is expected to benefit other vehicles servicing the oil and gas sector as well as cater to the increase of construction activities.

To this end, the economist warned, “I don’t see the good planning there and of course if you reduce the price of some of these vehicles and you make it too easy, you could have the Trinidad situation where one family now has three vehicles and what you have, you are building roads to take care of the traffic congestion and then you are right back there in two to three years so sustainability has to be a lot more holistic...”

Good governance also requires a Parliament that is handled without bias, where all Members are treated equally and where the business of the people are not denied at the whim and fancy of the presiding officials without sound explanation. This is what we mean by a ‘One Guyana’. The extensive delays in summoning parliamentary sittings, the many Opposition motions denied and questions that went unanswered, and the determination that matters, such as flooding of our communities are not urgent. This is basically not what we consider to be good governance and to lead a better ‘One Guyana’. To share a most recent occurrence, the reasons given for the dismissal of the Opposition’s motion, which suggest that the Opposition could not have brought a legal motion over an illegal action, and if initiated in the first place, in our view or in my view, has no proper foundation in law even though there was some legal maxim quote. I think that is more the exception than the rule. What that is saying is, if someone initiates an argument and the other person then physically assaults the initiator of the argument, then the person who initiated the argument cannot make a report to the police and to get a redress. That has to be ludicrous. The

National Assembly is the highest decision-making forum in the land and if we cannot get it right here in this House, we will be dominated by a governing system which can soon crumble.

Mr. Speaker and Colleagues, I leave you with the words of a former President of Guyana, Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham. He stated:

“...in our hands lies the destiny of the Cooperative Republic. Let these be safe hands...”

For the many issues highlighted in my presentation and the fact that a major portion of this Budget is funded by withdrawals from the Natural Resources Fund, which the Opposition considers to be illegal. I cannot support this Budget. On that point, I say thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and I thank the Hon. Members for listening. I, thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, the Hon. Former Leader of the Opposition. Hon. Members, it is now the time for the Hon. Prime Minister to make his contribution.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give my unwavering support to *Budget 2022* titled: *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*, which was brilliantly prepared and presented by my Colleague, the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. The Hon. Dr. Singh has presented, yet again, another budget that will allow our Government to continue our work started when we assumed Office in August, 2020, and to fulfil our commitments to every Guyanese citizen, changing and touching their lives, as we work towards achieving a prosperous future together. I must extend congratulations to the Hon. Minister and his hardworking and committed team, who have all toiled efficiently and fervently to complete this Budget.

This \$552.9 billion Budget is ground-breaking and transformative; no doubt, it holds people at the very centre of its focus. With no new taxes – I repeat, no new taxes – and a robust development agenda, *Budget 2022* stands as a glaring testimony of our Government's continued commitment to all the people of Guyana, including you on the Opposition benches. We just listened to one hour of negativity. However, that was a farewell speech and I did not expect anything better. However, it is protocol that, on behalf of my Government lead by President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and our General Secretary of the leading and winning political party in Guyana, the PPP/C, that I take this opportunity to compliment the Hon. Member, Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Joseph Harmon for his sterling

service as the Leader of the Opposition. I nearly said as a Member of Parliament, but he is still a Member of Parliament, but as Leader of the Opposition. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Sterling but interruptive.] Sterling but interruptive.

I would like to reiterate our Government's position. We are ready to work with whoever is appointed or elected the Leader of the Opposition in the interest of Guyana. What we ask in return is for the new Leader of the Opposition to accept the legitimacy of our Government. This is a Government that was elected by the people of Guyana and perhaps one of the most peaceful elections that we had in this country on 2nd March, 2020. You held on to power when you knew that you should have demitted Office three months after December, 2018, because had we stuck to the timeline of you losing the no confidence motion, you would have been in Opposition since sometime in April, 2019. You could hold on to power for as long as you wanted to, but once we had the elections, the same *tudoop*. It is the same place that you would ended up, on the other side. You are laughing but this is a serious issue.

As a country – I am not a Historian but a Guyanese – we fought for democracy in this country. We endured an undemocratic Government in this country for 28 years. In 1992, we had a return of democracy in Guyana under the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan... [**Ms. Ferguson:** Remember you were People's National Congress (PNC).] I was never in the PNC; I was a soldier. I was a soldier without a party card. A professional soldier. If you could go and find a party card for me, bring it. I was never a PNC. I was always a soldier serving in the interest of defence and security of Guyana. I became a politician on 5th January, 2020, when I went on the stage in Kitty, at the first rally for the PPP/C. I If you remember what I said at that first rally, it was "get ready for victory". You can go back and check the tape. I wanted to comment on all the speakers before, but this is worrisome. We had the outgoing Leader of the Opposition, who I quite rightly thank him for his service and for delivering his speech and we had more Members on the Government's side in the House listening to the Leader of the Opposition. What sort of leadership is that? I am not accustomed to that leadership. You should be supporting your Leader whether he is in government or he is opposition. Where are the supporters? Where are the elected APNU/AFC Parliamentarians? There is one, two, three, four and five. There is five out of 31. Shame.

7.34 p.m.

We on the Government's side must be worried. Do you know why? We believe in democracy and if one believes in democracy, one must have a viable and strong Opposition. We are in worrying times in Guyana, today. Do you know why? We do not have a Leader of the Opposition. Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon resigned and we are still waiting for a leader. I am disappointed, we all are disappointed and I am sure the Members on that side are disappointed because whoever is the new Leader of the Opposition, should have been delivering that speech, instead of walking around handing out plaque cards and flyers whole week in Georgetown and Berbice. That is what it relegated its Leader of the Opposition to. We need its Leader of Opposition to be in this House doing the people's work. We have a situation where one contender– and perhaps, I do not want to call names– is accusing the other contender, who is the Leader of the People's National Congress Reform (PNC/R), he is not the Leader of the Opposition yet. I have an article from *Demerara Waves*, dated Friday, 22nd October where that contender supports Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon for the PNC/R leadership. He says there is:

“...no room for Black People Party tribalism”.

The next day, in the same *Demerara Waves*, the next contender refers to the previous contender as:

“...a just come – knows nothing about my work among Indo-Guyanese”.

We are in worrying times in Guyana. We have a struggle for the position of Leader of the Opposition in your House, Mr. Speaker. I know you have very good skills at negotiating and conflict resolution. I humbly ask of you, to please intervene and resolve this conflict so that we could have a Leader of the Opposition by the next Sitting. Our country deserves a Leader of the Opposition. A Leader of the Opposition is important for representative democracy here in Guyana. We do not want a one-sided arrangement and so we anxiously await your work, Mr. Speaker, and we anxiously welcome the Leader of the Opposition. The outgoing Leader of the Opposition spent one hour trying to discredit the most transformative budget in the history of Guyana. This the same utensil as he was called– not my word–, former Head of State of this country – who I rather suspect was one of the main architects of its attempt to hold on to power knowing fully well that it lost that election, and that is hurtful to the people of Guyana. [**An. Hon. Member:** Losers.] Not only losers, but it was also caught rigging.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister if you are speaking to me, I am convicted.

Mr. Shuman: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a point of order.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) as reported.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, we have the Deputy Speaker on his feet.

Mr. Shuman: Standing Order 41(6), I think the Hon. Prime Minister is imputing ill motive on my character when he speaks of that. I think, maybe he should contextualise which party.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister was addressing the Speaker and he was saying you, so I would not entertain that. I contend that remark because speakers speak to the Speaker, and he corrected it. Go ahead, Hon. Prime Minister.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I stand corrected. The honourable outgoing Member of Parliament (MP) and Leader of the Opposition said the average Guyanese received no benefit from previous budgets. This is the same Parliamentarian of the previous government from 2015 to 2020, that increased 200 taxes and other forms of payments to his government that has affected the lives of all the people of Guyana. This was the same Government that increased... [**Ms. Ferguson:** The whole half of an hour, you spoke about Leader of the Opposition.] Are you going to allow me to speak? It increased the license for the donkey cart man, and it is telling us about no sympathy or no plan for the poor people of this country.

When we got into office on 2nd August, – our first budget that I fondly refer to as the rescue budget, and the emergency budget for our country – we reversed the 200 rates and taxes – including the one for the donkey cart man. This was a government that placed tax on education – if one sent his/her children to private school, one had to pay tax on that which was complements of the APNU/AFC Coalition Government. Tax on health – if one went go to a private health facility – one had to pay tax. Tax on drugs – it is obvious that it had a philosophy of tax and spend economics. Do you know what? It did not spend the money that it got from taxation on the people of Guyana instead it spent it on itself. How could it come and lecture us about a budget that does not provide for the people of Guyana? A budget that provided \$600,000, starting this year, for everyone who must do dialysis. I served in the military; I interacted with veterans, and this is one of the issues

that was raised by the leadership of the veteran foundation about many shut-ins who have kidney issues and are challenged to pay for their treatment. However, in this budget the Government has provided for that this year. This is a caring government. This is a caring budget. This is a government for the people of Guyana. This is a people's centred budget.

This Government returned the "Because We Care" cash grant. I wish to remind the Opposition, that it was something which started in the last PPP/C government before I became a politician. The APNU/AFC Coalition won the election, and one of the first things it did was to remove that payment. It claimed it had no fiscal space to continue that payment, but it had fiscal space to utilise money to enrich itself and to live the good life that it promised the people of Guyana. We have since returned the "Because We Care" cash grant.

In 2021, myself and all the Ministers and Parliamentarians went to every village and every community where we have our school children and paid over that money to all the people of Guyana. If one needs any explanation for the concept of 'One Guyana', that single act should explain to what we mean by 'One Guyana'. Everything that is provided under this Government is for all the people of Guyana. The only qualification for that pay-out is that the child had to be in school. Do you know what? It did not matter whether the school was a private school, because one also got the money. The same Government that Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon is accusing, has decided in this budget to increase the money to 25,000 and the money for uniforms will move from \$4000, to \$5000, so that is 30,000 per child. I have grandchildren, I have neighbours, I have friends, and all of them are coming to me saying, Prime Minister, we thank you, and we want you to convey it to your President, to your General Secretary and to your Ministers for such a decision. This is what the ordinary people are saying to us – and it is coming to this House to tell us that the budget is not for all of us.

We increased the old-age pension by \$3,000 this year to \$28,000. I have my old veteran friends; do you know what they tell me? Thank you very much because they are getting the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and they are getting the state pension. Incidentally, a decision was made by a previous PPP/C Government, that the state pension must not be less than half the minimum wage, and that helped many veterans who retired 40 years ago. They are having half of the minimum wage and the NIS too, which is equivalent to half of the minimum wage, and now they have not \$25,000 but \$28,000. [**An Hon. Member:** When we came into Government.] You did

nothing. Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon talked about sugar, free education and failure to introduce free education in our manifesto. We will reintroduce free education. It is a work in progress, do not be impatient. [**Ms. Ferguson:** We need timelines.] Do you need timelines baby? I want you to read this document. Every Member of the National Assembly on that side should go back and read this document. This is your document – “*Our Vision for Unity, Stability and Development*”.

7.49 p.m.

There is a reason why we only refer to this. Do you know why? After it prepared this, it had five years in office to deliver to the people of Guyana on this manifesto. It is so sad it did almost nothing. [**An Hon. Member:** Nothing.] I take my word back. It talked about the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS). It painted the Office of the President, the residence of the President and many other buildings in green. There are some bridges around Georgetown that are painted in green and yellow. That is so sad. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I am a Brigadier, for life. One could retire from the Army, but one does not retire the rank, baby.

In its campaign, it said sugar is too big to fail [**An Hon. Member:** Khemraj] Who said that? It then failed us all. It sent home 7,000 workers. Do you know what, before it sent them home, it commissioned, a Commission of Inquiry (COI). It had a Commission of Inquiry, and the recommendation was clear that is to keep the estates open. First, it said sugar is too big to fail, then it did a Commission of Inquiry which recommended to keep the estates open, and it sent home 7,000 sugar workers. It closed the estates and now it comes and tell us that it will form the next government. According to its manifesto no free education. It removed the money from the poor people of this country; it closed the estate against its own Commission of Inquiry; it lost the elections and it refused to demit office and now it comes to this House to tell us that it is on an uphill trajectory which will lead it to form the next government. We do not know what government it is talking about. Certainly, it is not 2025. It will not be forming the government in 2025.

It promised more disposable income for people in its 2015-2020 manifesto but as we said, we found out that that was a fallacy. It taxed the people into submission, and they voted it out of office. It never conceptualised any comprehensive plan to deal with Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) and yet it comes to this House and criticise us. All it did for Covid-19 was to lock down this country. It locked down this country and Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon, the goodly gentleman made himself

Director General (DG) of the task force. It did nothing. It built a shed at Liliendaal. We got into power, and we had to fix everything and return this country to some semblance of order, protecting the lives and livelihood of the people of Guyana. When we assumed office, one could not have done a proper Covid-19 test in this country and it did not have adequate testing kits. **[Ms. Parag: No. PPE]** There was no personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers, and it is the same workers that it wants to defend now – the frontline workers. **[Dr. Anthony: There were no ventilators]:** No ventilators. Those are the things that we had to deal with and yet it comes here and pontificate about how caring government it had from 2015 to 2020.

We are on record of keeping on the job or employed, all public service workers. We have not sent home any public service worker during the Covid-19 pandemic. The teachers and the public servants were at home, and both got paid. All we did was return them to work. You had them locked down. **[Ms. Ferguson: How many you sent home in 2020?]** It criticised the \$109 billion in our budget that is earmarked for infrastructure spending. One does not have to be an economist to know that infrastructure spending is transformative. It has a multiplier effect and that will drive development of this country; that will drive foreign direct investment in this country and that will catapult us into a developed state faster than we expect.

