



**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
(2020-2023) 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*

56th Sitting

Wednesday, 25TH January, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.14 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Excuse

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharat Jagdeo, has asked to be excused from today's sitting. I have some housekeeping matters before we start.

Live Feed

First, let us deal with the live feed. Yesterday, I had an extended break from the Chair to deal with some issues pertaining to our feed and, also, some of the comments. This was so that Members, along with the viewers, shall know. We have activated the social media filter which takes out certain comments that are discriminatory and all the other vile things. For example, a post may pop-up, but the social media filter platform that we have will remove that comment which goes up. We do not have somebody in a backroom editing people's comments. We have someone who would look at some of the words in our local vernacular that we would not use and then highlight those. That is for the social media people who are watching. We ask that you refrain from certain words.

Quorum

Hon, Members, it is always difficult to get a quorum at the start, and I understand that, and also after a break. I will try to have four speakers for the first session every day. We might go over 12.00 p.m. a bit because it is always difficult to get back and recommence the sitting. I say that because I see many of the staff of Ministries having to wait long and they may want to get back to some of the responsibilities they have in and out of their office. That way, I think, we could better manage our time and their time.

Meals

There are about eight persons among us who are vegetarians. Over the past couple of days, they have been challenged to get their meals. We know, at least, five of the vegetarians. Those who want a vegetarian meal, if you could inform the Clerk early, we will set aside, with your name, the vegetarian meal. This is so you will not be challenged with respect to your meals. If there is anything else, let us know and we will try our best to ensure that we can accommodate all of your requests.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following paper was laid:

The Customs (Amendment of First Schedule) Order 2023 – No. 9 of 2023

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

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Oral Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, yesterday we had deferred three questions by the Hon. Member Jermaine Figueira for the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport. I am just checking to see if... I am not online as yet, so do not know if the Hon. Member Figueira is online or if the Hon. Leader of the Opposition could tell me ... I see, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, the Hon. Member. Yesterday, they did mention that the Hon. Member would ask these questions in the absence of Mr. Figueira. Hon. Member, you may ask the first question.

1. Consultancies for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: The first question is, can the Minister inform this House how many consultants were employed by his Ministry between 1st September, 2021 and 30th June, 2022?

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: There was one Consultant employed. I am just following up to go through all of the questions. His name is Mr. Wazarie. The nature of his work is to support the music school in drumming and the making of drum materials for the development of their curriculum. Just to finish it up, based on the question, the fee is \$600,000.

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Sarabo-Halley, I think question one was there. Is that correct?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Yes. It was just one question. I think the Hon. Minister attempted to answer all three questions. My only issue with his response is that I was not hearing him, so I am not sure if he would be able to ...

Mr. Speaker: We are having some issues with the microphone on this side. The other problem we have is that the microphones tends to be directional, so if I come closer I get great volume. The Hon. Minister is endowed with height so he is a distance away from the microphone.

Mr. Ramson: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, you can.

Mr. Ramson: I am happy not to be vertically challenged too, Mr. Speaker. Just to answer all of the questions, there was one Consultant employed. His name is Mr. Wazarie. He assists and supports the activities of the music school – drumming, making of drums, the development of the curriculum and the salary or fee is \$600,000.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member, the question with respect to the synthetic track, are you passing that? I think there is one...

2. Synthetic Track in Linden

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: The second question is, could the Minister inform this House when will work on the synthetic track in Linden recommence and when is it likely to be concluded?

Mr. Ramson: I am glad that the question was framed in that way. To answer the question, comprehensively, I have to give some background and details as to when the work at the synthetic track had commenced, what got us to this point and when we are looking to conclude. I have a number of publications from the Department of Public Information (DPI) that I will be laying over to this House for reference. Just to go through this in a chronological way so that the House, the public and Guyana are able to get a good sense of what transpired and got us to this point, and to show what a monumental failure the management of this project was. I have one from 5th January, 2018, the caption stated:

“Synthetic Tracks will be constructed by the end of 2018 – Min. Norton”

This was Minister Norton. [Mr. Nandlall: Not Aubrey?] This was Minister George Norton. That very important clarification must be made. Document number two dated 12th May, 2018 stated:

“Linden Synthetic Track on target for Oct. 2018 completion”

Just for the sake of being clinical, I must read the first paragraph which stated:

“The Department of Sport is on target with its October 2018 deadline for the laying of a state-of-the-art synthetic track in the mining town of Linden in Region 10 (Upper Demerara-Berbice). This is according to Minister of Social Cohesion, with responsibility for Sport, Dr. George Norton who has responsibility for Culture, Youth and Sport.

That is 11th May, 2018. On the 26th October, 2018 the caption stated:

“\$320M in contracts signed for Berbice, Linden synthetic tracks”

This was when the contracts were actually signed, which was in October, 2018, keeping in mind the original statements that it would be concluded or be on target for completion in October, 2018. On the 26th October, this was what was said: they signed the contracts and that the works are scheduled to commence in one week at the date of signing and that it would take three to six months to be completed. That is what they are on record as saying. In April, 2019, the caption in the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper stated:

“Minister Norton impressed with ongoing works at the Linden Synthetic Track”

The contract was signed in October. This was now April, so October, November, December, January, February, March, April, six months had already passed, and the contract was supposed to be completed within three to six months. The caption stated that the Minister was impressed with the works that were going on there, even though it was not concluded. [Mr. Nandlall: *(Inaudible)*] No, not as yet.

10.28 a.m.

This was 30th June, 2019, after the six months period had elapsed. This was in the *Guyana Times* newspaper. The caption stated:

“Minister receives status update on synthetic tracks”

“...construction is said to be ‘shaping up nicely’.”

Already two months behind and it was shaping up nicely. On 5th September, 2019, this was the *Guyana Chronicle*. The caption stated:

“Linden synthetic track nearing completion.”

The first paragraph:

“VERY soon athletes who are residing in the Mining Town of Linden will be able to practise and compete in a modern state-of-the-art sporting facility, which will boast an eight-lane synthetic track.”

Two paragraphs later it stated:

“The actual laying of the synthetic material will be done by an overseas firm, and this is expected to commence at the end of September, 2019. The contractor related that work is moving apace and its completion is guaranteed before the end of the year.”

That was September, 2019. By December, 2019, the caption stated – Department of Public Information (DPI) – 5th December:

“Reg. 6 and 10 synthetic tracks almost complete for 2020”

“...Dr. George Norton gave the assurance in an exclusive DPI interview on Thursday.”

Where he said the following:

“We are certain that before the end of this year we will reach a stage of the laying of asphalt so come 2020 it would only need the accommodation of the synthetic materials and the laying of it (synthetic material) and of course other infrastructure surrounding those tracks.”

That was December, 2019. None of that was completed. Here is the kicker, they promised that the track would be completed by...first started by the end of 2018. Then they assured that it would be completed by the end of 2019. Here is the kicker, they never even paid for the synthetic material.

I have here the award coming for the Ministry of Finance which states, and I would like to give the date of the award, 31st May, 2021:

Please see advised that approval has been given for the contract synthetic material and installation of the synthetic tracks, Region 6 – New Amsterdam and Region 10 – Linden awarded to REGUPOL BSW GmbH for the tendered sum of \$1.031 million euros.

Who paid for this? The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. Just for the sake of clarity, let me also say that the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government had to complete a number of projects in order for us to get to the stage of the laying of the asphalt, which was completed at the end of October, early November last year, which we completed with the supervision of BSW. It was such a technical installation process that the margin of error was 5 millimetres. It was scheduled for the completion of the laying because we have in our possession, stored safely, the synthetic material. We already purchased it. We already received it. It is stored. It is waiting to be installed. It was scheduled for November – December to complete the installation of the synthetic track, which is supposed to be no more than 30 days. Then, the rains came early in November and there was a curing period that is required for the asphalt to be cured, and we were unable to do it. The other Consultant has to come to supervise the laying of the synthetic material and that is scheduled for April of this year. Once we do not have any weather conditions that would be disruptive during that period, the laying of the synthetic material will be completed.

What I abhor to...one of the worse thing... I do not want to say anything that is unparliamentarily, so I am being very careful with what I am saying. What I consider to be repugnant is that Members of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) have been going around telling the country, holding press conferences, *et cetera*, saying that this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government had stopped the project which is a complete falsehood. That is a complete falsehood. They know better. If one examines the Budget Estimates of 2020, 2021 and 2022, there are capital allocations for projects which needed to be concluded and are contained in there. For the projects that were started this year... Forget about the projects that were concluded last year, forget about the purchase that we made that was included in our budget document, which is a public document, which we spoke about. Forget about that. Let us speak about what happened this year. The projects started this year were all publicly advertised in the newspapers. Members on the other side, including the Leader of the Opposition, went on a press conference and said that

we were discriminating against the people of Linden by stopping the project. That was a complete falsehood. What I want the people to know and it is very important because you are going to have to go back to Linden and tell them that you failed them, the one project that you had been glowing and boasting about, has been a monumental failure of project management and there has been no consequences whatsoever for the people of Linden – those young kids who want to go and train there, none whatsoever and there is... Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, there was a question with respect to Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) relief of persons. Could the Minister inform this House whether his Ministry provided any post COVID-19 relief?

3. Post COVID-19 relief

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I missed that one. Could the Minister inform this House whether his Ministry provided any post COVID-19 (Material) relief to the persons in the performing arts, specifically, to return to theatre performance?

Mr. Ramson: Yes. The Government of Guyana has provided a number of COVID-19 relief measures and packages. There has been no specific industry that has received a specific measure of relief. It has been a general position of the Government of Guyana.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

Income Tax (Amendment) Bill 2023 – No. 3/2023

A BILL intituled,

“An Act to amend the Income Tax.”

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

GOVERNMENT’S BUSINESS

MOTIONS

BUDGET SPEECH 2023 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2023

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly and that, when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly, an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2023 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 16, 2023, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

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

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73.02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for each Constitutional Agency be included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2023 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 2023, of a total sum of seven hundred and twenty-one billion, five hundred and twenty-nine million, and seven hundred and thirty-four thousand dollars (\$721,529,734,000), excluding sixty billion, three hundred and fifty-one million, two hundred and twenty-nine dollars (\$60,351,229,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2023 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of thirteen billion, eight hundred and six million, five hundred and seventy-seven dollars (\$13,806,577,000) 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 2023.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$208,944,156,942, equivalent to US\$1,002,130,249, to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2023 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

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

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we call the first contributor today as we proceed with the Budget Debate contributions for 2023, again, the Air conditioning (AC), I see another barometer, Ms. Sarabo-Halley already covered up. One of the reasons too we have to keep the AC on is, the Control Room has equipment that are temperature sensitive. We are trying to get an isolated AC

unit for that room so that we could shut down the AC in the room more often, and it would not be this uncomfortable for people.

Also, I know many Members of Parliament (MPs) may have guests and they may want to, during the break, invite those guests to have some refreshments with them. Remember, the lounge for the MPs is for MPs and so let us keep that solely for MPs. If there is an arrangement we want to make, once we know, but let us keep those going into the MPs Lounge MPs only. We could always arrange for the accommodations of your guests, for the staff to come out and you could have it in a different area. Thank you. For the first Speaker for today, the Hon. Member Mr. Vinceroy Jordan, the Hon. Member will be starting at 10.42 a.m.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, all. Before I get into my contributions for today, I would just like to remind this honourable House that the National Communications Network (NCN) and DPI belong to all the people of Guyana. We in the Opposition are supposed to have the right to be aired just like the Government Members during this Budget Presentation. The unfair treatment by this Government to the Opposition continues by the Government with instructions not to broadcast Opposition MPs. Even the ordinary Guyanese have taken to social media to vent that disgust. Today, I say to this honourable House, the Opposition Members should be equally aired as those in the Government.

10.43 a.m.

I rise to make my contribution to the budget presented by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance on 16th January, 2023, under the theme: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow.*

This colossal failure and shipwreck to Guyana's economy called the National Budget has left all Guyanese with reasons to worry and wonder about their future. Sir, some are worrying about how is it that a government can be so uncaring in its plans, policies and programmes, while some worry about when they will get out of poverty in this much touted oil economy. A large cross-section of Guyanese is worrying about when this budget is passed, how will they survive? Where will the next meal come from? Evident to these facts is the statistical report in the *Kaieteur News* Editorial dated 20th January, 2023 of the United Nations (UN) Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) which shows that 43% of Guyanese cannot afford a healthy diet, while 5% are undernourished.

This was reported in its recent report released in January, 2023 titled: *Regional overview of 2022 towards improving affordability and healthy diets*. That report also states that 50% of the people living in our country, live in poverty. They went on to specify that half of the country's population is surviving on less than US\$5.05 or Guyana \$1,000 per day. It must be noted that with these facts about Guyana, the international organisation said that our country's national poverty status ranks the highest amongst Latin America and the Caribbean. The PPP/C Government should fix that and then come back to this august House and talk about 'biggest budget' and 'budget for all people'.

While this budget is some 41.4% larger than that of 2022, it is very clear that it will not be able to address the previously mentioned situations in Guyana, nor will it address the financial insufficiencies of the citizens. This visionless Government, while proposing to spend \$781.9 billion, has failed to propose any measures that will indeed address the high inflation rate and general cost of living. This budget is deficient in a poverty reduction strategy, a crime prevention plan and a permanent job creation strategy.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to talk to you about public health in Region 5. This budgetary allocation in two successive years, continues to fail the people of Region 5, Mahaica/Berbice, significantly, with some \$236 million allocated to this region for health care in an oil producing economy, a mere \$17 million more than last year's allocation. This Government for years has failed to upgrade and build upon the work of the Coalition Government to transform the Trafalgar No. 28 Health Post into a recognised health centre. This is a demonstration of the gross incompetence of this Administration and the lack of vision for the region, not forgetting the true uncaring nature of the PPP/C Government. Health care services should be the primary focus of any government, but, instead, this Government is busy ensuring that our health sector is quickly privatised. The Constitution of Guyana dictates that every citizen has the right to free health services. Yet, after the huge more than \$500 billion 2022 Budget, citizens still have to purchase drugs, pay to seek medical services of specialist doctors and, yes, continue to foot the huge cost of having a life and death surgery completed.

Our district hospitals in Region 5 continue to fail in their services to the people, with the x-ray unit down countless times in one year, the non-functioning ultrasound unit, shortages of drugs, especially for the elderly and children... The brand new one has not yet been installed, Mr. Speaker. Sir, even the dental unit was not working at the Fort Wellington Hospital for a number

of days, until I spoke about it. It is painful to hear the numerous complaints of residents who cannot access services at the medical laboratory at either the Fort Wellington or Mahaicony Hospitals. It is always, we can do this, or we can do this one, but you have to go to the other hospital to get the next one done. You find people living in Mahaicony having to travel to Berbice for a simple test, likewise persons from Berbice having to travel to Mahaicony. Who will give our elderly who have to go monthly or twice monthly to the hospitals... Who will give our elderly who have to go monthly or twice monthly the money to travel when the meagre pension is already consumed on utility bills? The Hon. Member Jaffarally would not be able to know about this because, apparently, he has the blue shield health care plan. As a matter of fact, he still does not live in the region.

Permit me to remind this Government of some of the things we called for as residents of the Mahaica/Berbice Region in 2022 and still need. We need new ambulances. One to be added to those existing at both the Fort Wellington and Mahaicony Hospitals. I said this last year. In addition, three new ambulances which should be placed at health centres across the region at our far flung and densely populated areas such as Rosignol, Bush Lot and High Dam, in cases of emergencies. This is a proposal. We need a new state-of-the-art modern regional hospital to house all the necessary departments, sectors of health care services such as a functioning surgical theatre, physiotherapy and radiology centres, maternity and paediatric wards and a dialysis centre. We need a fully equipped and functioning laboratory at both our hospitals. Our Amerindian brothers and sisters of Moraikobai still need a river ambulance to get them from 96 Miles up the Mahaicony river to a hospital in cases of emergencies.

Permit me to look at education in Region 5. Last year I denounced the meagre increase of only \$20 million added to the education delivery programme for 2022, against that of 2021. However, this year is nothing better with just a mere \$22 million added when this year's budget is over 40% that of last year. While I believe that education is one of the main pillars for development in our society, this Government and the Regional Administration do not believe it is. If one child is deprived of education and a bright future, it is one too many. In the African community of Burma, particularly at Augsburg Primary School, the Hon. Jaffarally would know about this, the children in that community continue to be deprived of their constitutional rights according to article 27. That is proper educational facilities that is required for them to learn. The Augsburg Primary School is still without electricity since 2022, the roof is leaking as if it is a strainer. The Regional

Administration continues to prove its incompetence and lack of ability to evenly distribute the nation's resources. In 2022, the budget included a large portion of \$101 million for the rehabilitation of the schools and living quarters of which Augsburg Primary School's living quarters were slated to be repaired. To date, that building remains in a state of disrepair and no housing is provided for the Head Teacher of that school. Mr. Speaker, this is the state of the living quarters of the Augsburg Primary School.

[Hon. Member displayed an image.]

This is the state, Minister of Education, of the Augsburg Primary School living quarters – fully covered in bush. Apart from that, there was a recent fire at the No.8 Primary School due to faulty electrical works. Yet, we speak about biggest budget. There is a shortage of furniture, inclusive of teachers' desks and chairs, at several schools including the Fort Wellington Secondary School, No. 8 Secondary, Rosignol Primary, among others throughout the region during the year 2022. This demonstrates this Government's poor performance in management and its gross incompetence. When one examines the 2022 and 2023 Capital Project Profile of Education Delivery, one would recognise that the classification is stated as critical. However, all these failures happened in a critical condition of our education sector. I wonder if the 2023 programmes are truly critical or is the same as the Augsburg Primary School? The teachers and parents of Region no. 5 renewed the call for a separate building to house the No.8 Nursery School and remove the children that are cramped in the lower flat of the No.8 Primary School.

This budget is vacuous, visionless, politicised, ethicised, unfair, unethical and benefits only the friends and elites of the PPP/C to get rich and for some to get richer.

Permit me to touch on public infrastructure, sea defence and river defence. The ordinary citizens are not mindful of the deteriorating relationship between the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development and the Regional Chairman of Region 5. However, the effects of an unjustifiable/original Budget 2023 concern them all, leaving them to suffer with little or no resources in some areas. Mr. Speaker, you would know Sir, that these proposed resources are to be spent in most areas in an unfair ethicised and highly politicised manner, only catering for the communities and to benefit only the friends, families and elites of the PPP/C in this much touted 'One Guyana'.

This Government returns to this House with a National Budget. It failed to heed the cries of the ordinary citizens. There is a host of residents throughout the region who are suffering and need urgent repairs to be done to their streets and dams. This Government continues its rampant rage and discrimination against villages perceived to not be supporters of the PPP/C Government and that is a fact. Mr. Speaker, let me give you a summary of the discrimination of the community roads programme 2022. Sir, across 10 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDC), this is the proposal of this apartheid self-serving racist demonic regime. With 135 roads to be built, both asphaltic and concrete surfaces, this is the breakdown by communities. In Blairmont/Gelderland NDC, where the PPP/C controls, nine roads are to be done out of a total of 135. In Rosignol/Zeelust, where the PPP/C controls, 21 roads are to be done out of 135. In Bel Air/Woodlands, where the A Partnership for National Unity/AFC (APNU/AFC) controls, 15 roads are to be done. It would appear as though there is only one village in this entire NDC because 10 roads will be done in Number 7 Village alone, where the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development is from. The NDC is left with only four roads for the other villages.

10.58 a.m.

Surprisingly enough, in the Bath/Woodley Park NDC, out of a total of 135 roads, 31 roads will be done in Bath alone. In one community, there will be 31 roads done. In Union/Naarstigheid, which the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) controls and which has about 14 villages, 25 roads will be done. That is good. However, out of those 25 roads, 23 will be done in one village called Bush Lot. The Hon. Jaffarally would know that Bush Lot is a support strong base of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). One road will be done in Hopetown and one road will be done in Trafalgar. Every time we come to this House and speak about the racism and the discrimination against our people, they call us racist. I will remain a racist once I am defending the people of Guyana. As long as I am dealing with the affairs of the people of Guyana, I will be called a racist and I have no problem with that. In Seafield/Tempie, which the APNU/AFC controls, six roads will be done. In Profit/Rising Sun, where Belladrum and El Dorado fall, only four roads out of 135 will be done. In Mahaicony/Abary, which the PPP/C controls, nine roads will be done. Surprisingly, in Hamlet/Chance, which the APNU/AFC controls, there is one PPP/C village, and one road will be done. That road will be done – guess where –in the village of the PPP/C. In Woodlands/Farm NDC, which the APNU/AFC controls – it controls a total of 6

NDCs in Region 5 – 14 roads will be done. Out of the 14 roads, 13 of those will be done in the village of the Regional Chairman which is controlled by the PPP/C. That is discrimination; that is *apartheidship*.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to speak about agriculture and food security. Under this sector, I was left spellbound and speechless during the already terrifying and scary, almost six hours of presentation by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance when he stated, and I quote from page 28, paragraph 4.33:

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I see the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs has on his light. Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, you have the floor.

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of clarification.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, on that point of clarification, there is a particular Standing Order. I have to seek the position of the speaker on the floor.

Mr. Jordan: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Benn: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Jordan: The Minister stated:

“...When we took office in 2020, the agriculture sector was in a state of collapse, as it had become a target for political vindictiveness, having been starved of financial support, and subjected to particularly poor planning.”

The Minister went on to state in his budget speech:

“This is tragic since agriculture is an important pillar in our nonoil economy and has been the base of economic activity, especially in rural communities, for decades.”

I, like many Guyanese, find this statement laughable since we all know that this Minister, throughout his almost six hours of vacuous presentation, found himself in the opposite corner of the truth with things such as the second paddy drying floor that was to be completed in Region 5

since 2022 and the incomplete state-of-the-art abattoir at Onverwagt that is presently at the foundation stage of construction, although funding started since the year 2020. This is the state of an abattoir that was funded since 2020. Only two days ago, the foundation was still being dug. This is the rate of completion. This is the fast rate of completion that the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance speaks about when he comes to this House. After three years of spending, this abattoir is still at the foundation stage. Kudos to the PPP/C Government.

If the Hon. Minister wants to talk about collapse, I will direct him to his Government's *Mid-Year Report 2022*. That is a total collapse. When sugar declines by 55.9% in one year, after an already reduced target, that is a collapse. When rice declines by over 22.4%, with no adverse weather conditions, that is a collapse. When fisheries and aquaculture declines by 19% in the same year, that is a collapse. When livestock and meat production declined, despite a growing demand for animal-sourced food products, both locally and internationally, that is a collapse. When other crops, value crops, coconut, corn and soybean still cannot move past the phase of studies, diversification, designs and theories, after billions of dollars are invested, that is a collapse. When the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), through this Government, spends over \$150 million on eight non-functional cane loader machines, place them at the Albion and Blairmont estates and after two months not one piece of cane could be picked up by these eight non-functional machines, that is tragic. That is a collapse, Mr. Speaker. When this Government can collect an entire flock of malnourished and, in some cases, barren Barbados Black Belly sheep and boast about this, that is a collapse. When the PPP/C Government, after investing over \$40 billion of taxpayers' money into GuySuCo, cannot reopen one estate, that is a collapse. When GuySuCo, after reducing its production target of over 97,000 metric tonnes of sugar in 2019 to a mere 57...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture has risen on a Point of Order.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order, Standing Order 40 – the Hon. Member imputed improper motive when he said that GuySuCo has purchased eight cane grabbers, which is not true. I ask that he apologises and withdraws that statement.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the Hon. Minister said that the information provided is not accurate. What we will do is establish the accuracy of that. I am going to ask the Clerk to pull up the exact

words that you said and ask the Minister to provide the contrary information. Go ahead now, Hon. Member.

Mr. Jordan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I could provide photos of those cane loaders. When GuySuCo, after reducing its production target of over 97,000 metric tonnes of sugar, in 2019, to a mere 57,000 metric tonnes of sugar in 2022, still failed miserably to make a single crop target, I say to the Hon. Minister that is what defines a collapse. How dare the Hon. Minister come to this House to tell us about a collapse in any sector of this economy when it was this Hon. Minister, through his Government in 2015, who left an entirely collapsing economy for the APNU/AFC Coalition to revive? Mr. Speaker, revive is what the APNU/AFC Coalition did. The APNU/AFC Government left a thriving agriculture sector in 2020. Today, we see a steady decline in this sector under the hands of a PPP/C Government. This contributes to the rapid rise in the cost of living in the sense that we are producing far less than we were three years ago and importing far more. Do not be bothered by the noise, Mr. Speaker. The proof is evident in the statistics of the *Mid-Year Report 2022*, which shows that most subsectors, in the year 2022, declined. Let me help them to understand their Government's performance. Sugar declined; rice declined; fisheries and aquaculture declined; small and other crops declined; and corn and soybean declined. This is tragic and this is what we call a total collapse.

While this Government proudly boasts about the \$4 billion allocated to the GuySuCo to commence the construction of the Albion packaging plant, the real argument is whether GuySuCo needs a multi-million-dollar packaging plant. The GuySuCo is failing, day after day and crop after crop, to produce enough sugar to be processed and packaged at its Blairmont central factory location. I ask the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, with sugar dying under his watch, is this feasible for GuySuCo?

The rice sector in 2019, according to the Guyana Rice Development Board's (GRDB) statistics, showed that Guyana produced 1,049,874 metric tonnes of paddy, making it the second-highest rice-producing achievement in Guyana's history. Region 5 alone produced 454,476 metric tonnes of paddy with a rice equivalent of 295,409 metric tonnes. This was the region's second-best performance. Today, rice production is at its lowest. I repeat, today, rice production is at its lowest or worst performance ever, with the rice sector contracting significantly since 2019. However, the

Hon. Minister comes, stands here in this honourable House and tries to mislead the nation as if all things are bright and beautiful...

Mr. Speaker: You cannot impute that he tries to mislead. You have to withdraw that.

Mr. Jordan: I am guided, Mr. Speaker. ...as if all things are bright and beautiful with the rice sector. In fact, the rice sector contracted by some 22.4% after the Government projected it to grow by 25.1%. The reality is that rice underperformed at a rate of 47.5% in the year 2022. That is a collapse; that is a tragedy; and that speaks of a collapse in this economy. I challenge the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance and the Minister of Agriculture to go now – and perhaps I can go with them – and they would see that hundreds of acres of rice lands have been abandoned for over two crops now. Rice lands in Regions 5 and 6 are left uncultivated because of the high cost of production. The prices for fertilisers and other chemicals have all skyrocketed. Yet, in *Budget 2023*, there is no measure to cushion this and assist the hundreds of rice farmers to return to the fields of their daily living. How heartless and cruel this is to our farmers.

The Hon. Minister lamented that his Government distributed \$900 million in fertilisers but he did not remember to report that probably all the fertilisers were spoiled and melted. If he did not remember, he can ask the Hon. Vice... [**Mr. Mustapha:** *(Inaudible.)*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, use your microphone. I am not hearing you. Your own Members are not paying you the courtesy of allowing me to hear you.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 40. Again, the Hon. Member is misleading this honourable House. In Region 5, we have distributed...

Mr. Speaker: All right. Hon. Minister, you want to provide contrary information and I have to get the Hon. Member to give you leave to make that point.

11.13 a.m.

Mr. Jordan: No.

Mr. Speaker: You have an opportunity to present....

Mr. Mustapha: But he is lying in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Lying and misleading, again, are unparliamentary words, Hon. Members. Hon. Members, before we recommence, Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, I will have to get an extension for you. I did provide you with the extra time when you were interrupted. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, proceed.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, I beg that my Hon. Member be given almost 10 minutes, but we will stick with five minutes to conclude his presentation. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Member, you may proceed to conclude in five minutes.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Speaker, in continuing, maybe he did not ask the Hon. Vice President what the people in Region 6 said to him or perhaps he did not ask the Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally, about the one man who collected all the fertilisers in Bush Lot and went to the Masjid and distributed same, when half of the village was left....

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may want to withdraw that, because I am sure our Masjids do not get involved in what you are trying to imply.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Speaker, I so do. He went to a special place and distributed same when half of the village was left at war over not receiving any. While I do not doubt the Hon. Minister that perhaps \$900 million was spend on fertiliser, I certainly doubt that 5,160 farmers received, as was stated by the Minister. If the Hon. Minister wants to prove otherwise, I challenge him to produce the list of those farmers and the quantities that they all received. Loud shouts and long speeches with no proof of accountability is not accepted in this House. It is unacceptable. I challenge the Hon. Minister to show us the farmers who received in Belladrum and Ithaca in Region 5; show us the farmers who received in Fyrish and Lancaster in Region 6; and show us the farmers who received in Dartmouth and Queenstown in Region 2. When he does, I will personally apologise. It is high time we expose these facts of racism, nepotism, cronyism and *friendism* of this uncaring cabal called a Government.

With all that being said, let me remind the Hon. Minister of some of the thriving achievements in the area of agriculture that his Government inherited. There was improved drainage and irrigation systems across the length and breadth of the rice belt. The Coalition did it. Since the year 2015, the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) installed pumps at stations across Region 5, Region 3, Region 4 and Region 6. Several pump stations have been built and rehabilitated across the coastland at a cost over \$3 billion. The areas which benefitted from this investment – and listen Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Member – includes Lusignan, Beterverwagting, Triumph, Good Hope and its environs, Friendship, Buxton, Herstelling, Mocha, Providence, Hope and Enmore in Region 4; Three Friends and Columbia, Aberdeen, Land of Plenty, Mainstay, Lima and Reliance in Region 2; and Bengal, Gangaram, Eversham and Joppa in Region 6. A new sluice was built at De Edward Village, West Coast Berbice (WCB) to improve drainage. The Coalition did that. The introduction of a high yielding paddy to the farming market, it was the Coalition that did that. The introduction of new varieties of fruits, such as citrus, that the Hon. Minister can now come and include in his budget, it is the Coalition that did that. It was the Coalition of the APNU/AFC Government that introduced the Rural Agricultural Infrastructure Development (RAID) programme, with funding from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) to the tune of \$318 million. This was done in the communities of Ithaca, Mocha, Mon Repos and Buxton and benefitted hundreds of single parents, cash crop, small and medium size farmers, who now have cultivation lands and machines with the requisite infrastructure to continue a daily living. On this point, I say to this uncaring Government, return the machines that belong to Ithaca, return the excavators and return the graders because they belong to the people.

The National Drainage and Irrigation Authority commissioned – listen to this, Mr. Speaker – the first amphibious excavator on 24th May, 2019. The Coalition did that. The Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA) commissioned Guyana's first duck egg hatchery, producing approximately 850 ducklings on a hatching day. The Coalition did that. The year of 2017 saw the introduction of the Black Giant birds to the Guyana market, through the hinterland development programme, with the handing over of 100 Black Giant chickens along with the requisite start-up feed and other supplies to Mahdia Secondary School in Region 8.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have been signalling you to conclude but you have been ignoring me.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Speaker, a minute to wrap up.

Mr. Speaker: No, Sir. You are already a minute over the five minutes, so you wrap up now.

Mr. Jordan: Yes, Mr. Speaker. In conclusion, I therefore propose to this Government to give onto every Guyanese what is due to them. *Proverbs 29:1-2* states:

“He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.”