We heard a lot about development throughout the last four days, is better on a sound democratic foundation. Democracy first and development will follow. What you wanted is to remain in office in a democratic manner and still talk about development of this country. It did not work, and it will not work. The people voted you out of office. It keeps talking about the cash grant and that communities were bypassed. We kept asking for the list. It is making this allegation and we keep asking for the list to help us. Give us the list. We have not bypassed any community. We had ‘pink slips’ that we gave out. We went back into those communities and paid the money. Lt. Col (Ret’d) Mr. Harmon said that sovereignty of Guyana is a bi-partisan issue, and we agree. He talked about patrimony which should be a bi-partisan issue. He went on to talk about oil and gas and consultation.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was in Opposition when the Coalition Government signed that public service announcement (PSA). Perhaps, if it would have consulted with the PPP/C while it was in Opposition, we would have had a better PSA with ExxonMobil today.

It talked about election reform. We are looking forward to its submissions on electoral reform. Kindly have a Leader of the Opposition as early as possible, so we could benefit from its contributions to the consultative process. We are awaiting a response. It talked about us not consulting with the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) and just offering salary increases unilaterally. For five years did you consult with the GPSU? [**Ms. Ferguson:** Oh yes, we did.] It was a toothless poodle. It continued in its bad ways of unilaterally deciding what it will pay the public servants. Now, it comes here to us and tell us that we should stop and engage in collective labour bargaining.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon talks about the State Asset Recovery Agency (SARA). It was an agency that was set up. He talked about 19 cases that were placed before... It was 19 cases that were witch hunt cases, and the State Asset Recovery Agency became an agency of jobs for the boys and girls. It was a waste of money. The money used run that Agency could have provided the fiscal space for the transfer of payments for the social sector safety nets that were necessary in this country during its time in office. He tried to preach to us about accountability. The 2016, 2017 and 2018 Auditor General's Reports are replete with instances of mismanagement of the finances of this country and corrupt dealings that should lead to further investigation.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon talked about the Natural Resource Fund Act (NRF). He referred to Andrew Bauer, the expert of sovereign wealth fund that the Hon. Attorney General referred to earlier. The NRF Act is now law, since it is already assented to by the President of Guyana. It is a progressive piece of legislation that will lead to proper management and a high degree of transparency of our revenues from oil and gas. I wish to place on record that the so-called civil society that Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon talked about in his address, was silent when the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government hurriedly passed in an illegal manner, the NRF Act 2019, at a time when we should have been planning for elections in Guyana.

We have people who are telling us about the illegality of the 2021 Act, but they are silent on what happened in 2019. Every cent that goes into and comes out of the NRF Act, and I am speaking for the people of Guyana to understand, will have to withstand the scrutiny of us in this National Assembly. It has to come here. There are many layers of control that will assure the people of Guyana of a high level of transparency, unlike what was proposed by the 2019 NRF Act, that placed immense powers in the hands of the then Minister, a Minister who was very opaque in

explaining to the people of this country, what was done with the US\$18 million bonus. If one cannot clearly account to the people for US\$18 million, I could imagine what would happen now because we have US\$607 million in the fund and by all projections there is every likelihood to having just under \$1 billion going into the fund in 2022, all things being equal.

8.04 p.m.

Those are by the commentators out there. We are in good hands. We have an act that will assure a high level of transparency to the people of Guyana. The funds will be expended as stated in the act for the present and future generations of Guyana. That is why, in this budget, we are requesting to utilise money from the fund because we are building the foundation to assure a better life for all the people of Guyana. The Hon. Member spoke about the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) having been expired but he failed to mention that it is a process that is required for the reestablishment of the PUC.

Mr. Speaker: It is the Public Procurement Commission (PPC).

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I stand corrected, Mr. Speaker. We are speaking about an Opposition who will come here and preach to us. An Opposition who, when it was in Government, did not respect the same process and procedures that it comes to preach to us about now in the interest of good governance. This will ensure that it remains on that side of the House. We heard about guardrails of democracy, respect for the rule of law, adherence to cheques and balances. We are adhering to and observing all that was mentioned by the outgoing Leader of the Opposition. We wish to take this opportunity to assure the people of Guyana that the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government will be a government that will practise good governance. Good governance, regard for the rule of law, transparency and respect for fiscal policies are all built on this solid foundation – the solid democratic foundation that I mentioned before.

Earlier on, we had many speakers who came to this House and misrepresented a number of issues that I can deal with. The Hon. Catherine Hughes came and regaled us with a number of untruths. **[Mr. Ramson:** Lying Cathy Hughes.] I will refer to her as lying Cathy Hughes.

Mr. Speaker: Prime Minister, the word 'lying' cannot be used.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Hon. Catherine Hughes, when she was the Minister of Public Telecommunications benefitted from the same advisors that advised me as Minister responsible for telecommunications. In 64 days, on 5th October, 2020, I signed the Commencement Orders liberalising the telecommunications sector in this country. It was based on the same advice that was given to the Hon. Minister [**Mr. Ramson:** Two or three years before.] ...two or three years before by the same advisors. Yet, the former Minister came to this House today and started to speak about issues of compensation for the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company Limited (GTT). When she knew fully well that the issue of compensation did not arise since GTT voluntarily complied with all the provisions of the law as we issued the Commencement Orders, as I said, 64 days after taking Office.

She went on to mention about the issue of tax which is a totally separate issue and discussion that is engaging the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the company. She went on to say that every Jesus has a Judas, but I do not know who she was referring to. Certainly... [**Ms. Ferguson:** Even Jesus.] Even Jesus had a Judas. I do not know who she was referring to as Jesus or as Judas, but she certainly demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding on this whole issue of the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector or maybe she was afraid that the sky would fall on our heads if we liberalised. As I mentioned before, her real advisors convinced her that we should go ahead. Now that we have gone ahead to liberalised and the sky has not fallen on our heads, she cannot believe it. She is still searching for some deal. Through the act of liberalisation of the telecommunications sector, all we on this side of the House are interested in is a better deal for the people of Guyana. Better service, at the best price for all the people of Guyana. I wish to assure this House and the people of Guyana that the Public Utilities Commission will be engaged and will be asked to pay more attention to the quality of service in the telecommunications sector in Guyana during 2022.

She went on to talk about the call centre. What she should have told us is that the call centre was closed under her which led to unemployment of over 100 young people in Linden. [**Mr. Ramson:** They love the young people so much.] The young people that they love so much in a stronghold of the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R)/ A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). One refers to that as one's stronghold. Since 2nd August, we have rehabilitated that building and with the guidance of Dr. Ashni Singh, we have facilitated an

investor who has since reopened that facility and has already employed 100 young people with the intention of employing more in the near future. [**An Hon. Member:** Young Lindeners.] Young Lindeners. The Hon. Catherine Hughes should never speak about corruption to this House. She gave contracts to her company. It is in the papers. The *Guyana Times*, 2nd May, 2019 edition stated:

“Telecommunications Ministry awarded contract to minister’s company”.

[**Ms. Ferguson:** That is stale news.] Is it stale news? [**Ms. Ferguson:** (*Inaudible*)] Look at that. The Hon. Catherine Hughes told us earlier in this House that it is the PNC/R Government who was trying to remove the monopoly from GTT, but we know differently. It is the PNC/R Government who gave GTT the same monopoly that she spoke about earlier today. It is the APNU/AFC Government including the Hon. Catherine Hughes who failed to remove that monopoly for five years. We did it in 64 days. It is so sad. It is understandable why the Hon. Members sitting on the other side of this House are bitter and will not support this budget nor any future budgets presented by the PPP/C. We cannot expect anything different. By now it is a proven fact to all Guyanese that the APNU/AFC has immeasurable disdain for the development of our country and the improvement of the lives of our people. Its own supporters– the many people who voted for it, have lost confidence in its representation. It shows, and for that it must hang its heads. Does one know why? It is because people do not support its baseless utterances nor wish to be associated with its madness. It has continuously betrayed the people of this country, both in Government and once again in Opposition.

Even in this honourable House it has failed to conduct itself properly and act like normal civilised human beings with dignity. Even nursery school children know better, can do better and will do better. From grabbing the Mace and running around this sacred Dome screaming, to abusing civilian staff who have no interest in anything else but performing their duties honourably – the APNU/AFC Parliamentarians have done it all. It owes the people it represents in this National Assembly many apologies, not only in words but in action. I have listened to the presentations of the Hon. Members sitting on the other side over the last five days and we can all agree that it is the same tune being sung by each one of them including its outgoing Leader of the Opposition. It has showcased its inadequacies and grave incompetence to this House and the Guyanese people by being unable to grasp the whole purpose of *Budget 2022*. We cannot expect much from those who have proven time and time again to lack basic comprehension skills.

8.19 p.m.

When people choose to be stuck in their ways to the point of no return, and after having realised that no amount of help will make a difference, sometimes you just have to decide that it is a total waste of time trying and hoping any longer for change. I have said this before, and I will say it again, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition is against anything that is progressive for this country and its people. This is not today's story. Throughout their time in Government, which was overstayed... By the way, after losing the no-confidence motion and disrespecting our Constitution and the entire nation, they had the opportunity to serve, but what did they do? They squandered taxpayers' money like there was no tomorrow. On what, Mr. Speaker? As I mentioned before, themselves, families, and friends. If any one of them is currently suffering from memory loss, let me remind them that it was their former ministers who, while they were supposed to be serving the people, honestly, took it upon themselves, with absolutely no approval from the people of this country, to purchase jewellery to decorate themselves off the hard-earned contributions of the ordinary men and women out there. Not only that, but they found it fit to live luxuriously. As if a 50% salary increase for them and them alone was not enough, they racked up billions of dollars, not millions, but billions, on food alone. All on the backs of the people of this country with next to nothing given back in service from them. They failed the people and this country while in Government and continue their record of failure in Opposition, only getting better and better every time at it. It is obvious that what the APNU/AFC Hon. Members aim to excel in, nothing else. It breaks my heart to see this because our people deserve better than what they offered them.

It is indeed amusing every time we come to this House and have to listen to the deceptions and untruths spewed by the Hon. Members sitting in Opposition. Each and every one of them appears before this House and proudly prove every single time why they earned their seats on that side. And so shall it be for a very long time. The APNU/AFC is known for empty lip service – all talks with no substance. I am convinced that most of them have mastered the art of theatrical performance, as this is the order of their typical day. I must address many of the falsehoods spoken in this House by Members of the APNU/AFC during this Budget debate. I wish to say that I did address many of the falsehoods already. I do not want to bore the Hon. Members here, but I need to mention that the APNU/AFC Members are brazened to come here to talk about housing, salary

increase, pension, global warming and climate change, democracy, and many other issues that they ought not to have the audacity to speak about.

When the APNU/AFC barely managed to allocate a mere 7,534 house lots and did not develop one single housing scheme during their five years in Office, it was our People's Progressive Party/Civic Government that came into Office in 2020, just 18 months now, and distributed more than 10,000 house lot to date. I will tell you this. It is our PPP/C Government that will distribute 50,000 house lots and possibly more by 2025. It is under the PPP/C that Guyanese in every category and income bracket are now finally able to access and own house lots and affordable housing, having their dreams realised with our Government; a necessity that was denied and far from reality under the APNU/AFC Government.

We had Hon. Members of the Opposition who said the people of Guyana are perishing, and our Government has lost the battle against the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Let me remind those Members, when the PPP/C came into Government, we took over from them and they did not even have the capacity, as I mentioned before, to do testing up to that time. I guess they were too caught up in attempting to rig the elections for five months, so public health and safety was the least of their priorities; hanging on to power was. Some guts the Hon. Members have to come here to say this when it was their Government, the APNU/AFC, that discontinued, I keep repeating myself here, the education cash grant and saw it fit to remove the assistance to our children and poor people that they so claim to love. It is under our PPP/C Government that the children of this nation in public schools are once again able to receive the school grant to assist their parents. The Opposition had five years to do all the things that were mentioned in their Manifesto and, as we mentioned before, they have not lifted a finger to get any or many of the things that they promise the people started.

The Opposition Chief Whip, Hon. Christopher Jones, during his address, went on about *Budget 2022* being disrespectful to the intelligence of the Guyanese people. Sir, what is really disrespectful to the intelligence of the Guyanese people is a Chief Whip who benefited from public funds to buy barber chairs for his private barbershop. He went on to say that Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) has cut its production target by a third and questioned whether the Government will cut the allocation to GuySuCo by a third. Once again, they have opened assault against the sugar workers.

The Hon. Christopher Jones hypocritically questioned what have the public servants, teachers, police and soldiers done to the PPP/C and said that our budget is silent on salary increases for them. Well, I want to ask the Hon. Christopher Jones, what did the police and soldiers do to the People's National Congress (PNC) and APNU/AFC that caused them to take away their one-month bonus? It is our Government that fulfilled our promise to the Joint Services by ensuring that we reinstated the annual one-month bonus, which they took away from those much deserving servants of our country. It was the APNU/AFC Hon. Members who said publicly that paying this bonus to these workers was equated to bribery. But you were mistaken; what you know of yourselves should not be mistaken as the same ideology shared and accepted by others. It is the same APNU/AFC, when in Government, that failed to pay the 20% promise to the law enforcement officers in the first year in Office in their Manifesto [**Ms. Parag:** Sugar workers too.] And the sugar workers as mentioned by the Hon. Member.