Our people are mourning, Mr. Speaker. *Budget 2023* is heartless, visionless and mean and I cannot support this budget. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member. The next presenter is the Hon. Member and Minister of Public Works, the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill, starting at 11.21 a.m.

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise as part of team PPP/C to support a strategic, purpose-driven and well-orchestrated budget to continue to promote Guyana's development, bring about transformation, modernisation and prosperity for all the people of Guyana. I would be very concerned if National Communications Network (NCN) and the Department of Public Information (DPI) did not broadcast such a presentation, because that was helpful to the PPP/C. That kind of presentation indicates why the APNU/AFC must never, ever get back into office.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you and the Parliament Office because I am aware that everything that is said in this House is publicly displayed for all to see and I am sure that DPI and NCN are also broadcasting. These kinds of presentations can be fact checked. The people of Region 5 could stand up and say that he is not telling the truth because they live there; where the people Region 5 could be able to say that he is talking about Trafalgar Health Centre, but they know that a new hospital is being build there; where the people who listened to the callout of roads would be able to tell you that they know where roads were built because they were living there when the roads were being built. Thank you very much, Hon. Member, for helping the PPP/C to advance its cause.

Secondly, something has been happening in this House, over the last couple of days, and people have been repeating it and it is about this report released in January, 2023. This report was studies and research done during the year of 2019 into 2020, during the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) years when people were not able to work and when there was a lockdown. Yes, it was released in 2023, but the studies were for a period when the APNU/AFC held the reigns of Office.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to your attention that we have the report about what was taking place in Guyana during the period of 1990 to 1992 – I am trying to find it back – where the percentage of people who were undernourished and the rest of it was over 22%. We got it down to 11% by 2011. That is the fact, written and published. I could send a copy of that for you, Mr. Speaker, but I am sure you are fully aware of it. Here it is that we have people coming to peddle narratives, big tent behaviour again.... [Mr. Duncan: Look who is talking about big tent behaviour. It is Mr. big tent himself.] I will not play ‘coloured girl in the ring’. So, we will have to be continually addressing these inaccuracies and misconceptions.

Mr. Speaker, because this debate is going live, people are continuing to listen to this narrative that Guyana is an apartheid, racist, demonic regime. Apartheid could only exist when there is a party that is all of one race. Apartheid could only exist where one race is subservient to another race. Apartheid could only exist when there are legal boundaries where one race cannot go and where another race cannot go. We are allowing, in this House, people to say that a Government.... Look at this side of the House. Does this look like apartheid? Do you know what is the problem? Its reverse racism that is at work, because if one is Afro-Guyanese and one does not follow the narrative of the People’s National Congress (PNC), one is not black. I would like to remind this House that nobody has a transport on Bishop Juan Anthony Edghill or any other Afro-Guyanese who supports the PPP/C. In apartheid, some people cannot vote while others vote. They were not allowed to vote. I will dismiss that for now. While I go through my presentation, I will take the opportunity to answer some of the other things that were said, but I would like to start here.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

I hold in my hands the extract from the People’s Progressive Party/Civic manifesto. It states: Infrastructure boom: building for the future. Mr. Speaker, the reason I am going here is because I would like to indicate to you and to the entire nation that what Dr. Ashni Singh brought to this

House stands true and faithful to the social contract we made with the people of Guyana when we went to the polls, and we are fulfilling our mandate.

11.28 a.m.

Budget 2023, I am being told by my colleagues in the Opposition, is heavy on infrastructure. Well, I have been hearing two things. We have to make up our mind which one is true. Both are coming from that side of the House. The budget has slush funds to look after the people who are with the PPP/C. Then we hear that the budget is only building for one set of people. We have to decide. Let me just remind that we came into Office on 2nd August, 2020, which was 28 months ago. I will examine, in detail, what the 56 months of the APNU/AFC looked like. I will start.

In 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, 56 months of the APNU/AFC rule, the total appropriation for miscellaneous roads, which Mr. Jordan just complained about, was \$8,522,000,000. All the roads that the Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, is complaining about that need to be fixed, they had 56 months to do it and they did not do it. In the 28 months that the PPP/C is in Office, that is, 2020, 2021 and 2022, it has already allocated and implemented \$45 billion worth of work in miscellaneous roads. In 56 months, it was \$8 billion. That was the lethargic, do-little-state of the APNU/AFC.

I am happy to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we closed 2022, where our capital budget was concerned, at 89%, and our current budget at 99.9%. In the overall roads programme, which includes miscellaneous roads, main access roads, hinterland roads and farm-to-market roads, in the 56 months that the APNU/AFC was in office, it appropriated and spent \$52 billion in 56 months. These are the same people who are complaining about the roads needing to be fixed. In 28 months, the PPP/C has appropriated and expended \$83.9 billion. While I am hearing the heckling, it is the same engineers and it is the same people who were there for 56 months who are there for 28 months, but they are delivering. Do you know why? It is because they have visionary leadership. They are delivering because they understand where Guyana needs to go. They understand that there is a Government that is looking after people and not looking after themselves. That is the difference.

Budget 2023 makes allocations for about \$136 billion that would be spent on roads and bridges. Mr. Speaker, while I seek to tell you what we will do with the moneys that have been appropriated,

let me tell you about our score card of what has transpired. In 2020, when we came into office between October and we when we had a budget in December, we did four coastal bridges. In 2021, we did 14 coastal bridges, moving them from wood to concrete. In 2022, we completed 13 coastal bridges, and 45 hinterland bridges are currently under construction, moving from wood to concrete and being built to international standards. We have maintained more than 40 other bridges. In terms of miscellaneous roads, in 2020, we did 80 kilometres of miscellaneous roads. In 2021, we built 117 kilometres. In 2022, we built 290 kilometres of community roads. That is what this PPP/C did. In terms of urban roads and drainage, in 2020, the three months that we came in, we did 6.37 kilometres. In 2021, we continued our programme with 3.6 kilometres. In 2022, we built 18.13 kilometres of roads in the city and in the towns – urban centres.

I would not do justice to my team at the Ministry of Public Works if I did not say congratulations to our Special Projects Unit. In 2020, in our maintenance of roads programme, we did 175 kilometres of road. In 2021, we did 420 kilometres. In 2022, we did 520 kilometres. Are you seeing the magnitude of what is taking place as it relates to Guyana's development? In terms of rehabilitation of main access roads, we did 6 kilometres in 2020. In 2021, we did 15 kilometres. In 2022, we did 23 kilometres. I have a report card for Mr. Ronald Cox who sought to chastise the Ministry of Public Works concerning Region 1. I will come to what we did in Region 1 just now. In terms of hinterland roads and in terms of concrete roads, in 2020, we did 1.5 kilometres; asphaltic roads – 1 kilometre; laterite roads – 21 kilometres; and maintenance work on 180 kilometres. That was from October to December. In 2021, in terms of concrete roads, we did 1 kilometre; asphaltic roads – 1 kilometre; laterite roads – 145 kilometres; and maintenance work on 400 kilometres. In 2022, in terms of concrete roads, we did 4 kilometres; asphaltic roads – 9 kilometres; laterite roads – 90 kilometres; and maintenance – 340 kilometres. That is what we did in the hinterland communities.

As it relates to the sea and river defences, which I am hearing a lot of buzz about us not protecting the sea and the conflict from the sea, in terms of construction, we did 5.4 kilometres of work in 2022. We rehabilitated 1 kilometre, and we maintained 81.8 kilometres of our sea and river defences. That is what we have been doing.

As it relates to our hinterland airstrips, we have been maintaining and bringing improvement. You will see when I come to what we will be doing in 2023. Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago, I think

it was last week Friday, I was in Black Bush Polder. I am pleased to announce to you, Sir, that since we came into Office, we have already done rehabilitation to 10 kilometres of the Black Bush Polder road.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, said that the two roads, Barbina Swamp road and the road to Wauna, are not done. The fact of the matter is that these are roads under construction. I hold in my hands a report card that cannot be matched by anything that the APNU/AFC did in their 56 months. There were 23 projects in all of Region 1, which includes Wauna and Barbina Swamp roads, totalling \$1.7 billion of works in Region 1. That is the reality.

This year, because of our track record of implementation and getting things done, I am humbled that the Ministry of Finance was able to make representation for Cabinet to approve that the Ministry of Public Works receives a total of \$158.2 billion to execute works, both capital and current expenditure. I would like to express my gratitude to my long-time colleague and friend, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for his partnership. I would also like to express to the team at the Ministry of Finance, our deep gratitude and appreciation on behalf of the team at the Ministry of Public Works for working with us to ensure that Guyana's development, transformation and modernisation are not stymied, but rather accelerated. *Somebody want we mash brakes but we mashing de accelerator.* We know which pedal to put our foot on. *We mashing de accelerator* because the people of Guyana are impatient. They want development and they want Guyana to modernise. That is what we are doing, and we will deliver for them. The Ministry of Public Works has a number of agencies that are part of our team. When we came to Government, the Transport and Harbours Department was one of the departments that was struggling.

11.43 a.m.

Let me explain, Mr. Speaker. For the period 2015 to 2020, no National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions were made for the staff of the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD). I am pleased to announce to you today that the arrears of \$470 million have been paid off and any staff at the Transport and Harbours Department can now get their benefits. That is what the PPP/C has done for the people of Guyana. Not only was the NIS not remitted, not even the union dues that were deducted were paid to the union. We are pleased to announce that all the arrears of union dues have been paid up and we are now out of the red. I would also like to indicate that while Pay

As You Earn (PAYE) was deducted, it was not paid over to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). I am happy to announce that we have been paying the backlog; we are current and up to date, and the people of the Transport and Harbours Department can now get their records in order. That is what we have been doing. The success story of the Transport and Harbours Department does not stop there. We have dry-docked every single vessel and have rehabilitated them, things that were not done for years – the MV Kanawan, the MV Sabanto, the Kimbia, the MV Makouria, and the MV Malali.

Mr. Speaker, you are aware that we have instituted an additional trip on a daily basis to the Parika/Supenaam route. We are now making more trips between Parika and Supenaam. We have a miracle; we have burnt 80,000 gallons less in fuel. How could one be operating a boat with more trips and less fuel? The hustle of the fuel hustlers has come to an end. We have instituted a ferry pass, so the long lines, the alleged corruption that took place about who could get on first and who could get on second, has all now come to an end. People can book online, and they can get to their destinations knowing that they can get there and come back.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have been cautioning about “corruption” every day, and this is the first time. Please take that one out.

Bishop Edghill: I am so guided, Sir. My apologies.

Mr. Speaker: Because it is an acknowledgement that there is corruption in Parika. Go ahead.

Bishop Edghill: I am so guided, Sir. In 2022, we moved 440,754 passengers, an increase of 28.74%. We have moved 102,634 vehicles, an improvement of 1.79%. We have moved 218,892 tonnes of cargo, an increase over 2021 of 30.7%. We are happy to announce and to let the House know that the MV MA Lisha has already departed Kolkata. It is on a submersible barge en route to Port of Spain, where she will sail into Port Georgetown in the first quarter of 2023. The Maritime Administration Department (MARAD), which is the regulatory body, has been tasked with bringing about improvements and even making interventions as it relates to our new oil and gas sector, which largely exists more than 270 kilometres (km) offshore Guyana. We have continued to establish safety and navigational aids in all of the rivers of Guyana. Quite recently, we signed a contract for the removal of 17 wrecks in our various rivers so as to ensure safety while people are traversing these rivers. We have expended another \$293 million to effect the docking and

rehabilitation of the administration vessels – the Barge Seamang, the Dumb Barge, the Split Barge, Hopper Barge; and the pilot boats, the ML Thompson, and the ML David P – I am sure he is in the House, David P – and the acquisition of spears. This year, the MARAD will continue to promote its safety and navigational programmes. One of the things that the MARAD has done, which I am sure even Members of the Opposition will be pleased about, is the initiative that we have purchased and distributed life jackets to people in the riverain communities, to all of the operators of the boats and their sailors, because we want safety on our waterways. We did not just depend on the operator and say, you buy, you buy, you buy; we took the initiative. We bought and we distributed.

The Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) continues to recover from the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) period. It has been doing exceptionally well, both as it relates to the air navigational services as well as facilitating and licensing new aircrafts and new airlines into Guyana. For the people of Guyana, I would like to report to you that as it relates to domestic flights out of Ogle, we have climbed to 15,553. Sorry, Sir, domestic freight has climbed to 15,553 metric tonnes and grew by 51%. Overall, on international passenger movement, a total of 710,564 international passengers were transported through both of the country's international airports, the Eugene F. Correia International Airport as well as the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). We continue to move more people and we continue to move more cargo. The air navigational services we provided to 74,453 aircrafts during the period January to December, 2022.

Mr. Speaker: Introducing period reminds me that your time is up and you will need an extension, Hon. Minister.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my honourable colleague be given time to conclude his presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister Teixeira.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Minister Edghill, you have five minutes to continue and wrap up.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much, Sir. Sir, as it relates to the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, you would recall that Guyana was among the first to reopen its international airport in the period of COVID-19, and without any regret. We were able to do well and have seen phenomenal growth. There were 4,141 international landings in 2022, an increase of 34% over 2021. We moved from 3,094 jet landings to 4,144, and that was mainly due to additional flights from FlyAllways and InterCaribbean Airways, additional airlines that started operating. We were able to put on additional seats amounting to 1,093,994, compared to 624,152 for the period 2021. The amount of seats available grew, and this represented a 75% increase. The Cheddi Jagan International Airport continues to manage well, financially. It has closed the year with a surplus of about \$1.7 billion. New airlines are surfacing, and I guess if everyone opened the newspapers of today, coincidentally, they would have seen that the modern, new airbridges, that could now accommodate both Code D and Code E type aircrafts, are on the front page of two dailies. That means we are ready for flights like the British Airways, which will be operating in the first quarter of this year.

The Guyana National Shipping Cooperation (GNSC) continues to do well. I must indicate that through the Guyana National Shipping Cooperation, we have seen 7,120 vehicles come through that port alone during the year 2022, an average of 791 vehicles—an average because this was over a nine-month period since they were able to engage this contract. We are continuing to work with them. Cement, stone, fertilisers, things that are needed for Guyana's development, that facility continues to provide the services.

The Government's electrical inspectorate continues to provide services to the people of Guyana. Last year they inspected some 8,441 new circuits and metres, whether for temporary works or for household use. This is a good indication of what is happening in the housing sector and the commercial sector, the demand that is taking place.

Mr. Speaker, allow me with my last few minutes to talk about the major projects that are taking place, of which *Budget 2023* will finance: a new office complex for government offices with the possibility of accommodating some 6,000 workers, consolidating government offices into one place to ensure we deliver greater efficiency and move away from the multiple buildings that have to be maintained, and some rented, to bring about greater levels of efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, you are aware that we are advancing the 2.8 km of that four-lane, high-span concrete bridge across the Demerara River. That contract is advancing. The construction of the four-lane highway along the railway embankment, starting at David Street all the way into Orange Nassau, and the development of the continuation of the East Coast road, from Belfield to Orange Nassau, is catered for in *Budget 2023*.

With the coming of the new ferry, the MV MA Lisha, we have started the construction of two new wharves, one at Kingston and one at Port Kaituma, to be able to adequately cater for the roll-on-roll-off type nature of this ferry, and further will have to be advanced at Mabaruma as well as Morawhanna.

The Linden/Mabura road is in swing. I recall standing in this House and criticising this while we were in Opposition, that we left this project; and every time this project came up for discussion in a budget debate it was just about two jobs, the consultants. I am happy to announce that currently, the last report, as of 20th January, 144 Guyanese are employed, working on the Linden/Mabura road. There is a mobilisation of more than 176 pieces of equipment that is actively engaged on that road.

11.58 a.m.

I would like to assure the people of Guyana that team PPP/C, under the guidance of His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and the other Cabinet Members guiding the Ministry of Public Works, will continue to do all that is necessary for the modernisation, transformation, and development of Guyana. Our commitment is to serve all the people without discrimination. We will not be manipulated by criticisms to give preferential treatment to prove any point to anyone. We will continue to work with our objective criteria in ensuring that, in the delivery of services, people who never had, people who never benefitted, and people who did not benefit will now begin to benefit first, while we bring benefit to all the people of Guyana. I thank you and I pray that we will have a successful year, 2023. Thank you very much, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Forde: Mr. Speaker, I rise today cognizant of the expectation on our shoulders from those who sent us to this honourable House to represent their interests and ensure that as Guyanese they all can benefit from the nation's coffers, based on need and the creation of opportunities utilising the principles of equity and equality. We may be on opposite sides of the House because of who

elected us as their representatives, but I can assure you that the ordinary Guyanese represented on both sides of the House desire to be an equal part of society and benefit likewise. This is not only a task but a responsibility which we must deliver without fear, favour or ill-will. Today, I rise to do this in earnest and due diligence because a country this wealthy has no excuse not to deliver in equal measures to all the people. The budget is serious business. It ensconces the financial management of the country for 2023, and what measures are lacked thereof Government has provided as a pathway or a hindrance, particularly for the ordinary Guyanese, who rely on us to create opportunities for them to thrive. We are reminded by Darrick Hamilton, Professor of Economics and Urban Policy that there are other ways to:

“...define economic value and traditional measures have not captured what is first and foremost our most treasured asset in the world, which is people”.

Therefore, critical examination, assessment and dissection of this Budget, in relation to the rights, needs, and welfare of all Guyanese, are imperative before arriving at a decision of whether this Budget is national or partisan. Some 43 years ago, the nation transitioned from a Constitution given to us by our former colonial master, to a Constitution which was indigenous and reflective of the aspirations, hopes and ideals of all the Guyanese people. Indeed, we would recall that no one other than Dr. Cheddi Jagan declared that he found nothing really wrong with the *1980 Constitution*. Articles 24, 26 and 27, for example, confer the right of free medical attention and social care in the case of old age and infirmity, free education from nursery to university, and the right of proper housing accommodation. The constitutional commitment to social and economic rights, stated in the aforementioned articles of the Constitution, were never intended to be barren, sterile or arid legal provisions. They were meant to be state obligations which underpin the nation of Guyana.

In 2016, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change signed the oil Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) to ensure and guarantee a prosperous and stable economic future for all the Guyanese people. Despite the PPP/C much maligning of the oil production agreement, it is the basis of the economic growth that the PPP/C now seeks to falsely claim as its own and is now grossly mismanaging. What is really owned by the PPP/C is the grave deterioration in the quality of life of most Guyanese, increased poverty, increased hunger, low wages, high crime, ever-increasing unemployment, especially among the youths, low pension, malnutrition and little or no meaningful attention to the elderly, aged and informed.

However, Mr. Speaker, the PPP/C budgets certainly have one thing in common, and that is the failure to introduce vision and a plan for all Guyanese consistent with our motto of *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. They exposed the ugly underbelly of structural discrimination, evident in the growing income gap between ‘the haves and the have nots’ – the few beneficiaries of the PPP/C’s ‘One Guyana’ and the vast majority of Guyanese. The economic decay is reflective of the decay in the quality of citizens legal rights and their opportunities to access their own economic empowerment. It remains today relevant, as stated by Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham in his speech of *Vision of the Cooperative Republic*, that this nation must be cognizant of:

“...social needs and wants in creating a just society for the people of Guyana.”

He stated also:

“A just society cannot be achieved unless the majority of the people, the masses, the little men, have a full share in the ownership and control of the economy...”

Apart from the PPP/C’s ‘One Guyana’, the majority of the people, the masses, the little men and women have not benefitted from the oil economy nor have they seen their quality of life positively impacted.

Since 2020, the economy has grown. It has grown by 43.5%, 20.1%, 62.3% and projected to grow in 2023 some 25.2%. It is amazing that the Hon. Minister has been unable to point to any ownership by the little men and women, and their families, in the ownership and control of the economy. We call upon this Government to ensure that the Government provides mechanisms for ordinary Guyanese to own and control the economy. To stable inflation rates from 2016 to 2020, despite high levels of economic growth under our side of this honourable House, saw greater spending power of the Guyanese people, greater rates of saving and the lowering of poverty. To this the nation owes and holds gratitude to the credential stewardship of the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, President Granger, Prime Minister Nagamootoo and the Ministers of that Government.

Inflation has rapidly increased under the PPP/C from 2020 to 2021 when compared to the APNU/AFC period of governance. In 2016 to 2020, inflation was 1.4%, 1.5%, 1.6%, 2.1% and 0.9%, respectively. During the PPP/C’s period, it is recorded as 5.79% and 9.4% in 2021 and 2022, respectively, and is expected to be 3.8% in 2023. The high inflation and high prices are wreaking

havoc in this country and this Government must bear full and accept full responsibility for this. The PPP/C budget offers no prospects with equitable economic and social transformation, which is now more necessary than ever for the people to prosper in an economy identified as the world's fastest growing. The Hon. Minister in his Budget presentation omitted to provide us with any information on the human development of the Guyanese people. I submit that the deteriorating quality of life of most Guyanese since 2020, the Minister thought it prudent in this oil rich economy to hide the facts, but facts are stubborn and cannot be hidden.

Mr. Speaker, you have heard how perturbed they were when we mentioned the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO's) report. They want to say that it is a report done during the period of the APNU/AFC. What cannot be denied is that, for the last 31 years of government in this country, these fellows over there have been in government for 26 years. The problem is their failure to effectively...

Mr. Speaker: You know better. "These fellows over there..."

Mr. Forde: Sorry, Your Honour. These Hon. Members have been unable to effectively deal with the issues. That is why the report states that around 43% of Guyana's population cannot afford a healthy diet. They may not like it, but this is the fruits of their governance for 26 of the last 31 years. This certainly is not the quality of life any caring government would desire for people or flippantly speak about. The PPP/C is spending billions on infrastructure and has forgotten our struggling working class, single parents, youths, ordinary families, farmers, fisherfolks, the elderly, our brothers and sisters in the Indigenous communities. Our people are suffering under the heavy rising cost of living caused by this Government with their poor fiscal policies tearing into every pot and pan of every Guyanese home across the country.

This Government has become disconnected from suffering families. This can be seen in more than a hundredfold increase in prices for the period January to December, 2022. Ordinary items: cabbage has increased by 130%, pumpkin by 185%, eddoes by 150%, eggs by 82%, bora by 183%, pakchoy by 166%. This is what the Guyanese people are facing. The fact is, the prices of basic commodities have increased at a pace that now outstrips income of any sort, whether salary, whether wages, or whether pensions. Social and economic equalities are increasing for the vast majority of Guyanese, yet the Budget has failed to address these. This must be a source of shame

on the President, it must be a source of shame on the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and certainly a source of shame on the Government.

What the Hon. Minister has failed to address, also, in the Budget, is Guyana's score on the Human Capital Index (HCI), which revealed some frightening matters. It discloses that 97% of our children survive to age five, increasing levels of non-communicable diseases contribute to only 79% of our 18-year-old potentially surviving to age 60, with only three quarters of our 15-year-old boys reaching 60. You would agree, Mr. Speaker, these are disturbing statistics. The health and longevity of our people are critical for the nation's development, likewise the survival of both sexes to ensure procreation, family stability and growth. Twelve percent of our children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition, twice the rate in the interior of Guyana. The maternal mortality rate is now 229 per 1,00,000 live births – one of the highest rates in the region. The health care professional to population ratio is 31 physicians and nurses to 10,000 of our population. Suicide rates continue to be high, with Guyana still having one of the highest rates in the Caribbean – 32 suicides per 100,000 persons. We on this side of the House believe that the Government must increase, in real time and real terms, the allocations to education and health, and these must be directed to the quality delivery of necessary resources, training and recruiting competent personnel.

The recent announcement by the Government that it is against the cash transfer because it cannot afford it, has no basis in evidence other than the partisan desire to keep the poor, vulnerable persons from benefitting from our oil wealth, therefore increasing the poverty gap. Cash transfers must not only be paired to the poor and vulnerable, based on needs, but to every household as recommended by Guyana's and the regional's premiere labour economist, Professor Clive Thomas. The PPP/C, despite rapidly worsening the economic circumstances in Guyana since 2020, the increase in poverty, and the abundance of oil resources, has failed to expand and overhaul the social safety net. The Government must, at once, provide an employment grant, establish a social safety net that addresses the circumstances of young children, young persons, elders and women in our society.

Among the travesty still occurring in Guyana is the persistent failure by the Government, to make wages and salaries livable and to respect the constitutional right to collective bargaining for all unionised workers in the public service or where the Government is a shareholder.

12.13 p.m.

I believe this Government must act now and move to the bargaining table with the trade unions to achieve increased wages and salaries and improve conditions of work, reflective of an oil and gas economy. After more than two years in Government, the Government has failed to deliver on its elections campaign promise of a 50% increase to all public servants. Unilaterally tossing less than 20% increase in wages and salaries to public servants in three years is as discriminatory as it can get. In 2020, public servants received nothing. In 2021, they were tossed a 7% taxable increase. In 2022, an 8% taxable increase. This is unacceptable. What is needed for the small man in this country is a helping hand up, not the Government's *boot on his neck*.

When the Government boasts of development to the people, this development is meaningless if it is not accessible to our people. In instances where the Government is seeking to establish housing development, citizens are being asked to pay exorbitant sums of money on unliveable wages and salaries. The locations of these areas are far removed from persons' workplaces and their children's schools. Persons also cannot get to the locations where these houses are going up because they cannot afford to purchase a car. It is a situation of one step forward and many steps backward. The situation will get worse if we do not value the importance of progressive infrastructural development, and building communities which are accompanied by the requisite amenities and services. Even though we are seeking to break free of poverty by the seemingly supportive opportunities that exist, they remain shackled by policies that do not empower them either. I believe that we can afford to build quality houses for the ordinary Guyanese man and woman. The construction of these must come from small contractors, primarily the marginalised communities of our society. This is a plan that will give the small man an opportunity to escape poverty.

The Government is also facilitating the massive transfer of state wealth and awarding huge contracts to the identified 'One Guyana'. Flagrant disregard for the public sector workers and the vulnerable in our midst continues despite evidence of the vast economic disparities and the repeated advice to pursue political inclusion and shared prosperity. Even the Joe Biden Administration had urged this Government to act responsibly. In the world's fastest growing economy, the Government ignores that 49% of the people are living in poverty and 48% of the population is existing on less than \$1,200 a day. It is in this Guyana that pensioners are expected to survive on \$33,000 per month, with today's cost of living. These groups, which represent the

majority of Guyana, get no direct benefit from living in the fastest, or the 5th fastest growing – depending on what the President says – economy. Only the ‘One Guyana’, that special ‘One Guyana’ is benefitting from this growth.

This Budget is anti-family. It has given the small man nothing. Nothing to survive on, nothing to live on, nothing to hope for. As families are *stretching themselves thin* on small incomes, the Government has been withdrawing millions from the Natural Resource Fund (NRF), but these sums have had no direct impact on the ordinary lives of the people. Three times last year the Government dipped into the fund. In May, \$200 million was withdrawn. In July, another \$200 million. This month, \$207.6 million. In 2022, Guyana earned more than \$1 billion in oil and gas revenue. More than \$150 million in royalties and the economy grew by more than 60%. By no stretch of the imagination is Guyana a poor country. Yet, poverty is pervasive with the widening economic disparity and Government’s indifference. My fellow Guyanese, we would like the Government to address its mind, assuming it has a mind and a heart, to the philosophical underpinnings of Aristotle’s theory, and I quote:

“Poverty is the parent of revolution and crime.”

Aristotle is referenced merely to direct attention to the causative effects of deprivation and what we must do as representatives of our people to address this. The reappearance of street executioners and extra judicial killings are symptomatic of the social decay and the return of the breakdown in law and order. These indicators do not augur well for the stability of our people and our beloved country, Guyana.

Two days before the budget presentation, Guyanese were shocked at the news of the gunning down of Mr. Delon Josiah at his home, in his bedroom, at Perseverance on the East Bank of Demerara. Days earlier, Mr. Anthony Charles called ‘Skiddle’, of Leopold Street, was gunned down in broad daylight. This Assembly cannot ignore these untoward happenings in our streets, either by rogue officers and/or by civilians threatening the safety and security of us all. It is not national development when the PPP/C continues to ensure that significant and transformative projects are only landed in their geopolitical strongholds, a continuation of what obtained during the previous terms in Office.

Guyanese are aware that the hospitality training complex is identified for Port Mourant, the gas to shore at Wales, the packaging plant in Enmore and the list goes on and on. There will be no similar economic transformational projects, as far as we know, slated anywhere near communities represented and dominated by supporters of the Opposition. This is the President's 'One Guyana', and this should certainly offend our sense of national consciousness. The largest budget in the history of the nation deliberately avoids meaningful funding to the predominantly black civil service and disciplined services. I can say more.

The attention is now going to be directed to the travesty in Cane View/Mocha Arcadia, in which the police was used by the Executive of this country to prevent their fellow Guyanese from protecting their homestead and belongings. It is beside the point whether they were asked to remove or offered support to move. Will the other side of this Assembly initiate this very public policy to clear the Grove to Diamond, East Bank, reserves which will ease traffic congestion on the East Bank corridor? This legislature, this law-making branch of this Government, in which sits the executive Members, knows that homeowners being described as squatters or otherwise, have rights. No Government should demolish persons' homes and properties without engagement, providing them with comparative opportunities for relocation and securing their hard-earned possessions and investments. *Squatters' Rights and Adverse Possessions* states:

“The U.N.'s Commission on Human Rights, the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities issued a report illuminating “Twelve Misconceptions and Misinterpretations of the Right to Housing”...”

The report dispelled the notion of squatters being criminals and unworthy of meaningful engagement and respect. Indeed, article 154 of the Constitution demands and calls upon every state organisation to respect the rights arising under international treaties. Lest it be forgotten, we were elected here to represent our people and this representation must be to the benefit of all Guyanese. In this regard, the PPP/C continues to fall woefully short. The Government's inattentiveness to the people is also reflected in its treatment of the judiciary. Not only has President Irfaan Ali failed to respond to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Aubrey Norton's letter agreeing to the substantive appointments of Ms. Yonette Cummings-Edwards and Ms. Roxanne George-Wiltshire, Senior Counsel, as Chancellor and Chief Justice, respectively, consistent with article

127 of our Constitution, he has failed to ensure that the judiciary be conferred with the required human resources to dispense justice in a timely manner.

Initiation by the President of the required consultation with the Leader of the Opposition for the appointment of confirmed officers must happen forthwith. The judiciary demands immediate attention. I believe the dillydallying must end. The situation is dire. The Government's dereliction of duty was politely addressed by the acting Chancellor, Justice Cummings-Edwards when she said in the 11th January, 2023 edition of the *Stabroek News*, and I quote:

“We need more judges! We need the Judicial Service Commission to be established ASAP (as soon as possible). We are facing increased caseloads. Judges are now overburdened, they are exhausted, they are nearly worn out and they are, in some cases, burned out”.

Undoubtedly, Justice Cummings felt compelled to remind the Executive, and I quote once again from the same article:

“We do not need the rhetoric. We need more labourers. We need the judges. We've been hearing time and again about the JSC is soon to be established. We would like to see the implementation and the establishment of the Judicial Service Commission.”

As an officer of the court and a Member of this House, and my fellow colleague, Mr. Anil Nandlall, Senior Counsel, ought to be advised, and I do advise him, to render proper advice to the President to ensure that the executive honours its obligations to the judicature. All are aware that justice delayed is denied and the moral of the members of the judiciary is tied to the employment, stability and the proper conditions under which they dispense justice.

A review of the Budget disclosed all the essential characteristics of the Dutch disease. It certainly discloses it. None other than Mr. Geoffrey Da Silva, a PPP/C Comrade, has waved the red flag in our faces. He identifies the manifestation of the Dutch disease in four spheres. These are the political, financial, economic, and social. The characteristics are: there is political instability and increased interethnic rivalry; national institutions are weak in effectuality and corrupt; the people have less say in Government; the Government is overdependent on oil income for its revenues; there is unrestrained public spending; crude oil is a very large part of exports; there is little economic diversification and the competitive of the non-oil sectors including agriculture and

manufacturing is declining; all types of crime are increasing; professionals are paid lower salaries compared to foreign professionals; the education system produces the wrong graduates and it is tailored to bureaucracy instead of the productive sectors; there is a brain drain and there is no limit on the foreign number of employees in the country; political office holders are paid highly while workers and farmers earn relatively low incomes. These are the views of their own Mr. Geoffrey Da Silva. That is exactly the situation in Guyana.

The pages in this Budget reveal the Government's overdependence on oil income and there is no restraint in public spending. We heard from the Minister of Finance that the major non-oil sectors of the economy are indeed declining. We heard, and the country heard from the Hon. Minister that crime is increasing. Guyana is now ranked at Level 3 by the United States of America (USA) Travel Advisory, which is a message to avoid travelling to Guyana due to the increase of crime. A recent survey indicated that Guyanese preferred to migrate rather than to stay here in Guyana. It is my view that we can prevent the ravages of the Dutch disease, but the socio-economic praxis must change from exclusion to inclusion. This could be sensibly done through article 13 of the Constitution, which provides the basis for inclusive governance, shared prosperity, peace, and social cohesion. Before I take my leave, I believe it is timely to remind this House that Premier Forbes Burnham, in 1964, said:

“...all the people of this country are equally important, whether they belong to a large group or a small group. To us, the Amerindians are important. To us, the Chinese are important. To us, the Portuguese are important. To us, the Europeans are important. To us, the mixed races are important. To us, the Africans are important. To us, the Indians are important. In short, all Guianese are important and valued members of our community and we cherish them and consider that, as a Government, it is our duty and privilege to guard, protect and further the real interests of all.”

These words articulate the desire of every Guyanese. They were more evident on the 26th May, when the then minority leader, Dr. Cheddi Jagan and Prime Minister, Forbes Burnham, embraced as a Guyana, embraced a new nation to lay the indigenous foundation of inclusivity, equality, and equity. Therefore, following Members of this honourable House, it is being proposed that we do the honourable thing and scrap this Budget. Together, along with the national stakeholders, let us conceptualise a vision for all Guyana and put a spending plan in place to reflect all Guyana, not

‘One Guyana’, and return to this honourable House to unanimously approve of a national budget that secures the rights and interests and prosperity of all Guyana.

12.28 p.m.

I am sure my Colleagues on this side of the House and those on the Government side, who believe that all Guyanese are important will not oppose a national vision and a national economic plan that is inclusive which would give hope to all Guyana, and the aspiration flame of our founding fathers and mothers for *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. It remains as bright as day as it was at the dawn of independence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, and to complete the morning or the pre-lunch presentations, is the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Zulfiqar Mustapha. Minister, you may process.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support my Colleague and brother, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, and his team for the formulation of a budget that is transformative, dynamic and comprehensive.

This Budget will address the social economic transformation of our country and continues to fortify the Government’s *One Guyana* vision. What was presented by my Colleague, the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, is concrete evidence that our Government’s policy is forward-looking. There could be no doubt that Guyana is positively transforming at a breathtaking pace. This rapid development is outpacing our brothers and sisters in the region in some Caribbean countries. As a matter of fact, we have been ranked the second fastest growing economy even without oil in the world. This country is in the international spotlight for good reasons and is much sought after investment destination; a far cry from just two and a half years ago under the Coalition, when it was classified as a place of doom, gloom and hopelessness and its people devoid of confidence. This transformation that we are witnessing did not happen by magic. It took visionary leadership of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government and the prudent management of the country’s resources to make it happen. It told that visionary approach to craft budgets since taking Office in 2020 to realise and sustain this unprecedented development.

Budgets are the fiscal means to deliver this transformation development for the benefit of all Guyanese. Budgets are means for us to deliver on our promises and we, on this side of the House, are delivering on promises that we went to the Guyanese with. The *Budget 2023* ensures that we will continue to deliver on those promises that we have made. We have witnessed a number of events in our country's history. Since we took Government in 2020, we have seen a number of events that took place in our country. Let us imagine for one moment, if the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was in Office during this time, what would have happened to Guyanese and Guyana? The entire country would have been in serious consequences but, today, when we speak the region listens. We have brought back creditability. We are now leading agriculture in the Caribbean. The entire Caribbean is looking forward to the leadership of His Excellency, the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. With that portfolio that our President holds, we have seen a renewed interest in agriculture in the Caribbean. Countries who solely depend on tourism are now moving to transform their economies into the agriculture sector because they see a future in agriculture.

We have seen what took place during the last two and a half year during the pandemic. We have seen many countries who have large sums of money being unable to procure food for their population. We, in Guyana here, are very fortunate because with prudent management and the investment that we have invested, we are able to process 60% of the food that we are consuming. **[Hon. Members: 100%.]** I am hearing that my Colleagues over there are saying 100%, we will reach there and, in my speech, I will let them know how we will be going there because I have a plan, unlike them. I have a plan for the agriculture sector. They could beat their breath and chest but let us not deny the fact that the non-oil economy performed credibly and excellent by performing 11.4% in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In that, agriculture contributed almost nine per cent to our GDP. They could come with all sorts of statements; they could come with all sorts of untruths and they could come with all sorts of misinformation, that does not deny the fact that our country's economic growth, especially, in the agriculture sector, was excellent.

As I said, we have seen the energetic leadership and the regional front by our President. We are seeing that our President is leading the charge to reduce the Food Import Bill of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) by 25% in 2025. Guyana was the first country in CARICOM who hosted a successful Agri-Investment Forum and Exposition last year May. With that, we have seen many

investors and financiers coming to Guyana to invest in the agriculture sector. The special ministerial task force that was set up by the heads of Government, who is leading that? Yours truly is the Chairman of CARICOM's Ministerial Task Force. Guyana is leading that charge. That shows how the CARICOM countries are looking at Guyana. That shows the confidence that Guyana is now enjoying by our CARICOM brothers and sisters. I might have to change my prepared speech because of certain misinformation that was brought to this House. As a matter of fact, on the first day of the Budget speeches, I heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, said that we have destroyed the sugar industry. She does not know about sugar, probably, she knows about sugar in her coffee or tea. The Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, said that we destroyed the sugar industry and that has been the mantra of the APNU/AFC.

Mr. Speaker, when one look at what took place under the APNU/AFC and when one looks at the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan's, right size that he talked about, he seems to have some problems with. [An Hon. Member (Opposition): Tell us how many estates you reopen; tell us.] [Mr Duncan: How many?] I will get the facts just now. I will have the facts. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, went to Whim's rally and told the sugar workers there that the sugar industry is ingrained in the Berbice economy and that the sugar industry is important for Region 6. As a result of that, the APNU/AFC will not close any factory and they will increase the workers' salaries by 20%. That is what Mr. Ramjattan said. As I said, we have seen what happened and who destroyed this industry. I want to say, in 2014, listen to this, when we left Government, the Guyana Sugar Cooperation (GuySuCo) was producing 216,352 metric tonnes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, just give me a moment. Hon. Members, we had three presentations with everyone giving a certain modicum of respectus. Clearly, the Minister of Agriculture is exciting a lot of attention to himself. Please, allow him the courtesies that the other Members had this morning.

Mr. Mustapha: As I was saying, in 2014, when we left Government, the industry was producing 216,352 metric tonnes. It moved from 216,352 metric tonnes in 2014 to 92,256 metric tonnes in 2019. In 2016 or 2015, the Skeldon Estate produced 39,157 metric tonnes. In 2016, the Skeldon Estate produced 31,782 metric tonnes. They went to the Parliament and the former Member, and the Leader of the AFC, Mr. Trotman, boasted that they have turned around the industry and sugar will prosper. In 2017, the production fell to 14,000 tonnes and that was the end of the Skeldon

Estate. In 2016, the APNU/AFC abandoned four sugar estates which put 7,000 sugar workers on the breadline when they were enjoying a 100% increase. The same time they took their salary increase, they dismissed 7,000 sugar workers.

Today, we employed approximately 1,500 of those workers. I want to inform the APNU/AFC that later in this year, the second crop of this year, Rose Hall Estate which is one of the estates that the APNU/AFC closed and choose to suffer that area, will be reopened and smoke will be coming out of that chimney. That is the problem in the sugar industry. Mr. Ramjattan said that wants to rightsize the sugar industry. The Guyanese people have right sized this country and put the APNU/AFC over there for the rest of their life. The Guyanese has right sized the country and put them over there. Mr. Ramjattan will be there for the rest of his political career. Then, the APNU/AFC came and talked about the rice industry. How dishonest are these people?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, two things: withdraw that and continue to refer to the Hon. Members, opposite, as ‘honourable’ or ‘comrade’.

Mr. Mustapha: As advised, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Members over there came to this House with misinformation talking about the rice industry. I have here, with me a *Kaieteur News* newspaper. In the *Kaieteur News* newspaper on 5th October, 2015, when APNU/AFC went into Government, do you know what it said? This was no lesser person than the President, His Excellency, Brigadier (Ret’d) David Arthur Granger. He said:

12.43 p.m.

“...information is that farmers sell their paddy to millers who, in turn, produce rice which...”

Mr. Holder: A Point of Order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, Hon. Member. What is your Point of Order?

Mr. Holder: According to the Standing Orders, 41 (7):

“The President’s name shall not be used to influence the Assembly.”

Mr. Speaker: I do not recognise that as a Point of Order. He is quoting as I allowed the previous Speaker to do quoting extensively from President Ali's address to the United Nation (UN). Go ahead Hon. Member Mr. Mustapha.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Speaker, when you come to this honourable House, must come with facts. Do not come with baseless accusation. I will go to the Hon. Member who spoke just before the Hon. Bishop. I am quoting here and I will leave this with the National Assembly. It states:

“...information is that farmers sell their paddy to millers who, in turn, produce rice which they try to market.”

It is a private business. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) are now coming to shed crocodile tears and say that we run down the rice industry. How will we run down the rice industry when they increase Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) and land rental by 6000%? They increased D&I and land rental charges from \$3,500 to \$15,000. They talk about rice problem. They lost the Venezuela which was one of the most lucrative markets that we had. The farmers were suffering. The farmers who were exporting rice to Panama, they left them on their own to fend for themselves. The Hon. Member, Attorney General, Mr. Anil Nandlall and I, are trying to recoup the money that they left the farmers with. I could go on and on with what they did.

Mr. Speaker, they talked about spoil fertiliser. Let me tell you something, when we took Government in 2020 and we went to the bond at National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), there were 16,000 bags of fertilisers that were spoiled under the APNU/AFC – 16,000. The Cheif Executive Officer (CEO) of NAREI is here and he could testify to that. There were thousands of bottles of chemicals that they purchased them with tax payers' money were in the bond spoiled. Those are the fertilisers that the Hon. Member is probably is referring to.

Again, we heard misinformation and baseless acquisition. When you come to this honourable House, you must come with facts. That is why I am quoting the facts and I am bringing documents to show that these are the facts. The Hon. Member left. Probably he cannot listen to the facts. These are the facts. He quoted just now and said the mid-year report shows a decline in livestock, shows a decline in crops and a number of other areas. Forget about mid-years' report – let us look at the full year report that the Senior Minister within the Office of the Presidency with

Responsibility of Finance published. Let us look at the Budget that showed that the agriculture sector grew by nine per cent in 2022. That was not the fact, this here states that other crop increased by 27.7% in the half-year report. There is livestock which increased by 4.2% in the half-year report. I do not know what the Hon. Member was quoting. He came, called names, called numbers and say you go and prove them. I am proving them. This is the deception that the Hon. Members of the Opposition have been displaying to the Guyanese people. Do all of you remember when they lost the elections? They said that they won the elections and they wanted the people to believe that they won the elections. That is the figment of their imaginations. I could go on. Then, the Member went to some other place and took some pictures and said that they started the abattoir in 2020. The abattoir is an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) project and the contract was signed on 3rd, November 2022. Look, there is the contract document here. I think this Member should be taken in front of the Committee of Privileges (COP) because he is misleading this National Assembly.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

Mr. Speaker: You are going great, Hon. Minister. Do not use words which will destroy your presentation.

Mr. Mustapha: As I am saying, these are the misinformation that they are bringing to the National Assembly. These are the misinformation that they come and feel that Guyanese will believe them. For example, the Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, said that he does not believe about the report that agriculture in Region 1 has improved. Probably, it is that the Hon. Member is not living in Region 1 or he is isolated from the population of Region 1. These are pictures that I brought with me where we have turmeric, we have nutmeg... As a matter of fact, Region 1 has been declared the area where all of our spices will be produced. We will have export going from Region 1 to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the eastern Caribbean countries. We have seen the IDB report and what was stated about the agricultural sector. I could quote it. It says that agriculture export has increased 31% in 2022 to the Caribbean countries and North America. The IDB report said that. It is there on my desk and I could give the National Assembly a copy of that.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, Hon. Member. So far, all the persons who promised, only the Hon. Members, Ms. Manickchand and Mr. Indar, have provided their documents.

Mr. Mustapha: The Cocoa production in Region 1, nutmeg production, here we have a ginger processing plant at Hosororo in Region 1. I do not know when the Members come here if they are not going around to listen to the people. Then, again, my Colleague has informed me about the black giant. The black giant has been a success in this country, not only in the Hinterland, but across this country. We have improved that and increased production of black giant bird so much so that our egg production is coming back to normal in this country. That is the commitment and investment from this Government.

When we come to this House, we must come with facts that are important. As I said, this year we will increase a number of productions. Rice will be increased; we will see rice. There would be 170 hectares of rice planted this year. As I said, we have seen that rice has increased by eight per cent for 2021. This is a sector that is capable of bringing in large revenue. That is why we have seen increased markets in 2022. Rice, we have seen an eight point three per cent increase and we plan to increase land for cultivation; farm-to-market road; introduced higher yielding varieties, for example the Guyana Rice Development Board-16 (GRDB); and we were able to improve and increase yield from 39 bags per acre to between 55-60 bags per acre. We have improved crop husbandry management, improved drainage and irrigation, although, in the APNU/AFC time, they bought 12 under sized pumps with fire engine. Minister Nandlall and I are trying to rectify that problem. We are still talking to the contractor in India to get this matter resolved, because every single time there are heavy rainfall, the pumps cannot pump the water out of the system.

As I said, we heard the mockery about drying floors. Drying floors are important for the development of the rice industry in Guyana – drying floors are important. We know for a fact that when we were young, paddies used to dry on the road and still in some parts of the country paddies are being dried on the road. Now, we are building drying floors to ensure that we have the conflict meter motorist and farmers reduced. The danger reduced. That is why every year, we have been building drying floors across this country so these facilities could be made available to the farmers. In 2020, the largest rice growing area in this country is Region 5, the Mahaica, Mahaicony, Abary-Agriculture Development Authority (MMA /ADA) scheme. In 2021 the first crop and the first time we went into Government after 2020, we planted 100,000 acres of rice in that area. We had the most devastating flood, in the history of our country, where all 10 regions were affected, but we persevered. This crop we will rebound and plant another 80,000 acres in that scheme. In Region

6, we will be planting almost 75,000 acres. I am hoping by the end, because by the end of this month the sewing period will expire, we will cultivate approximately 200,000 acres of rice. That is why Dr. Ashni Singh in his report mentioned that rice will grow by 29.3% in this year.

In infrastructure, we have revolutionised the infrastructure in this country. We have changed the landscape in this country. Over the last two years, a number of critical drainage and irrigation (D&I) work we have executed. As a matter of fact, in 2021 we have built 12 new pump stations. In this year, we will continue that trend. We will build another eight. Mr. Speaker, do you know what? We will not end up like what APNU/AFC did; go to India to test pump. The pumps will come to Guyana to test on site so that we could have suitable pumps for the country's drainage and irrigation.

Also, this year, what would we be doing? We would be looking at large infrastructure to drain our area. For example, when the Hope light canal was built, we heard that it was a 'Jagdeo's white elephant'. The 'Jagdeo's white elephant' saved Georgetown and saved the East Coast during the flood of 2021. This year, we will start the construction of three Hope light canal in Regions 3, 5 and 6. [An Hon. Member (Government): Progress, progress.] Those are the progress that we are talking about. We will be a number of farm-to-market roads at Onverwagt, West Coast Berbice; Mahaicony; Albion; Chesney; and Takama Savannah; We did 40 kilometres (Km) of road in virgin Savannah. Today that Savannah, a person could drive 100 miles per hour to go there where the corn and soya are being planted.

We did a farm-to-market road at Number 58 where almost 50,000 acres of new land will become under cultivation in the near future. That will continue. In 2023, we will have a number of rehabilitation of roads in Onderneeming, Essequibo, and those are farming areas. We are modernising the infrastructure. If Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has to achieve the 25% in 2025 (25 in 5), then we, Guyana, have to play that leading role and that is what His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, is driving to achieve that goal. As I said, the non-traditional sector would be the driver for the non-oil economy. We have been creating the supporting environment for its development. During the last Regime little was done in this area here. In 2022, we cultivated and we produced 463 tonnes of soya beans from the Takama Savannah. Mr. Speaker, you could remember in the Budget Speech of 2022 my Hon. Colleague highlighted that we would start the cultivation of corn and soya. We have started them and that is a reality today. We have completed

40 kilometres of road in that Savannah. We have expended almost \$1.2 billion to commence the foundation of psyllium and storage facility. We will be constructing a wharf in the Takama, Berbice River so that we could transport the commodities out and take in other agriculture inputs.

12.58 p.m.

Mr. Speaker by the end of 2023, we will cultivate 9,000 acres of soya bean with projection for 26,000 acres by the end of 2024 and 30,000 acres by the end of 2025. By that time, Guyana will be self-sufficient. Guyana will produce all the corn and soya that is needed for the livestock industry and we will save USD\$60 million in savings. Mr. Speaker, you have to look at the linkages because when the livestock feed is produced, we are seeing an improvement in the livestock industry. We are already self-sufficient in poultry needs. We want to be a net exporter and we will continue to do that because there are a number of investors who are coming to Guyana and wants to invest with locals. We have brought in new breeds of animals including 64 breeding bulls from Texas, where we are working with farmers to develop the genetics in the beef industry. We are building this abattoir there because we have to satisfy the beef industry.

We will be importing and we already have 437 blackbelly sheep. We will receive the remaining amount to take us to 1,000 so that we can create that blackbelly brand in Guyana to replace the New Zealand and Australian lamb that are coming in this part of the world. Those are the developments that we are talking about. The APNU/AFC did not have a plan. As a matter of fact, I saw, in the same Report here, one of the farmers said:

‘Farmers protest countrywide and nobody came out and talk to us at the Ministry of Agriculture. Then we get to hear that that the Minister gone on 21 days leave. The man wuk two month and get three week leave...’

The farmer said that. That was the sort of performance from the...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will need to seek my leave to conclude so should... Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, you may have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my Hon. Colleague be given time to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Teixeira. Hon. Minister, you have five minutes to conclude your presentation.

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We will continue this because we recognise the importance of the agriculture sector. Although we have the oil and gas sector that is bringing a large chunk of revenue into our country, we recognise that food security is important and we will continue to invest in this sector. We will diversify it. We have started the high value crop for young people because we have seen that there needs to be an injection of young people in the agriculture sector because we have seen the population are mature. That will continue the high value crop. We have started broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce and carrot. Now, that programme is making a lot of money for the young people. There are over 100 graduates who have been engaged in that programme. Unlike the APNU/AFC, the Opposition leader was the advisor on youth empowerment under the APNU/AFC, what they did? They told the young people to produce cook-up rice, pepper sauce and plantain chips with no help. We have our President who took his interest to ensure that he formed this group.

One other project I would like to mention, before we conclude, is the cut flower project, the fresh rose project which we did and that is making a big difference. A number of single parents especially mothers are involved this project. Annually, they will be earning almost \$20 million. We have already started it. Every week, we are producing 400 roses and, by the end of February, we will produce 800 roses. These are some of the roses, Mr. Speaker. They are very beautiful. In a very short time from now, we will produce all the roses that are needed in Guyana. Do you know what happens? A foreign rose is being sold at \$2,000 to \$2,500 and we are selling a rose for \$500. A person will save \$2,000. That is the way we are putting disposable income in one's pocket.

[Hon. Member displayed a rose.]

This Budget is a budget that encompasses the development for every single sector, every area and every group. What I have said just now are the facts. What my Colleagues have said over the last two and a half years are the facts and what my Colleagues will be saying in the next two and a half days will be the facts. That is something called the facts. Indisputable like something as simple as

in Guyana, there is rain and sun, yet there are people who would dispute by saying we have other seasons.

While we are tempted to excuse an ordinary person for ignoring the facts, it is worrying when an elected official does that. Just in 2020, the world – not just Guyana – saw the deliberate attempts by the Opposition when they were in Government to deny the will of the Guyanese people to steal a country and to steal an election. To deliberately ignore the fact that they lost, the Members of this noble House who took an oath to uphold the Constitution did everything they could to transgress it. Recall what happened following the successful passage of the no confidence motion, the Constitution was clear, that is the fact, yet, what is mandated was clearly ignored for all to see – embarrassing our country in the process. If you can deny something that is so enshrined in our Constitution; deny the fact that you lost the 2020 Elections and, even up to now, denying the fact that they desperately attempted to steal those Election, if they can even...

Mr. Speaker: I allowed the word ‘stealing’ to pass once; I would not allow this one. Just expunge.

Mr. Mustapha: Alright, Mr. Speaker. I will replace it with the word ‘rigging’. It is not surprising, therefore, that they continue to deny the facts that *Budget 2023* is continuing the unprecedented rapid transformational and visionary development agenda by the PPP/C Government, and to improve the lives of all Guyanese including the Hon. Members on the other side. It is sad. It is a gross disservice to the people of this country that some elected official in this House would come here to deny the fact. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 1.06 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.38 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. Please, be seated. We will now take the contribution of the Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes. I said, Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you Mr. Speaker. As I stand to make my contribution on *Budget 2023*, I wish to place on record my observations as well as that of others. Perhaps, the most underwhelming part of this Budget are the measures. Some measures will have no impact on the current situation as they are merely being continued. As such, their benefits are already being enjoyed. These measures relate to the maintenance of zero excise tax on fuel and the use of pre-Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) rates for the calculation of applicable customs duties and taxes.

Some measures will be of little to no interest to the poor- and low-income earners. With the level of withdrawal expected from the Natural Resource Fund (NRF), the Government could have moved the threshold to at least \$150,000 whilst keeping the one-third of the gross income. Many of the Members of the disciplined services and the health sector who are beneficiaries of the elevated salaries payable to them from 1st January will not be amused with this threshold change. The lack of originality in *Budget 2023* is evident from the introduction which bears an eerie resemblance of Budget 2028, if one looks at the two. It is not complaining, just highlighting that appropriate recognition is due. However, this seems to be a familiar pattern, as for example the recent signing on an operational agreement for the Natural Resource Fund without referencing that what was being signed, was an updated version of the agreements signed in December, 2019, between the former Minister of Finance Minister and the Governor.

Let me pause here now to examine the theme of this Budget: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. After reading this theme over and over, and giving it a careful thought, I ask myself the question, is this the case for the people of Cane View in Mocha Arcadia, who recently experienced the worst treatment meted out to them as human beings when their place of abode was destroyed by an excavator? Surely, this cannot be the case of improving their lives for a better tomorrow. Placing myself in their shoes, I definitely cannot agree to the theme as presented for this year's Budget. If I had my way, I would rewrite the theme for this Budget and the theme would be, 'destroying Lives Today for The Benefit and Prosperity of a Few'. I also wish to repeat the words of a song written by the people of Mocha/Arcadia that was seen circulating on social media. I will not sing it because it is not appropriate to do so. It states that 'with impunity you destroyed our homes, killed our livestock's, you have brought us to our knees while you regularise our other squatters in Region 3. Where is the equality? You demolished our homes, buried our livestock's' alive, homeless and destitute and robbed. Still, you not done; you took my job.'

2.45 p.m.

Where is the love? I would add, where is the, *One Guyana?* In his book entitled, *Reflection on Happiness and Positivity*, on page 14, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Crown Prince of Dubai – we are aiming to become little Dubai – who became the Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2006, when interviewed, was asked the question, how much will he spend on happiness programmes? He answered:

“Happiness does not fall under programmes that are separate from the government’s daily work. Happiness is the focus of government work and the government’s entire budget must be considered as dedicated to achieving the happiness of our people.”

If only we can recognise and accept the effect happiness has on health and the savings that the Government can make when the society is healthy, then surely, a Government that asserts itself as caring will not hesitate to spend more money on its human resource. In this case, it will be our public servants, teachers, nurses, soldiers, policemen, policewomen, Toshaos, Mayors, doctors, pensioners, and the differently abled, just to name a few. We can only imagine the spiral growth in the economy and productivity as a result of spending more moneys on our people. These are estimated to be worth billions of dollars. Investing in our people to make them comfortable and happy should not only be seen as a cost but as wealth for the country. I, therefore, call on this Government to step on its accelerator and increase the salaries and wages of our public servants to a minimum liveable income. Money should no longer be seen as a problem since the budget becomes bigger and bigger every year. The budget for this year is \$781.9 billion. The only problem here is the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). Money is not the problem. The problem here is the PPP/C that, in its discriminatory and haphazard manner, continues to dole out a cash grant here and a cash grant there – here a cash, there a cash; everywhere is cash grant.

We, on the Opposition, would like to propose a people-centred vision of developments for cash grants. We are not against cash grants. We must see cash grants as a mechanism with multiple uses. We believe that when this is structured effectively and delivered in a predictable manner, citizens’ lives can be transformed. To that end, rather than employing people on a part-time basis for \$50,000 a month, as the Government does presently, it should receive the \$50,000 as a students’ stipend while they study and train. This will swiftly empower the Guyanese workforce with the

required tools to take advantage of the economy's opportunities. We also believe that cash grants for business developments are vital. If we intend to take small businesses seriously, we will massively increase both the allocations to agencies such as the Small Business Bureau and the size of the grants received from hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars. This will allow small businesses to hire employees and bring new products to the market.

With that said, the problem here is not the cash grant; again, it is the PPP/C. The PPP/C parades around Guyana with loud claims of inclusiveness and oneness, but, Sir, the reality is totally different from what it chants. There are numerous examples of the level of discrimination that was highlighted by most of my colleagues who spoke before me. A case in point is when the PPP/C boasted about giving \$25,000 to the hinterland and riverain communities. In Constituency 9, Bartica.... [Mr. Mc Coy: *(Inaudible)*] If you listen, you will learn. It literally distributed that \$25,000 only to the part of that Constituency that it considered voted for it while completely neglecting all other residents in the same constituency. Again, the cash grant is not the problem; the problem here is the PPP/C. How can the Government hand out only \$25,000 to the hinterland people when the cost of living is far greater or higher than that on the coastland? For those living on the coastland, I am not saying that they should not have gotten it. Some of them got \$50,000, some got \$150,000, and some got more. Tell me, how can this be, *One Guyana?*

I, therefore, say to this Government, step on the accelerator and start distributing the resources of this country in an equitable manner to all the citizens. I will not stand here and pretend it is just at the level of the central; it also reeks at the local level too. To date, not one major project has been done in Bartica – middle or Upper Mazaruni – since the PPP/C took Office. The residents are left only to enjoy what the APNU/AFC did. At this time, I would like to thank the APNU/AFC for all that it did for the residents of Region 7 as a whole. Thank you, Hon, Member Mr. Patterson, for the power station at Bartica, the solar farm, the Bartica stelling, and the generator for Kamarang. Thank you, Hon. Ms. Lawrence for the computerised tomography (CT) scan machine at the Bartica Regional Hospital and the extension of the Kamarang District Hospital, which is yet to be furnished by this Government. Thank you for the Doctors' Quarters which were built in Kamarang, Jawalla, Kako, and Phillippi, which are yet to receive Resident Doctors to this day. Thanks to the APNU/AFC for the Magistrates Court in Bartica. Thank you for the 21 three-bedroom houses that were built in Upper Mazaruni in the villages of Waramadong, Kwebanna, Kamarang, Warawata,

Kako, and Jawalla. Thank you for the new primary schools that were built in Paruima –my Hon. Colleague Mr. Lee can attest to that – Kamarang, Imbaimadai, Kako, and Eteringbang.

I wish to remind this House and citizens of Guyana that we, in the APNU/AFC, after recognising the wide gap between the hinterland and the coastland, began establishing radio stations. There are radio stations at Orealla, Mahdia, Lethem, Bartica, Aishalton, and Mabaruma so as to ensure that our Indigenous people are informed about what is happening around them. Thank you, Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes for the 170 plus Information and Communication Technology (ICT) hubs that were established at the schools, community centres, Regional Democratic Council (RDC) board rooms and offices. Had we remained in Office, by now, all our remote schools would have been connected.

We built and acquired all these buildings within a period of two years with no oil money or carbon credits. To date, no new schools have been built. [*Interruption*] I want to repeat for that, Comrade had we remained in Office, by now, all our remote schools would have been connected. All our remote schools. To date, no schools have been built by this Government in my region that I know of. However – I must mention– and I wish to commend the Minister of Education, Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand for sticking to her portfolio and defending her budget passionately yesterday. Thank you, Hon. Member for the new secondary school that will be built in Jawalla. This definitely will ease the overcrowded classrooms at the Desrey Fox-Caesar Secondary School. [*Interruption*] I will repeat – this definitely will ease the overcrowded classrooms at the Desrey Fox-Caesar Secondary School and the overcrowded dormitories whereby students of Grades Seven and Eight have to be accommodated in a separate building away from the complex, which can cause security concerns. Added to that, the children do not attend classes every day due to the inadequate space at the school. I am therefore happy to accept the Hon. Member’s invitation which she extended yesterday in this House to work along with you especially when it comes to education.

3.00 p.m.

I also wish to bring to the attention of this House that the children of Maruranau in Region 1 urgently need a new primary school so they, too, can enjoy or have access to education. At present, they would have to paddle across the river to attend classes in a church building at Smith Creek, where there is no access to potable water and sanitary block. Again, I say to the Government, step

on your accelerator and build a new school with all amenities for our Indigenous children in this part of Guyana.