The APNU/AFC so love the people of Region 10 and Linden and in five years have not repaired the Soesdyke Linden Highway, and that is provided for in this Budget that you are criticising. Also provided for in this Budget is the Linden to Mabura road, a very important artery from Linden into the mining areas of this country. The APNU/AFC Parliamentarians – the Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams, the Hon. Shurwayne Holder and all others, are hypocritical to come here mentioning anything about Community Service Officers (CSOs) and the CSO Programme when they were the ones who shut the Programme down and fired all the CSOs. Their Party, while in Government, did this to the poor, working class people who were earning a living. They took bread out of the mouths of those people and many others. They dared to claim that the Coalition has a track record of training and caring for young people. What about the CSOs they fired? And before, what about the thousands of young persons they fired from GuySuCo in 2015? I did mention before, what about the people who lost their jobs at the call centre in Linden.

As I move on to areas under the responsibility of the Prime Minister, I want to thank the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance for the general allocations in the Budget to the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA). It was able to commence several major initiatives within the energy sector, aimed at supporting our Government's strategic vision of providing our citizens with more affordable, stable and reliable energy through an energy mix that includes hydropower, natural gas, solar and wind. Among those included the advancement of

the works on the installation of a 1.5 megawatts (MW) solar farm for Bartica; a one-megawatt solar farm for Lethem; commencement of the installation of a 64 kilowatts hybrid solar Photovoltaic (PV) system in Region 1; and the installation of a level logger at Amaila Falls in December, 2020. Much of these works lay the groundwork for much more that is in store in 2022.

Under *Budget 2022*, \$1.5 billion and \$90 million have been allocated for the capital programme and recurrent expenditure, respectively. The sum of \$666.7 million has been allocated in 2022 for the installation of an additional 20 solar PV mini grids to serve 20 communities and public buildings in the hinterland that will benefit 14,324 residents. Work on implementing a significant electrification project to supply, deliver and install 30,000 solar PV home energy systems for hinterland and riverine communities will commence in the first quarter of 2022. The systems are designed to provide electricity to unserved homes in the hinterland and riverine communities using renewable sources of energy.

8.34 p.m.

Recognising the basic needs of residents, each system is designed to power two (2) 9-watt Light-Emitting Diode (LED) Lamps, one (1) 12-watt Stand Fan, and is equipped with a Universal Serial Bus (USB) Port for charging of portable electronic devices. At the completion of the project, a total of 4.5 megawatts will be installed across all 10 Administrative Regions. The project is expected to benefit over 200 communities and 30,000 households, bringing to a total of 120,000 people who will benefit from this project. The installation of a 1.5 megawatts solar farm for Bartica and one megawatt solar farm for Lethem will be completed in the first quarter of 2022. The installation of transmission lines for the Lethem and Bartica solar farms will also be completed this year. The installation of a 0.65 megawatts solar farm for Mahdia and a 0.6 megawatts solar farm for Lethem will be tendered in 2022.

The construction of 1.5 megawatts Kumu hydropower plant and rehabilitation and upgrade of the defunct Moco-Moco hydropower plant will be advanced in 2022 and is expected for completion in 2023. The design, supply, installation, and commissioning of 13.8 kV overhead transmission line to connect the Kumu hydropower plant to the distribution network will be tendered in 2022. Also, the 150 kW Kato Hydro project will be completed in 2022. A project started under, and grossly mismanaged by the APNU/AFC Government until it was rescued by our Government in

August 2020, is now back on stream and will be delivered to the people in this year. These initiatives that capitalise on the power of renewable energy will certainly lead us along a path of sustainability, while allowing us to reach remote areas to serve the needs of the people who have, for too long, remained unserved because of their geographical location. Even as we move further into our remote communities, attention will also be placed on injecting sustainability into our Government buildings, where \$500 million has been allocated for the installation of solar photovoltaic systems at 100 public buildings in all of the 10 Administrative Regions of Guyana.

I could go on and on about these projects, but we cannot ignore that Guyana is on the brink of transformation, as you will hear reiterated throughout our messages. No doubt, technological advancements will be a major catalyst upon which such transformation will take place. Within the energy sector, such advancements will also be seen in Guyana. A sum of \$31.6 million has been budgeted to catalyse e-mobility in Guyana and provide comfort to persons interested in investing in e-mobility by demonstrating opportunities for the private sector. This project entails installing six level 3 fast chargers for electric vehicles, scooters, cycles charging stations with the ability to achieve 80% charge in 40 minutes. The proposed locations are S & R Parking Lot, Guyana Energy Agency, MovieTowne, Giftland Mall, Massy at Providence, and Little Rock Suites at New Amsterdam.

Guyana Power and Light (GPL) – Despite the challenges faced by the ongoing Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL) customer base increased by 5% in year 2021, from 204,162 customers at 31st December, 2020 to 213,978 customers at 31st December, 2021. Given the dynamism in the economy that is projected in *Budget 2022*, GPL expects a further 10% growth in the customer base, with an estimate of 235,576 customers by 31st December, 2022. This increase in the customer base is expected to result in a 19% increase in needed generation output for 2022. In order to meet this increased demand, GPL added 9.6 megawatts of new generation assets in 2020, 46.5 megawatts in 2021, and a further 2.8 megawatts is projected to be added in 2022. We are proud to announce that under the Energy Programme, two megaprojects are to commence in 2022. Wales Gas to Power project will commence in 2022 and is projected to be delivered to the people of Guyana come 2024. Secondly, the Amaila Falls Hydropower project will commence in 2022 and is projected to be completed in 2027. Both

projects will transform the cost structure of GPL and will also bring stability to the current fluctuations in generation costs due to the volatility of fuel prices.

I wish to remind the Hon. Members on the other side of the House that the Amaila Falls was a project that should have been delivering electricity to the people of Guyana. In 2017, the Amaila Falls was a project that they failed to support, a project that is scuttled. Notwithstanding, while they were in Government they asked for and received a review by none other than Norconsult. A review of the Amaila Falls Hydropower project in their final report of 12th December 2016 stated clearly that Amaila Falls is the best option for Guyana's energy transition. I wish to take this opportunity to remind the people of Guyana that, by now, we would have been enjoying 165 megawatts had the Opposition supported that project. *[Interruption]* There are many other points I want to mention under power generation, but I am fearful that I maybe running out on time.

I wish to mention, at this stage, that we have in 2022 planned interventions that will reinforce the Demerara-Berbice Interconnected System through the upgrades of four of GPL substations at new Sophia, Georgetown, Good Hope and Edinburg; and the rehabilitation and construction of a second 5 kilometres of transmission line from Kingston to Sophia. These investments will strengthen the reliability of the transmission system, reduce technical losses, and provide transmission system redundancy. Other plans for 2022 include the commencement of the upgrade of the Sophia and Kingston substations; and rehabilitation of approximately 5 kilometres of associated transmission line. The Wakenaam Renewable Energy Project has commenced and will realise the installation of 750 kW PV and 1151 kW battery energy storage for the people of that community. For the Gas-to-Energy Project, GPL is involved in a tripartite arrangement with the Task Force and Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited to execute the request for proposal for the 300 megawatts power plant and the liquified natural plant.

GPL is part of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project Committee appointed to negotiate the terms and conditions of the project with the preferred bidder. The project, as mentioned before, is expected to commence by mid-year. The Smart Grid project will enable GPL to efficiently manage the mega projects of gas and power and renewable energy initiatives going forward.

Telecommunications Agency (TA) – As we all are aware, our Government liberalised the telecommunications sector within 64 days of taking Office on 2nd August 2020. Following our

Government's historic achievement, the efforts of the telecommunications agency since then has been on ensuring that it builds upon the foundation established and that the benefits of liberalisation are realised through putting in place the environment and frameworks to maximise competition. Some of this work includes the implementation of local number portability with a target date set for December, 2022. This achievement eliminates what would otherwise be a significant barrier to competition if customers had to deal with the time, and cost of changing numbers, or having two phones in order to take advantage of the best deals on offer at the time. Consequent upon this initiative, there is currently a working group under the leadership of the Public Utility Commission (PUC), and including all operators, to bring this number portability regime into being.

Another competition facilitating measure is the issuance of a licence for the operation of a third submarine fibre optic cable connecting Guyana to the Global Internet *via* the Atlantic Ocean. This development means that all three of our major service providers will have their own transatlantic submarine fibre optic cables. Once completed, Guyana will have at least six independent connections to the Global Internet with each of the three current facilities-based providers operating both primary and backup cables. This investment in telecommunications infrastructure, together with investments in cheaper and more reliable energy and electricity supply, when placed with our natural advantage of geography outside of the hurricane belts, and earthquake zones, will see us ideally placed to facilitate the expansion of business process outsourcing operations by the private sector.

In the area of Spectrum Management, the agency has gone to great lengths to work with all providers to regularise spectrum usage. There are currently three operators duly authorised and operating within their lawfully assigned spectrum providing no less than 4G services, thereby ensuring that operators deploy modern and contemporary technologies to customers. Recently, a fourth mobile service operator was licensed and will enter the market with rollout scheduled to commence in calendar year 2022.

8.49 p.m.

In our manifesto we pledged to increase access to cheaper data and bandwidth by scaling up State-sponsored efforts to provide countrywide cover with fibre-optic cables and other wireless options;

to ensure subsidised access to poor and remote households, and to develop the infrastructure and provide the enabling environment to promote the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) across Guyana. We promised to increase access to cheaper data and bandwidth by scaling up state-sponsored efforts. In 2021, the National Data Management Authority (NDMA), continued to operate and maintain the National Broadband Network. This infrastructure is now the backbone of the Government's online and interoperability efforts and comprises 55 fourth-generation wireless (4G) Long-Term Evolution (LTE) sites; nine third-party leased point-to-point connections; one satellite ground station supporting 91 satellite sites; over 227 kilometers of fibre and 658 mobile LTE units – with fibre and LTE being accessible in the coastal regions; and satellite technology being used in the hinterland and remote parts of Guyana.

In order to continue to provide internet services to the public sector and further increase the bandwidth supplied to every educational institution on the national broadband network, the NDMA prioritised the procurement of increased bandwidth in 2021. Dedicated bandwidth was increased by 167% to better serve Government entities, including schools and hospitals on the National Broadband Network in 2021 and beyond. This allowed for the increase in Wireless Fidelity (Wi-Fi) bandwidth from 50 to 200 megabits per second (Mbps) at 139 public internet access sites. Overall public wi-fi consumption increased from 242 Mbps in January to 500 Mbps in October, 2021. This comes from the backdrop of a previous system. When I was campaigning and visited remote parts of this country, I tried to get on to the internet, it was just buffering and showing connecting. We are at the stage now where the service was not only increased, in terms of reach to the people, but has improved and will continue to do so in 2022.

In addition to the continued provision of internet services to 369 educational facilities, the planned provision of fibre connectivity to 35 schools, and the provision of internet access to 50 additional nursery and primary schools, the NDMA's focus on providing appropriate equipment and software to schools, as was also promised in our Manifesto, continued with the provision of advanced teaching aids for smart classrooms, which include smartboards, cameras, digital audio-visual recorders, and auto directing classroom solutions under the National Broadband Project. Installation of these smart classroom solutions was completed in 10 schools with Queen's College as the main and the other nine schools being, Leonora Secondary, East Ruimveldt Secondary, Wismar Christianburg Secondary Multilateral, St. Stanislaus College, New Amsterdam

Multilateral, Bush Lot Secondary, Skeldon Line Path Secondary, Brickdam Secondary, and Charity Secondary. The APNU/AFC, under the Hon. Ms. Catherine Hughes, failed to implement this project but had the temerity to try to say that she implemented and completed this project, but this was done by us.

There was US\$17.1 million made available for a project known as the Hinterland, Poor and Remote Communities (HPRCs) ICT connectivity project. This project had started in terms of signing the papers and releasing moneys under the APNU/AFC Government, but nothing was done. Sometimes when we say, nothing was done, the Hon. Members on the other side of the House take offense. With regards to this project, nothing was done. We had the situation – when we took Office – of the materials, including 4500 laptops and 200 television (TV) screens stored in a bond in Diamond. I am happy to report that we have since installed 33 of those components in 33 communities. We are in the process of installing another 60 of those components in 60 communities between now and the end of the first quarter of 2022.

The year 2021 posed unique challenges for the Civil Defence Commission (CDC) as natural disaster impacts continued to intensify. In 2021, Guyana faced the worst natural disaster in its history. The 2021 May-June rains, which extended to August, resulted in large-scale flooding which affected 51,622 households across the country. The impact included the displacement of residents, water intrusion in homes, inundation to farmlands and animal dwellings. Thirteen shelters were set up to provide living space for those displaced families. Yet, the CDC continued unwaveringly to execute its mandate, achieving major wins in bringing relief to our citizens in their greatest time of need. Among the main achievements of 2021 Mr. Speaker, was the completion of the Lethem Warehouse at a value of \$112 million; distributions of over 160,000 flood and COVID-19 relief hampers in all 10 Administrative Regions of the country; the launch of the Country Work Programme for the CDC for the period 2021-2025; the establishment of the National Oil Spill Committee; the resumption of CDC Headquarters construction at Thomas Lands; the coordination for conducting several training courses to enhance the oil spill response capacity of staff, volunteers, partner agencies and Government agencies; the assistance with the establishment of shelters in Regions 2, 5, 6, 9 and 10 which saw up to 257 persons being housed in shelters at the same time across a total of 12 shelter facilities. This was the highest number of people ever housed at any one time in shelters in Guyana.