I can recall the Hon. Member Nigel Dharamlall, during one of his budget presentations for the year 2021 or 2022, whichever is correct, when speaking about the road projects that were to be done in my region, pointed towards my direction, saying, ‘MP Hastings can now jump on her ATV and ride home Kako from Kamarang’. Two years have passed, and I am yet to jump on my ATV to ride home. I can go on with the list of projects promised in the 2021 and 2022 budgets that have not been honoured to this day. Again, I call on the Government to step on the accelerator and get busy with building proper roads and establish Information Communication Technology (ICT) hubs and provide every hinterland and remote villages with access to the internet so that no Indigenous boy or girl be left behind.

I wish to note here the call for a new social contract as was echoed in the theme used to observe the International Day of World’s Indigenous People, and I state, ‘*Leaving no behind: Indigenous peoples and the call for a new social contract*’. Social contract, an unwritten contract, must be honoured when it comes to our Indigenous peoples. They, too, have a right as any other Guyanese to enjoy the quality of life and economic security. To this date, the Indigenous peoples of this land are still considered the most vulnerable population when it comes to economic insecurity and sustainable development. A caring and competent Government will put in place systems to ensure that every citizen is protected or can recover quickly from economic crisis.

In fact, the inflation rate can very well affect individuals living above the poverty line now when suddenly they find themselves in economic crisis and poverty should they experience a shock and are unable to recover. So, we have to put systems in place to avoid same. At this time, I wish to salute and recognise in this honourable House the Toshaos of the Upper Mazaruni who took the Government to court 20-plus years ago to fight for their rights for their ancestral lands to be recognised. I am so proud of them and wish to thank the Attorneys and the other persons or organisation who were involved in making this history. I remain a proud Akawaio daughter of that soil. The recent ruling of the High Court has empowered the Arecunas and the Akawaios and can now move forward in their consultations and discussions in the development of their lands. The National Toshaos’ Council (NTC) was reconvened in the year 2022 but this time under a different circumstance. The Indigenous Members of Parliament from the Opposition side were not even

extended the courtesy to attend. The former Chairman of the NTC and other Council members were nowhere present to do a proper handing over, which the NTC has been accustomed to doing over the years. Where is the transparency and inclusivity that this Government is talking about?

I also wish to rebut the Minister of Agriculture, who stood in this House to say that 7,000 sugar workers were fired under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). I am asking him to lay the data that supports this figure. We need a data to support that figure of 7,000 sugar workers being fired under the APNU/AFC. Unless he is talking about the sugar workers that were fired prior to the year 2015, because we all know that some sugar estates were closed during that time. I am happy, and the Indigenous people of this country are happy to see that some moneys have been allocated to the tune of \$124 million for the celebration of heritage, \$4.7 billion allocated for the Amerindian developmental programmes, and \$2.7 million for entrepreneurship and other programmes. We should encourage our Amerindian Village Councils (AVC) to plan its village development plans in time when we are also budgeting for the entire budget. It should not wait until the budget is passed to plan its village council plans or what we call Amerindian Village Councils–AVC. We must train our Community Service Officers (CSO) and our Amerindian Village Leaders so that they too can be a part of the consultations of the Budget so that as soon as the budget is passed, they be able to start working on its village plans.

I say this because if I ask the Minister now to submit to this House, how many village plans has she received for this year's Budget? I am quite sure she will not be able to give me that accurate figure, for I know some communities have not even started their village plans. In closing, we are happy for the moneys that are allocated for the Indigenous peoples. We are asking that they be...
[*Technical difficulties experienced.*]

Mr. Speaker: Try again. Try again. Normally when this happens, we have to check under the desk by the Chief Whip for the Opposition. We are asking the technician to come down so that this very good presentation by the Hon. Member could be concluded. Hon. Member, one could also close from one's seat. Go ahead.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: In conclusion, I wish to say that a bigger budget does not necessarily mean that we will have a better quality of life. If spent in an equitable, transparent, and accountable manner, the people of this country will enjoy a good and better life. I wish to say that I really

cannot support the Budget in its forms. I really cannot support the Budget as how it is presented, and I do not commend that this Budget be done in this House. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, my apologies for the microphone at the podium. It seems to be having some signal issues. I now invite the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs, the Hon. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai to make her contribution.

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride that I rise to support the motion for the approval of the budget estimates of the public sector for the financial year 2023. This is the largest Budget in Guyana's history, and under the leadership of His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) led Government. This Budget will meet the immediate needs of our nation while securing the future of the Guyanese People. It cements the gaps to realising a 'One Guyana'. As such, this Budget could not be presented under a more appropriate theme than 'Improving lives today, building prosperity for tomorrow'. Mr. Speaker, permit me the opportunity to congratulate the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh and his team from the Ministry of Finance for the thorough work done leading to the successful presentation of the 2023 Budget.

3.15 p.m.

Upon the return to Office, the PPP/C Government met a plethora of issues that affected our Indigenous peoples. These range from indiscriminate neglect and stagnant village economy all the way to the pause of land tenure activities for our first people. The inclusive and progressive path of this Government has sought to propel the rights of our Amerindian brothers and sisters to greater limits. This Budget purports the transformative path, which is emanated in the absence of new taxes while focusing on promoting incentives that seek to enhance the lives of our Guyanese people in the most progressive way. It is against this background that the budgetary allocation to Amerindian and hinterland development will be presented. *Budget 2023* has allocated a capital allocation of \$4.7 billion towards the continued development of the livelihood of our Amerindians. This is in furtherance to other major allocations in the health sector, the education sector, infrastructure, and social services, which directly translates to the increased standard of living of our Indigenous citizens in every region of our beautiful country.

I want to say that I need to respond to the previous speaker since the previous speaker only spoke about Region 7. Apparently, in all the years that the Hon. Member Dawn Hastings-Williams served as a Member of Parliament (MP) representing Amerindians in this National Assembly, she has never found the time to adequately, and I say adequately, visit any of the other regions to understand the challenges or the progress taking place there. In response to her diatribe on Region 7, I wish to say that in Region 7, more than \$100 million was invested in 2022. Some 700 residents of Kamarang in Region 7 are benefitting from a new \$45 million water system funded by the PPP/Civic Government. As a result, after more than 20 years, even when the Hon. Member Dawn Hastings-Williams Government was in office; there were constant complaints by the residents of Kamarang about the poor supply of water. We have corrected that.

The drilling of new wells in Jawalla in Region 7 to the tune of \$40 million will provide central Jawalla with pure and safe water. There was the completion of another water system in Kurutuku. This investment is not only in the water sector, but it has also extended. As I said in a few paragraphs above in the delivery of my presentation, education, health, infrastructure, social services, and attention to the village economies of the Indigenous villages and the hinterland communities were all addressed during the period of the PPP/Civic Government from 1992 to 2015, from 2020 to current. We have a vested interest in ensuring that the hinterland and the Amerindian villages which populate the hinterland gets the benefit of the country's resources under our Government. I wish to say that there was a presentation earlier in the week which accused the PPP/Civic Government of providing contracts to only family and friends. We are very happy that the Hon. MP, Dawn Hastings-Williams's spouse is a friend of ours and so he continues to receive contracts under our Government.

As a reminder, under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) led government, during the period 2015 to 2020, the land tenure for Amerindians was simply not a priority. I repeat that the land tenure for Amerindians was simply not a priority. Upon our resumption to office, the PPP/Civic Government has reaffirmed its commitment towards ensuring the fulfilment of our Manifesto commitment and our governmental obligation to ensure that we complete the land tenure project. This will benefit numerous Amerindian villages when it is concluded.

Yesterday, the Hon. Vincent Henry's presentation attempted to demonstrate effective government by the APNU/AFC. He chose a very poor example while trying to assume credit for titling and demarcation, and he listed a number of communities. He listed Mainstay, Mashabo, Capoey, and Yupukari, but he lacked an understanding of the process of land titling. To set the record straight, Mainstay, Mashabo, Capoey, and Yupukari were titled since in the 90s. There was no need for the APNU/AFC Government to title them again. I suppose the Hon. Member was referring to the extension which they had applied for.

I want to lay the facts, and what are the facts? It is the PPP/Civic Government committed US\$10.6 million from the Guyana agreement with the Kingdom of Norway, be it possible through the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). It was the PPP/Civic Government which established the Amerindian land titling unit during our tenure to execute the land titling project of lands for Amerindians. There was misinformation that was shared in this House yesterday. It was the MOAA, or the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs which commenced processing the application for land extension for Mainstay, Mashabo, Capoey and Yupukari. Only early last year, myself, Minister Zulfikar Mustapha and Minister Vickram Bharrat all visited Capoey and Mashabo. We had a review of the investigative report, which we left in 2015, and it was only recently they received their extension, and they are up on the list for demarcation.

The Hon. Member actually forgot that there was a no confidence motion presented in the Parliament. That no confidence motion will not be used or will never be used to justify why it did not title the Amerindian lands when it was there. It failed to process the application for Rockstone and Parabara. This year, before the first quarter, again, several ministers will travel to those areas to revisit the old investigative report which the PPP/Civic finished in May. In fact, the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) team was active in May while the election was going on, the campaign including the election. We will revisit that old investigative report that the APNU/AFC failed to act on, and we will see that the recommendations or the findings will bring a conclusion to both Parabara and Rockstone. In addition to that, yesterday, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, was chastised for mentioning at some point in time that no lands were awarded during the APNU/AFC period in Government. However, please permit me to quote from the *Newsroom* Article of 30th May, 2018 entitled:

“I have not been able to title any village – Min Allicock.”

It states:

“Minister of Indigenous People’s Affairs Sydney Allicock has admitted that in three years his Ministry has not issued any titles to Amerindian Communities.”

This was in 2018. It states again:

““Speaking to reporters, Minister Allicock expressed, “I have not been able to title any village because...””

And he was speaking like a sweet boy:

““...we wanna do things that are truly reflected in the Free Prior and Informed (FPIC) process.””

“The Amerindian Land Titling Project was slated to end in 2016...”

I am still quoting from the article:

“... but since the Ministry made no progress, they were granted an extension of two years.

He is speaking to the press. It states:

“However, little progress has been made since then and the new deadline is now October 2018.”

It further states:

“Minister Allicock said he will be making a request for another extension by writing to the Ministry of the Presidency which will then communicate with representatives in Norway.”

The Hon. Mr. Vincent Henry and the APNU/AFC have no moral standing to speak about effective government nor taking credit for land extensions to Amerindian villages. It failed the Amerindians miserably. I want to assure this honourable House that the PPP/Civic Government will continue to support the Amerindian land titling project. In just under two years, the MOAA demarcated seven villages and issued five Certificate of Titles (COTs) to villages. In addition to this, the Ministry has completed revision of 23 investigative reports to date and we will act on them. We will not sit down for five years and watch them on the shelves. The Government will further support the ALT

programme through the allocation of \$500 million to advance Amerindian land titling activities, to further safeguard and improve the security of land tenure enjoyed by Amerindian peoples.

3.30 p.m.

As such, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs will be pursuing 19 demarcations and 11 land extensions in 2023. Far more than zero, which the APNU/AFC performed or delivered to the Amerindians. [An Hon. Member: Shame on you.] Shame – shame on you. Furthermore, I heard ramblings about a court case. I want to set the record straight that, from 1966 to 1992, the People’s National Congress (PNC) was in Office. They did nothing to title Amerindian lands for the First people of our country. From 1995 to 2020, the then Minister confirmed to the press, the public and to the parliamentary committee that there was zero titling for Amerindians during his period. The APNU/AFC’s broken record that the Community Service Officers (CSOs) were dismissed by the PPP/C Government is an old argument in an attempt to clear their conscience. It was the APNU/AFC Government which dismissed the young Amerindians, so no amount of justification will erase the hurt they inflicted on Amerindian youths. The APNU/AFC paid the price for this wrong on the young people in the Election of 2020, and I say no more.

The Government of Guyana remains committed to youth empowerment and development with nationwide initiatives such as the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship. Today, youths have a plethora of opportunities at their fingertips for academic growth. This is being complemented by the ongoing efforts of the PPP/C Government to bridge the digital gap between the hinterland and the coast through the Government’s reinstated Information and Communications Technology (ICT) access and e-services for the Hinterland, Poor and Remote Communities Project under the ambit of the Prime Minister’s Office. I heard in this House just now that more than 100 ICT hubs were installed under the APNU/AFC Government. Every village that one goes to, even the Hon. Cox complained about it, there is weak, poor and non-existent internet services. It is limiting to the young people of the hinterland to access comfortably and adequately, the opportunities that abound. However, they did not tell the whole story, because those who are now working on the reinstated project, the ICT hub project, have discovered that all the equipment, the laptops, the batteries and accessories, were stored in a bond in Diamond for five years without being touched, denying the Amerindians internet connectivity and computer

literacy. That was absolutely disgraceful. Shameful. And you talk about effective government. What is effective about that?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have to take out “shameful”. “Disgraceful” and “shameful” cannot work.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: As of 2020, 90 hubs have been completed and 75 have been fully equipped and functional – and functional. This is what you call effective a government. In less than two years, we are up and about, doing what a responsible Government should be doing. This year, \$500 million has been allocated in *Budget 2023* for the continued construction of internet facilities and equipping of those hubs.

In 2015 when the PPP/C left Office, may I remind the Hon. Members on the other side that there were 1,972 CSOs who were dismissed. What did that mean to the Amerindians? It meant, annually, they were deprived of \$700 million from their pockets. Over the five years of the APNU/AFC Government, they denied those young Amerindians \$3.6 billion. This is grievously disappointing, and you tell me that you like and care for Amerindians. Mr. Speaker, they will forever have to live with that on their consciences. On assuming Office, we addressed the matter, and we addressed the manifesto promises to the young people of the hinterland. We have reinstated that project. Today, we have 2,500 young people fully engaged, again, receiving an income so that they can assist to put food on their tables, whether it is for themselves or their extended families. Amerindian youths were trained in computer literacy. These youths have returned to their respective villages in anticipation to manage and support the ICT project being executed by the Office of the Prime Minister. Further, 160 young Amerindians were trained in solar installation and maintenance and have also returned to be prepared for when the household solar unit project gets underway.

The Ministry of Housing and Water has invested more than \$2 billion in water systems in the hinterland. In 2023, \$1.4 billion has been allocated. In anticipation of that, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs and the Ministry of Housing and Water have already signed, earlier, a memorandum of understanding (MOU), where 466 young people will be trained to operate and manage those systems.

Further, 720 Amerindian youths were trained in several other areas. I will just list a few: maintenance of small engines – 125; training in computer literacy – 151; training in garment construction – 129. What a small number, but one has to look at the big picture. The GOAL has trained in addition to more than about 2,000 young Amerindians under its programme. The Board of Industrial Training (BIT) has trained, and the numbers were shared in this House on the first day when the Minister spoke about the programme and training in the hinterland. Scholarships are being awarded to Amerindian students at the university and at the secondary level. It is not about the numbers, this is the initiative and the projects that are conducted by a single sector, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs.

Let us now turn ourselves to some other matters. The APNU/AFC speaks about reckless spending and mismanagement of funds. In fact, I heard yesterday that the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, in 2015, could not account for \$1.2 million. Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention to their legacy of unaccountability. In 2016, the Auditor General’s Report, page 108, provided details of spending. An amount of \$1.3 billion was spent for which no progress report was presented for audit. The paragraph of that same report, paragraph 235, stated that the Audit Office of Guyana could not determine whether the funds were utilised for the intended purposes. No accountability. The following year, in 2017, the *Stabroek News* reported on the Auditor General’s finding of lack of accountability for over \$1.5 spent by the Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs Ministry. The *Guyana Times*’ headline screamed:

“Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs Ministry cannot account for \$865M – AG”

On checking the Auditor General’s Report for verification, the Report of 2017, at paragraph 282, it is once more validated:

“...it could not be determined whether the funds were utilised for the intended purposes.”

This was the legacy for the five years. No accountability. That is why, when we were not in Office, we travelled extensively as Members of Parliament. Every community spoke about neglect, no transportation, no support for school children, no gasoline for the riverain school children, nothing. This is clearly gross unaccountability by the APNU/AFC Government and its operatives in the then Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs. Economic Development with local village economies remain a priority for the PPP/C Government. We will continue to provide the resources

to transform and develop village economies for them to prosper economically and bridge the gap which challenges our Government as well as the local beneficiaries in maintaining and sustaining livelihood activities in an inclusive and transparent manner, contributing to the transformation of hinterland communities and Amerindian villages.

In 2023, the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) has been allocated \$2.7 billion to cater for further support, investment for training in tourism and hospitality, business development plans, *et cetera*. This is laying the foundation for some of the economic projects and activities that will flourish over the period ahead. Yesterday, we also heard another Member *thumping his chest* about land being allocated to construct the National Toshias Council (NTC) Secretariat. Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention to a headline in the *Guyana Times*, 21st July, 2018:

“Govt reneges on promised NTC headquarters land”

“... after issuing 50-year lease...”

They cancelled it. The National Toshias Council and I have all of the articles here ready to hand over to the Speaker, well enveloped:

“The National Toshias Council (NTC) will have to wait somewhat longer for a plot of land to construct a Secretariat Complex, after Government on Thursday announced it has scrapped plans to issue a plot of land at Sophia.”

It was only after a rigorous representation by the then Executive of the NTC that forced the identification of another plot of land in Sophia in the vicinity of the Amerindian Heritage Village, located in the compound of the National Exhibition Centre was it really provided. When the Hon. Members want to *beat their chests* about the APNU/AFC providing land for NTC Secretariat, the full story must be told, since it is my understanding that the lease for the initial plot of land was cancelled and disposed by sale to their friends so that they could retain it – their friends and cronies. It is the PPP/C Government which has made it possible for the beautifully designed NTC Secretariat, which was described yesterday, and which includes offices, conference halls, and accommodation facilities. The construction is currently in progress and is slated to be completed by the first quarter of 2023. This year’s budget provides an allocation of \$70 million, which

includes \$20 million for furnishing. The total sum allocated for the full completion of this Secretariat is \$127 million for the building and \$20 million for the furnishing. A total of \$147.

3.45 p.m.

Nothing was granted in your time towards the NTC. When the NTC Conference is held this year, the Indigenous leaders will be able to utilise the Secretariat. This year, an allocation of \$91 million is allocated for the hosting of that meeting. There were talks about how the Conference last year was influenced by the Government and the Minister and that the leaders were held hostage. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind you that the last NTC meeting, which was held by the APNU/AFC Government, my Colleague on the other side, the Deputy Speaker of this House, had to protest. He even wrote an article saying that ‘we are not the girlfriends of the Minister, so do not come and visit us in the evenings’. The Ministers paid no attention to the issues, the challenges, and the concerns of the leaders who came to the city to represent their people. Do you remember that? Do you remember the NTC writing a letter to the Leader of the Opposition asking for the former Minister, Mr. Scott, who is not here... A letter was sent to the Leader of the then Government asking for an apology. In fact, a Member sitting right here decided that there was not going to be any apology, that they had done nothing and said nothing wrong. Their memories are short but I will proceed. I wish to point out also that the NTC has endorsed this budget. I have here the NTC’s endorsement press release.

“This budget, the largest in Guyana’s history, shows the Government’s commitment to the continued upliftment and improvement of the lives of all Guyanese, especially the First Peoples”.

All of these interventions and more show the Government’s commitment to fulfilling its Manifesto promises, while at the same time bridging the gap between the coast and hinterland.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, your time has expired by two minutes.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, my Hon. Colleague, I would like to give her another hour to speak, but I leave it up to you to decide the time for my Colleague to let her conclude her presentation. It is time that history is corrected.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister Teixeira. Thanks to my assistant timekeepers for reminding me about time. Hon. Minister you may continue to conclude in five minutes.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I remind this House also that there is an endorsement by the NTC for the expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030. I will quote from that Resolution passed by the NTC and I read:

“Recognising that a central tenet of the LCDS 2030, like the LCDS 2009, involves communities benefitting from revenues earned from the sale of forest carbon services; and where the LCDS 2030 sets out new opportunities for new revenues.”

“Agrees with Guyana’s national approach of engaging with forest carbon financing that is aimed at bringing benefits to Guyanese and particularly Indigenous Villages and Communities.”

“The NTC recognises that extensive national scale and community-based consultations, conducted over the past seven months, have informed the main aspects of the LCDS 2030.”

“Recognising the commitment the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in Guyana’s LCDS 2030.”

Bringing to rest criticism that is repetitive on the other side about consultation and FPIC. There you have the legally constituted body of the leaders of the Amerindians endorsing the LCDS and, also, the sale of carbon credits. In addition to all the direct and usual programmes of the Ministry, I must say that, out of the LCDS 2030, 15% of all revenues received from the sale of carbon credits is going towards projects for village sustainability, currently being undertaken by the villages.

The Amerindian Act – \$80 million is allocated this year to directly consult with the Amerindian villages and their people.

Training – I heard the request for training. Over the period of the APNU/AFC there was no training. Training was resumed in 2021, 2022 and again another sum has been provided in the current budget for the training of Toshaos.

Women, culture and language revival – these are important to the lives and the identity of the Indigenous people. Two hundred and five million dollars will be allocated to address women,

culture and language revival. I would wish to go on and on, however, I want to also say that our Government provided more than 200 tractors to address food security improvement, to expand cultivation in the hinterland Amerindian communities and to contribute to the national drive to making Guyana food secured and the food basket for the region.

They talked about transportation for school children. Long before they came into Office in 2015 to 2020, our Government provided 38 minibuses in the hinterland. Since we came back into Office, we have already been providing transportation, both land and water, to school children. Even leaders were denied all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to traverse to do administrative work and to use as a tool to move about in the region. I am proud and with pride I say that every village in Region 8 in the North Pakaraimas now have ATVs, even wipers. One of the further villages has a Landcruiser to transport the few secondary school students who have to go to the Paramakatoi Secondary School.

I know my time is up and I would love to have had two hours to share with this House, the achievements of my Government and the projected and expected achievements for the year and for the rest of the term and beyond. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I endorse this budget for approval.
[Applause]

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: As I rise to make my contribution to the Budget Debate of 2023, I will immediately move to do the parliamentary business of close to half and arguably, more than half of the Guyanese population at this stage, with the current state of affairs in our dear land. Please permit me to declare my gratitude for my family and close friends who continue to support me and to provide the necessary strength which has become a daily occupational requirement. To my mom who is online, I love you.

As we look around at the decay before us, due to poor governance, most of us are horrified and worried about the current state of affairs. I extend great appreciation to the public servants who worked tirelessly to complete the technical work that produces a budget. For that reason, your efforts are humbly recognised and appreciated. In this same breath, I extend special recognition to the men and women who protect us every day. To our soldiers, our prison officers, our fire fighters, our policemen and women and all of the honourable men and women within the security sector, and all those frontline workers, hold firm, the Coalition will be back to deliver the ‘good life’. This

represents my fourth presentation of this nature and in the capacity of which I hold and on every occasion of budget presentations by the Government, I have maintained several themes.

First, there must be competent leadership at the Ministry of Home Affairs. I do not see my Friend here and that is an indication of what I am speaking about. Public security is serious business, and it demands serious leadership. Sir, I wish to emphasise that if we continue to ignore the immense incompetence that sits in the chair at Brickdam, we will never be able to arrest the serious decline in public security. Hon. Minister Benn, who is here, in his previous ministerial appointment, picked up a certain name and from his performance to date, it appears that he intends to continue in that vein in the security sector, to not only demolish the homes in Mocha but the Coalition's effective plans and programmes that were in place to reduce crimes and to make the citizens of this country safe and secure.

Mr. Speaker, public security must be re-imagined in this new oil and gas paradigm. It must be considered at the Cabinet level and at the national stakeholders' level. It is way too complex, from the Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy to the youth on the streets whose survival is a daily challenge. The country's security situation has reached its lowest ebbs. Public security in the context of a polarised society must be based on two key considerations - economic security and the general security of all members of society.

I take no pleasure in reporting that none of these themes has been addressed in *Budget 2023*. As a consequence, I cannot in good conscience lend any hint of support to certain aspects of the budget. When I say that there are certain aspects of the budget that are good and I will support those aspects, but, Sir, we are in serious trouble. *Choke and rob* is a daily norm. It happens every second and the Minister is aware of this. It has become so prevalent that Guyanese simply cannot walk pass as their fellow citizens are being robbed in plain view. The gunmen have become so bold. They jump out of their cars and pump bullets in their victims. When citizens alert the police about what had just occurred, they respond by saying 'we have the car number'. The gunmen are walking into homes and executing their victims in the full view of their families. This is public security under the People's Progressive Party/Civic. It is the *wild wild west*. Families can no longer go out for a peaceful seawall walk. Nobody knows what or who is next. We are at the lowest ebb.

4.00 p.m.

In comparison to the Coalition's term in Office, one may recall that under the Coalition people were safe and secure and crime was on the decline. This is an indisputable fact, and you can heckle as much as you want. There are no more metal detectors at the night spots. Weapons are seen bulging from the waists of patrons at various night spots. The PPP/C budgets have always been about brick and mortar, and human development always takes a backseat. If one looks around, one will notice that there are several private security firms in operation. We must ask ourselves why? The answer is simple. It is an indication of the people's lack of confidence in the State to provide security. This is an indisputable fact. The number of high-powered weapons in the streets is another worrying concern. We may recall the most recent discovery of the two high-powered rifles in a bag. Another complaint we have received is the ease in which firearm licence are acquired. Reports we have received indicate that for a small fee, with no background checks, these licences are granted.

Sirens blaze through the town with zero accountability. Many of these vehicles are illegally equipped with flashing lights and sirens. Hon. Minister Benn, what are your plans to address this nightmare of a situation? It is absolute lawlessness and chaos. It is an absolute nightmare to drive when, out of nowhere, these vehicles illegally use these sirens and flashing lights to push you off the road. This is something that happens on a daily basis. I say to the Hon. Minister, familiarise yourself with the provisions of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act. Your Colleagues, who are heckling, could provide you with the section. I say to you, it is illegal for these private vehicles to be outfitted with sirens and flashing lights. Citizens like myself, no longer know the difference between legitimate security vehicles and private vehicles.

Lawlessness has gripped this dear land of ours. Just like the Gotham City, we are in the stranglehold of the Joker and his gang, and we persistently need a hero. Even our classrooms are not safe. Our teachers are under assault. Businessmen and women are expressing their fears about guns for hire. We are now the land of the many sacred cows who are above the law and those at the bottom are following the examples of those who are at the top. Law and order have been replaced with lawlessness. Loud music blaze at the wee hours of the morning and the people cannot sleep. This is not only my personal experience; this is the experience of many citizens. Indecency in office has given way to blatant indecency; accountability has given way to the carnival of corruption. I see my friend is shaking his head and I know he agrees with me.

In the midst of the grandiose speeches and the unrelenting propaganda, we were promised better public security and performance, but like we all know, things got worse. *Budget 2021* came and again there were grand speeches and great hype. We were promised better public security and good governance, but things got worse. This is not only my testimony. This is the testimony of not only the Opposition, but the people of Guyana. *Budget 2022* came with us like any other budget. There were speeches, propaganda and no impact. It got worse. Here we go again in 2023 and the same thing obtains. I know many of the other speakers have been quoting so I will also quote. Albert Einstein told us:

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”

A cursory glance... [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] If you listened to what I just said, I have quoted Albert Einstein. It is probably too high up for you to understand. A cursory glance at *Budget 2023*, reveals the same methods, same approaches. This results in insanity. This budget represents the fourth round of the insanity which I have already mentioned. This time around, it is presented under the theme, *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. If there is no economic security for all lives, lives will not be improved and there will be no tomorrow for many. If the people cannot afford basic necessities, there is no security. Many of my Colleagues have spoken about this – when the price of bora has increased by over 50%, it ought to be difficult to talk about prosperity for all. This budget was presented against the backdrop of high prices at the market. It leaves a large section of our population with the view that the prosperity of a few is only available to a selected few.

Budget 2023 did not have a situation analysis, theories or general philosophies that formed the Hon. Gentleman who made this presentation here for over five hours. I say this, for over five hours the people waited to hear how the oil money will make its way to the dinner tables and the lunch kits of their children, but this never happened. It appears the money has been directed to infrastructural projects. I wish to state this and place this on record, this is something that we absolutely welcome. We need infrastructure. However, we have to balance that with the wellbeing and the prosperity of the citizens. I state this for emphasis – infrastructural projects are important.

I will now deal with the security allocation. *Budget 2023* has allocated \$58.6 billion for public safety and security, an increase of \$7.1 billion. In 2022, the Government allocated \$51.5 billion

for public safety. What did we see? That is the big question. What did we see? What did we experience during this period? In the year 2022, the Crime Rate by Country 2022 reports submitted – I will layover these reports that I am citing – Guyana has the eighth highest crime rate worldwide, at 68.7, and a murder rate of four times higher than that of the United States of America (USA). This statistic is from an independent source and did not square with the numbers provided by the Guyana Police Force (GPF) who reported on themselves. I call on the Guyana Police Force to release the resources on data collection. How are these statistics compiled? What method of sampling is being employed? Do these statistics consider that Guyanese hardly report incidents of crime to the Police Force? We cannot trust this data because it flies in the face of what we experience every day. If a \$52.5 billion could not make us safe in 2022, it is safe to conclude that \$58.6 billion cannot do the trick with no plans to address these serious issues.

Like most of you, I am reading, and it is safe to conclude that money is not the problem. The problem lies in the lack of economic security, and it is something you cannot comprehend, the feeling of general insecurity in this country. The problem is the compromising of the independence of the Guyana Police Force. The World Bank has reported that Guyana's poverty rate is amongst the highest in Latin-America and that of the Caribbean. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has noted that Guyanese live on less than \$5. In this sad economic context, any strategy to address public security must rest on targeted poverty reduction programmes. I refer the Members on that side of the House, who are clearly at a loss with what I am talking about, to the manifesto of the APNU/AFC. I know this is a high level of information for you to comprehend but read page 24. Page 24 is very instructive. Our policy on public security is premised on the consideration of promoting our people's safety. We tie public security to the economic security of our citizens. It is simple. If a man cannot find food, he is likely to become a perpetrator of crime.

I now turn to the Guyana Police Force. Between the years 2015 to 2020, the Coalition Government worked assiduously to professionalise the Guyana Police Force. On 31st August, 2018, President Granger appointed a substantive Commissioner of Police, one Deputy Commissioner for Administration, one for Law Enforcement and one for Intelligence. At the ceremony at State House, the Head of State declared:

“Office of Commissioner of Police is not a toy, a trinket or a tool of political favour or patronage.”

This declaration articulated a policy that established a clear constitutional distinction between the police directorate and the Guyana Police Force. It reinforces the view that the Police Force must be independent. At that moment, we proceeded on a path of a professionalised Police Force that has gained the trust and confidence of the public. After years on the vice grips of phantoms, ghosts and the drug underworld, the Guyana Police Force was returned to some semblance of normalcy. The Police Act is very clear. The Force is charged with the prevention and the detection of crime. I know some of you on the other side of the House would want me to elaborate because it is very hard for you to comprehend but time will not permit me to do that. What I will say is that the hearts of the past and current officers bleed for the Guyana Police Force. Incident after incident, the credibility of the Force is being called into question. A few in the leadership structure are *under the thumb* of the political directorate. The men and women under this leadership cannot speak and they cower in fear. This is the reality. This is your legacy. Added to this, they are being instructed to make themselves tools of Government propaganda. These are not strictly the lamentations of the Opposition. It is the people of Guyana who are complaining about this. The US State Department in its 2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Guyana, complain that:

“There were reliable reports that members of the security forces committed abuses. Significant human rights issues included credible reports of unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings; ...”