The 2022 current expenditure for the CDC is designed to boost the capacity of the agency to increase its response efficiency to multiple hazards and strengthen the teams at the national, regional, and community levels. To achieve this, the Commission's 2022 budget is built around three outcomes: strengthened institutional framework for the mainstreaming of disaster risk management; enhanced knowledge management for disaster risk management; and improved capacity for disaster preparedness and response at the national, regional, and community levels. Our Government through the CDC will adopt a more comprehensive approach by fostering interagency linkages and coordination. The development of a National Land Search and Rescue Plan and the development of a National Recovery Policy are key priorities in the 2022 Budget cycle. Moreover, the strengthening of regional Disaster Risk Management (DRM) systems and Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) mechanisms are critical to support the sustainability of the work laid out in 2020 and 2021. These initiatives will bring together a wide cross-section of stakeholders throughout the development processes of these priority areas.

We in the PPP/C took Office in August, 2020 with a manifesto that represents the path to success and prosperity for our country and people. *Budget 2022* will help us to significantly advance along that path through enormous investments in every sector; economic growth; increased employment for our citizens; ease in cost of living; increase in disposable income; and support for the most vulnerable.

The APNU/AFC speaks about caring and loving Guyanese people when they distanced themselves from their own supporters while they sat in their fancy offices behind closed doors. Doors that remained shut to the ordinary people from 2015 to 2020. Consulting with people was not a thing for them. The voices and cries of Guyanese were shut out and ignored. I have had the honour of being the first Prime Minister in many cases to ever visit numerous communities, especially in the hinterland. This speaks to the way our Government works. It is the true definition of, *boots on the ground*, and on the ground shall our boots remain. The APNU/AFC comes to tell us about the way this plan and that plan should be. These are plans they had the opportunity to implement but did not. These are plans that they lacked even an iota of vision to think of and develop, much less execute. I want the Hon. Members on the opposite side of this House to be rest assured that, whether they like it or not, 'One Guyana' will achieve prosperity. 'One Guyana' will overcome the hate and racism people attempt to use as a tool to divide our nation. There is no place for any

of this in our ‘One Guyana’. Since they have admitted, right here in this House, their confusion and difficulty with grasping the simple and clear concept of ‘One Guyana’, let me remind them that our Guyana belongs to six different people. Bullies and dictators cannot accept and understand the meaning of ‘One Guyana’. The APNU/AFC does not own anybody or any group of people in this country.

The biggest problem of our friends on the other side of this House is that they can no longer benefit for themselves. It hurts them to see Guyanese people actually benefiting as they should. It hurts them to see the rapid pace at which Guyana is developing. It hurts them to the core. It will hurt even more come 2025 when the people of Guyana re-elect the PPP/C back into Government. They will have to come to sit on that side and accept the reality of this new era. An era of vast development as we continue to build our country – our ‘One Guyana’ – and improve the lives of Guyanese across all the regions of this country. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

9.04 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. I was patient in not interrupting, but we need to suspend the Standing Orders to continue to conclude this debate.

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 10.00 p.m.”

[Prime Minister]

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: I ask that we suspend the Standing Orders to continue the session.

Motion put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Now, we will turn to the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, to conclude this debate.

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

(replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise, this evening, to bring to closure this first of two major segments of this honourable House's consideration of *Budget 2022*. The first segment, of course, being the policy debate and the second, which will commence next week, being consideration of the national estimates. Let me, at the very onset, express my deep gratitude to all of my colleagues on this side of the House, not least, of course, and perhaps foremost amongst whom, the Hon. Prime Minister, who spoke immediately before me, for the time they took to elaborate our Government's programme for advancing economic and social development in our country in this new and incredibly exciting era in Guyana's history. Let me also thank all those who spoke from the opposite side of the House for their contributions to this debate, which, almost invariably, served the important purpose of reminding the Guyanese people of the appropriateness of the judgement they exercised on 2nd March, 2020.

I wish, in particular, to acknowledge the speech and contribution made by the former Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I wish to join the Prime Minister in acknowledging and thanking the former Leader of the Opposition for his service in this capacity. His hour-long presentation would have reminded us, in this House and the world at large, why his own Members of Parliament (MP) brought to a premature end, his service in Government on 21st December, 2018. It would be recalled that it was the Government in which he played such an instrumental role, and I will come back to that role, that merely three and a half years into their term of Office, their own corps of Members of Parliament exercised deliberate judgement that they should no longer be there. If that premature termination of his tenure in Government were not enough, on 2nd March, 2020 – and I will not speak of the two Local Government Elections (LGEs) that took place in the intervening period – the people of Guyana spoke clearly and resoundingly to the Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon, and his Government. If that were not enough, on 18th December, 2021, the membership of his own party rejected him from the leadership of the party. Small wonders that Mr. Harmon, today, chose to deliver his swansong from the confines of some hidden room so that he did not face the indignity of the empty Opposition benches, which demonstrated that his own Members of Parliament could not be bothered to be present when he was speaking. What a striking image it was, this lone figure standing all alone in a room by himself, a man who once bestrode Guyana like the *de facto* emperor and a man who once bestrode the length and breadth of Guyana as the emperor at large and the self-appointed emperor for life. Lest there be any mistakes, the person who was supposed to have

been his boss had already assumed almost divine proportions. One of the most striking images of the 2015-2020 period, one of the images that will forever be etched in the memories of the Guyanese people and in the annals of political history of this country, is the image of the cardboard cut-out, positioned in the middle of the National Stadium, because the great and divine leader was too good to be amongst his supplicants. If one wanted to pose with the President, one had to line up to stand next to the cardboard man. That image will live forever, and you wonder why the people of Guyana rejected you. This great and divine leader, to whom the emperor at large reported, for five years only condescended to speak...they speak about democracy, openness and transparency.

Today, Mr. Harmon spoke disparagingly about the Vice-President giving a press conference. The Vice-President, His Excellency the President, the Prime Minister and all the Ministers of this Government speak to the media almost every week, but the cardboard man only condescended on three occasions in five years. The cardboard man only condescended to speak to the media on three occasions in five years, and you dare to come to speak about the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and our commitment to openness, transparency and good governance. You and your cardboard leader have the audacity to speak about openness, transparency and good governance; a cardboard leader who refused to answer questions, which were not scripted, from a media. *Y'all* jumping. *Yuh* jumping. *Yuh* like to talk about Jagdeo and Ali but *yuh* do not want to hear about Granger, the cardboard man. You do not want to hear about Granger, the cardboard cut-out. You like jump up and talk about Granger and Ali. Listen and hear about the cardboard cut-out President, cardboard man.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, His Excellency is not here to defend himself.

Dr. Singh: My apologies, Sir. I was referring to a cardboard cut-out. Let me say this: this is not 1972 or it is not 1982. It is 2022 and the people of Guyana are watching and listening, and they are far more informed than the APNU/AFC Members of Parliament would like to give them credit for. Sir, do you want to talk about dictatorship? Sir, my apologies. It is my colleagues on that side of the House. Simple things say a lot. Whole week we heard about the three B's – or was five – books, bookbags, boots, boats and buses. Sir, let me just give a simple example. Do you know the buses that they are boasting of were all painted green and yellow and they had emblazoned on them ...even the boats. The boats were all called the 'David G' and the buses were all called the

‘David G’ buses. The cardboard man that you all rejected. You all did not even nominate the man to be a member of the executive council of the party and you are jumping up about him being distinguished. He was not distinguished enough to be a member of the executive of the party, but you are jumping now about him being distinguished.

9.19 p.m.

His own party rejected him. His own party did not consider him worthy of a nomination to any office in the executive, but you are jumping now about distinguished.

Sir, these buses and boats were painted ‘David G’. I just have to give a simple example. Could you imagine what their response would be if we started launching buses and boats called the ‘Irfaan A’? Could you imagine if we started launching buses and boats called the ‘Irfaan A’ or the ‘Bharrat J’? The hypocrisy and double standard right there in that issue captures the essence of what the APNU/AFC is all about. It is fine for these buses to be emblazoned green and yellow and for them to be called ‘David G’. They should have called them ‘cardboard M. It is fine for them to be called ‘David G’ but imagine the calumny that will be visited upon a bus, or a boat called the “Irfaan A” or the “Bharrat J”. You imagine; just imagine. They see nothing wrong with that. That, for them, is good governance. They believe that the Guyanese people are not watching and are not listening, but this is not 1972 or 1982. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Talk about the exercise book.] I have not started talking about the exercise book with the picture. I have not started talking about Melanie Damishana or Roxanne Burnham Gardens or Linden. Mind you, I am not sure if he was Prime Minister or President at the time, but Mr. Burnham was still incumbent when Linden was called Linden. Could you imagine if we found Silica City and called it *Irfaanville*? It is the direct parallel. Mr. Burnham was the sitting Prime Minister or President, I suspect Prime Minister, when Mackenzie and Wismar were linked, and a new town was founded. I believe he was the Prime Minister. This was prior to his assumption to the executive presidency. He was the sitting Prime Minister, and a new town was formed, and the new town was called Linden. It is like if we call Silica City *Markphillipsville* or *Jagdeoville*. That is the nature of the PNC, and they see nothing wrong with that. They have the audacity to come here and watch the Guyanese people in their eyes and in their faces and pontificate about good governance, about democracy and about constitutional rule. This is not 1972 or 1982; it is 2022.

On that note, I want to say the following. The Hon. Member's, Mr. Harmon's performance today was not an outlier. It was not an isolated exception or an anomaly relative to the performance of those on the other side. In fact, it was very characteristic of the presentations we received from all of our colleagues on that side of the House. Of course, this should not come as a surprise because the PNC has never really changed its intrinsic and fundamental nature. On a previous occasion, I had spoken about their successive name changes, which do not disguise the fundamental consistency of their nature. Witness, for example, all of this jumping up about appointment of commissions that Mr. Harmon went off on. One of the most important constitutional offices in this country is the Office of the Leader of the Opposition. On Monday, we heard that the Leader of the Opposition – was it on Monday that we heard? – had resigned. In fact, it was budget day. It was 26th January, budget day, that we heard the Leader of the Opposition had resigned, [*inaudible*] definitive whether resigned, forced to resign, or whatever it was. A day or two ago, we heard that Dr. Nicolette Henry had resigned. Whether the Hon. Member has or has not, apparently, is still a mystery. There has been no move to fill the position of the Leader of the Opposition, a critical... Instead, there was a lame duck, has been, former Leader of the Opposition who came to pontificate, today, from a hidden room, unsupported by his own MPs and rejected by his own MPs.

I do not wish to be a rumour monger, but given the gravity of the matter, rumour has it that the cardboard man is planning a commission of inquiry (COI). You know, he likes commissions of inquiry. He spent five years of doing commissions of inquiry. The cardboard man, apparently, is causing a commission of inquiry into whether Mr. Norton is fit and proper. Do you remember that phrase, 'fit and proper'? Apparently, a commission of inquiry is planned on whether Mr. Norton is fit and proper to be the Leader of the Opposition. They are going to do a position paper before they get to the white paper and then the green paper. This is perhaps understandable, because one of the apparent lead contenders, or lead aspirants, for the position of the Leader of the Opposition is on public record as describing Mr. Norton as racist. I am going to go one step further, Hon. Prime Minister, with your permission. The Hon. Prime Minister did not name the Members involved, but I am reading here an article that states:

“Roysdale Forde supports Harmon for PNCR leadership...”

The article states:

“Prominent Attorney at Law, Roysdale Forde...”

[**Mr. Nandlall:** *Inaudible*] I should have inserted the appropriate qualifier. I am quoting from the article. The Attorney at Law, described in this article as prominent:

“...Thursday night came out with a ringing endorsement of Joseph Harmon for the leadership of their People’s National Congress Reform (PNCR)...”

This is the very democracy [**Ms. Ferguson:** *Inaudible*] Do not let me tell you what Mr. Carl Greenidge said about your party’s internal democracy. Mr. Greenidge is still vexed. He said, on public record, that the party robbed him. That is on public record. So, do not talk about party democracy. Do you want me to quote Mr. Carl Greenidge? Mr. Forde, the Hon. Member, is quoted as saying:

“...there was no place for a tribal or divisive leader.”

There is no doubt about who he was referring to because promptly the next day, none other than Mr. Aubrey Norton himself penned a letter, a public letter, and this is what he stated. His words, Mr. Norton’s words, not mine:

“I find it laughable but mischievous that Mr. Roysdale Forde insinuated that the PNC/R under my leadership will turn the Party into a Black Party... Mr. Forde is too new to the PNC/R to know”.

In other words, he is a *Johnny come lately*. I believe he probably did say that. Sir, these are not my words. They are the words of Mr. Forde himself, who came today, and with a lot of drama, hysterics, empty theatrics, and histrionics, even, appeared to be submitting an application for the job. Mr. Norton, I do not know if you will have to wait for five months, like how Mr. Irfaan Ali had to wait for five months. But brace yourself because the country had to wait from December, 2018 to March, 2020, and the country then had to wait from March, 2020 to August, 2020. Mr. Norton, brace yourself, my brother. Brace yourself. You are *in for the long haul*.