Mr. Speaker, I will submit all these reports. I will say to my Colleagues that many of your police officers are quietly complaining. I will say, like I have said before, to the men and women, I will say to you, be professional, hold the strain, we will be back. In the context of the new oil and gas, where there is economic and ethnic insecurity, we must establish a professional Police Force as envisioned by the Constitution. Regrettably, I see nothing in this budget that remotely seeks to address these issues. Hon. Minister, besides holding your head, what are your plans to overhaul the police force. How will you strengthen investigative capacity. Is it your long-term plan to always resort to the Regional Security System (RSS). It must be recalled that, under our tenure, there was investigative capacity that was improved by the Police Force. We are now back to being incapable of solving serious crimes. This is nothing but a sad state of affairs.

I will now turn briefly to the Guyana Fire Service. If there is ever a need to point to the particular area under the Ministry of Home Affairs that reflects the certainty to absolute incompetence, it is

the issue of the constant fires. Never in the history of this country have we seen this development. Something is terribly wrong and there are a lot of conspiracy theories that abound. However, I will not venture to engage in these conspiracy theories to besmirch the good reputation of this Chamber. I will, however, venture to show a direct link between the incompetence at Brickdam and the inefficiency of the Guyana Fire Service.

4.15 p.m.

Sir, allow me to be clear. There are professional men and women, who could get the job done, in the system. I have researched this issue and I have spoken to those who are involved. They are demoralised due to constant political interference and the lack of a system based on merit. The hardworking and bright young people in the Guyana Fire Service are being pushed to the side and overlooked because they refuse to kiss the ministerial ring.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall the issue of the promotion list. You would recall the extension of the contract of someone in leadership who should have been pastured a long time ago, not only because of age but due to statutory requirements. The proper management of a ministry does not lie in one's ability to be present at every fire and watch the manifestation of one's incompetence as he/she drips in sweat. It lies in the ability to let the system work. Stop the micro-management absolutely. Let the professionals do their work. Clearly, our schools are now a target for arsonists and so the incompetence is having real and far-reaching consequences for us. In any country of any consequence, the minister would have been sent home a long time ago. I said let the system work and stop the micro-managing. Let the professionals do their work. It is what they are trained to do. The \$2.7 billion which was allocated to the Guyana Fire Service in 2022 produced more fires. There is no reason to believe that the \$545 million, the \$489 million and \$20 million allocated in 2023 will make any difference. One cannot continue to throw money at incompetence. It will make no difference. It is insanity; absolute, insanity. The budget needs to include allocations to send the leadership at Brickdam packing. That is the only way it will prove its efficacious.

I will now, briefly, turn to immigration and passports. I wish to repeat that Guyana's biggest public security threat remains the issue of economic insecurity. We cannot construct good public security in a nation where a large section of the population feels as if they do not have access to the resources. We cannot talk about public security without addressing the insecurities being felt. In

that context, we must examine the issue of immigration in the oil producing Republic of Guyana. The National Security Advisor informed the nation that there are 60,000 Venezuelans currently residing in Guyana. The Migration Policy Institute has reported that the number of Caribbean nationals entering Guyana has doubled. These statistics and reports that I am quoting from will be laid over. Added to this revelation, Guyanese are reporting that they are encountering nationalities from across the globe. I have no argument with this. This is understandable. I do not understand the need for heckling. This will occur because we are being touted as the fastest growing economy in the world. We, on this side of the House, are cognisant of the fact that we need at least 160,000 workers to reach our potential. This requires a comprehensive immigration policy.

There is immense uncertainty about who has arrived in the land of El Dorado. These numbers have frightening implications for security. There is nothing in this budget that seeks to ascertain the following: how many foreign nationals are here; how many jobs have been acquired; how systems are in place to ensure that the nation's national security is not being compromised; and what systems are in place to ensure that Guyanese are given the first option for job opportunities? It is a known fact that Guyana possesses a relatively small population in the context of oil and gas and we may need to source special skills from other places. However, the lack of transparency and the lack of a clear and consistent policy by this Government has the nation worried. We need to know. These are reasonable questions. The people need to know. What category of skills do we require at this juncture? Which foreign nationals have we identified to plug those gaps? How does the policy align with the Guyana Citizenship Act, the Immigration Act and the Constitution in general? *Budget 2023* should have included a sizeable sum for the Bureau of Statistics to embark on data collection to ascertain what is happening with the immigration policy in this country. The Migration Policy Institute has cautioned that the discovery of oil will lead to an influx of workers. Even though this is needed, we must ensure that Guyanese workers are our number one priority. Those who are heckling cannot argue that this is an unreasonable request. It is a reasonable request.

I now turn briefly to the issue of governance. Every week, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government reported to the Guyanese people on the decisions of the Cabinet. We reported on contracts and many more details. Today, there is a complete blackout of information. Members of civil society are writing countless letters to the Minister responsible for information to get the details on how contracts are awarded but there is

little success. The Government refuses to be transparent. We all know that good governance demands, at minimum, the availability of information to the people. Nobody knows what is contained in secret contracts that will impact Guyanese for generations. There is no information available on the large mining contracts. The Government refuses to tell us what concessions have been made on behalf of the Guyanese people.

Budget 2023 is being presented in the Government context where the Government is openly flouting, and I say this to my colleague, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) standards. This has resulted in the EITI reporting on its Board's decision to accord a fairly low score to Guyana. All of this poor governance is coupled with the Government's lack of interest in listening to the pleas of civil society. In this regard, the Government appears to be engineering a plastic civil society that will remain at its beck and call. The Government has moved to question the membership and leadership of civil society groups that provide a constructive critique of its programmes and policies. Members of those organisations are being placed on blacklists and ostracised by the Government. I take no pleasure in reporting that the fear is real.

In my efforts to prepare for this presentation, I made contact with a few members of civil society to get a better understanding of their struggles and what they were facing. I was told, in no uncertain terms with almost gripping hands, not to reveal the names of those with whom I have spoken. The fear of retribution from this Government is real. The Government's policy on governance appears to be, 'you will have your say, but we will have our way'. I wish to re-emphasise that this \$781.9 billion budget will amount to nothing if there is no attempt to ensure economic security for the Guyanese people. This is a real concern. It cannot be taken lightly. You have to measure all these measures that you are placing in the budget to ensure that there is economic security for the less vulnerable. We have seen for three years what destructive governance looks like and how it could negatively impact our life. This is the deception in the 2023 Budget and the deception which has become the hallmark of the PPP/C.

I wish to state that there are certain aspects of the budget where there are positives – infrastructure and some sort of benefits for the people. I have no qualms about that, but I will state that you have to balance that. If you cannot balance that, I will have difficulty in supporting this budget. When I speak, this is not my personal view and this is not the view of the Opposition, but this is the view of the persons I have encountered. I traversed Regions 4, 5 and 6 and this is the view of those

people. So, when I stand here, this is not a representation of me as a Member of the Opposition, but this is a representation of the views of those whom I represent in Regions 4, 5 and 6.

In closing, I will say that this is the deception that we have seen in the continuous budgets presented by the PPP/C. This has become the deception of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. There are certain aspects, but at this point I cannot render any sort of support to the budget. I thank you.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Now, we will have the Hon. Member, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, Minister of Human Services and Social Security to make her presentation.

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]: It is interesting how my colleague, Minister Robson Benn, was the centre of attention just now. As I add my support to my colleagues in commending *Budget 2023*, I do so very conscious of the efforts that have been expended by Guyanese across sectors and in ministries to give their input to a budget that is transformational, a budget that is crosscutting, a budget that is integrated and a budget that focuses on every aspect of human development and country development, comprehensively. As I thank all those members of staff across ministries, I must recognise the astute leadership of my colleague, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and his team from the Ministry of Finance in crafting the biggest budget we have seen to date.

This budget is one that offers much to many, but I will focus on the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and give you insights into works that have been done, works that are planned and works, which I am sure, will have an impact on the lives of the most vulnerable and populations that will definitely understand how this budget will impact them. Like last year, they will live it this year and feel the impact in their lives.

I want to state that this budget is something that my colleagues on the other side should support. Would you not want to support the Government's efforts towards children, education for children, the efforts of the Government towards keeping children safe, and the efforts of the Government towards providing for children with disabilities and the efforts of the Government for providing solutions for mothers who would want to leave their children in safe and secure places? That is the legacy of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government in catering for children across the length and breadth of this country and children who depend on parents. As such, there is much in

this budget for families across the country. As a Government, we believe in the stability of families. We believe in community development. We believe in infrastructural development. We are not a Government that is impervious to the global crisis that is affecting every country in this world. We are not a Government that is oblivious to the trends in the world that have had an impact on so many different aspects of governance and the way people govern. In fact, we have offered, as a Government, tangible solutions to the challenges to food security, making Guyana pivotal in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) – the voice of CARICOM – providing the solutions that CARICOM is following, the region is looking at and the world is looking at in terms of fighting the global crisis. We, in this National Assembly, should not resort to the usual broken narrative of divisiveness and polarisation. This is a country that wants unity. This is a country that demands inclusivity.

4.30 p.m.

This is a country of which I am very proud and in which our people would like to benefit from what we, as a Government, has managed to do in just two years.

If I am to look at what the world said about gender equality, I could quote a report from the World Economic Forum. This report is usually presented annually and was first presented in 2006. It is *The Global Gender Gap Insight Report*. It is an important thing because one of the key indicators is economic participation and opportunity. This is very important because it speaks to what I have been listening to being questioned. This is not the Guyana Government doing it. This is the World Economic Forum. In just one year, last year, 2022, Guyana traversed 18 spots up from place number 53 to 35. There have been numerous indicators. I am only speaking of what is relevant to my sector. However, if we are to look at many of the other sectors, we could see that the contributions of programmes that transformed the employment prospects of people across the country was recognised in moving us 18 spots up. For example, we could speak of Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL), Get Ready for Opportunities to Work (GROW), Women Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN), Board of Industrial Training (BIT), just to name a few of those programmes that do not come with a price tag. They come absolutely free. They are accessible to all the people of Guyana. One of the Members on that side of the House, I believe it was the Hon. Member Mr. Roysdale Forde, spoke about Government's boots being on the neck of people. They were on the necks of people for five years with a taxation existent budget, budgets

that were crafted on the taxes on the backs of people. This is a budget that does not give any new taxes to the people. In fact, the income tax threshold has been increased so that people are able to have in their pockets \$3 billion and 12,000 people are not in the tax net anymore. That is the level of the kind of development, the kind of governance, and the kind of input that we want to have in the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to provide this report to you. In fact, in education attainment, Guyana ranks first, globally, tying with 21 other countries such as Canada, Brazil, the Netherlands and Jamaica, which is the only other Caribbean country in first place. Guyana has also tied for first place in ranking for enrolment in both secondary and tertiary education. This is especially important as it clearly indicates the outcome and long-term impacts of projects implemented by the Government. I continue. The construction of schools and provision of human and other resources in Amerindian communities throughout the interior regions of Guyana has made education accessible and attainable even during periods when Guyana has had limited fiscal capacity. This is an expansive report, Mr. Speaker, and I will be presenting it to you upon conclusion of what I am saying.

I believe that I would like to ask my colleagues, my Guyanese brothers and sisters on the opposite side of the House to remove the myopic lens and to remove the obligatory mantle that they like to wear when it comes to causing division and rejecting progress and development. It is a simple walk from over there to over here. Deep down I know you want to do it. You are more than welcome. We embrace collaboration, we embrace your support, and we embrace your working with us. Feel free to walk across the floor. It is as easy as that.

No country is insulated from the world economy and the global crisis. We want to say that Guyana has managed to, in the shortest possible time, have the opportunity to transform the lives of women and men across the country. A programme that I am immeasurably proud of is the Women's Innovation Investment Network programme. There is nothing to compare it to in your five years because nothing existed. The WIIN initiative is a programme that has produced 6,193 trained persons across every region in this country. In fact, just last year, we were able to provide free training with no prerequisite required for admission and 4,033 women and men benefitted from that training, which was free, which was offered in a hybrid model, and which allowed them the potential of employment and starting microenterprises. No amount of noise will dissuade me from

presenting irrefutable facts; facts that 6,193 people across this country have benefitted. This year, \$100 million will ensure 6,000 more women and men benefit this year alone.

I want to say that it is not only training. This is a comprehensive model of training, moving people into our WIIN and business clinic, giving them business literacy training and moving them into the field of microenterprise. Of a sample of 2,339 of these persons who have been trained, we have 48% of them who developed business proposals, and 25% of them who own a business. That is the level of progress that has happened in one year. For the first time in the region, for the first time in the Caribbean, and definitely for the first time in Guyana, we have an App that is called WIIN App where 750 women have the opportunity to advertise their business for free coming this year. With a collaboration with Mobile Money Guyana Inc. (MMG), these women will be in a position to offer their products for sale on this App. This is a beautiful blend of Information Technology (IT), entrepreneurship and vision. I would like to continue on WIIN and to say that there are so many projects that have resulted in people from the hinterland and across the coastland in remote and rural areas benefitting from that WIIN training. Those who have been trained in professional courses like elder care, childcare and patient care will now benefit from the opportunity, whether individually or in consortium, to be able to be placed at referral points. Patients from hospitals and people who would like to have access to caregivers who are trained could do this by utilising those persons who have been trained through the WIIN programme.

One of the novel initiatives that has been established and this year will really speak to thousands of women, women who when they saw this announced in the 2023 Budget were ecstatic, is the establishment of day, night care and early childhood development centres. This is a blended model, and this is the first of its kind in the region, definitely in the Caribbean, and I could venture to say, perhaps, in the world. I have recognised that people who work long hours, parents, single parents, mothers, and fathers who would like a safe space for their children to be kept while they are at work, now will have the option as this budget provides \$100 million so that we could start construction of these day and night care and early childhood development centres. This offers a sanctuary for children. Those persons who have been trained not only are they trained in childcare, but they will also receive training in special needs as well as early childhood. This could be something of which Guyana is very proud.

As we continue to look at what was achieved and what is to be achieved, I cannot go forward without recognising that the WIIN programme operates out of a building called the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute. This was a building that was in serious disrepair. Everything had grounded to a halt. Now, that building is a thriving hub, completed with modern classrooms, a brand-new computer laboratory, a WIIN in business incubator and it will house the first of the day night care and early childhood development centres.

In addition to that, we are adding to this. We understand that people, especially women like to cook. Why not make it profitable? We will be putting out, for those women, an opportunity to have free training where they could, from this training, start their own businesses. A state-of the-art culinary centre will be launched in the first quarter of this year, and women across the country will have access to training at no cost to them. It is not just training. This training is certificate training done by the University of the West Indies (UWI), ABMA Education in the United Kingdom (UK) and through Coursera. It offers those persons who come through the WIIN programme an opportunity of stackable courses, giving them a recognisable qualification that puts them on easy footing to further develop themselves in the technical vocational field to have employment or to start their own microenterprise.

We have been in talks with a number of entities – the Private Sector Commission (PSC), Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) – to ensure that these women have an entry into those places where, ordinarily, they never had such an opportunity. The fact that this speaks to women who have never before in the world of business is a powerful message to all women in our country. This is real empowerment. Nothing could be achieved without single-minded focus and hard work. I am prepared to work hard. In fact, I am a hard worker and I believe that I work with people who have similar vision to make these things materialise. In fact, if we look at the first week of registration, over 7,000 people applied. We did not only leave them like that. Over 3,000 women benefitted from seed funding for their businesses through a collaboration with the World Food Programme. I want to say that mothers, single parents – single fathers and mothers – will also benefit from subsidies which come out of the Ministry that helps them with their childcare cost. I want to say that the 'WE LIFT' activity that is usually celebrated around International Women's Day has grown. From 75 women owned businesses, we grew to 150 women owned businesses under one roof, under the 'WE LIFT' programme.

The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security's Gender Affairs Bureau (GAB) continues to work with men and women across the country, developing women's groups, men's groups and working to continue on the shared responsibilities campaign. We are now embarking on an exercise where we will be training a number of persons, including coaches, taxi drivers, bartenders to name a few, on gender, on shared responsibility, gender-based violence and a number of other social issues. Our groups expand and extend throughout the length and breadth of Guyana and work is expected to be completed on the national gender policy this year, 2022. We have, as a Government, always put emphasis on family. As such, our Family Enhancement Unit will be expanded and the excellent work that this unit has been doing in Region 4 will now move across to the various regions and will be in collaboration with our other programmes so that, holistically, we would cater for the social issues that abound.

4.45 p.m.

I have always believed that there is no need to say what people live. Work speaks for itself, and the work of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security is very visible for all of Guyana to see and to participate. I want to say that the Child Care and Protection Agency (CCPA), which is pivotal when it comes to the care of children, has been consistently working on developing a number of key areas that address child abuse. The 'Every Child Safe' project speaks to community engagement and interaction in all of Guyana's regions and a number of persons will benefit from training. We have produced a parenting manual and workbook and there will be structured training for parents across this country. In addition to that, we have allowed children to express their voice as a part of us protecting child rights and giving children a platform on which they can share their experiences on safety and security. We have managed to produce a storybook where children shared their stories on safety and what it means to them.

The 'Street Light' project, which falls under the 'Every Child Safe' programme, is a key project as it speaks to children who are on the streets. We have been effectively removing children from off the streets, working with their families addressing socio-economic issues and we have managed to remove at least 30 of those children from our streets. This programme will intensify as we do not want to have any child on the street, and we must get to the source of why they are on the street and work with them, and their families so there is not a recurrence. Mr. Speaker, the community approach that we are taking through the Child Care and Protection Agency is bound to yield results

because we are not working in a vacuum or silo. We are also looking at those children who have special needs. This budget provides, as a promise from His Excellency, a fleet of seven retrofitted vehicles that will help those children who are living with disabilities.

This takes me to the work of the Ministry on persons living with disabilities. We have managed to help hundreds of persons across the length and breadth of Guyana, centrally from the Difficult Circumstances Unit, and through our outreaches to have free access to support aids, assist aids, wheelchairs, walkers and so many more things. The construction of the learning lab, a training complex for persons living with disability, will be opened in the first quarter of this year, providing, for the first time, an empowerment entrepreneurship opportunity for persons living with disabilities. Last year, a sum of \$100 million was budgeted. This year, we continue to focus on training, we continue to work with persons living with disabilities and the revolving fund for persons living with disabilities can be accessed through the Small Business Bureau (SBB). There is a comprehensive outlook for the kind of support and health that we are giving to the people of this country.

We have been working assiduously in protecting child rights. As such, we were able to ensure that legislation was passed in alignment with the Hague Convention on International Adoption which is expected to commence this year. We have been working with the United States Department of State and other State entities and other stakeholders to ensure that this happens.

Our legislative agenda is a rich one. We have completed the counter-trafficking in persons (TIP) legislation and that will be brought to the floor this year. We have other pieces of legislation to consider, to review and to bring, at some time, to this House, including the Domestic Violence Act, which will incorporate new forms of family violence, the Harassment Act, which I am sure some of you will be very wary of having but it will be coming. We will be looking at the Pensions Act and the Poor Relief Act, which are archaic pieces of legislation.

I want to say thank you to the international community which has not only been very supportive, but which has recognised the sterling work done by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. We spent these last few years looking at a number of the homes and some of the establishments that focus on the elders, children and on persons living with a disability. Last year, a beautiful new kitchen and recreation centre was opened at the Sophia Drop-In Centre, much to

the delight of hundreds of children. It is modern and beautiful. What they cooked in and what they ate in was akin to a shack. It was appalling and horrible. I want to say also that, this year, the centre will receive a much-needed facelift. We are also looking at the expansion of our shelters. We are also looking at shelters for domestic violence and trafficking in persons. We are also looking at the residential care facility for children living with disabilities and they will have a brand-new facility. All of these will be enclosed in the Mahaica complex. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(Inaudible)*] The more noise you make gives me the impetus to continue.

Parents who have children living with disability will continue to benefit, through the work of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and through the budget, to the tune of \$40.4 billion. Our pensioners would have received an increase which totals 67% just over two years and now moving this budget. This is in comparison to less than 30% over the five-year period of the APNU/AFC Government. I will not stand here and say that this is the be-all and the end-all of pension but there is a tangential increase that is planned, and pensioners will not only benefit from the increase to \$33,000 but, of interest, the life expectancy is increasing because we have seen from 2020 to 2023...we started with just about 60,000 pensioners. Now, we are projecting 73,000 pensioners which means we are also helping those persons to have access to their source documents so that they can access their pensions.

We have also transformed the delivery system for pension by creating a shut-in delivery system, a direct delivery system and alternate venues so the post offices are not crowded. We are adding MMG Inc to this very soon and pensioners would have more than 1,000 new locations to access their pensions. Mr. Speaker, it is not only the pension. It is the water subsidies that you took away, you also raised taxes...

Mr. Speaker: Be careful, Hon. Member. I did not take away anything.

Dr. Persaud: The Hon. Members removed it. We are looking at public assistance spiralling to 29,000 recipients and this is remarkable. This has happened because of a decision made by this Government for just about 5,000 children to receive a \$100,000 cash grant towards their permanent disability. All those children have now been moved to the permanent register of public assistance which means that a significant number of that 29,000 is comprised of children and adults living with permanent disabilities. A policy change also resulted in persons with permanent disabilities

not having to apply and reapply. They can now access public assistance more effortlessly, if I can put it that way. We are creating a disability unit at the Ministry that is geared...For the first time ever in Guyana, there would be a whole unit for persons living with disability, focused on their assistance, focused on supportive and assistive aids, focused on training and focused on every single need that would arise for persons living with disabilities. In order to structure and streamline the efficiency and efficacy of our Ministry, there is also going to be a senior citizen's unit to focus on all of the elders and the seniors as we value their contributions and we would like to ensure that whatever is within our power, we can provide to them so they can have a better quality of life.

The Ministry's Eye Care Programme: this was a new programme, and this programme was able to offer, in 2022, 1,230 persons free tested spectacles. We went to communities that never had this kind of access before, including Mocha and Philippi to name a few. I can give you the list of all the communities so that you can hear – Baramita, Tuschen, Mon Repos, Bartica, Yupukari, Kumaka, Kamarang, Kato, Aishalton, Annai, Kwakwani, St. Cuthbert's Mission, Wakenaam, Susannahs Rust, just to name some of them. Last year, we were able to do just over 1,000 spectacles as well and this is a programme that we have seen make a difference in the lives of people, whether it is their education as children or pensioners whose face lights up because they are able to now read their books. This is a very helpful programme.

Through the Difficult Circumstances Unit, we have also helped with home rehabilitation for pensioners and persons living with disability and single parents and we continue to offer assistance in other areas.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I will assist you with an extension if I get a mover.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that my colleague be given time to continue, I know she has a very large sector and would love for her to have lots of time.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have five minutes to conclude. Thank you very much.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Night Shelter is a facility that has undergone, I would say, complete renovation. From looking like what I call a chicken coop when I came into this Ministry, it is now a place that provides a dignified environment for people who

are homeless, people who are indigent and people who require shelter and a hot meal. This year, the Night Shelter will also benefit from a kitchen. For those of you who even deem to look at people on the street, we are not only looking at them on the street, but we are also removing them from the streets, through our health programme, and we are ensuring that they are well taken care of. We have excellent collaborations with the Mental Health Unit of the Ministry of Health and the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) to ensure that they are well taken care of. Ms. Veerasammy, good work as the Administrator. In addition to what has been happening at the Night Shelter, those persons who have been removed from the street and are able-bodied, through a collaboration between the Ministry of Labour and Human Services and Social Security – I spoke to my Colleague – would be introduced to the Board of Industrial Training so that they can be trained in technical vocational skills and have the opportunity to get back into the world of work.

I want to just conclude with something that has always troubled me and that is gender-based violence. This Ministry has received a commendation from the United Nations Sexual and Reproductive Health Agency (UNFPA), this year, for the work that it has done in conjunction with Spotlight Initiative, and I would just read a few excerpts. [An. Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] You know it. I think some of you may have to call 914 from time to time. It works and it has helped a number of persons. This year alone, we received over 15,000 calls on 914 as compared to 12,000 calls last year. From the Survivors Advocates Programme, we have managed to have over 1,200 interventions, helping those survivors of gender-based violence. Our legal *pro bono* initiative, which complements the Government's subvention to the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic to provide free legal service to persons experiencing domestic violence, continues and is a collaboration between this Ministry and the Guyana Bar Association.

We have 500 free cases so that we can at least help 500 persons experiencing violence. Mr. Speaker, I want to read you just a few and I will leave this with you as I...

“The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security is the national coordinating entity for spotlight in Guyana, it leads and conceptualizing holistic national efforts for preventing and responding to GDV, engages other parts of the Government in such national efforts.”

5.00 p.m.

If there is any distinguishing feature of the Spotlight Initiative in Guyana, it must be “national ownership. At the most recent National Steering Committee (NSC) of the programme, the Minister committed to incorporating elements of Spotlight into national budgets, noting in particular the preventive community-level activities that address the root causes of violence.”

We established the Community Advocates Network (CAN) and trained hundreds of persons in eight of the 10 regions. This Spotlight Initiative works towards providing support on the draft Family Violence Bill, the gender-based violence (GBV) Essential Service Package (ESP) for Guyana, the 914 24-hour hotline service, the GBV Application (App.) and the COPSQUAD2000 Initiative. Thank you to the person much maligned just now in a very... Minister, Mr. Benn, thank you for cooperating with this Ministry so together we achieved the training of more than 1,400 police officers through the COPSQUAD2000 Initiative. The Survivors' Advocate Programme continues to work as it is across all the courts of Guyana. We also have shelters, and collaboration between the Ministry of Legal Affairs and this Ministry will yield the Hope and Justice Centre, where we will provide all the services required for persons experiencing domestic violence under one roof. If this is not something to be proud of, then you are blinkered as usual.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mr. Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

I would like to leave you with the final comment from this report. This is from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Spotlight Initiative Guyana Annual Programme Report. It stated that the level of commitment of the Minister of Human Services and Social Security and the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security in advancing a holistic approach to addressing gender-based violence in Guyana is exemplary; that Spotlight played a catalytic role which now promises longer-term sustainability thanks to political leadership, sound legal and policy frameworks and integration of models and services in national mechanisms and budgets, all buttressed by community-level engagement and civil society partnerships.

I could go on like this for many hours, but I know my time is at an end. I want to say thank you to the people of Guyana for the privilege of serving them. We will continue to serve. We will continue to deliver to the people of Guyana. We do so with humility. And I say to my colleagues, my

brothers and sisters on the opposite side of the House, across the floor: support the Budget because this is only just some of what the 2023 Budget promises for the people of Guyana. It is transformational, innovative, cross-cutting, and simply spectacular. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

Mr. Sears: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to present to this honourable House, and to the citizens of this great country called Guyana, my contribution to the national budget debate for the fiscal year, 2023. Let me state at the onset, that it is my intention to focus my contribution on improving the lives of every Guyanese, to highlight inconsistencies in the *Budget 2023*, and to make recommendations that should be considered for its improvement. In areas where I do not go into the details, I am pretty sure my colleagues who are to come will deal with those issues.

No responsible person would dispute the fact that indeed this is the largest budget in Guyana's history. It is a budget that should have catered for equality, bridged the gaps of poverty, and embodied generational wealth. This Budget does not do that. Instead, this Budget averts from addressing the growing economic crisis that the Guyanese face on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed. I am disappointed in the poor attempt of the Government's side of the House to convince Guyanese that they care. They are constantly insulting the Guyanese's intelligence and attempting to distract them with chicken feed and, of course, hogwash. There is no substance in their arguments and constantly they ridicule and criticise our term in Government. Also, they give ball-by-ball coverage of what is to happen, who did what and what not. Might I remind this honourable House that it is the APNU/AFC that acquired over 50% of votes in the last General and Regional Elections and should be sitting on that side of the House? Might I remind the Government that we must exercise political maturity? Every point that is made by my colleagues on this side of the House comes with substance. We represent the people because they elected us here. The harsh reality is this: when we look at the economy of Guyana, the World Bank in its recently updated factsheet on Guyana stated that Guyanese are living under US\$5 a day – that is \$1,000. That is unacceptable, especially in an oil-rich economy. It is embarrassing to note that the PPP/C Government has embraced autocracy and also dictatorial governance. That is not what Guyana should represent.

It is noted also that Guyana ranks as one of the lowest in terms of living conditions in this part of the world. We have a brain drain situation. A lot of our educated young men and women are seeking employment overseas because the Government cannot cater for their qualifications in this oil-rich economy. In order to effectively address such a report that was posted, we must focus on the non-oil sectors such as tourism. Tourism offers great opportunities for emerging economies and developing countries. It creates jobs, strengthens the local economy, contributes to local infrastructural development and can help to conserve the natural environment, cultural assets and traditions and reduce poverty and inequality. This cannot be achieved because the PPP/C Government lacks vision.

In the Minister's presentation, the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh lauded the tourism industry. He said how we had gotten an increase in visitors last year alone as compared to 2021 – by 85%. He talked about the Caribbean Premier League Cricket (CPL T20) final which is coming to Guyana. Do you know what is surprising? The tourism industry has been performing very well, yet still, this Government decided not to give a proper increase in the budgetary allocation that reflects that growth. That is disappointing. An 83.9% increase in tourism from 2021 to 2022 is a big leap. The Hon. Member boasted about 3,300 rooms that will come on stream because of massive investments. We are the number one eco-tourist destination named in 2019 and we hold a solid spot on the global market for sustainable tourism. Yet still, they decided to give the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce only an increase of 7%, jumping from \$6 billion in 2022 to \$6.5 billion in 2023.

Let us look at what is happening, the breakdown. When one looks at Programme 234, Tourism Development and Promotion, the allocation is \$33 million going to capital work. Do you know what that money is going to? It is for a flagpole project at this very Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) and the payment of retention and provision for a parking lot and trestle. Hon. Member, this is not enough when it comes to dealing with tourism, especially if we want to empower people. I want to touch on a few considerations that maybe the Government and the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, should take into consideration. The Hospitality & Tourism Training Institute is a very good initiative, and it is welcomed because we want to elevate tourism within our country. The location might be an issue. If one looks at where these huge major investments in hotels and infrastructure are coming from, it is along the coast and Georgetown. If this project is to go to Port

Mourant, it will be very good. However, I would like to believe that many of the investors will find it difficult to transport their employees there to do training and then come back. We will not see the great impact of this unless the Government can consider setting up one in every region so that we can effectively deal with the hospitality sector.

The APNU/AFC, in its greater vision to transform this sector, created Regional Tourism Committees, with the aim of having greater inclusion and bipartisan cohesiveness geared towards regional development. These committees need funding. I am speaking about the Regional Tourism Committees. Now more than ever, those committees need subventions so that they can effectively serve their regions. We cannot run away from the fact that every village, every community, and every town, has a tourism product that can be sold to the world. With regard to the Tourism Officer and office, Region 10 luckily had acquired such. Such needs to be placed in all the regions. We need Regional Tourism Officers and offices so that we can decentralise what is happening here in Georgetown and better serve the villages, towns, and communities.