When our colleagues on that side of the House came with their contributions, and I am looking here... When they came to this Budget debate with their contributions, and they used... I see the Hon. Chief Whip on the other side is here. He used a word. I believe that he said that the Budget

is disrespectful. That was his word. Contribution after contribution, the APNU/AFC sought to insult the intelligence of the Guyanese people [**An. Hon Member:** Disrespecting them.] Disrespecting them. The real disrespect came from the APNU/AFC. Having looked at a Budget that includes a lengthy number of interventions that will dramatically transform Guyana and that will materially and directly improve people's lives, they still stood up and believed that the people of Guyana were incapable of interpreting and processing things for themselves, and they barefacedly sought to insinuate otherwise to the people of Guyana. I want to say this: in 2022, in the information age, or even the post-information age, in an age where people have access to the vastness of the world wide web (WWW) and when there is immediacy of communication and there is ability to process like never before, the people of Guyana are capable of judging for themselves. Our country is maturing. It is maturing. We are maturing as a country. For 28 years, we were in a dictatorship, from 1964 to 1992. In 1992, we were finally able to break out of the stranglehold of this oppressive dictatorship with the restoration of democracy. The People's Progressive Party (PPP) was in government for 23 years until 2015.

9.34 p.m.

Perhaps, understandably, some people started to have faded memories of what it was like to live under the PNC. Their memories started to fade, as memories will do over time. This will happen to all of us. Some people's memories started to fade. A whole new generation of young voters were born, grew up and came of age. They did not know the pre-1992 period; did not understand when you spoke about rigging of election; when you spoke of the destruction of an economy; when you spoke of dictatorship; when you spoke of economic collapse; and when you spoke of banning of basic food items. This was not relatable to them because all they knew was the freedoms they enjoyed in the post-1992 era.

Perhaps, understandably, in 2015, there were a number of people who figured that, maybe, it was time to give these other guys a chance. Mind you, there are some who, in fact, will dispute, on very credible grounds, the basis on which they claimed victory, but put that aside for a moment. They assumed Office in 2015. It only took them three years, and indeed less, for the people of Guyana to say that they know what it is like to live in a Guyana where there is the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, and they know what it is like to live in a Guyana where there is a PNC Government. It took the Guyanese people only three years of tasting the

bitter medicine of the APNU/AFC in government for them to say out you go; *gimme* back the PPP/C. They may not be perfect, but they are far better than *yall*. Bring back the PPP/C. It only took the people of Guyana three years or less to figure that out.

I want to say that, at this point in Guyana's history, and, as I was saying a few minutes ago, in this modern age of information and in this era when Guyana is going through such a rapid and dramatic transformation, what we need more than ever before is a serious, credible, capable and competent government. No amount of gymnastics and theatrics from the other side will change that fact. The fact of the matter is that what we were treated to, presentation after presentation, was a succession... [**Ms. Manickchand:** Reading after reading.] ...and there is that point, too, which Minister Manickchand made about people who came and read. I do not know if somebody else wrote those speeches for them to read. When reading their prepared scripts, they sometimes stumbled over the words and sometimes struggled a little bit with the pronunciation, but we would not hold that against them.

Sir, presentation after presentation, the people of Guyana were reminded of why their judgement in 2020 was as appropriate as it was. To begin with, the APNU/AFC has a serious problem with credibility. You cannot come [**Ms. Ferguson:** (*Inaudible*)] We salute you, Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, for writing your own speeches. That was pretty clear, actually. We were under no illusion about... Thank heavens, you are writing your own speeches. I ask you never to stop writing your own speeches. The Parliament will never be the same were you to devolve that responsibility to somebody else. The Prime Minister held up a manifesto. I did not want to interrupt him, but he held up a manifesto. Those who remember 2015 well enough, and I am sure the Prime Minister remembers this, would remember that there was not only one manifesto for the APNU/AFC, but there were two. As a matter of fact, they did not want to issue a manifesto to begin with. Do you remember that story? They did not want to issue a manifesto. [**Dr. Anthony:** I have the other one.] I have the other one. You have one and I have the other one. They did not want to issue a manifesto to begin with, but when they were cornered by the people of Guyana who said to tell them what they were promising to deliver and give them a manifesto, they rapidly outsourced it. They probably commissioned two white papers, or green papers, or position papers, or whatever kind of paper. They produced not one... I think they released this one first and then they released this one,

confusing my fellow citizens. I do not know if they held a CoI as to the case of the duplicated manifesto.

[The Hon. Member displayed documents.]

Let us take the second version. Usually, version two is the new and upgraded version relative to version one. Let us work with version two and see what version two promised the people of Guyana so that we can understand why the APNU/AFC is devoid of credibility. Sir, listen to what they promised the people of Guyana. Listen, Sir, and try to contain your laughter so as not to impugn the dignity of your high office. They promised:

“...Significant salary increases for government workers, including nurses; teachers...; security personnel; and civil servants...”

Five years later, they left office...They forgot about this commitment for five years. They never delivered on it. Now that they are back in Opposition again, they have suddenly picked up and they are championing the cause. For five years, they impoverished public servants and I want to speak about how they did that.

Sir, do not worry about that cheap magician’s trick that they used... **[Dr. Anthony: Three card.]** That three-card trick about giving some public servants salary increases slightly above 5%. They used a tiered level of salary increase, so that some public servants, in some years, were only getting 1%, while some were only getting 3%. There were levels. **[An Hon. Member: Sliding scales.]** Sliding scales. Do you remember the sliding scales? Some public servants, who now suddenly, they are championing their calls, were only getting 3%. In fact, the managerial grades of the public service were being penalised, with salary increases so that for almost every year out of those five years, managerial, middle supervisory and managerial civil servants did not get more than 3%. They did not only do that. They forced thousands of public servants, including all of our professional doctors, to move from the contract gratuity system to the pensionable establishment.

Sir, I will tell you this. It might not be obvious to people what the consequence of that was. That resulted in a 22.5% cut to the pay of those public servants, because those public servants were getting a gratuity of 22.5%. They took that away. I know public servants. I once had the privilege of being a public servant, and I know public servants in my own Ministry who look forward to

their gratuity. They know that every six months, they will get their gratuity and they will already be planning that they are going to set aside that gratuity; they are going to make a little down payment on their mortgage to write down the principal; or they are going to go to a hire purchase place and buy a significant piece of furniture or a significant appliance that they have always wanted for their home. They used to say that they are getting gratuity in December and what they were going to do in December. People used to promise their children not to worry because in December they *gon* look after things. People used to promise their spouses and partners not to worry because in December they *gon* fix up the fence or they *gon* paint over the house, or they *gon* buy that new stove or they *gon* buy that new fridge. Ordinary public servants were told that they will take away their gratuity. Do you not think they are watching? Do you not think they know? Do you think they are living on another planet? There are thousands of public servants who have been watching you, and who know that you took away their gratuity, and you come here and cry *crocodile tears*.

Sir, there were many public servants who worked beyond the call of duty. As you know, many of our Ministries...some of them are understaffed. I can say the public servants in my Ministry work far beyond the call of duty. Some of them you cannot send on leave. Some of them voluntarily said that they knew it was a *lil pressha* time and they *ain't gon bada tek* the leave, and that their family putting them under *lil pressha fuh tek* the leave, but they *gon* hold on. I know *yuh deh* under *lil pressha*. The public servants said that to me over all of my years in Government. Do you know what the APNU/AFC said? [**Mr. Ramson:** Go take your leave. You must take your leave.] Take your leave. Do you know what they said? Was it use it or lose it? [**Mr. Ramson:** Use it or lose it.] Use it or lose it. The public servants who were already over stretched and hardworking...They *wuking* hard. They *wuking* beyond the call of duty. They are working beyond the call of duty. They are willing to forego their leave to get the work of the people done. The APNU/AFC Government said to them that they were not going to pay their salary in lieu of leave. Use it or lose it.

But guess what, Sir? What the public servants at large do not know is that there were a tiny, privileged few who used to get a *lil* letter saying that approval was granted. Do you know how many public servants out there knew that the Ministry could not have afforded to send them on leave, so they forewent, if that is the correct past tense of forego, their leave, stayed on the job and, at the end of the year, discovered that their leave had been forfeited and that they could not have

gotten paid for it? And you come here and cry *crocodile tears*. Do you not think those people are watching you?

9.49 p.m.

You come here and you jump up about the Disciplined Services. [Dr. Anthony: They took away the bonus.] They took away the people's one month bonus for reasons that are still not clear. Apparently, there is a rumour that if one was a serving member of the Disciplined Services, one was not good enough. One had to be a retired member and over 70 years of age before one could be in their good grace. Let me hasten to add that I have the greatest of respect for the septuagenarians in our society. Let me hasten to add that I have the highest of respect for the septuagenarians and the octogenarians in our society. They deserve our highest respect. Not only people over 70 years of age are supposed to get work. It was a joke. People used to laugh on the streets. One had to be a former soldier and be over 70 years old.

I know people who are connected with the PNC/R. It is not a secret that I have a lot of friends in the PNC/R. I have a particular example in mind. He is a gentleman who is in his advanced 60's. I do not want to call his name, but everyone in this House knows him. I used to jokingly ask him what happened and if they forgot him. He used to laugh and say to me, *nah man* he was too young. I used to ask him what happened. I said to him, *yuh boys dem deh* in Government, *dey* forget *yuh*. He said *nah man*, he was too young and that in about five years' time they might call. That man was 69 at that time; he just celebrated his 70th birthday. I do not want *yall* start guessing who it is. At 69 that man was too young to get a job with APNU/AFC, but they come here and they *cry crocodile tears*.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document]

Hear what they promised. The APNU/AFC programme for the first 100 days is the page that I am reading. They promised to:

“...immediately, implement a phased reduction of value-added tax (VAT) and the removal of VAT.”

Hear the words. They are not my words; they are the words of the cardboard giant and his cardboard team. They promised to:

“...implement, immediately, a phased reduction of VAT and the removal of VAT from food and other essential items.”

The removal of VAT – Let the people of Guyana judge for themselves, as indeed, they have already done. They promised that they will immediately double old age pension and that they will immediately double public assistance. Five years later, they gave a miserly \$7,000, and guess what? We delivered \$7,000 in 18 months and they are jumping up. They believe that the people of Guyana are not watching them. It is just as how they watched the people of Guyana and told them that 33 is not bigger than 32. They believe that they could tell the people of Guyana all of this nonsense, and that the people are not watching and judging them.

They said that they would establish a national cane worker’s and cane farmer’s conference, and that they would establish a national rice farmers and rice millers conference. This is what they promised when they wanted people in the rice producing and sugar producing... When Mr. Ramjattan and Mr. Nagamootoo, in particular, wanted people in the rice and sugar producing community to vote for them, they promised them that they would establish... Hear what they established. Well, mind you, it is not anything big; it is a committee. I guess the committee would have then worked on a position paper, and the position paper would have then resulted in a green paper, and then it would have then resulted in a national strategy. Let us just say, for argument’s sake, that they promised the people a committee. Mr. Ramjattan, was this committee established? You went, Sir, and promised the people in writing...

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

Your picture is in this thing here. Look at your boy ‘rubber stamp’ grinning. Look at the senior ‘rubber stamp’ grinning and promising the people. Do you want to see the senior ‘rubber stamp’ again? Watch, the Prime Minister without portfolio. Look at the senior ‘rubber stamp’ grinning and promising the people in the rice producing and sugar producing areas... Hear what he promised them. He promised then that they will establish a national cane worker’s and cane farmer’s conference. It is well known that none of this... I am hoping that... **[Mr. Mustapha: (Inaudible) \$9,000 per bag for paddy.]** Let us not go to the \$9,000 a paddy. *Leh we tek the committee, I woulda tek de committee and all.*

Do you remember the then Leader of the Opposition, now Vice- President, had said that we would support any initiative in the APNU/AFC's own manifesto which would benefit the people of Guyana; any initiative? I rather suspect that we would have even supported this committee. Even the committee they did not deliver. They promised that they would liberalise the telecommunications and information and communications technology (ICT) sector. Oh boy! oh boy! Sir, *man look*, it continues.

They said that they would establish a hinterland and depressed areas fund. *Whey de fund deh?* They said that they would develop a hinterland policy, and that they would facilitate access to affordable credit. Hear this one. Minister Mustapha, you will like this one, Sir. Hear the language; they are very good with language. They said that they would:

“...place the hinterland cattle rearing-industry on a scientific footing...”

It is not ‘ordinary footing’; they said, on a ‘scientific footing’. Hear what it is to do.

“...to take advantage of the international demand for organic beef.”

There is a saying: Where is the beef? Sir, where is the organic beef five years later? Forget about scientific footing; we *gon tek any footing*. Where is the organic beef? [**Mr. Nandlall:** Forget the organic.] Forget about organic, *way de cow deh?* Organic beef.

They said that they will create a strategic development plan for Region 10. Minister Todd listed the number of times he visited Linden. It is more than the cumulative APNU/AFC did in five years. He is not the only Cabinet Member who has been there; we have all been there. Where is the development plan and what are the results of the implementation of this plan? Maybe the development plan was the closure of the call centre. We left a functioning call centre there.

When I returned to Government a few months after President Ali assumed Office, I visited the location of that call centre and what I saw was a tragedy. The last time I had been into that building it was a functioning call centre. One hundred and twenty-five Lindeners were busy working at their computers; interacting with persons at the other side of the world; smiling, cheerfully, knowing that they are collecting an income at the end of the month, and would be able to support their families. When I went back to 2020, I was almost moved to tears to see what was there. Not only was the call centre closed, but the building was a dump. It was completely destroyed. I want

to go further. A young member of my staff at the Ministry of Finance is a Lindener. There are many Lindeners who are working in the Ministry of Finance, but I am speaking of one in particular. There is a young lady from Linden who is working at the Ministry of Finance and whose name I would not call out of obvious respect for her privacy. I was in a conversation with her shortly after I returned, and I was finding out about her family. She said to me that she had and has a sister who lives in Linden. She is a Lindener. The family still lives in Linden. She came to Georgetown to go to the University of Guyana and now works at the Ministry. She has a sister who graduated a few years ago, about two or three years ago, and is at home living with her mother. I asked her what her sister was doing. She said that she has graduated but she is unable to get a job. This was late 2020, early 2021. Shortly after that call centre opened, as a result of the effort made by this People's Progressive Party Civic Government, that very same young lady came to me and said, Minister, her sister applied and is now a team leader at the call centre. Guess what? There are 125 young Lindeners just like her. By the end of this year there will be 250 young Lindeners, and in the near term there will be 500 young Lindeners.

Our friends on that side of the House will come and beat their chests. They will thump their chests in feigned triumphalism and profess their love for the people of this region and that region, except that they wrought trauma and havoc on the people of all ten regions of Guyana for all the five years that they spent in Office during 2015 to 2020. I will repeat those famous words: 'the truth hurts'. You may ask why I chose to highlight the fundamental problem that the APNU/AFC has with credibility.

10.04 p.m.

I will ask why they have this fundamental problem with credibility. It is because the APNU/AFC has a long history of selling pipe dreams. They intend to deliver nothing. Do you know what? They are jumping up and saying that, from 2015 to 2020, they did not have oil money. In the same manifesto there was a section that explained how they were going to finance their economic czars, and how they were going to finance these lofty plans. It was by cutting the VAT, taking off VAT of food and doubling old age pension. They meticulously documented how they were going to finance all these promises. This section is called:

“REAPING THE DEMOCRATIC DIVIDEND”

“1. **Reducing capital flight.** This is currently estimated at US\$200 million annually. We expect savings to be between 10 and 20% of this total.”

2. **Augmenting capital inflows.** This is currently estimated at about US\$450 million annually as a result of our improved political environment. This augmentation is projected to be 15%.

3. **Reducing incentives for the underground economy** currently estimated at 20-60%...”

That is pretty strange, mind you. They might as well had said 0% to 100%.

“... currently estimated at 20-60% of official GDP... Projected savings from this underground/formal economy conversion benefits are 10% of this amount, or 2-6% of GDP.

Reducing procurement fraud estimated ... to be about 28-35% of total procurement ... amounting to G\$140 billion.

Tax reforms are expected to yield 12% on total revenues of G\$168 billion.

Growth of GDP to reach its “potential” thereby yielding a further 3% on annual growth of GDP...”

I am going to return to that matter shortly, Sir.

“**PetroCaribe** ... projected savings from eliminating syphoning-off practices will be about ... G\$6 billion.

Improved labour productivity, due to ...industrial relations climate...”

They had 23 years in Opposition. They sat for 23 years and studied, analysed and cogitate and they came up with this white paper, green paper, position paper, or whatever paper you want to call it. I am not going to speak about the kind of paper that Mr. Nandlall apparently applied those mysterious lecture notes that he was so slanderously accused of having borrowed. They took 23 years and came up with this masterpiece – selling pipe dreams to the people of Guyana – and then they came into Office. Where was this democratic dividend? Where is this democratic dividend? The abolition of this procurement... where is this 30%. You were going to save 28% to 35% of

total procurement fraud. Where is this 28% to 35%? Where has it gone? Where is the conversion of the underground economy? I am making this point to say that the APNU/AFC's track record, when it comes to selling pipe dreams, is a long and a well-established track record.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

When Mr. Roysdale Forde comes here and he says that they will abolish income taxes, just like how he would have delivered all these things in this paper here, all those things that were promised and called for... The people of Guyana know better. They are wiser now. They promised all of those things in here, and they explained how they were going to finance it. There is a fundamental problem in the APNU/AFC with credibility. In all honesty, it is not only a credibility problem. The truth is that there is also a problem either with competence or with honesty, or perhaps a lethal cocktail of the two. This problem with competence and honesty is as rife today, if not more than it has always been.

Just like how they looked at the nation and the world and said that 33 is not bigger than 32, and the story about divide and half of a man, just like how they said they won the elections, but they are not showing the Statements of Poll (SoPs)... **[Ms. Manickchand:** They put on suit and tie.] They are watching with a straight face. Many of them put on a suit and tie and are speaking with very sophisticated accents in exactly the same manner. All this *mumbo jumbo* that you heard today, and you heard some of it today from our colleagues on the other side of the House... All the *mumbo jumbo* that you heard over the last week from them is just that *dey tek dey eyes pass de* Guyanese people. Just like how *dey tek dey eyes pass you* when they told you that 33 is not bigger than 32, just like how *dey tek dey eyes pass you* when they said they won but they did not have to show the SoPs, *dey tek de eyes pass de* Guyanese people. I do not want to use unparliamentary language, Sir. **[Mr. Ramjattan:** I want to go and sleep.] You *mus wan ga* sleep. As the Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill, said, thou shalt not sleep in the summer. You spent five years sleeping. Did you not sleep enough? You were sleeping at the wheel. You were sleeping in Brickdam, understandably, because Mr. Felix had some of your work. Who else had the rest?

This problem with competence, credibility and honesty is as rife today, if not worst. I wish to just give maybe two or three simple examples drawn from the last week. Before I do so, Sir, permit me to congratulate all of the newly appointed shadow Ministers on their appointments. Some are

new, some retained their portfolios, and some were moved. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Like Mr. Jones.] Perhaps, the Chief Whip was being freed up to do his important parliamentary work. The Chief Whip is a very active Chief Whip. Perhaps, he was freed up to do the Chief Whip's work. Some were removed. Mr. Ramjattan, I note was not given the Ministry of Home Affairs portfolio because, perhaps, he never had it, but I will put that aside for the moment. We will set that aside for the moment. I would like to congratulate all of the newly appointed or reassigned shadow Ministers. I would like, and I know that I speak on behalf of all of my colleagues on this side of the House, to say that we are available to engage our counterparts on that side of the House on any issue of national interest and national importance. I know that I speak...

I wish, Sir, on the subject of credibility, competence and integrity, to cite two or three simple examples. My distinguished counterpart and newly appointed shadow Minister of Finance [**An Hon. Member (Government):** Who is that?] The Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, [**An Hon. Member:** No, man, do not do that. Do not do it.] No, she is a new Member of Parliament (MP), and a relatively young MP. I would not. I have always considered it my duty to encourage young Members of Parliament, as I was once encouraged as a young MP myself. I wish to say to the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, that we do serious business in this House. This is not a skit that is being performed at school. This is not a school skit for Christmas where one goes at the podium, repeats one's lines and then pauses and waits for people to clap, and one feels nice when one gets an applause and then one goes back and sit.

This is serious work; this is the peoples' work that we are doing. As a young Member of Parliament, who probably has a long career in politics, I would say to her that nothing is more important than her credibility. In a manner, somewhat, akin to a high school skit, with a chorus line that said F-F-F, what a joke, what a joke, she came, and she struck a pose at the podium, she delivered two lines and then F-F-F grade. She delivered another line, then 'F' for F grade. She delivered another line, then it was: 'What a joke?' I want to share with the Hon. Member a couple of examples drawn from her own presentation. She made much ado about what she described as the anaemic growth. I think she read that in some book somewhere or some publication somewhere. She made much ado about the anaemic growth under the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

Hear what the anaemic growth is which she is speaking about. She said that, in 2020, the People's Progressive Party/Civic returned economic growth of -7.3%. Apparently, it was under an illusion that they had respected the electoral result in March and allowed us to be in Government for nine months of the year so that we could be held accountable for 2020. She apparently did not remember that she participated in a protracted effort to deny the will of the people of Guyana, as result of which the APNU/AFC was illegally in Office until August, 2020. You cannot come and speak about the PPP/C being responsible for 2020. Put that fact aside for the moment. She said that growth was -7.3% in 2020. Growth was 4.6% in 2021. If the PPP/C achieves growth of 7.7% in 2022, they will... Let me see; I want to read it.

10.19 p.m.

She said:

“Let us say...”

I want to quote her. I have it here. I asked for the verbatim transcript. I believe it is at 10 minutes and 30 seconds, or there about, into her speech. She said:

“Let us say the economy actually grew by 7.7% in 2022 non-oil economy...”

It is a little difficult to decipher. I will try to translate it into smooth English language.

“Let us say the economy actually grew by 7.7%... non-oil... Unlikely as it is, that would amount to an average GDP growth of 1.47%...”

Sir, in this business, one cannot *play fast and loose* with numbers. One cannot *play fast and loose* with numbers if one wants to be taken seriously. Negative 7.3, positive 4.6 and positive 7.7... Every little child with a pocket calculator can calculate the average of those three numbers. She said that would amount... [**An Hon. Member:** The Hon. Member.] The Hon. Member said that would amount to an average gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 1.47%. I invite the people of Guyana to take out their pocket calculators, calculate the average... [**Ms. Manickchand:** Or their phone.] Everyone has a phone. They have calculators. Listen to the video. These are the numbers: negative 7.3, positive 4.6 and positive 7.7. Tell me how the Hon. Member arrived at

1.47%. I do not know if it is this same numerical challenge that they have. One has to wonder whether it is a deliberate intent to deceive and mislead.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you cannot imply a deliberate attempt to mislead and deceive.

Dr. Singh: I would happily withdraw. In addition to that, like I said earlier, if one is to do an objective analysis of the PPP/C's performance in Government, one cannot take into account 2020 during which, for almost eight months, they were squatting in Office. Over and above that, to have achieved... Maybe this word anaemic is new to her. She may have heard something about anaemic growth. In a world where there is the COVID-19, to describe 4.6 % as anaemic is to be doing a little bit of gymnastics. It is to be *playing fast and loose* with your interpretation. Countries all over the world... I can show you the charts that have Guyana as one of the strongest performing economies in the world. But, she does this amateur analysis to say we budgeted this number and we reported less than that number.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what the 'F' grade is about? It is that, because of COVID-19 and the flood, our actual growth came in lower than what we had projected. Let me share with the Hon. Members what they projected in 2015 and in 2016, and in 2017, and what their actual growth was. Sir, in 2015, they projected – and they were in Office from May, 2015 – growth of 3.4%. Do you know what was the actual? It was 3.1% and they were harvesting the democratic dividend. They projected 3.4%; they came in with 3.1%. Had she reported that, she may have said 'F' there too. In 2016, with a full year of the democratic dividend, they projected 4.4%; they reported an actual of 3.3%. It got even better as more and more of the democratic dividend started to be harvested. In 2017, they projected 3.8% and they reported an actual of 2.1%. It sounds to me like this was not the democratic dividend.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

It sounds like the dictatorial dividend. The negative dictatorial dividend was already *starting to take root*. The Hon. Member, with similar theatrics, spoke about gold and about how they were managing the economy well. She cited some numbers about gold. [**An Hon. Member:** Similar aplomb.] Similar aplomb. Thank you very much, Sir. With similar aplomb she took on a look of *gravitas*. She assumed the countenance of *gravitas* and she said:

“...gold declaration...”

“In 2014, the last year of the People’s Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) in Office...”

I am quoting here:

“...gold declaration was 387,000 ounces.”

Then she paused for dramatic effect like they do in school skits. She paused for dramatic effect like they teach one to do in primary school drama class when one is doing a Christmas skit. She said:

“Mark this number —...”

With all her feigned *gravitas*, she said:

“Listen carefully. Mark this number — ...”

She said:

“The Coalition came into Office in 2015.”

“The first year of the APNU/AFC in Office, gold declaration was 451,000 ounces, a 16.5% increase. That was our first year in Office...”

She then went on, Sir. She said:

“Let us move to our second year in Office...”

Sir... [**An Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]*] Do not steal my punchline. I am getting to it. She said:

“Let us move to our second year in Office – in 2016. Let me recap...”

For added emphasis, my distinguished counterpart on that side of the House paused as she would in a school skit and said:

“Let me recap for persons who missed that.

She said that the PPP/C left Office in 2014. [**Mr. Ramson:** In 2014?] I am hoping I do not have a typographical error here. She corrected it. She said:

“The PPP/C’s last year in Office, in 2014...”

Repetition for emphasis. This is good training for the school’s Christmas play.

“The PPP/C’s last year in Office, in 2014, the declaration of gold was 387,000 ounces.”

The drama teacher said that with repetition for purposes of emphasis.

“The Coalition came into Office in 2015 and we had the declaration of gold being 451,000 ounces, a 16.5% increase. In 2016, the second year of the APNU/AFC being in Office, there was 713,000 ounces, a 58% increase.”

Then, Sir, I will not say the *pièce de resistance*. It has been said already. I do not want to abuse and overuse that phrase. Then she said with an air of great authority:

“And they try to school us on extractive industries.”

Then, similarly, with a lofty air of condescension she said:

“What a joke.”

Our young colleague on that side of the House said:

“What a joke.”

Sir, what a joke. I am sure that the people of Guyana are thinking why she stopped this story in 2016. She had another three years she could have told us about. She could have told us about 2017, and 2018, and 2019, and maybe even 2020. I am sure she left the people of Guyana hanging. Why did she stop the story there?