I must also mention to you that Guyana is now a big player in the world market for tourism and all sectors need to jump on board. According to the United States (US) Department of State, Guyana is ranked number three on the travel advisory list, which is second to the last. Do you know what the number three means? It means, reconsider travel. Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) have issued warnings against travellers – their citizens – coming to Guyana. If we do not focus on the security sector, Hon. Member Robeson Benn, we will not see the true benefit of tourism. We could do all that we want to do but we will not see the true benefits of tourism. I also need to say to you that in anticipation of the tourism boom, it is expected that investors who disguise themselves as tourists will come to this country. When they come to this country, the next time they visit, they will come to invest in our country, Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira. They will come into our country and will want to invest. What we are lacking is investment portfolios. Regional investment portfolios are needed. This Government needs to go and sit around the table with regional and municipal officials and the Chamber of Commerce and draft these investment portfolios so that we can give them when they come and encourage them to invest.

Really quick, the industrial estate that is going to Linden is a very good initiative. Do you know what? The lack of consultation is what is affecting the progress in this country. The Government

refused to go, sit around the table, and engage the residents, engage the elected officials, Hon. Ms. Teixeira. They are not doing that. In the location where the 1,000-house scheme and the industrial estate are going – around that same area – we have millions upon millions of tonnes of commercial grade bauxite which we will not get to touch if the 1,000-house project and that industrial estate goes there. This is a lack of consultation. Mind you, Hon. Members, we are not against development and investment at all; we are not. The Opposition supports that, but consultation is what is needed.

My position on tourism is simple. Based on its performance, more needs to be allocated to the tourism development of this country. I also want to share with you with regard to the Upper Demerara/Berbice, where I am from and where a lot of the Members on the other side of the House wish they were from... a strong, resilient people whom I represent. Upper Demerara/Berbice, more specifically Linden, has enjoyed a long history of bauxite and it has contributed handsomely to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of this country. The Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh lauded the industry's performance owed to, first bauxite and the Bosai Minerals Group. He said that US\$18.9 million was earned within the last year but the Government is not doing enough to represent the employees of the bauxite industry. Last year alone, in the latter part, guess how much increase Bosai Minerals Group workers got? Zero point five percent. The Government issued no statement concerning that. That is unacceptable. The Hon. Member Dr. Singh boasted that they employed almost 1,000 employees but when we did the fact-checking, let us just get the facts straight.

5.15 p.m.

At Bonasika Creek at first bauxite 150; fair enough at Bosai 588. But when one looks at Russian Aluminum (RUSAL), which the Government continues to turn a blind eye to, who are employed there? The payroll clerks and the security guard. Mr. Speaker come on, the Government needs to accept and let the people of Aroaima, Hururu, and Kwakwani, know that they have no interest in bringing back the bauxite company in those areas and that they will fall to the plight of poverty. It is a ghost town, and the Hon. Member Vickram Bharrat has not been visiting those people to give them any reassuring words. For three years we have not heard anything about the task force that was set up to deal with those issues. This is unacceptable. I can go on and on with regard to bauxite but what I must say to you, Mr. Speaker, the day will come when those same persons who were

placed out of a job and whose interest are not being attended to will vote the PPP/C out of Government in the end.

In terms of the budgetary allocation, I want to share with you the budgetary allocation for Upper Demerara-Berbice which spans three main rivers – Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice. The largest housing scheme in the Caribbean, Amelia's Ward, has 16 indigenous villages, 1 Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) and a township that is grossly underfunded. This Government decided to cut or chop off \$3.3 billion from the budgetary allocation which the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) proposed. **[An. Hon. Member: Really?]** Yes, \$9.2 billion they submitted, and you said no. These are the things you said no to: No to better health care and mobility to serve the people; better education delivery. Even at this stage you refuse to fund or allocate \$600 million to set up a new RDC building. Do you expect the people to vote and support this Government that is ignoring development? Those are elected officials; the staff currently is dealing with electrical problems, sewage problems, and a whole bunch of other issues. The budget was only increased by 12% and we are saying that we need more.

The construction of the Wismar bridge we thought would have been included; we thought that this year it would have been a legacy project of the PPP/C. But ladies and gentlemen, Hon. Members, I must say to you that this year's Budget does not cater for the Wismar/Mackenzie Bridge. The road from Mabura to Linden has started, fair enough. You have allocated sums of money to develop the Linden Highway or rehabilitate it, but not to the Wismar/Mackenzie Bridge. That bridge is over 50 years old, and the people of Linden are saying that they need that bridge, not tomorrow, not the next day; they want it now.

The Government, last year, forked out over \$1 billion in repair and emergency work at the Harbour Bridge – \$1 billion spent in five days. Could the Government not have allocated at least \$1 billion to start the construction at the Wismar/Mackenzie Bridge? It is because they do not care about the people of Region 10. Mr. Speaker, listen to this, the Regional Democratic Council had found a land where we are pushing to have a Wismar Fire Station established. This was completely ignored; it is out of the Budget. We have found land in Wisroc because that area, that community, is developing just along the corridors of the Linden to Mabura road and the population is expanding, but no allocation to a Wisroc Primary School. The Government has a vice grip lease

on lands in Linden and Region 10. Along, again, the Linden to Mabura road, one or two miles in on both sides of that corridor, the Government said that no land is to be issued. So, it puzzles me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I am afraid, in order to conclude your presentation, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member.

Mr. Sears: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, one could only conclude that some of these lands are going to be given to their friends for investment, but we are saying we have the investors right in Linden who need those lands to invest so that they can provide better for their families.

In terms of infrastructural development, when we look at that, the synthetic track which the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, praised and said that they are completed in Region 6 and Region 10, unfortunately, it is not. We have national athletes and Olympians who have to train along the Linden/Soesdyke Highway in those dangerous conditions, and you are saying that you care about people and athletics. I, for one, expected that greater guidance would have been given by the Hon. Member Charles Ramson on this issue.

In terms of roads and drainage, the Hon. Member Minister Edghill announced last year \$800 million to serve roads which fell under urban development. Mr. Speaker, really and truly, those roads do not make any sense; we need the Hon. Member Patterson back; we need 'Patto' back so that the roads can be better. Just about three months ago those roads were constructed, and they are already in a deplorable state – no drains; nothing. I do not know what is happening.

In terms of agriculture the Government continues to ignore the need for sustainable farming and also food security within the region. We welcome the road from Ituni to Takama and even the wharf that is going to be set up there. But those are for the five major farms which deal with soya beans, *et cetera*. What we are saying as representatives is that from Millie's Hideout to Sand Hills the road is needed which will cater for small farmers who live at Sand Hills, De Veldt, Wairuni

and those areas. To travel from those locations to go to the Takama Savannah Road, it will be very costly.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to share with you that there seems to be a war on the boards and cooperative (co-op) societies in this country, and this needs to be addressed. What is happening is that the Government fears that when one empowers people and they become less dependent they become more capable of doing things for themselves and, yes, they need to be independent. But this Government wants to make them dependent, to buckle on their knees and ask for handouts. This is not the Guyana that we envision.

In terms of employment, I must say that unemployment in the region is very high. We have Guyanese who are well educated but, unfortunately, cannot find a job. We talk about legacy, but at this point in time if one looks at Midas Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), nobody wants to go and work there. The legacy of the PPP/C will be just focusing on parttime jobs but, really and truly, Guyanese need more jobs. The legacy of the PPP/C is primarily this: at this point in time, in terms of healthcare, 30 doctors have asked to be resigned; we have over 100 nurses who are trained by Charles Rosa School of Nursing who have migrated. The sad state is this, while we welcome Cubans into our country, why should we have to bring Cuban nurses to our town, to our country, to work when we have our own right here?

The Government should consider the following things: the economy is not functioning, it is not functioning in a good state; oil is the only sector that has been doing impressively well; the increase of subvention for our municipality is needed; we need to have a full revaluation of boundaries within the municipalities; parttime jobs cannot be the solution for long term growth of this economy; now more than ever, money needs to be spent on traditional sectors so that Guyana does not become dependent on oil, which we are constantly glorifying; food security, we need to focus heavily on that.

In concluding, Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that if Guyana is to grow and develop, all of us must be committed to a strong Guyana, economy and society, grounded in credible practical plans and solutions, to the social and economic challenges we face, with hands and hearts joined together with great experiment, we move forward to build a nation of prosperous citizens. To live out those fundamental principles enshrined in our Constitution we, the Opposition, remain dedicated to

enhancing our nation. In this current form of the Budget I, unapologetically, cannot support it.
[Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water [Ms. Rodrigues]: Mr. Speaker, I have listened with incredulity as Members of the Opposition came one after the other, over the past three days, and made presentations riddled with inaccuracies and unsubstantiated claims. We are here to debate the national Budget; this is serious business. The electorate is tuned in and listening to everything that we are saying in this House. The least we could do is be factual and credible in our presentations.

Case on point, the Hon. Member who spoke just before me, the smallest child in this country knows that this PPP/C Government is the most consultative Government they have ever had. The smallest child at home knows that and he just accused the Government of no consultation. He spoke about Linden, as they love to speak about Linden, they love to express their love for Linden. All of the matters he raised just now are minor, we can easily fix them. The question is, why did they not fix them when they were in Office for five years? This was yesterday; the year 2020 was a short time ago, not a long time ago we are talking about. These people were just in Government.

Bauxite, logging, and all of these industries they decimated. We had hundreds of workers from RUSAL that were sent home because their Government antagonised the bauxite company. There were people in Linden who hung signs, loggers who hung signs around their neck – Do you remember that? – saying that they were hungry because they got no support from the APNU/AFC Government when they were in Office. Credibility is extremely important. The APNU/AFC are claiming to be champions of squatters, but they never created a single new house lot in five years. The APNU/AFC are calling for fulltime jobs but put thousands of people out of work. The APNU/AFC are claiming the Budget is for friends, families, and cronies, but it was the Hon. Member Volda Lawrence who *seh we guh* only give *wuk* to PNC people. The APNU/AFC are asking for cash transfers but took away \$10,000 from our school children. The APNU/AFC are calling for free university education but raised tuition by 35% and even taxed education. The APNU/AFC are calling the Government racist, but their leader is being accused of racism by members of his own Party. The APNU/AFC are calling for cheaper energy, but they imposed a tax on electricity and bankrupt the national power company. The APNU/AFC are calling for increased social welfare but taxed water and took away the subsidy given to pensioners. Credibility is

extremely important when we are going to come to this House and make claims. That is the legacy of the APNU/AFC's combined Opposition. The Opposition has no moral authority to speak of what they themselves failed do.

We have heard a lot of sloganeering and sound bites, but no sound political arguments have been made against this Budget up to now, and I do not expect any to be forthcoming from the Opposition. Hon. Member Mr. Norton in a press statement said that the PPP/C has no national development plan. Again, the smallest child in this country can tell about some of our programmes and plans that we have had since the year 2020 when we issued our manifesto and have been making our plans and our programmes available. We have been speaking about it publicly; we laid out our vision for five years in Government. They are 31 Members of the APNU/AFC and only 29% of their Members served in senior positions when they were in Office; 71% of them never held any senior substantive position in Government, including the Leader of the Opposition. Imagine the majority of them have no experience to govern, they do not understand how government works, and these are the people who are advocating for a chance at government.

5.30 p.m.

Imagine, the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes is shadowing the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, a man who is a financial genius, an economic czar, and she comes here trying to sound profound after reading the series *Economics for Dummies*. What is her qualification? What is her occupation? They come here to analyse a budget they are incapable of understanding. There is an evolving trend in the Opposition to take credit for the oil and gas sector. Oil was found under our Government; I remember clearly. They even said it was an election gimmick. What they must be clear to take credit for is the bad deal that they signed with ExxonMobil. That is what they have to take credit for and not for the investments that we are making now with the limited access to resources that we have; we have to prioritise. That is not what they should take credit for. They must take credit for the bad deal.

In the *Global Witness* report *Signed Away*, we have to remind our people about what the APNU/AFC did. The people of our country must be reminded that, when the APNU/AFC was

supposed to be guardians of all of our oil resources, Mr. Trotman went to Texas and instead of negotiating the best deal for Guyana, the then Minister spent his time and:

“...toured Exxon’s new glass and steel offices...”

In his report he said that the most impressive thing he saw was the very strong smell of oil that filled the room. They sold out this country. The report concluded that the Government was not working in Guyana’s best interest. This is the legacy of the APNU/AFC. We must remember the torment of the bad decisions and the visionless leadership when these people were in Office. We must remember how the country was adrift; there was no direction. They must not now come here and grandstand as though they are the beneficiaries of some divine wisdom of what is best for Guyana. Their track record tells a very different story. In their 33 years of government in this country, the APNU/AFC has not had a single new idea. They have been reading the same book since the 1960s. There has been no evolution in that Party.

Mr. Speaker, in the past few budgets, you would recall that a common criticism used to be ‘private sector budget’; every PPP/C budget used to be a ‘private sector budget’. That was a common criticism. This year, they have gone back to a line that they used in 2015, and they are claiming corruption in government. In the APNU/AFC Manifesto in 2015, they were so committed to this line...

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I am really trying to take the track of the substantive Speaker and not interrupt. Member, when you are speaking about the Members in this House, they are the Hon. Members. So, if you are referring to them, it has to be ‘the Hon. Members’ and not ‘them’ and so on and so forth. Please continue.

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so guided. The most Hon. Members on the APNU/AFC were so convinced that they were going to take office in 2015 and prove to the country that our Government was corrupt, that they dedicated an entire section in the 2015 Manifesto called:

“REAPING THE DEMOCRATIC DIVIDEND.”

They said in the “DEMOCRATIC DIVIDEND” they would be able to finance the new government, because the PPP/C was so corrupt and would be able to rein in all of this money

through corruption. They would be able to finance a part of their government. They have a list of points. I will only pick out three:

- “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%.
4. Reducing procurement fraud estimated... to be about 28–35% of total procurement spending of G\$140 billion...”

They were so concerned about corruption and adherence to the procurement laws but once they took office, what did the APNU/AFC do? The D’Urban Park project: Over \$1.6 billion unaccounted for; motion scales still to be delivered to the Ministry of Public Works six years later. The contract said that 50% of the contract sum was supposed to be paid, but instead the full contract sum was paid and no scales were delivered. They talk about friends and cronies: Audit into motion-scales finds supplier was APNU/AFC associate, a crony, a friend. I am going to lay all of these over for the record.

[Hon. Member displayed documents.]

Minister Catherine Hughes, in clear breach of the Integrity Commission Act, gave her own company contracts from her own Ministry. The sum of \$1.8 billion was spent on a chemical called SeaQuest by the then head of the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), Dr. Van West-Charles. The sum of \$1.8 billion was spent on a chemical, that is a temporary solution, to treat water. On average it costs about \$1.2 billion to build a permanent large treatment plant that could give treated water to thousands of people on a permanent basis that will last for decades. They spent \$1.8 billion on a chemical, a temporary treatment, through a corrupt transaction, for which no receipts have been provided for this transaction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I think the guidance was provided earlier by the Speaker and it will be repeated for... **[Hon. Members: (Inaudible)]** Hon. Members, I will take this opportunity to remind you that we have Standing Orders that address when the Speaker is speaking.

The issue of the words that was passed around by the Speaker still stands, and I would expect that every single Member respects that list. Thank you.

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This was a highly irregular transaction for which there are no receipts for payments. I must say that these were reports generated by the Auditor General, so that is what I am quoting.

There was a sole sourcing scandal again that involved the Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, who bypassed all of the procurement procedures and went directly to source drugs to the tune of \$1.5 billion. There was the tender process that was cancelled by the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, in the infamous feasibility study where all of the procurement laws were bypassed. If we are going to speak about fraudulent transactions and we are going to accuse governments of misappropriating funds, we have to remember our own track record, and they have to remember their track record when they were in Office. I want the people at home to know that they must not fall into this trap again, because this was a mantra in 2015. We must not allow it to happen again. We have a Member sitting right here in the National Assembly, the Hon. Ganesh Mahipaul, who was accused of misappropriating the students' fund, but when he took the podium accused me, personally, and then tried to denigrate my character in this House. This is evidence.

[Hon. Member displayed a document.]

He had none when he came to this House. I have the report here; I am reading the article. In *Stabroek News* on 26th April, 2013:

“UGSS president accused of misappropriating students fund.”

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Rodrigues: The Hon. Ganesh Mahipaul.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I refer to Standing Order (SO)41(6). The Hon. Member is imputing, and I ask that she withdraw what she has just said because that is not true. There was an audit.

Ms. Rodrigues: I have not given permission, Sir.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, if I may?

Ms. Rodrigues: Mr. Speaker, I have not given permission. [*Noisy interruption.*]

[*Mr. Deputy Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Mahipaul: There was an audit that was done by the University of Guyana and at no time...

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, if you are standing on a point of clarification...

Mr. Mahipaul: No. It is not a clarification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: ...you have to ask the Hon. Member's permission to be able to clarify.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, my point of order is not a clarification. Sir, I am not clarifying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Speaker, I am not clarifying. On a Point of Order I am standing on Standing Order 41(6).

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Chief Whip.

Mr. Jones: Thank you.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I am standing on SO41(6).

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, the Hon. Member, Ganesh Mahipaul is not standing on the Standing Order for clarification. He is not standing on a clarification and he should be heard on what Standing Order he is standing on.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I am standing on Standing Order 41(6) and not 40(a). Sir, I am saying to you that an audit was carried out by the University of Guyana and that matter was...

Ms. Rodrigues: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mahipaul: ...and that matter was investigated and nowhere was it found that I misappropriated any sums of money.

Ms. Rodrigues: Mr. Speaker has not given you permission to speak.

Mr. Mahipaul: At no time was it found that I misappropriated any amount of money, and the audit was made public, Sir, and my name was cleared. [*Noisy interruption.*]

[*Mr. Deputy Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, we went through this earlier when I asked for the floor to clarify something. I was denied by the speaker.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am not clarifying. I am standing on 41(6), Sir.

Ms. Teixeira: This is exactly, the same situation. The speaker has to be asked if she agrees to give time to explain. If she does not, then it is too bad.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am standing on SO41(6) and not for clarification. The Member is imputing.

Ms. Teixeira: The Hon. Member admitted in the press that he had paid back because he borrowed the money to buy a car.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, that is not true. I did not misappropriate. In order for there to be misappropriation there has to be appropriation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, there is a reason why there is an 'honourable' that prefaces every single Members' name in this House. As such, we must conduct ourselves in the order that is worthy to be displayed in a public manner as an example.

5.45 p.m.

I will not have this House descend into chaos in the absence of the substantive Speaker. Hon. Minister, if you are reading from a report, I would expect that report be circulated through the House. Do continue.

Ms. Rodrigues: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. A common theme in their presentations...

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Speaker, on a Point of Order, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, proceed.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much. I am standing on Standing Order 41 (6). I am saying to you, Sir, that there is a public audit that was done at the University of Guyana (UG) of which my name was cleared. The Hon. Member cannot be giving us half stories. Lay over that report and it will show that my name was cleared. I am not saying that the Hon. Member cannot lay over what she has there, but the Hon. Member is imputing me.

Ms. Rodrigues: I am quoting a newspaper report. The Member admitted to taking the money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members!

Mr. Mahipaul: I think it only fair that if the Hon. Member is speaking that half, there is another half... The Hon. Member can lay over that audit report that cleared my name. Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Rodrigues: Mr. Speaker, when a person borrows money without asking, there is one word for it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you. A common theme in their presentations...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, could I ask that the Member get back her time due to the stoppages with the Point of Orders by Mr. Mahipaul?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Chief Whip, thank you. That has...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Mahipaul can bring his audit report if he so wishes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your time will be given back for the interruptions.

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A common theme in their presentations is 'high cost of living'. We tackled this issue frontally and were proactive in implementing measures to ease the burden on our people. We distributed several cash grants; we removed the value-added tax (VAT)

from water, electricity and data; we kept shipping costs at pre-pandemic rates; we gave free fertilisers to farmers; and we absorbed the increases in fuel and kept water and electricity tariffs stable with no increases. We absorbed these burdens so that they will not be passed on to our people.

The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Members love to quote reports out of context. However, we did so much in measures to bring relief to our people, so much so that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) called on our Government to reverse some of these measures and to reverse the tax subsidies aimed at easing the cost of living. When the Hon. Members say that we have done nothing to ease cost of living in this country, we have the IMF report actually calling on our Government to reverse some of the subsidies that we are giving, because we have done so much already. If there is more that we can do, we will certainly consider. I *shudder to think* about where we would be in 2023 under the leadership of the APNU/AFC. Thankfully, Guyana now has a President and a Government with vision, a clearly defined plan, and the experience to ensure prosperity comes to every home.

I am shifting my attention now to the Budget itself. Speaker after speaker have been calling for more money to be distributed to our people. Our oil proceeds must be invested so that we can secure a brighter future for our people. We could easily take the proceeds from the oil and gas and distribute it; it would be a popular thing to do. It may even secure our next term in Office, but that would be irresponsible of us. We are investing in infrastructure aimed at improving lives, not infrastructure such as the D'Urban Park or arches which are totally useless and add no value to people's lives. People need to understand how the Budget benefits them. I am fortunate to serve in a sector with achievements I do not need to boast about, because the evidence of our achievements is available for all to see. Since we have taken Office in 2020, we have embarked on an unprecedented housing programme on a scale and magnitude never seen in this country before. There is no community that is left out of this development. It was very unfortunate about what took place in Mocha/Arcadia but I believe that many of our Comrades, on this side of the House, have addressed that issue. I believe, in the public sphere, that people understand what took place there, which is that 28 people who resided in Mocha Arcadia were able to accept settlements and were able to relocate into areas where they were given certificates of title, compensation and

land for agriculture purposes. It was very unfortunate that we were not able to negotiate with all of those people even though our offers are still on the table.

Unlike the legacy of the APNU/AFC for five years where they did not create a single new house lot, we have ongoing, at the moment, infrastructural works in 54 new housing schemes. People will have access to housing all across this country. We are also ensuring that we increase our housing construction drive so that people can achieve homeownership even faster because we are making it more affordable. Our collaborations with the bank have been seeing lower interest rates for people to acquire cheaper mortgages and to be able to get people to transition faster into their own homes. We are going into communities and we are working with everybody. No community is left out. Even though Members of the Opposition accused the Ministry of Housing and Water of distributing titles in a certain area called “Pigeon Island”, which is a predominantly Indo-Guyanese community, they failed to recognise the work that we did in Bare Root, which is a predominantly Afro-Guyanese community. When I went to Pidgeon Island and distributed 44 titles, I went to Bare Root and distributed 300 titles but they would never acknowledge that because it does not fit into their rhetoric.

I am pleased to report that we have delivered in excess of 20,500 house lots. We have regularised 1,355 lots in regularised squatting areas. We have completed the Mocha/Diamond interlink road. We have completed the Mandela/Eccles four-lane highway and we are in the process of extending that highway, along with construction of the Schoonord/Crane Highway in Region 3. We passed the Condominium Act and laid this House the Single Window Bill for passage very soon. This is our record, among many other achievements. With a budgetary allocation \$54.5 billion in housing and \$17.7 billion for water, we can continue the work we started in 2020 to pursue all our targets and objectives in our carefully planned five-year programme. From 2014 to now our Budget has increased by over 1500%. The APNU/AFC’s Budgets of 2016, 2017 and 2018 contained no subvention to the Ministry of Housing and Water. It is a natural consequence that if the central Government does not make resources available for housing, there will be no new housing schemes created under their Government.

The housing programme increases net worth. The cost, approximately, to develop one house lot is \$3 million for first-phase development, plus an additional \$2 million for the final stage of development. The Government subsidises low-income housing up to 90% in some cases. Let us

examine this carefully. Let us say, for example, on the higher side of the scale, a house lot in Region 4 costs \$500,000, the approximate market value of that subsidised low income lot after we have completed first phase infrastructure is \$2,250,000, an appreciation of 450%. Before the beneficiary acquires a loan, before the beneficiary even purchases a load of sand, his/her net worth has already increased by 450% thanks to the subsidy that is provided by the Government of Guyana. This is what our housing programme was designed to do when it was developed back in 1992 under Dr. Cheddi Jagan. It was intended to subsidise low-income housing for people. This People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration has always recognised the value that access to affordable housing adds to the development of our people. This is how we are empowering people, in transferring wealth by investing in infrastructure for our housing schemes, not to be viewed through the lens of oil buildings roads but to be looked at holistically as building net worth and improving overall wellbeing of our people.

The total number of new applications received for 2022 is 14,974. Twenty-one to thirty-nine-year-old account for 10,763 of our total new applications, over 10,000. This shows tremendous confidence in our housing programme. Our young people are saying to us that they believe the Government has a good plan, that they have seen evidence of the Government delivering on this plan and that they are submitting their applications in full confidence of knowing that they will receive their house lots.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, in order to conclude your presentation, you will need a five-minute extension, and that is including the time that was given back for your time allotted.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member started at 5.26 p.m. and spoke for 30 minutes, as you said, with the extension of five minutes. The Member was also interrupted for over seven minutes, at least, by Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul. At this point, the Member has not concluded her half hour and we, therefore, need to let her finish her half hour before we go to the extension of five minutes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, in order to conclude your presentation, you will need a five-minute extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, do I understand you to say that the Hon. Member's half hour is finished? That does not include the seven minutes that were paused with the Point of Order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, the time that was allocated has elapsed...

Ms. Teixeira: It is not a question, Sir. In...

Mr. Deputy Speaker: ...which includes the time that was given back for the interruption.

Ms. Teixeira: No, Sir. I am sorry, I have never done this before. I have never challenged this before. I clocked all my people. The Hon. Member started at 5.26, had half an hour, which took her to 6.00, and then a five-minute extension after that, but she had a seven-minute interruption, therefore she has not finished. This is now another interruption. I hate to disagree with you, Sir, and I do not mean any disrespect, but something is wrong with the timing that I have not seen happen here before.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, in order to conclude your presentation, you will need a five-minute extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I will ask for an extension, however, I would also politely like to ask: could you say what time the Member was clocked starting? It would be up there in the record. It should be up there in the record. I therefore ask that my Colleague be given time to conclude, but I also ask that I be informed of what the time the Hon. Member commenced her presentation was.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you commenced your presentation at 24:02:04, according to the Speaker's clock that is in front here. You will need a five-minute extension to conclude your presentation.

6.00 p.m.

Ms. Rodrigues: Looking across to our record for women from 2020 to 2022 of the approximately 20,500 lots allocated, where 8,516 lots represent 43% of our total house lots that were allocated to women only. We were accused by Members of the Opposition of not doing enough for women. Surprisingly, they would neglect to quote the *World Economic Forum – Gender Gap Report of 2022* which showed Guyana improved its position by 18 points, moving up in its global ranking on gender parity in just one year, from a ranking of 53rd to 35th. This is by no accident; this is because of conscious work that we are doing, and conscious policy making to ensure that we bridge

the gender gap and ensure that there is equality. A total of 73.8% of our total allocations went to low- and moderate-income families. While the APNU/AFC were giving lands to cronies, 200 acres of land in Linden, and they claim to love Linden so much, those 200 acres of land could have produced 1,000 house lots for the Lindeners.

We are ensuring that our housing programme protects our vulnerable people. We have further assistance through our steel and cement subsidy to help low-income earners acquire a mortgage and to get on their way to home ownership even faster. Evidence of our successful housing programme can be seen in the banking sector, where we have seen consistent growth in real estate mortgages loans. In 2021, it was three point seven per cent increase. In 2022, it was five point five per cent and in 2023 it is nine point eight per cent increase. These numbers tell the story of our housing programmes impact on increased access to finance. These are the facts; these are the facts that our people need to hear.

Turning my attention now to the water sector, we have embarked on a transformative path to support the rapid economic expansion and to deliver on communities as set out by our five-year strategic plan in the potable water sector.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that we took a water sector in shambles, where the company was bankrupt. We had to take that sector and ensure that we rejuvenate the water sector. We have removed VAT from potable water. We have restored the monthly water subsidy to over 28,000 pensioners, to the tune of \$523 million. We have reduced water tariff by five per cent in 2021 to ease the hardship that citizens face. This provides an estimated \$260 million annually in disposable income to our people. More importantly, we have issued a policy decision that water tariff will not increase as a result of increases in fuel prices. The Government of Guyana has been absorbing this increase so that it is not passed onto consumers. Government has expended in excess of \$15.4 billion to support the expansion of water distribution system, the drilling of 33 new wells and for the providing of improved level and quality of service, including first time access to potable water to more than 35,000 people in over 60 communities nationwide.

We have a strategic five-year plan for the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) which will see coastal water coverage treatment on the coast, which improved from 52% where it was in 2020, to 92% by 2025. To realise this, we have already executed seven contracts for the construction of

seven water treatment plans, which will see us getting closer to achieving our 90% treated water programme. Similarly, in the Hinterland, more than \$2 billion have been invested from 2020 to now and a further \$1.4 billion will be invested in 2023, all to provide 100% access to water services to all riverain and Hinterland communities targeted to be achieved by 2025. I dare say, Mr. Speaker, that we have seen tremendous success in our Hinterland housing programme, which has seen access improve from 46% in 2020 to 75% by the end of 2022. By the end of 2023, after we have executed this Budget and implemented the programmes in this year's Budget, we will be at 85% access across our Hinterland communities. I know that the Opposition spoke that there is no excitement in the Budget. People do not need excitement, people want development; people want a government who is consistent; a government who is measured; responsible; a government who is not reckless; and a government who can display true leadership and commitment to transforming the lives of every Guyanese. We have a far superior programme to anything offered by the APNU/AFC Government.

In wrapping up, I would just like to thank the members of staff of the Ministry of Housing and Water who have been working overtime from 2020 to now. They have worked nights; they worked weekends; they work 24 hours to ensure that we can deliver on this housing and water programme. I also want to thank the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, for recognising the importance of this sector and also his staff. I commend this Budget for passage in this honourable House. *[Applause]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings to make her contribution.

Dr. Cummings: Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Members, members of the media and visitors, an exceptional good afternoon to all of you.

I rise today to register my dissatisfaction with *Budget 2023* presented on Monday, 16th January, 2023, to this noble Assembly captioned: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. This title is a misnomer, as the Government remains relatively apathetic to the welfare of the poor. The people of Guyana clearly expected a Budget designed to address developmental needs, tackle poverty, create jobs and redistribute revenues in a manner to benefit the working class and the indigent. But this overview of the estimate of income and expenditure for 2023 is

dismal, troubling and characterised by blaming and finger pointing, especially when an industry or a sector is underperforming to say the least.

I must say, this parliamentary Assembly has heard better presentations from Dr. Singh, the Hon. Member. This one was certainly not up to par. I am tempted to forgive him because it can be attributed to the straw-coloured liquid that was imbibed by the Minister. The frequency of its usage may have had a toll on the Minister's delivery of this Budget Presentation to the Assembly for 2023. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance exhibited an optimism that only the Hon. Member seemed to share. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance proffered tidings inconsistent with good governance, which is key in fostering growth and reducing poverty. The Hon. Member's presentation revealed a lack of transparency which is paramount in policy making. The presenter also fell short of describing to the citizenry, the efforts to be made to combat practices which are dishonest. The Hon. Member failed to explain to the Guyanese populace how they will benefit from the natural resources production.