If the truth is to be told, the reason gold production increased in 2016... The Hon. Member, Minister Benn, who knows this sector more than anyone else in this country, said it just now. The reason gold production increased in 2015 was because two largescale gold mining companies started producing – Aurora Gold Mine and Troy Resources Limited. Does one know under whose stewardship those largescale gold mines were developed? There are no prizes for guessing. Those two large scale gold mines were developed under the stewardship of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. Guess what? They started to produce because we had laid the foundation, we had

supported them and we had facilitated their entry and their mine construction. They started to produce in 2015, they continued producing in 2016 and, apparently, around 2017... She did not give us the 2017, 2018 and 2019 numbers. I am inviting her to share with the citizens at large why she did not share those numbers. It is because, by the time the dictatorial and the negative democratic dividend started to set in, gold production took a nosedive. The same 712,000 ounces, which she was boasting about in 2016, by 2017 that 712,000 ounces had become 653,000 ounces. By 2020, it had become 585,000 ounces. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** What a joke.] I do not want to say what a joke, Sir, because I feel that it is my duty to encourage young Members of Parliament in the discharge of their responsibilities. In doing so, I say to the Hon. Member that gone are the days when you can hoodwink the people of Guyana in this barefaced manner. One cannot hoodwink the people of Guyana in this barefaced manner. Sir, I could go on because the entire presentation is replete.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

She spoke about sugar, and she said... Again, with similar aplomb. I am not going to go through all of that again. She spoke about sugar. In 2014, which was the last full year that we were in Office, sugar production was 216,186 tonnes. In 2015, when we were in Office for five months of the year, sugar production was 229,000 tonnes. By 2020, when they demitted Office, sugar production was 88,000 tonnes. It went to 88,000 tonnes from 229,000 tonnes. But she did not tell that story. If one takes an old motorcycle and one parks it, padlocks it and does not use it for three years, what does one think will happen? If one takes three sugar factories, padlocks the gates, does one think one will say *open sesame*. Is that the correct phrase? One padlocks the three sugar factories, parks the equipment and throws away the keys. Does one think one will come back three years later and say *open sesame*?

10.34 p.m.

Sir, presentation after presentation, I do not want to go through them. I took copious notes and I paid keen attention to everybody. Sir, I am only going to give one more example, and I am going to give it in relation to another young Member of Parliament and clearly a rising star in the People's National Congress. This is why I am devoting my time to his presentation. He is obviously a rising star in the Party for which he deserves our respect. I am speaking here of the Hon. Member, Mr.

Holder. I want to congratulate Mr. Holder on his election to the chairmanship of the Party. Was the Hon. Member elected the Chairman? [**Mr Ramson:** Yes, he was.] Is Shurwayne Holder his name? [**Mr. Ramson:** He is ahead of Mr. Roysdale Forde.] [**Mr. Nandlall:** He watched Mr. Roysdale Forde (*inaudible*).] Does he sit somewhere over there? The Hon. Member sits behind Ms. Ferguson, I think.

I believe that the Hon. Member, Mr. Holder Shurwayne Holder, got more than 400 votes for the chairmanship. Did Mr. Forde scrape 200 votes? [**Mr. Nandlall:** I do not think he made double figure.] *Oh*, he did not make a double figure. Anyways, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, who swept the slate... Ms. Ferguson, were you a contender for the chairmanship too? [**Ms. Ferguson:** No, I was not.] Okay. I *guh tell yuh* why. You will see why in a minute. You will love this one. *Ah promise yuh, yuh guh* like *dis* one. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, I promise you, you are *gonna* love *dis* one. Mr. Holder, the newly elected and freshly minted Chairman of the People's National Congress, went to the podium and put on his chairman's voice. Sir, I am not going to read his speech. I only selected one paragraph. I had to listen to this video myself about four times because I started to doubt myself. *Yuh* laughing Hon. Member. Hon. Minister Ms. Walrond, you know what I am going to say. I started to doubt myself. I *seh*, man, something *gah wrang wit yuh* hearing. I listened to this thing about five times. I called other people. I *seh* listen *dis* thing *fuh meh*, I *aint shoore* if *ah* hearing right.

The newly elected and freshly minted Chairman of the People's National Congress took to that podium with his written speech, and this is where Minister Ms. Manickchand's comment is important. The Hon. Member knows that he is on show. He has to demonstrate that he is worthy of his election as Chairman. He is on show for the nation. He spent from the 26th January to yesterday writing his speech [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*).] Whenever he spoke; I cannot remember; yesterday or the day before. [**Mr. Nandlall:** He went to President's College.] I do not want to get into this business about which school. This thing caused enough problems for the day already. The Hon. Member, the Attorney General, wants to get me into trouble with past students of President's College. I am not going to fall into that trap.

The freshly minted Chairman of the People's National Congress *tek* from the 26th January to the day before yesterday to write his speech. Knowing that he is going to be on show, he read back the speech. He probably practised it. I understand that they do practice in *duh* room *ova deh*. There

was a time when I saw, through the window, a man standing up with his speech reading it. Apparently, they do practice their speeches over there. *Dat room wah dem gat ova deh*, apparently, *dey* does put *dem* to practice *di* speech *ova deh*. A day I saw the window open, and one of the Hon. Members stand up with his paper in front of his hand. Is that not true? Did I see correctly? *Dey does* stand up *ova deh*. Apparently, the panel of elders *does put dem* youngsters and *seh*, read *yuh* speech *fa meh*; *practice*; and *dey does deh* reading. So, poor brother, the Hon. Member and Chairman, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, write his speech and he stand up *ova deh*. *Dey mussy had he* reading it *bout 10 times* and vetted by a panel of elders. Then, the Hon. Member came downstairs to put on this masterpiece performance; his first performance as Chairman of the People's National Congress. I *gonna* only read one paragraph *fuh yuh*. I think it occurred about 3 minutes and 15 seconds into his speech. I quote:

“Guyana is dubbed as one of the fastest growing economies in the world ... with over US\$600 million already in the bank.”

[**Ms. Parag:** Guyana dollars.] No, there was no doubt about the currency on this occasion. Let me say that again [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*.] No, the Hon. Member is the Chairman. He was clear about the currency.

“Guyana is dubbed as one of the fastest growing economies in the world ... with over US\$600 million already in the bank. Guyana has only about 750,000 people.”

And then Hon. Member paused, the Christmas skit again. Apparently, they teach them to do that over there; you have to pause. The Hon. Member then paused and he came back and said:

“...not 75 million...”

The Hon. Member put on his Chairman's voice.

“... not 7 million, 750,000 people.”

Then the Hon. Member continued:

“That means that we already have in the Natural Resource Fund close to US\$1 million for every man, woman and child that lives in the country.”

The Hon. Member is a youngster and clearly has a bright political future having been elected Chairman of his Party, for which I congratulate him. I would encourage him to devote himself to ensuring a long and successful political career. [**An Hon. Member:** In the Opposition.] In the Opposition, of course. I want to say that if that is the best that *y'all*... I do not hold the young Mr. Holder responsible for this. *All ah y'all wah sit down deh*, when *y'all di vetting di man speech* and when he *di rehearsing*, *non ah y'all ain't spot dat* and tell *di man*? I *gat a feeling* somebody sabotage *di man*. Is it you, Mr. Ramjattan, who sabotaged or set up the man? How could you do this to your young Member of Parliament? You listen to him rehearse this speech over there and allow him to come here and play...

Let me ask you a question. Mr. Holder is clearly a smart young man. Do you honestly believe that he believes US\$600 million divided by 700,000 is one million each? Do you honestly believe that he believes that? The Hon. Member did not leave any doubt. He did not say the population, so we could have speculated that he meant the adult population. The Hon. Member left no room for doubt. He did not say household, or the whole population, or then go back and say, I meant the adult population. The Hon. Member removed all doubts. He said every man, woman, and child; US\$1 million each. [**Ms. Ferguson:** Like you got Dr. Jagdeo hour.] I got not only the Vice President's hour but the half hour that the Prime Minister (PM) left back for me.

I give these examples [**An Hon. Member:** Did Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon left back half hour for you?] Or was it 45 minutes that he left back for me? He was a little brief. Throughout their presentations, all of them, without the exception... I only selected two or three examples. I could literally give you several examples, from every speech given, where there was a lot of fast and loose with numbers, all sorts of random, miscellaneous, nonsensical things being thrown at the people of Guyana. These are only some illustrative examples. I offer these examples with the best of intentions. I want to say to those two young Members of Parliament that you are young people, as I once was in this House. Do not play fast and loose with numbers. You cannot deceive the people of Guyana by just plucking random things like that. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** Not because you are a magician with numbers that means the Opposition (*inaudible*).] Do not play fast and loose with numbers. Sir, you do not have to be a magician with numbers to figure out that US\$600 million divided by 700,000 cannot be one million each.

Do you see this 33 versus 32 thing? This is engrained behaviour. My concern is that the senior Members of Parliament of the APNU/AFC have convinced their junior counterpart that it is acceptable and appropriate to come to this House and mislead the people of Guyana. They are actively encouraging it. I am saying to these young Members of Parliament: you have a long future in politics; do not fall into the trap and be misled by these fossils. My point is that throughout the week we were regaled by nothing but empty and vacuous theatrics that were replete with the ample and abundant demonstration of the fact that the APNU/AFC is, up to today, a Party that is devoid of any credibility. Up to today, they have not changed. They have not learnt that they cannot tell the people that 33 is not bigger than 32 and think that the people are stupid. Up to today, they believe that they could get away with this foolishness. Their presentations were filled with misrepresentations, pipe dreams, false promises, distortions, and all manner of statements that have no place in a debate on the serious business of the people. They have no place in this House.

Regrettably, they missed the opportunity to actually contribute to a serious debate about *Budget 2022*. If they had any semblance of credibility, competence and integrity in them, and if they had the least scintilla of any of those characteristics, much less all three of them, they would have arrived at the unavoidable conclusion that *Budget 2022* includes a number of initiatives that are worthy of unanimous support in this National Assembly. How could anybody with a straight face come to this House and say that a budget that will be giving every single family that has a child in school a grant of \$30,000 per child...?

10.49 p.m.

That is 200,000 children. All of their families are watching. Some of the families are probably saying that instead of \$30,000 they would have preferred \$35,000. Admittedly, who would not prefer \$35,000 rather than \$30,000? All of them are watching and are saying, they are satisfied, or they are happy that the Government gave them a \$30,000; maybe next year they would get \$35,000. Realistically: who would not want \$35,000 instead of \$30,000? You can be sure that the parents of those 200,000 Guyanese children are at home and they are saying, *yuh no wha, ah gun tek deh* \$30,000 – bearing in mind that the APNU/AFC had taken it away. And you are watching these people straight in their faces and saying that the Budget does not have anything for you.

There are 300 persons suffering from dialysis treatment. We said to them that we will pay \$600,000 a year, and they are watching those people and saying to them, the Budget does not have anything for you.

Everyone who pays income tax will benefit from the increase in the income tax threshold from \$65,000 to \$75,000 a month. Of course, people would have preferred it to be \$85,000 if you ask them, or \$95,000. Do you not think they are at home saying, you know what, at least we know that they moved it from \$65,000 to \$75,000 and it will put some more disposable income in our pockets? We will take it and next year we will probably get another increase, because this is the People's Progressive Party/Civic in Government not the APNU/AFC. You are watching these people in their faces, and you are saying the Budget does not have anything for you.

The 1,000 persons who will be trained to work in the oil and gas sector... there were 1,000 young Guyanese persons looking and hoping for a job, for five years. Apparently, Sir, the drama school that they have over there had also told them that they must come up with real life examples. Every one of them came – some come with Shelisa and Shanesa, some come with Michael, some come with some security guard that he met somewhere. Apparently, the drama school that they have over there, told them that you have to have real life examples. Did you notice how many of them came with so-called real-life examples? [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Sunita]. Was it Sunita? All of those persons whether real or imagined, all of those so-called real-life examples that the training program for the Christmas skit said they must come with, that will have appeal to people, they came here and they gave a lot of real-life examples. Whether it was Sunita or Shelisa, or Shanesa or Michael, do you know why they are in the situation they are in? Because for five years they were suffering the consequences of a dictatorship in this country, of an unconscionable Government that did not care about people, whether imagined or real. Sir, 1,000 persons out there will be benefiting from training as a result of this Budget. They will be able to get a job in the oil and gas industry. They will be able to earn an income, and you are watching them in their faces, and you are telling them that this Budget does not have anything for them.

The fisherfolk, a sector that Minister Mustapha has devoted tremendous effort to, we recognise that the sector has challenges. Minister Mustapha has put together a special task force to identify options for intervention in the aquaculture sector. Mr. Mustapha has already implemented measures to develop the brackish water shrimp program in Berbice. How many ponds are already

in operation? A total of 63 ponds are already in operation. Mr. Mustapha has identified the marine cage programme that fisherfolk would be able to benefit from. Only today, Minister Mustapha and His Excellency participated in a special meeting of CARICOM, devoted to the agricultural sector and to achieving food security in Guyana. It is a sector that was abandoned by the APNU/AFC, callously, because they feel that people in agriculture are PPP/C supporters. Do you not think those people are watching? They know that, maybe, this is not a magical solution. They know that all the problems are not going to disappear, but they are watching, and they are saying, you know what, at least the PPP/C is trying to assist us. For five years, we never heard from APNU/AFC. They will try the marine cage, they will try the brackish water shrimp, they will try the onshore farming of the fish, and make things happen; not a white paper or a green paper or a position paper or a strategy. While we are sharing out house lots, they were doing a [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible.*)] How could I? Given that the Hon. Member Ms. Anette Ferguson has been so gracious to stay in the House until now, I cannot possibly end without making reference to her. The Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, and former Minister, in speaking about their housing program, announced with customary APNU/AFC aplomb, we prepared a... You know she is a very forceful and a very emotional speaker. She put on her brother James voice, full of emotion. The Hon. Member delivered the punch line. Hear what the punch line is, and we prepared a position paper. They prepared a position paper, and we are giving the people house lots. That, right there, summarises the difference between the APNU/AFC and the People's Progressive Party/Civic. While they sell pipe dreams, while they seek to mislead the people of Guyana, we are hard at work. Our President is hard at work, our Vice President is hard at work, our Prime Minister is hard at work, our Ministers are hard at work, while they are busy selling pipe dreams. There could be no doubt, any objective-minded person would arrive at the unavoidable conclusion that this Budget outlines a plan to deliver a historic or an historic – depending on what the grammarians would say... This *Budget 2022* outlines a historic plan for the transformation, a historic and unprecedented transformation of Guyana.

The Hon. Member Anette Ferguson asks, what about their recommendations? Let me say, definitively, that this Government is a listening Government. We are a listening Government. We are not a cardboard Government. We listen to all of the people of Guyana, whether in Region 1, Region 5, Region 6, Region 4, Region 7, Region 9, or Region 10; I left out a few – Regions 2, 3, 4 and 8. I am glad because you have given me a nice entry point to my conclusion. Not only are we

a listening Government, but we listen to all of the people of Guyana; not like the APNU/AFC who only used to listen to themselves. The APNU/AFC used to operate in an echo-chamber. All they used to be hearing was their own voices. They did not even have a clue of what was going on. This Government, this Budget, outlines an agenda for transforming Guyana in a way that generations of Guyanese have been waiting for.

The energy: the Gas-to-Shore Project and the Amaila Falls to deliver energy, at scale, using clean and renewable sources including, of course, gas as a transition fuel; at scale delivering of electricity at the level that is required to facilitate an industrial revolution in Guyana. Finally, the industrial revolution that our foreparents have dreamt of but were unable to realise because of inadequacy and cost of power. Finally, this PPP/C Party Government will deliver it and *Budget 2022* initiates that delivery.

The transport infrastructure, the new roads, and the bridges... The commuters from West Demerara and the commuters from East Bank know what they have endured. Today, we are delivering new roads. We have already delivered new roads along the East Bank, and we have a new highway additionally. I think another eight lanes are planned along the East Bank and, ultimately, a brand-new highway all the way to Timehri; a new bridge across the Demerara River; a new and expanded highway on the Corentyne; the bridge across the Corentyne River linking us with our neighbours in Suriname, expanding the market in which we are operating. Imagine a Guyanese farmer from Black Bush Polder being able to load up his lorry, and just as he drives to Port Mourant market and he delivers some produce, and he drives to Skeldon market and he delivers some produce, he crosses over the river with his truck, and he delivers his produce in Nickerie too. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*).] That is correct. That is vision. That is development, and that is being delivered by this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. That is being delivered by *Budget 2022*. It is being delivered by this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government.

There are many other points that I could deal with. [**Dr. Anthony:** The hospital.] The hospitals – Minister Frank Anthony does not want me to leave out his sector. Thank you for the reminder. Brand new hospitals are being constructed – six brand new regional hospitals and a brand-new maternal and child health hospital are being built starting 2022; not a green paper or white paper; a hospital is being built. As a matter of fact, not one, six of them.

Sir, we are a working Government. We may not have solved all of the problems immediately, because there are a lot of inherited problems. But I do not believe that anybody with a straight face could question that *Budget 2022* makes a significant contribution to transforming Guyana and to improving the lives of the Guyanese people. I want to make this point: this hullabaloo – I used this word previously – all of this noise that was made about the Natural Resource Fund, do you know what the real crux of the matter is? The real crux of the matter is the APNU/AFC and their surrogates want to frustrate development in this country, as they have always done.

11.04 p.m.

Every dollar to be withdrawn from the Fund is subject to parliamentary scrutiny and appropriation. Every dollar is subject to ex-post audit and scrutiny by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). It is unlike the arrangement that they had in place when expenses could have been met from the Fund without appropriation. Every dollar is subject to scrutiny in this House.

Sir, if an objective analysis is to be done, the Natural Resource Fund Act of 29 was one of the greatest legislative perversities ever perpetrated on this country. [**Mr. Bharrat:** It is 2019.] It is January, 2019. To begin with, they see nothing wrong with forcing through this Parliament, after they lost a mandate from their Members of Parliament. They came with a straight face and forced through this House a Natural Resource Fund Bill. Putting aside the flaws in the Bill, to begin with, it suffered the fatally irreparable defect of constitutional illegitimacy. In addition to that, if one were to examine the Bill, it is a grave and vulgar perversity. It is replete with ministerial autocracy. They come now and they make a lot of noise about the Board being appointed by the President. [**Ms. Ferguson:** They are not saying that the 2019 Bill (*inaudible*).] I will repeat what I said: “APNU/AFC and their surrogates.” Sir, I want to repeat, I think the Hon. Attorney General quoted from one source. [**Mr. Ramson:** It was Andrew Boyer.] It was Andrew Boyer and what he stated about the APNU/AFC and the Natural Resource Fund. Sir, I will quote from another source. I will quote from a book published by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), called *Economic Institutions for A Resilient Caribbean*.

This is on page 270 of this book, in a section called, *Assessment and Options for Reform*. The authors of this book are incidentally renowned. The author of this chapter is a pre-eminent global

authority on sovereign wealth funds. He is a pre-eminent global authority. Here is what the author had to say:

“The objectives and design of the NRF raise several issues. The fund on its own cannot achieve the objectives that have been set for it. The rigid withdrawal rules may do little to foster stabilization or saving but may entail fiscal costs.”

He goes on. Sir, I will quote particularly pertinent sentences. He goes on to state:

“The formula for the maximum permissible withdrawal in the initial period is among the most complex operational rules for a resource fund in the world.”

This is a person who is a global expert on sovereign wealth funds and has designed many sovereign wealth funds around the world. He states:

“It is among the most complex operational rules for a resource fund in the world.”

He goes on to state:

“Its design departs from good practices. As discussed above, state-of-the-art advice based on international experience and good fiscal management principles emphasizes simplicity, flexibility, transparency, and close integration with the budget and public asset-liability management.”

The final sentence in that paragraph states:

“The rule’s complexity may also conspire against fiscal transparency and public understanding.”

He goes further and states in a subsequent paragraph:

“...the rules could hamper sound asset-liability management, ...”

Et cetera, et cetera. Sir, there is a whole section in this book that demolishes that perversity that was inflicted on the people of Guyana. Do you know what the plan was? I heard reference to the plan. Somebody said today that the APNU/AFC is forward-thinking. I think it was Mr. Forde who spoke about, forward-thinking. I could come back to forward-thinking. They were forward-

thinking when they appointed Mr. Patterson as Chairman. They rejected 18 people and appointed Mr. Patterson as Chairman of the Elections Commission (GECOM). **[Bishop Edghill:** Forward-thinking for a purpose.] They were forward-thinking for a purpose. **[Mr. Nandall:** They were way ahead.] They were ahead of the curve there. The intention behind the 2019 NRF Act was designed for ministerial autocracy. There was the ministerial determination of the economically feasible amount. Do not worry with the smokescreen about the macroeconomic committee. The macroeconomic committee was not deciding anything. It was only making a recommendation, and the Minister was determining. I do not want to use the word, pillaging. The determination of the fiscally sustainable amount was being determined by the Minister as well. Incidentally, the macroeconomic committee that was recommending to the Minister was appointed by the Minister. They were recommending to him. He could discard their recommendations and form a view of his own.

There was intent here. The fact that there was no governing body or no governing board, make no mistake of it, the Public Accountability and Oversight Committee is not a substitute for a board. Whatever you called the board – whether you call it a Board of Directors, a Board of Governors, Governing Council, Governing Committee, or whatever you called it; we could have called it anything – the Santiago Principles require a governing body. The APNU/AFC discarded that particular principle and installed – they like to use the word, installed – and anointed the maximum authority, the sole authority, the Minister of Finance. **[Ms. Ferguson:** *(Inaudible)*.] Whomever that person would have been, with intent. **[Ms. Ferguson:** Do not personalise.] I am not like the APNU/AFC. Do you want me to start on the personal jibes and attacks that were launched? Do not start me up. *Yuh complain already dat* it late. Do you want us to deal with the personal insults? Do you want us to deal with the personal insults that were being bandied every day by Opposition speakers? If I start on *duh*, we *ain't leffin hay till tomarro marning*. Do not let me start on that. *Yuh know I cud do ah six-hour hay* easy. Do not start me up on that. It was the Hon. Member Mr. Ramson who said it. He wagged his finger and he said, do not get personal with me. He said, do not get personal with me. I did not do that. I sat here in silence, and I endured all manner of personal insults. I sat here, tried to muster whatever dignity I could, and endured all manner of personal insults. It was all of us on this side of the House, all manner of personal insults. So, do not get me started on personalising; I could personalise too but that is not my style. I would not do that because I do not stoop to the level of the APNU/AFC. I would not stoop to the level of the APNU/AFC.

[**Mr. Ramson:** I would stoop though.] I might deploy the Hon. Member Mr. Ramson who is volunteering to stoop. [**Ms. Manickchand:** (*Inaudible*).] I hear there is a second volunteer; the gentleman who wore a particularly flamboyant jacket today. I want to say this, I am not going to start on that personal thing because we would be here all night. I am glad you mentioned it, Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson, because I will refer to it as I conclude.

This moment in Guyana's history is a critical turning point. It is a critical turning point. We are dealing with the serious business of building our country and transforming it. This is not a moment for personal insults. It is not a moment for snide remarks. It is not a moment for amateur theatrics. It is not a moment for high school skits and drama. This is serious business. When you come to this House to debate the national budget, especially a budget as important as this, you have an obligation and a responsibility to the people who put you here to take the task seriously. Tragically, the 31.... I am recognising the Hon. Deputy Speaker and excepting here. Is it 31 Members that they have? [**Hon. Members (Government):** It is 30.] We are not sure what the status is of the Hon. Member. [**Bishop Edghill:** It is 30 and a half.] That is this half-man thing. The 30 or 31, whatever they have right now, regrettably... It is the 31 because the Hon. Member... What is her name again? I do not know her by the more popular name. It is the former Minister of Education. [**Hon. Members:** It is Dr. Nicolette Henry]. The Hon. Member and former Minister of Education, Dr. Nicolette Henry, spoke. The 31 Members on that side of the House who spoke, regrettably... [**Bishop Edghill:** It is 30; Mr. Raphael Trotman did not speak.] I am sorry. The 30 Members who spoke, sadly, missed the opportunity to participate in a meaningful and sensible debate on *Budget 2022*. However, this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government will not let the people's business be frustrated. We will proceed with implementing this transformational Budget and continuing to do as we always do – to listen to and engage closely with the people of Guyana. We are here to serve. We are not cardboard overlords.

On that note, let me say that I consider myself, and I know that my Colleagues on this side of the House consider themselves, deeply privileged. I might go so far as to speak on behalf of the hundreds of technical people who worked on this Budget from my ministry – many of whom are here – and in other ministries. For the hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands, of technical persons – not elected officials – who contributed to the preparation of this Budget and who will contribute

to the implementation of it, if I might dare speak on behalf of all of us, we consider ourselves greatly privileged to be a part of the preparation and implementation of *Budget 2022*.

11.19 p.m.

Sir, at the appropriate time, it would be my honour to move the passage and approval of this historic, transformational *Budget 2022*. I thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Hon. Members, the general debate of the Budget concluded today, 4th February, 2022. Before we adjourn, we will consider and dispose of the Report of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply on the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2022 Estimates of Expenditure. We will have to go into the Committee of Supply for this purpose. The Assembly will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met on Thursday, 3rd February and Friday 4th February, 2022, and considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2022 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Committee of Supply passed a Resolution on this matter. Copies of the Sub-Committee's Minutes, Resolution and Schedule have been circulated. Would the Hon. Member, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, kindly move the necessary motion?

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure now to move:

“That this Committee doth agree with the Business Sub-Committee in the said Resolution.”

Thank you very much.

Question put and agreed to.

RESOLUTION OF THE BUSINESS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY, 4th FEBRUARY, 2022, ON THE CONSIDERATION OF ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2022

RESOLVED, That the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply recommend to the Committee of Supply that –

- (i) the number of Sittings to be allocated to the consideration of the 2022 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure in the Committee of Supply, should be a maximum of four;
- (ii) the allocation of time for the consideration of the Programmes and Agencies of the Estimates in the Committee of Supply should be as shown in the Schedule attached:
 - Provided that any time save on the consideration of any Programme or Agency on that allocated, may be added to any other Programme or Agency, as may be decided on by the Chairman of the Committee.
- (iii) Approval for Ministers to answer questions and vote away from their seats would be sought from the Speaker (Chairman of the Committee).
- (iv) the proceedings at the Sittings of the Committee of Supply during consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure should, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be concluded at the time recommended in the Schedule attached.

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

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Committee of Supply has been allocated four days for the consideration of the Estimates. Considerations will begin on Monday 7th February, 2022, at 10.00 a.m. and will continue, thereafter, on Tuesday 8th February at 10.00 a.m.; Wednesday 9th February at 10.00 a.m.; and Thursday 10th February at 10.00 a.m., being the last day for the consideration of the Estimates. This is in accordance with the Resolution of the Sub-Committee.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let me congratulate all those who have contributed to the Debate. Hon. Members, this completes our business for today.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 7th February, 2022.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Motion put and agreed to.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m., Monday 7th February, 2022.

Adjourned accordingly at 11.22 p.m.