A clearer perception, an understanding of the Government's comprehensive plan for this newfound wealth would be exciting to the Guyanese people. The citizenry would like to know how the increase in GDP integrate into the plan for sustainable development and economic growth? It is a well-known fact that an orderly oil market today provides the essential base for a stable and orderly oil market tomorrow. We are talking about enormous sums of money here. The people of Guyana would want this massive and budgeted sum of \$781.9 billion to be utilised in an efficient, effective and equitable manner to all Guyanese, inclusive of the poor and vulnerable, both now and in the future. Efforts must be made by this Government to root out depravity, insecurity and lack of confidence as was mentioned in the *Stabroek News* and *Kaieteur News* on 22nd January, 2023. The writer of the article indicated that there must be a level playing field to prevent a race to the bottom, which could lead to racism and racial hate conflict.

On paying close attention to the Budget, it is obvious that Guyana remains one of the world's fastest growing economies in the medium term but the risks of proper management of the oil wealth, the quality of spending by this Government and the effects of the Dutch Disease are already evident. The non-oil growth rate is struggling. The sectors as was mentioned by one of my Colleagues, agriculture which had made a significant contribution to the economy in 2019, are

struggling. What is noted, as more resources are poured into the economy, as was alluded to earlier, there is not a concomitant effect in the quantity of investments. Rather, there is a decline, so more money and a bigger budget does not necessarily mean better spending. In 2018, the APNU/AFC Coalition went after the so-called rich ones who were not paying taxes in the mining sector, more specifically, the gold sector. We even had a period of amnesty. We had collected US\$876 million, but with the arrival of the PPP small 'c' Regime, there was massive relief measures. In 2022, we saw gold reduced to US\$830 million, which was less than what obtained in 2019. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is not to be blamed because mandatory masking was removed in 2022. The inflation rate is on the increase, moving from five point seven per cent in 2021 to seven point two per cent, as estimated at December, 2022. It is because of the rising food prices which contributed to six point four per cent, according to the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you would agree with me that a mere eight per cent with tax is certainly inadequate for the survival and a good quality life for the public servants and Guyana as a whole. In addition to inflation, the Government's deficit is rising as seen in 2019 when the Government deficit stood at \$29.9 billion as compared to 2021 and 2022, where the government deficit was \$114.8 and \$155.5 billion, respectively. It is projected to rise even further in 2023 to \$167.6 billion. What we have seen in this Budget is nothing short of the paradox of plenty. If, at a minimum wage of \$85,000... Which an Hon. Member over there said works out to \$3 million. If 12,000 persons are taken off the payroll, that in itself is indicative of a paradox of plenty. The threshold should be at a minimum of \$150,000 monthly. The theme of the Budget which reads: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*, should be replaced with the theme: 'A deteriorating quality of life for the Guyanese people in the midst of an oil increasing wealth while simultaneously borrowing large sums of money thus affecting present and future generations.'

I will now turn my attention to the health sector which I see has been allotted and budgeted a sum of \$84.9 billion, an increase of \$10.4 billion from 2022. The known adage of the health of the nation being the wealth of the nation is certainly true. The populace deserves public health services that are acceptable, accessible, affordable, appropriate, timely, and of a high quality which are staffed by competent and trained medical professionals.

The Members on this side of the House believe that a valiant effort must be made to respond to local and transnational public health challenges as we have seen we have emerging diseases. Mr. Speaker, please allow me to remind the Hon. Minister that the APNU/AFC Coalition, notwithstanding, operating on one-twelfth of its budget in 2019 /2020, had proudly controlled the COVID-19 pandemic between 2019 and 2020. There was the establishment of a task force who met regularly, there was a Health Emergency... [Dr. Anthony: *Inaudible*] Listen to me; I am going somewhere. ... Operations Centre (HEOC) which the PPP/C dismantled. There were public health measures which made use of the three Ws – washing your hands, watching your distance, wearing a mask; the three Ts – increase testing, contact tracing and treatment; and the four Es – the patients were encouraged, engaged, the need of using the three Ws were explained to the patients. You encourage them and if they do not listen and adhere to the gazetted orders, then you enforce the law.

While the PPP/C has since adopted this... [Mr. Mahipaul: Mantra.] ...mantra, there was intersectoral and interagency collaboration. Included also were home isolations, lockdowns, active surveillance and there was the expansion of laboratory service that was assisted by our technical partners including the PAN American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The impacts from social and economic effects due to COVID-19 were addressed by partnering with regional and local farmers. The database was already set up for to roll out of the cash grants.

[Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Topping the list, the APNU/AFC Coalition Government conceived and achieved the first of its kind in the Caribbean, the COVID-19 hospital. If that was not insight and foresight, I do not know what it is. The Coronavirus disease and its impact remains a matter of national concern as new strains of the virus emerge such as the Alpha, the Delta, the Omicron, and we now have subvariants – from BA.1, to BQ, in November, 2022, BQ.1, BQ1.1, in 2023 we now have XBB.1.5. The PPP/C Government has adopted a laissez-faire attitude towards controlling the spread of the virus in Guyana. Consequently, many people travel around without protective wear with the risk of being infected or infecting others. Timely reporting of the incidence of the disease by the Government has gone by the wayside and Guyanese are being left to defend themselves against the virus and the reckless management of it by the Government. As is typical of the PPP – small ‘c’, it engages

in the infantile behaviour of not taking responsibility for its actions or inactions. You folks would recall the evidence of the deal with the Sputnik V and the middleman, but we will not go there.

I now turn to paragraph 4.112 concerning healthcare. Universal access to public health coverage is a right and an entitlement. According to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a standard of living must be adequate for the health and well-being of himself or herself and family and should include medical care. Therefore, the Government must ensure this fundamental right of every Guyanese citizen being universal health coverage and more particularly, that Sustainable Development Goal three is protected. In addition, the Constitution at Article 24 states:

“Every citizen has the right to free medical attention and also to social care in case of old age and disability.”

The APNU/AFC Coalition proposed that Guyana’s national health objectives must be driven by universal access to healthcare, the promotion of universal primary healthcare and emphasis on preventative care.

Paragraph 4.113 speaks to expanding primary and secondary healthcare. The APNU/AFC Coalition will always defend efforts to improve the health of its nation and welcome any reasonable steps to expand the delivery of healthcare. However, while the Government wants to expand tertiary healthcare, the weight and the focus should still be on primary healthcare. We are aware of the differences in the availability and delivery of such care between the coastal and the hinterland areas of our country. We should be trying to narrow the gaps. It is our wish that the Government work together with the municipalities, the neighbourhood health systems and the health centres within the communities to ensure that the provision of primary healthcare is realised. On the topic of health facilities and infrastructure, we have learnt of several health initiatives being taken or proposed by the Government. We will always defend efforts to improve the health of this nation and welcome any reasonable steps to expand the delivery of healthcare, as I reiterate.

At paragraph 4.114, mention was made of \$11.9 billion being paid as mobilisation advance, works were initiated and site preparations for six regional hospitals and the state-of-the-art paediatric and maternal hospital. In our view, it is not unreasonable for additional hospitals to be built by the Government in communities that can transform the imbalance between life and death in favour of

life. Indeed, the main public hospital in Georgetown and its committed staff members bears a far greater burden than it should carry, an unflattering reputation about the services that it provides. For many, the thought of the public hospital conjures up images of incompetence, misery and death. Stories continue to abound about inexplicable maternal deaths and the lack of agility and compassion for emergency and trauma patients seeking the attention of its medical personnel. We must raise questions to the reason the Government will spend upwards of billions of dollars on six new regional hospitals and specialty hospitals and at the same time facilitate the establishment of several private hospitals? This Government has advanced medical tourism, as justification for entering public/private partnerships for healthcare. In other words, the Government, which is already sharing a paltry five per cent of our national income with the workers of our country, is asking them now to transfer some of that meagre money through their taxes to family, friends and favourites who are already enjoying 95% of the country's wealth. The demand for taxes of workers is being made under the guise of promoting medical tourism, something of no value to the workers of this country.

One company, I think the Sheriff Medical Centre, has emerged as a prominent investor in private hospitals around this country. The resources of this company are open to question and not many Guyanese may know of the close friendship between the owners of this private...

Mr. Speaker: You are now imputing on the company who cannot defend itself. Hon. Member, kindly, withdraw that statement.

Dr. Cummings: Yes. I am so advised. It is alleged that the person has a close connection with the second Vice-President (VP) of the PPP/C Government, the Hon. Member who should be here. We find it to be more than coincidental and heartless that the Government is getting all sorts of favours to this group of investors without questioning the source of its funds. We have...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, again, that the Government is getting favours from this group'.

Mr. Mahipaul: It is true.

Mr. Speaker: She said, alleged, but the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, on your side is saying it is true. I will ask him to produce the evidence.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Mahipaul? I am speaking to you. I am not listening to you. In fact, I want protection.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will give you the protection from Mr. Mahipaul. Yes.

Dr. Cummings: Could I go on? Yes. We need clarity as to what is behind having this private entity build several hospitals and how much help the Government will force the already cash-strapped taxpayers of this country to give to the endeavours of this entity.

Turning now to Festival City, we are pleased that \$92 million was spent on the Festival City Polyclinic. The construction commenced under our watch and its the brainchild of the APNU/AFC Coalition. I think we must have mature politics to, if we did something just compliment us for it. No big deal. Hashtag, no big deal (#NoBigDeal). The construction of the polyclinic was intended to be new and not to be retrofitted. This facility is expected to provide dental, rehabilitation and laboratory services to the community in South Ruimveldt and its environs. It is the wish of the APNU/AFC Coalition that like the Lusignan Diabetic Clinic, the Festival City clinic would offer a retinopathy clinic, a diabetes in pregnancy clinic and a diabetic foot care clinic. We hope those are going to be done there also.

At paragraph 4.115, it is the wish for the completion of the Bartica Regional Hospital as the West Demerara Regional Hospital and the Suddie Public Hospital were constructed with the same source of funding. An amount of \$1.8 billion is allocated in *Budget 2021* for the facilities that will deploy communication and technology to telemedicine. I trust that the Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony, will remember the telemedicine that was implemented at the health facilities at Baracara and at the New Amsterdam Hospital as well.

6.30 p.m.

Health is decentralised and so access to primary, secondary or tertiary care should be based on quality, reliability, and inclusivity. We do look forward without delay to the upgrade of the Karasabai, Annai and Sand Creek health centres which are slated to be done for \$237 million.

Drugs and medical supplies – At paragraph 4.116 of the Budget speech it states that the Government plans to spend \$2.5 billion to enhance the quality of healthcare for the purchases of medical equipment across the 10 developmental regions, an increase of \$0.4 billion. It is our wish

that there will be training for the biomedical technicians, so that there will not be equipment lying as white elephants.

At paragraph 4.117, of the Budget speech, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) describes a broken mechanism of pharmaceutical supply chain management which needed to be rectified and the Materials Management Unit (MMU) aims to fulfil over 80% of all requests to be made for drugs and medical supplies. What needs to be done is an improvement in quality assurance – a mechanism to ensure that the quality of all products is being delivered to clients. Anecdotal evidence shows that for a particular diabetic drug when used from the Government pharmacy, is often inferior to a similar drug from the non-Governmental pharmacy and sees better outcomes, including diabetic control. It is anecdotal. Efforts must be made quickly and methodically to have product quality surveillance to monitor – [An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*)] If you monitor that would solve the problem – and analyse temperature and humidity at the storage warehouse and during transportation. To have improvement, there must be pharmacovigilance, more storage space, and operationalisation of the drug bonds. [An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*)] There is a laboratory at the drug bond, you know. Just make sure it is operationalised. The drugs should be available and there must be better relationships with manufacturers. In the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of Guyana and on the accounts of the Ministries, Departments and Regions for the fiscal year ended 31st December 2021 states:

“... that the Head of the Budget Agency take action to ensure that Drugs And Medical Supplies paid for are delivered as intended.”

It also goes on to state about the regions because, as one would know, we also benefit from the economies of scale from the regions; they send it to us, and we buy in bulk. We hope the region, too, can also reconcile and provide the list of the requested drugs and medical supplies. It is an old problem, in the sense that 750,000 persons live in Guyana, and so one would find that from these big time manufacturers, we would not be able to order the drugs, or we do not have the capacity to order a big set of drugs; thousands and millions of drugs because they, too, will benefit from the economies of scale so we will always have this problem. What we have to do, Hon. Member Dr. Anthony, rather than buying drugs every year, the Ministry could buy them every two years. It is something one may want to think about because if one buys one year, it is always... You might

have to buy two sets of drugs, like in two years or three years; make it like a sort of multiyear. It is something to consider. That is my recommendation, Sir.

As I stated, these manufacturers certainly want to benefit from economies of scale. It is good to know that Guyana plans to partner with the intergovernmental South-South Cooperation. I saw His Excellency went to the Conference of the Parties 21 (COP 21), where he met with Her Excellency Ms. Mia Mottley and some others from Africa and Brazil. This initiative was birthed and aimed at manufacturing 60% of all essential and contemporary pharmaceuticals for Latin America, the Caribbean, and African populations by 2040. I think this is a step in the right direction. Although the initial intent was for the Cooperation to focus on the next generation of oncological drugs, preventive and therapeutic vaccines and modalities for women's health are also to be considered. Once this project is started, it is possible that there may be the manufacturing and scaling up of other drugs, so there is still some light at the end of the tunnel. At 4.118 of the Budget speech, it states:

“Human Resource Capacity”

According to Kimberly Amadeo, human capita refers to the economic value of workers' experience and skills. The author stated that human capita allows the economy to grow. If there is an increase in human capita, it follows that there has been an increase in science, education, and social well-being. There will be a concomitant increase inequality, productivity, improved participation and innovation. Medical personnel, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and technologies make up the sinews of any health system. The quality of health care is dependent on the quality of doctors. The sum of \$500 million allocated in 2023 is inadequate as capacity building is one of the pull factors leading to the migration of healthcare professionals. I recommend to the Hon. Minister to have retention strategies that will reduce the push factors and encourage our healthcare workers, our valued assets, to make their contribution to this fastest growing economy.

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) usually take up approximately 70% of the health budget. It was the former President, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Arthur Granger, in his book *Public Health is a public good* states:

“Preventable lifestyle disease – characterised most notoriously by alcohol and drug abuse, the excessive consumption of processed and fast foods, lack of recreation and sport and

sedentary habits - have ... such as cancers, diabetes, heart disease, hypertension and obesity.”

Those are the consequences and spin-offs of those sort of lifestyles and behaviours. The Author went on to state that the known chronic diseases, along with injuries caused by careless road and workplace accidents have resulted and inflicted huge social and economic costs, become a public health burden, and reduce human productivity and the financial security of families. The Author went on to state the known chronic diseases...

“... along with injuries caused by careless road and workplace accidents...”

And have resulted in:

“... inflict huge social and economic costs, ... public health ... and reduce human productivity and the financial security of families.”

There is certainly no health without mental health. In 2014, Guyana had the highest estimated suicide rate in the world at 44.2 per 100,000. In 2017, this rate was reduced to 24.63 per 100,000. It is the wish of the Hon. Members on this side of the divide that with the passage of the Suicide Prevention Act 2022 and the Mental Health Protection and Promotion Act 2022, a further reduction of the suicide rate will be realised. In addition, before coming up here, one of my colleagues from my side made me know that there is some mental health issue in Linden; persons will have to go to Georgetown. We trained several doctors and healthcare workers in the World Health Organisation (WHO) Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP), and they should be able to be the first lines to assist that. [An Hon. Member (Government): *(Inaudible)*] I know we have mobile clinics, but we still want us to go to the next level. Make sure those doctors who were trained do not lose... If they do not use it, they will lose it.

It is important to note that lower social class, social deprivation, and lack of social support are among the determinants of health. Unemployment and the lack of adequate housing have been recognised as major predictors of morbidity and mortality and can be associated with several chronic and severe health problems. Hon. Minister Dr. Frank Anthony, special attention should be paid to the residents of Mocha as it relates to NCDs.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, paying attention to the clock, and giving you back your time for the interruption, one will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Dr. Cummings: According to Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organisation, (PAHO/WHO), communicable diseases inflict an unquantifiable social cost on individuals, families, and communities, with their health, economic, and social costs preventing the full achievement of health. The PAHO/WHO further stated that the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), tuberculosis (TB), and malaria neglected infectious disease accounts for 6% of the total burden of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) across age groups and sexes in the Americas in 2017. Apart from screening for malaria and tuberculosis, it is about time that efforts be made to regularise and regulate roadside dumps, canals, and creeks that provide habitats for mosquito larvae. At paragraph 4.123 of the Budget speech, states:

“Maternal and Child Health”

It refers to the construction of a world-class paediatric and maternal hospital to revolutionise the quality of care provided; the operationalisation of the waiting homes at Moruca and the completion of the waiting homes in Mabaruma, while the homes at Kato and New Amsterdam are still to be operationalised. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) supports any intervention that will promote a woman’s ability to receive the care needed to be safe and healthy throughout pregnancy and childbirth while protecting women’s sexual reproductive rights. Maternal mortality and neonatal mortality are national tragedies. About 99% of these deaths are preventable. While skilled care by a healthcare provider is imperative, an enabling environment is equally important. There must be medical supplies and drugs, transportation and communication systems for referrals, supportive policies, informed women and family members, and a mother-friendly approach to service delivery. In addition, there is anecdotal evidence that mothers are poorly monitored through pregnancy and childbirth. Hence, there should be a re-emphasis on a strong primary care focus in the polyclinics and so forth. I have spoken to *ad nauseam* on this

topical issue, thus encouraging the Hon. Minister of Health to ensure that the appropriate interventions are made at the referral hospital and at the other four levels of care to conform with accepted standards and common obstetric practice. I will encourage the goodly Minister, the Hon. Member, to follow the best practices of countries like Finland, Greece, and Poland. For every 100,000 births, just three mothers die compared to Guyana, with a maternal mortality rate of 112 per 100,000.

Before I conclude, I want to highlight some of our achievements. Of course, we, the Opposition, reduced infant mortality. We did a lot of good things in the maternity rate. We reduce those. We did a lot of training. We had access to public health services for adolescents; constructed the National Mental Health Unit, which is Quamina Street; we had the first Public Health Cardiac Intensive Care Unit in Guyana; a new open competitive bidding process was used for the first time in January 2016; we trained miners in Region 8 to use malaria rapid testing kits to administer treatment for uncomplicated cases of malaria; we had 36 foreign medical missions facilitated, and we did bridges and trained flying doctors through the International Desk. I think it dismantled the International Desk.

Permit me to conclude. The *Budget 2023* as presented by Mr. Ashni Singh, the Hon. Member and Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance cannot be supported by the Members of this side of the divide as the measures put forward did not address the quality of life of the citizens of Guyana. The measures lacked predictability. The Hon. Minister was unable to convince the Guyanese people, 40% of whom are hurting and are poor, as seen in the World Bank Report that was mentioned earlier, that a balance was not struck between addressing the pressing needs of today and any future investments. During the Budget speech, the populace is more confused as to the growth and development of the economy as the Hon. Doctor failed to differentiate between productivity and expansion and was unable to explain the difference between capital expenditure versus capital formation. The 2023 Budget is indicative of the PPP/C not having a comprehensive plan to govern the country amid the growing oil economy. I would encourage the Guyanese people – Guyanese people are you listening – despite the dismal outlook, do not despair. I will let them know that the good life certainly cannot be established while particular families, a few friends, and favourites pursue self-interests because of disability,

poverty, illiteracy, or lack of opportunity. Fellow Guyanese, you will not be left behind. The APNU/ AFC will be back at the helm of Government to make Guyana great again.

6.45 p.m.

I will remind the nation that there is still power to the people; power to the people right on and *aluta continua*. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the last three days of the budget debate, I have listened to the Members of the Opposition's contribution to *Budget 2023*. Every contributor who stood up to speak spoke of no substance. It is clueless and incompetent. All it does is come here to this honourable House to insult the Guyanese population by making a public statement that it does not support the *Budget 2023*. Every Member repeatedly made it public that they do not support the Budget.

I would like to respond to the Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams who just stepped out. I would have been happy if she had been sitting here. Indeed, doctor's quarters in Kako was constructed, but it was an empty building. It was not furnished by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), which is why doctors went in and came out. It was not furnished by the APNU/AFC. The Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams Minister, who was the Minister of Communities responsible for water, did not do any major project in Upper Mazaruni. She ignored the water system in Kamarang. She then became the Minister of State; she did not use her high office to solve the overcrowding at Desrey Fox Secondary school. She ignored that school as Minister of State. [An Hon. Member (Opposition): Honourable.] Hon. of course.

The Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams again spoke about the land case in Upper Mazaruni. Even though I respect the court ruling, I want to put on the record that she did not tell the whole story. It was the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) President – Desmond Hoyte then, who handed over reduced land titles to Toshaos in the Upper Mazaruni. If you do not know, just put it on the record today. I was 10 years old then at Waramadong when that was handover by Desmond Hoyte. It was a political gimmick just before the elections in 1991. It was not the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) who fooled the Amerindian people. It was the PNCR led by Hugh Desmond Hoyte who reduced the land title who, put the Amerindian people in Upper Mazaruni at

stake, and who put the lives of Amerindian Upper Mazaruni in the court. It is not the PPP/C Government.

Before I could begin my contribution, I would like to commend Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his staff at the Ministry of Finance for working assiduously to bring the Budget at the right time.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic, since assuming office on the 2nd August 2020, has been fulfilling its commitment outlined in its Manifesto, and *Budget 2023* is not exceptional. The *Budget 2023* is a balanced, people-centred budget addressing the pressing needs of today so that all Guyanese lives could be improved while building prosperity for tomorrow. *Budget 2023* is a thoughtful budget presented to this House by the PPP/C Government. I want to put on record, not straying from my presentation, but to go back a little in *Budget 2020* so that my Guyanese brothers and sisters who tuned in today to hear our contribution must understand and remember that this year's budget is a thoughtful budget presented by the PPP/C Government. *Budget 2020* was presented as an emergency budget in September 2020. In my view, that budget was to regularise what the APNU/AFC Coalition did between 2015 and 2020.

In that budget, the People's Progressive Party/Civic reversed all 200 heavy taxes. It removed value-added tax (VAT) from water and light imposed on Guyana's citizens, including the Amerindians and senior citizens. Not only that, but the PPP/C Government reinstated all policies and measures that the APNU/AFC Coalition discontinued. We, the Guyanese, must not forget the hardship that was imposed on the ordinary man. It is the PPP/C Government that brought back these policies and measures to bring disposable income to the Guyanese people. Some of the measures are the 'Because We Care' cash grant for all school children, subsidies for senior citizens, a one-off cash grant of \$25,000 per household, bonus for joint services, to name a few. The PPP/C Government continues to deliver yet another budget under the theme '*Improving lives today, building prosperity for tomorrow*'. Indeed, the Budget is people-centred and brings relief to the ordinary. The Budget before us is a budget that will improve the livelihood of all Guyanese that could bring disposable income to the pockets of all Guyanese.

I have noted remarks made by the Leader of the Opposition, and I have in my hand the statement he made in the *Kaieteur Newspaper* that the Budget of \$781.9 billion is 'dead meat' and a press

release by the Opposition leader stating that the increases of all pension as shameful, criticising the increase of all public assistance as shameful, criticising increases of the Because We Care cash grant to all Guyanese children as shameful, increase for the Amerindian Community Service Officers (CSO) from \$2500 to \$3000 in 2023 as shameful, providing the breakfast for school children as shameful, training of our young people in health sciences as shameful.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, are you quoting that someone as saying shameful in the House?

Mr. Williams: Yes. The Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, yesterday stated that 2023 is to buy out vote. I would like to ask the Hon. Member, what did you do to buy votes? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. That is why you are there and will be there on the Opposition seat for a long time. Instead of buying votes, the APNU/AFC tried to steal Guyana's democracy for five months from the 2nd March...

Mr. Speaker: I would not allow stealing either.

Mr. Williams: I could use the word it tried to hide or sink the democracy of Guyana. All it does is come here to divide the Guyanese population and use race as a bait. As the PPP/C Government, we will not divide but rather build '*One Guyana*'. I will put on record that the 2023 Budget of \$781.9 million is a people-centred budget regardless of which society a person belongs to. A sum of \$4.7 billion is allocated for Amerindian development and initiative to improve the livelihood of Amerindian people. I want to outline some of the development programmes that will be implemented in 2023. Youths will be employed under the CSO programme from 2,000 to 3,000 in 2023. A further \$5 million is allocated for the land titling project, and \$2.7 billion is budgeted for the Amerindian Development Fund, which includes training and tourism and hospitality, improving transportation and Presidential Grant, agriculture processing, and food security. These programmes will alleviate village economy.

The vision of the PPP/C Government led by His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2020 vision moved to a reality in 2022. A measured milestone was achieved for Guyana. The PPP/C Government is a Government of '*One Guyana*'. I want to put on record that between 2015-2020 a sitting APNU/AFC Government Minister came to this House and said if the Amerindians needed more land, the Amerindians must not benefit from oil revenue. He further went on to say that the Amerindians are avaricious – meaning greedy

and never apologies to this date. The Amerindians will remember and must not forget this insult to the first people of Guyana.

The PPP/C Government has a heart not only for the Amerindians but to the Guyanese population. The revenue from oil belongs to the people of Guyana. The Amerindians will not be left behind. The PPP/C has a national plan for all of Guyana from all revenues, including oil and forest. I want to put on record that under the LCDS, the PPP/C has committed 15% of the revenue received from forest carbon credit that will go to the Amerindian development. This will be invested in various sustainability plans produced by the Amerindian village and community. This is in addition to the national budget that the Hinterland villages will benefit from. The APNU/AFC Coalition replaced the LCDS with the Green State Development Strategy. In that strategy, it proposes the revision of the Amerindian Act through an inclusive and consensual process based on free prior and informed consent to address issues of concern to the Amerindian people and bring the Act in line with the international obligation. In 2015 the APNU/AFC, during its campaign at Kamarang, Mr. Nigel Hughes, the then candidate for AFC and the Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams promised that it would revise the Amerindian Act 2006 as soon as it assumed office. The APNU/AFC, who now sit in the Opposition, did nothing, absolutely nothing, to revise the Amerindian Act 2006. I want to put on record that provision is given in *Budget 2023* to commence consultation of the Amerindian Act 2006, and we will fulfil our promise.

Let me turn to education. Our children are our future leaders for tomorrow. Our Government has allocated \$9.4 billion to improve infrastructure, and new school for learners. As a matter of fact, new school were constructed at Eterinbang, Dark Point, Kurutuku, and new schools will be constructed at Waramadong, to name a few. In 2023 the lives of the education will be improved for improved performance, label, curriculum development, textbooks, and teacher training on the Coast and Hinterland. The PPP/C Government reinstated the Because We Care Cash Grant to all school children, discontinued or abolished by the APNU/AFC in 2015 upon assuming office. In 2021, school year, the Because We Care cash grant programme was reinstated from \$10,000 prior to 2015 to \$15,000 plus a \$4,000 uniform allowance that gives the child \$19,000 per child. In 2021-2022 it was increased to \$25,000 plus a \$5,000 uniform allowance, giving the child \$30,000 per child disposable to the children of Guyana.

In 2023, the PPP/C has increased the Because We Care cash grant to almost 34% from \$25,000 to \$35,000 plus a \$5,000 uniform allowance giving a child \$40,000 per child. This will benefit over 214,000 school children in public and private schools, and this will place an additional \$8.6 billion in the hands of school age children's parents. Putting into perspective because of time, I have known a father and mother who has six children who struggle without the B's – boats, bicycles, boots and all the B's that one could think of under the APNU/AFC Government. Under the PPP/C Government, we do care about our school children. If you do a simple mathematics problem solving, you will find the answer that the parents I know of six children will receive \$40,000 per child times six \$240,000 to one family in their pockets. This is reality, not a guess. These measures are not shameful or buying votes but rather improving the lives of Guyanese school children.

The Hon. Member Ms. Fernandes spoke about equity in yesterday's presentation, and the Member came to this House and lectured us about putting the poor people first. The Hon. Member seems to be losing her memories and has a dead brain. I want to remind my Guyanese brothers and sisters that the same APNU/AFC, upon assuming office in 2015, forgot about the poor people. Instead of giving the poor first, it increased its salary by 50%. Instead of giving to the poor first, the APNU/AFC took away the \$10,000 Because We Care Cash Grant from the poor school children. Instead of giving to the poor first, it dismissed 2,000 CSOs. Instead of giving the poor first, it took away subsidies from pensioners. Instead of giving the poor first, it imposed 200 new taxes to the poor, and I could on and on.

7.00 p.m.

Budget 2023, with the sum of \$781.9, is a Budget that will bring relief and transform Amerindians and all Guyanese under the '*One Guyana*' initiative. A '*One Guyana*' Government does not only care about one sector. Our elderly pension has increased by 60% since 2020, from \$20,500 to \$33,000 in 2023. In addition, our senior citizens have benefitted from a one-off cash grant of \$25,000 and \$28,000 in 2022, respectively.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I want you to benefit from an extension, let us get someone to move that.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my Hon. Colleague be given time to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Williams: Water is life, so in 2023, a sum of \$1.4 billion will be spent for further upgrades and extension of water supply in hinterland regions 1, 2, 7, and 9. In August 2022, I visited Isseneru, Tasserene, and Issano; sad to say, the then APNU/AFC, who now speaks about equity, forgot to give the poor potable water to the residents of Tasserene and Isseneru. Today as I speak, Tasserene, Isseneru, Kamarang, Jawalla and **Waramadong** will now enjoy the flow of water in their cups and their cups will continue to overflow under the PPP/C Government. Thanks to Mr. Colin Croal who visited these areas in the latter part of 2022, to commission these water systems.

In the health sector we have done a lot of work in health centres. For the first in Kamarang, it is soon to have a functioning new theatre with new equipment and improved laboratory dental services. First time surgeries will be done in Kamarang District Hospital under the PPP/C Government. Improved health services and the extension of health facilities with attending Government medical officers at Imbaimadai, Kaikan, Eteringbang, Paruima, and Jawalla, to name a few. The Government has trained 20 community health workers in Region 7 as part of the PPP/C Government plan to improve health services in Amerindian communities. It will continue to train the young people in their respective regions in order for them to return to their respective village, to give their services to their village.

I can go on and on, but I want to conclude that I have been hearing from the Opposition's side about friends and families. I want to let you, or the House know that we are friends and families, even on the Opposition's side. That is why the spouse of the Hon. Member Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams gets contract every year from the Government, and he alone benefits from the contract, whereas the village council should have gotten the contract. He gets the contract because he is our friend and family in our region. It is because of they are our friends and families, their grandchildren and their children will benefit from the 'Because We Care' cash grant. It is because they are our friends and families, their grandmother, and grandfather will be benefitting from increase pension. It is because they are our family, we on the Government's side are appealing on the Opposition to be part of this solution by joining the Government and pass the *Budget 2023* that should be noted as being part of the solution and not a problem. I commend and support the *Budget 2023* and its sum of \$781.9 billion with no new taxes be passed in the House. I thank you.
[Applause]

Ms. Alert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I get into my presentation on *Budget 2023*. If you will permit me, Mr. Speaker, to express my sincere appreciation to the Clerk and staff of the Public Buildings, they have been nothing but helpful, Mr. Speaker, and very professional. I commend them, Sir. To the Members on both sides of the House who welcomed me so warmly, I really appreciate it. Especially to you, Mr. Speaker, your words of encouragement, taking the time to chat with me, taking me through a few steps, and your offer of an open door, should I ever have a need for it. I thank you, Sir.

Before I get into *Budget 2023*, let me address a few things I have been hearing in the House. First, it has to do with the engagement with the National Tshao Council (NTC). I do not know, Sir, how the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government engages with the Amerindian community, but I can say for the Coalition Government, our policy and our position was that we respect the Amerindian peoples, we established protocols for engagement, and that is why Sir, in 2019, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the National Tshaos Council to establish how we engage with the group that represents the Amerindian Peoples of Guyana. It is here, Sir. Further, Sir, to quote from a Department of Public Information (DPI) article on 5th November 2018, which sets out and reports on the assistance given by the Ministry of Natural Resources to the National Tshaos Council. Office supplies – it states what will be given and what was already given in the form of computer equipment and other supplies. I am sure other records within the Ministry of Natural Resources still exist of how the Coalition Government engaged and provided for the National Tshaos Council, including renting a building for it, Sir. We have also heard about Amerindian land titling. Let us go to the foundation of that. It is rested when we became an independent nation. It states:

“In 1965, the first Amerindian MP, Stephen Campbell, accompanied the PNC delegation, headed by Forbes Burnham, to London to negotiate the terms of Guyana’s imminent independence. Annex C of the Independence Agreement stipulated that the independent Government provide legal ownership or rights of occupancy for Amerindians over: “areas and reservations or parts thereof where any tribe or community of Amerindians is now ordinarily resident or settled...”

The article went on to state:

“By 1976, the Amerindian Act passed by the then PNC Government to give effect to Annex C resulted in some Amerindian villages obtaining title to their lands”.

This is reported in the *Guyana Times Newspaper*, Sir. Further in *Guyana Chronicle Newspaper* on 12th February, 2020, I will get that report for you Sir. There is an article that stated that by then 15, 552 square miles or 18.8% of Guyana’s land mass was titled of which 11.9% was done under President Forbes Burnham and President Hoyte. Those are facts, Mr. Speaker. Let me first and foremost state that and to allow me to place on record appreciation for the work done by all the public servants across all the ministries and all the departments who made their contributions to get the Budget to this House. It is not an easy task, so their work is appreciated.

I have listened to the Members of the Government’s side of the House comparing what the APNU+AFC while in Government. What are they doing now? The year 2015 to 2019, Guyana was not an oil-producing nation. The big box of oil and gas was not available during that period of the Coalition Government, and the present period of this PPP/C Government is like *chalk to cheese*. One cannot compare it. Let us look at some facts. As I said, what the present Government has available for spending now, was not available during the term of office of the Coalition Government. That is a fact.

What is also a fact and which you will not hear from the Government’s side is the fact that the revenues it is now enjoying and spending this big spending, and it seems as though on the Government’s side, it is just spending. Spend. Spend. Well, on this side, we are talking about results. Results. Results. So that money it is now spending, Mr. Speaker, was made possible by the hard work, the diligence, and the commitment of the Coalition Government under whose stewardship, especially that of former Minister of Natural Resources Mr. Raphael Trotman, which saw this country moving to first oil in just about four years, half the time of the global, national average which is nine years, we did it in four years. Less than half the time, from discovery to production, one of the fastest ramp-up ever. That is a fact. It took vision. It took the drive and absolute commitment to the people of Guyana to get there in four years. When the Coalition Government forged ahead to bring Guyana’s oil and gas industry on stream, there was a clear, unambiguous policy of where we were going with this newfound wealth.

Our intention is that the revenues from the industry must be for the development of a better quality of life for all Guyanese. Not just some, not just family, not just friends and favourites, all Guyanese. That is why when one looks at it, the First Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) was named Liza Unity. It set out the trajectory that the Coalition Government was going to move it. It sends a clear message that Guyana's newfound wealth must first and foremost forge national unity. That is the first thing that our wealth must do for the people, all the people of this country. Sadly, the focus of the present Government is just the opposite. Look at it further, subsequent FPSOs, the Liza Destiny, it was an indication of where we were going to go next, and I talk in progression and development, ensuring that Guyana fulfils its destiny as the breadbasket of the Caribbean. Food security for our people, that was the vision. A unified people, moving towards a destiny that we had heard about ever so long – pre-independence. Guyana, the food basket of the Caribbean, food security, ensuring food security.

Guyana was once the big brother of the Caribbean. The go-to place for opportunities, for teachers, for nurses, and for well-trained people in all its fields. The Attorneys of Guyana represented this country well all over the world. [An Hon. Member (Government): *Inaudible*] Yes. We do, to a large extent. I agree with you, Sir. We need to get back there, that Mr. Speaker, is our destiny to be the big brother of the region and manage carefully. We can realise that destiny without taking anything away from the Guyanese people, without making them feel as though foreigners are taking away their jobs and wealth. We can do it, Mr. Speaker.

7.15 p.m.

Now, the vision was, having placed ourselves well on the path to realising our destiny, then as a unified nation, we would have walked hand in hand to prosperity. So, there was the Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessel, Liza Prosperity. It was the intention that all our people enjoy in the prosperity of our nation, the future of all generations secured. That was where we were going to head. It was a vision. It was a vision with a plan that would encompass each and every Guyanese. Before we start our daily proceedings here in the House, the Clerk would read a prayer. I do not know how many of us listen to that prayer but there is a line that speaks to, *the vision so to lead*. That, Mr. Speaker, was the Coalition's vision – to lead this nation in unity towards a common destiny of prosperity. It was a vision of a better quality of life for all our people. It was a vision of unity, as I said, and of prosperity.

What we are witnessing today is the total reversal. It is the reversal of noble aspirations – the realisation of our destiny for all our people and prosperity for all our people. One thing we can agree on, on both sides of the House, is that *Budget 2023* is indeed the largest budget to date with over \$700 billion for spending. Half of that will be spent on capital works – roads here, bridges there, schools, a building here, a building there, and a building everywhere. Big contracts for the boys. Over here, on this side of the House, it is about value for money. It is not just the spending. We want value for money.

For instance, take a drive through La Parfaite Harmonie in Region 3. The Government made a lot of noise about the four-lane highway. We are glad for the four-lane highway and the bridge across the Demerara River. We are waiting for them – the kilometres of roads and streets being done. However, look at the quality of works done. Two vehicles cannot pass side by side on those streets, in what we the west siders call ‘Dairy’. One would have to go off the edge of the road and onto the shoulder so that the other one can pass. That is the reality on the ground. Mere months after these roads and streets were done, potholes appear. It is like pox, contagious, they are spreading. Today it is one pothole, within a few days there are a series of potholes. When I go through Dairy, I am reminded of a satirical show where reference was made to ‘Mommy pothole’, ‘Daddy pothole’ and all them ‘*Pickney* potholes’. In Dairy, there are ‘Granddaddy potholes’. You do not know if the gutters drain the road or if the road drains the gutters. During the rainy season, the gutters and potholes are one. You would see young women with babies in their hands, bags over one shoulder, babies’ bags over the other shoulder, and shoes in their hands, struggling through the mud to get to a dry spot where they can clean off and put on their shoes. That is the reality. Even in the dry weather, taxis and minibuses refuse to go through certain streets in Dairy because of the destruction those streets would cause to their vehicles. We are not talking about the old streets and roads; we are talking about the new ones that were done months back. That is the on the ground reality. It is not just about how much we spend and the massive allocations. It is about how we are improving people’s quality of life. It is about getting value for money.

In continuing to look at Region 3, over 60% of the children writing the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) fail to score half of the past mark in all subject areas. This is primary education. The Hon. Minister spoke of the schools being built, and the allocations for textbooks, buses, and feeding programmes. We support that but what was not addressed was the fact that with

all the money being spent, too many of our nation's children are leaving school and they do not have the passes to get into university. They do not have the wherewithal to join the workforce.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we have the wherewithal to give you an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you have five minutes to conclude your maiden presentation.

Ms. Alert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Chief Whip. I was talking about children coming out of school and not being equipped for the workplace. We all know that our schools need help and that our teachers need help. Look at what is happening in the schools now. You are finding parents going into schools and assaulting teachers. Parents that you would want to think, know better. They go in there and be judges, jurors and executioners, dispensing their own brand of classroom justice. How will *Budget 2023* cater to the trauma that those teachers and parents have to go through? How will it ensure the safety of our children?

The Hon. Dr. Singh is a brilliant Economist. Give the Hon. Member some data or numbers and he will craft any story you want to hear – sad ones, happy ones, or angry ones. *Budget 2023* is no different. It is a cleverly crafted story. I believe that the PPP/C has underestimated the capacity of the Guyanese people to discern illusions. The average Guyanese on the street may not have their Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Master of Science in Computer Science (MSC) and Masters of Business Administration (MBAs), but they have a healthy dose of common sense. They can easily recognise when they are getting a *six for nine*. Never underestimate the common sense of the Guyanese people.

I wanted to talk about salary increases. I wanted to address the conditions our women folks are living through. Every day you open the papers, some woman has been assaulted. Oftentimes, they lose their lives. Just recently, you read that gruesome report of a woman who had her intestines ripped out. We want to see value for money from all these programmes. We support the cash grants given to children and we want to see more. We want to see that the children who go to clinics, the

pre-schoolers, they must get too. Hopefully, by next year, when we come back here, it is not just a one-off annual grant to the school children but every term they can get a package. That is what we want to see. You are asking for proposals, there are proposals.

As I come to a close, let me address the children we have in institutional care. We all agree that the children are our future. Why do we have so many children in institutional care? Children belong with families and there must be a social programme that will help persons who want to adopt children to do so. The State must assist in that so that our future is not in the institutions. Our future will be growing up in homes and growing up with families that can love, care and nurture them so that they can take their rightful places in society.

Great irony is taking place here in our country, and this is final. Off the coast of Guyana, there is the offshore oil and gas industry bringing in great revenues. We are glad for that; we worked towards that. It is also a great polluter.

In the hinterland, there is the forest. You can refer to it as the factory that is cleaning up the pollution, the lungs. Recently, Guyana signed this massive agreement that would see carbon credits coming to this country. That is a great job. Why is it that the area where the lungs, the factory, is cleaning up the environment and the pollution, is just getting the minute percentage of the earnings? Give 50% to the Amerindian people. Give it to the National Toshias Council so that Amerindian villages can decide how they want it. This is because they are the ones taking care of the forest. They are the ones preserving the forest and they deserve it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member on setting the pace for your future presentations in the House. Thank you very much. Now, it is time for the experienced Dr. Westford, our Hon. Member.

Dr. Westford: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The pleasure is mine today to add my support to this 2023 Budget. My congratulations are extended to the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, for his herculean effort in crafting, preparing, and presenting this budget. Congratulations are also extended to the staff of the Ministry of Finance who worked diligently, beyond the call of duty, to ensure that this budget was presented to this nation on time.

For the Hon. Member that just spoke, Ms. Alert, who had her maiden speech, let me correct some things that she said. One is that it was the former President, Ms. Janet Jagan, who first brought ExxonMobil to this country in 1999. In April of 2015, under the Presidency of His Excellency, Mr. Donald Ramotar, was when ExxonMobil first announced that it found oil. This was in April 2015. [**Ms. Manickchand:** ...and they laughed.] Exactly, it was a big joke. Unfortunately, for this country, the PPP/C lost the General and Regional Elections and there entered into the ring the APNU/AFC. In May 2015, was when the APNU/AFC collected \$3.6 billion and signed what I would deem, a messy production agreement bonus. The rest we know about; the rest is history.

7.30 p.m.

The Hon. Member was asking for single parents to be supported by Government, that we should help persons who have lots of children. Maybe, if the Hon. Member was paying attention when the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security was speaking, and the Hon. Member... [**An Hon. Member:** Mr. Mahipaul.] Mr. Mahipaul was not making so much of noise, they would have heard when she mentioned the two programmes that she was implementing to assist those very persons. So, it means that we should listen carefully when persons are speaking in this House, so that we would not distort or misinform the public.

The theme of this budget: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*, properly describes what this budget is designed to achieve for all of our people. This budget comes at a juncture when the eyes of the world are focused on us. There is no doubt that the major economists worldwide are keenly waiting to see if Guyana will become the next *Dutch Disease* victim. But I dare say that their wait shall be in vain. This is because this PPP/C Administration will continue to implement scientifically proven prudent economic practices which will be sustainable for generations to come.

When the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, spoke he said that his party had proposed that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance do the following things immediately. Those things were: 1. Increase the minimum wage to \$120,000; 2. Increase old age pension to \$50,000; and 3. Increase the public assistance to \$40,000. Clearly, it is obvious that the Hon. Member knows nothing about sustainable economic practices. He is behaving like the man who had the *goose that laid the golden egg*. He thought that instead of waiting for one golden egg

everyday it was best he killed that goose, and he would get hundreds of eggs. We all know what was the outcome of that story. The goose was dead, and there were no more golden eggs. Similarly, we heard other Members of the Opposition calling for additional spending on various activities during their budget presentations. Let it be known that this Government will not acquiesce to the frivolous demands of our Colleagues on the opposite side of the House which will obviously land us into the same hole that the dead goose ended up in. Also, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, alleged that there is an undernutrition phenomenon that is occurring in Guyana. Also, when the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, made his presentation, he also mentioned about the presence of malnutrition in our communities. Let me remind the Hon. Members, and for those who may not have known, I would like either of the two Hon. Members to point us to any statistics that show us that there is an increase or that there are numbers or lots of persons with undernutrition disease or, as the Hon. Member Mr. Forde said, malnutrition. The facts are that it was this PPP/C Government who, I do not want to say stop, but we diminished and more so we would want to say eliminated that scourge of undernutrition from this country in the early parts of 1994.

When we took Government in the year 1992, do you know what we took over? There was a special ward by the name of the Mal Paediatric Malnutrition Ward in this country. All of us, I think, look at the television (TV) and we see those gruesome photographs that the donor agencies put up with malnourished children from the continents of ... in some Latin American countries and the continent of Africa. We probably cringe when we see those little children with fine limbs, very stick like limbs, big stomachs, a big head and some little fine hairs on it. That is what we had here in this country until the first quarter of the year 1994. This is no joke. This is showing that this PPP/C Government has always and will always have people at the forefront of everything that we do. As a matter of fact, if we go back to statistics, we will see that one of the causes of death in children 5 years old and below, was what? Malnutrition and gastrointestinal diseases. There was another thing too, which not only the children were affected, but we also had to deal with the adults. And where was it occurring? In one of our Government institutions. Remember, they had the 'Beri Beri walk'. I am convinced there are some persons who may still be alive who were incarcerated during that time and who would have the scars to show what happened there. Instead of Beri Beri now in our prisons, we have persons going in skinny and coming out of our prisons well muscular. What we have now, instead of malnourished or undernourished children... I do not want to say malnutrition because we have some doctors in here who would say that malnutrition

mean if you are undernourished or over nourished... Well, I am going to say undernourished because we do not have undernourished children right now, we have obese children. That is the issue that we are facing now in this country. The Hon. Minister of Health would tell you, we are currently implementing mechanisms for nutritionists to advise our parents not to over feed their children and have them fat like our friend, Mr. Mahipaul, over there. When the Hon. Member sit here and say things....

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are confusing fat with muscular, I hope you are not imputing. Okay.

Dr. Westford: I would like to urge the Hon. Members of this House and by now I think our discussions should be honourable and I think the public would appreciate it and enjoy it more if we come here with constructive criticisms and the facts. If we come with facts, people out there might be able to relate to them, but then we if come with facts and people say, no I do not believe that, remember when we speak people listen to us. I think we should try and stick to the facts sometimes or all the time.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, also said he was hoping... Senior Council, I would not take that from him. He called for the Government to have a meaningful relationship with the workers' union in order to look at better conditions for them. Let me, for the sake of informing Mr. Forde, say that this Government has been having negotiations and interactions with the Public Service Union. Those negotiations and interactions are aimed at improving the employment benefits, both salaried and non-salaried of our workers. I know that Mr. Forde pays keen attention to what happens with the Public Service Union and the Public Service Ministry (PSM) but I think something side tracked him. This is because we have been meeting since last year and we met quite a few times this year already... No, it was the year before last year and we are schedule to meet again this year, very soon. Maybe he was busy with some of the other Comrades in here, indulging in his subversive phone calls. He could not play and plot, so he could not pay much attention to what was going on there.

I think we all must appreciate that we may have some candidates for Hollywood here. The best of all was the Hon. Member, Ms. Flu-Bess. When the Hon. Member made her dramatically choreographed... listen to my words, Mr. Speaker, because I think she is a good candidate for

Hollywood... Her dramatically choreographed presentation on the first day and that was her opening batting of our Parliament....

Mr. Speaker: While you might be imputing, she was auditioning, I will now have to ask that your audition be extended by five minutes.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that my Hon. Member Colleague be given time to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Westford: Thank you, Sir. During her speech, she tried to portray this Government as being uncaring, heartless and most of all racist. Why was this so? Why was she saying that? All because there was a group of persons who were illegally squatting on the Government's land which were earmarked for developmental programmes in this country. They were not removed sneakily by night. They were firstly informed that they would need to remove. They were offered packages, relocation packages, which some of them accepted and some of them refused. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Most of them accepted, thank you. But some of them who were instigated, and I think we know who did that, they who were instigated not to receive those packages, those were the ones who eventually were removed. I am going to quote something then I will say where it is from. No, let me say where it is from first. This is a quote from Ms. Valerie Adams-Patterson, who was the former Minister of Housing of the APNU/AFC Government. This article is on the Department of Public Information's website, and this is what she said.

7.45 p.m.

These words that she spoke were after there was the demolition of some houses in C Field Sophia in 2016. In the wee hours of the morning. [Mr. Mahipaul: Could you provide that... *(inaudible)*] Yes, I can. I will do so. When children were asleep in the wee hours of the morning, this is what she said when the media approached her on the very day. She said:

“We...”

Meaning the Government of the day:

“...cannot continue to operate the way we have been operating, order has to come, and if we are trying to do it in a decent manner, and people don't want to cooperate with us then we have to bring the hammer down...So I am appealing to all Guyanese because it is not only happening in Sophia, stop the squatting...”

And she said something interesting:

“...we know we have issues with land allocation, we are working on it. Stop the squatting.”

As I said, these words were spoken by the former APNU/AFC Minister within the Ministry of Communities with Responsibility for Housing. This was not only done in Sophia. There were also demolitions in Region 3 and in East Ruimveldt.

Most of the speakers of the Opposition also had issues with our infrastructure programme. I dare say that most of my Colleagues on the opposite side do not understand that infrastructural development is undertaken by countries to achieve the goal of enhancing economic growth and further improving the quality of life of citizens. The gamut of infrastructural enhancements that we are going to be seeing in this budget is definitely going to improve the lives of our people. Time would not permit me to give all of the infrastructural developments that would be expected. When the Hon. Member, the Minister of Agriculture was speaking and he had said that we are leaders in agriculture, somebody shouted, ‘because you have oil’. It is not because we have oil. It is because they all recognise that our fiscal policies are sound, and it is translating into sustainable development.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the PPP/C Government's commitment to the construction of a ‘One Guyana’ State, continued growth of our economy, improving livelihoods, as well as securing the long-term prosperity of our nation. It is said that you would not realise the distance you have walked until you look around and realise how far you have been. The reality is that we have come a long way from where we were in 2020. Thank you, Sir. [*Applause.*]

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker for giving me this opportunity to join with Dr. Westford to give you a wider overview of what the budget is intended to do. As a matter of fact, her contribution was so powerful that I think mine will be easier to complete and we would get to let you off home early tonight.

First of all, let me thank the team that prepared this budget. Why I am doing that is, sometimes and many times the persons looking at it, the Guyanese citizens, do not appreciate the amount of hard work of Dr. Ashni Singh and his team. Some of them are here. As I would usually like to say, good things come wrapped in small packages. I am referring to the budget. Thank you, Dr. Singh on behalf of Guyana, and especially the persons working at certain levels. It is an early budget and I do not think any speaker before me brought that to your attention. I want to bring it to your attention to again congratulate the team and let us see... What does it mean? I will speak to an early budget which has no new taxes, so congratulations Minister. At the same time, it is transformational. I want to develop three major points.

Early – What does it this mean? It means that when the funds are officially budgeted and passed through certain legal processes, the Regional Executive Officers (REOs) across the regions and the Regional Health Officers (RHOs) and their subordinates will have 12 months almost to deliver 12 months of money's worth. Usually, because it comes around March or sometimes...I think one year the budget came out on all fool's day. Do you remember that? The timely budget or an early budget gives those operatives the time that they need. This is because we sometimes demand from the REOs and the executors in the field 12 months' products, when we take away the first three months as it was in the past and they would have only nine. I think that is a point we have to note. It shows that we are getting our governance structures and the manner of managing the government better and better all the time.

No new taxes – not much to talk on that. It is early, there are no new taxes, and it is transformational. It is laying the basis so that, in the future, it is making us so strong in the health sector and the related sectors so that we could build and stand on strong shoulders in the coming years. For example, we heard many times from many speakers here that there are six new hospitals. That is transformational. As you may remember, just before the PPP/C came into Office in 1992/1993, we, at that stage, had inherited a system where there were only 157, I think it was doctors in this country, and our hospital staff was not expanded, not even in the private sector. Many of those doctors, if not all, or practically all, were based in Georgetown and some built up in population points in our country like New Amsterdam, Bartica and so on. That has changed with the number of doctors we have now. That is transformational. What this budget does is to build further on that which is introducing training of other classes of workers or groups of workers

who need to help the doctors deliver their services better and better, in more time and in more places and using more technology and more diagnostic skills. That is good and thank you for that.

The Transformation – There are six new hospitals. This is massive and it is predicted. It is transformational. We knew that there was going to be oil and gas and people would be coming here, and we had to come up to a world standard. Mainly, it is for our people who will be enjoying now a wider network of hospitals that are modern, and not only that, but well-staffed. Please note that, Mr. Speaker, and the wider audience, especially the Guyanese out there.

Of course, there would be teething problems. There might be little delays in getting it, but what I get from the discussions that I am having is that everything is on track. In other words, Guyana is back on track. Thank you, Minister Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh for being part of the team that is putting us back on even keel. Do you remember those destructive five years? It is like a rotten fruit. Even if you remove it, it will leave a stain. You have a good representative of it now and showing how they worked. They were indeed rotten. Is that an allowed word, Mr. Speaker? I am now getting into the real mood now.

Training – If your strategy is to expand in terms of hospitals, the next part of the strategy, and the Ministry of Public Service would tell you, is that you have to train the adequate personnel in the right numbers, including not one shift, but you have to cater for three shifts. You have to cater for pregnancies. You have to cater for vacation and so on. I want to thank Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh for doing that, and I know that the Minister of Public Service is now going to have a heck of a time and a lot of work to do. I think she is up to it. [Mr. Mahipaul: Jenny?] Well, Ms. Westford is an advisor there, and that was a good move by this Government. What this Government did was to give the new Ministers some support by the administrators – by advisors. That is a good thing to do. Congratulations to President Irfaan Ali, and, of course, the Prime Minister, who is there and the Vice President. There has been a massive programme for training going on for the past few years, and I do not think Guyanese really appreciate the scale. For example, as I said, when we took over many decades ago, there would have been about 30 or 40 nurses in any one programme. Now it is massive, to such an extent that we had to, and I did this quietly without any fanfare, add to the Georgetown School of Nursing on East Street. Everybody talked about the nurses training at the Georgetown School of Nursing on East Street. That was a miniscule amount of people who were there.

With regard to the Georgetown School of Nursing at Kingston, many people forgot about it. Those were transformational and innovative initiatives. We took it over, and it was in good condition. That was a very good move and why was that? We have space now for additional training, not only in the day but in the night too. I am happy for the first batch of the night nurses. They stood by me because they were being discouraged. Who studies in the night? How could one study at nights? One could get rape going home. The minibus might not go there and all kinds of things. Do the nurses not work at nights? The student nurses that they were trying to protect from the night-time duties and night-time learning, do they not eventually graduate and become qualified nurses who have to work in the night-time? Some of them have their kids at home and have their own issues. I want to thank them for working throughout the day after coming to the nursing school and giving service while having their own concerns. Congratulations. I am certain that Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, when the wealth from the oil and gas has integrated, we will get a little *tups* more. We will think on it. It is not only money wise, and Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh might agree with me. Yes, it is about money, but it is about putting the training in your brain from the nursing schools. One major thing that this budget will do is to upgrade the nursing schools. Of course, staffing was always a little problem, and I think that he has already made arrangements in his budget to get better and qualified staff.

As a matter of fact, when I was the Minister of Health, we started having laboratory technicians from the small islands. 'Big brother Guyana' here. Somebody copied that name from me. Guyana was being the big brother and I was pushing it in the health sector. Having met some of them when we travelled, that is, the leaders of the health sectors in the small islands, I came to the conclusion that we could invite some of them here to get the training. 'Big brother Guyana', I want to copyright that term. I think the Minister of Public Service would have known that. I hope that has not been scaled back due to the intervention of the five years' mismanagement, but we were being united. Cricket and calypso were not enough to keep Guyana united with the Caribbean, so we were putting people to people contact. As you know, and I would not develop this point much beyond this time, Guyana is now full bore on its continental destiny. That is on a side, you might want to think of and what it means. We have an influx of people from other countries but how do we do border control? But that is a side.

For this discussion, we have to indulge in massive training which means we sometimes do not have the skills, so we have to import some in terms of training to make curricular and so on. That is one thing I wanted to say that I found in the new budget. They still have little rubrics supporting the continuation of those massive activities. A lot of the work you see happening goes on behind closed doors. A lot of professionals are spending their nights getting together the programmes and the training, *et cetera*. Congratulations for being enlightened enough to continue that approach.

Health Democracy – The word ‘democracy’ is bantered about so much that I said let me do it too. We have systems now in place. Where not only advanced or developed areas, the population points in the country, have resources to have doctors and nurses. We even have them roving now looking for patients. Because of the number of doctors that we now have, you could send some of them out in the fields to identify certain health threats before they become a threat, prophylactic.

8.00 p.m.

I want to congratulate those doctors for sticking to the guns. Of course, there are some difficult ones who we have to manage sometimes, and the Ministry of Public Service was very helpful in keeping them in line. Why? Practically all of the doctors and other personnel are on government contracts. They were not educated with their own funds. They took your funds. They were educated as civil servants and they must give back. I want to congratulate all of the handlers, all the parents, and people who are related to these doctors for the great effort to get those doctors to come back and serve, wherever they are sent in Guyana, because they signed such a contract. I am getting the impression that they are doing better and better all the time in spite of us having a few bad eggs in the bunch.

Improved diagnostics – I noticed that, in the budget, there is massive increase in spending for imaging, in other words, non-invasive methods of diagnostics. In some cases, some of the equipment and the software sold with them are so sophisticated that you can link up with centres of excellence overseas and be guided on how to do the diagnostics. It is like magic; it is like the comic books we used to read when we were kids. That is another good thing that was done. I notice that not only funds for this very special equipment are being provided, but funds for training. This is where another aspect of it – the diaspora – comes in. I did not hear, directly or indirectly, much mention of it in the budget preparation. That is the next thing we can look at and remedy. For lots

of the equipment that we have, Guyanese doctors or technicians overseas – some of them retired – have some knowledge. So, we need to reach out a little bit more to get that cohort of Guyanese who want to come back to Guyana, and a Guyana that is blooming, not a Guyana of blackouts and not a Guyana with organised thievery and so on. Guyana is better. Not only will the diaspora be coming back but we are laying the foundation for health tourism, whereby people coming from jurisdictions in which they are accustomed to better things, modern medicine, will have access to those six hospitals and so on. Of course, the hospitals will be made mainly for Guyanese, but I get the impression that we will very well be looking for a foreign audience, which could be from the resources being garnered.

Further, because of a massive training of doctors... Listen to it, 1,000 doctors. The PPP/C thinks on big scales, not *kuch kuch* or these small things. If we did not do that, we would not have been able to populate the new hospitals and health centres that we have spread right across the country. It was vision. Over the past few years, we have built dozens of health centres and hospitals, apart from the six that are coming up. The four walls of hospitals and health centres do not deliver health services. It is the people who populate them and the work attitude, too. By and large, it is a success story with two prongs: the construction of infrastructure, which is going to be continuing with the six hospitals, plus the other smaller ones. You must not forget that – the smaller physical infrastructure. The six new hospitals will be eclipsing those, but your Government, your party, is taking it even further at various levels. I noticed, in other sections of the economy, they are doing training. The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) Training Centre, which was one of the best training colleges for such students, will be expanded and made into a technical college. President Ali's Government is not thinking of specialising in one area but also in the productive area, that is, the GuySuCo school. As a matter of fact, we can *put a plug* for that. I do know of several graduates of that centre who are overseas, doing well, and their services are sought after. I think, with more funds from oil and gas, that institution is about to be upgraded, and I am certain that the results will be even more qualified persons. A next thing I want to note...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you move to the next, you will need an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my Hon. Colleague be given further time to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Dr. Ramsaran, you have five minutes to conclude.

Dr. Ramsaran: Got it. Maternal health, child health and the vaccination programmes – Guyana is on top of the world in this regard, believe it or not, and it is because of the 20 to 30 years which started under the PPP/C, when Mrs. Jagan insisted on this. The vaccination programme was being done at the health centres for some 18 or 19 vaccine-preventable childhood diseases. That is how we were able to wade into the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). We did have deaths but check with other jurisdictions that did not have that strong primary healthcare system and you will see that they did worse, including the United States where there is paid medicine and where there are all the specialists in the world. In Guyana, there is dedicated medicine and free medicine and prophylaxis. The nurses would go out there and find the patients who are ill and have them come to the health centre. We have a good model. The imaging capacity, as I said, is becoming more and more modern. In other words, we will be having technology in our hospitals which even some big hospitals overseas will not be having. We will be having more specialists. That is where education comes in. It goes for health education. More specialists are going more places and are staying there. It would not happen overnight, but we have measures in place to do that.

The vaccination programme – I want to let the nation know that it is funded in the budget to be continued. We are going for about 20 vaccine-preventable childhood diseases. At the political level, chronic diseases take about 65% of our budget. Chronic diseases are things that one does not catch when somebody sneezes on him or her, but he or she is born with it, and later in life one will get it, like heart conditions, diabetes, and so on. We are doing great in that because the doctors who were trained overseas, mainly in Cuba and other areas, we have enough of them to specialise in small areas, especially in childcare, neonatology. A neonate is a child who doctors suspect still needs to be in the neonatal arrangement up to a certain period of time calculated by them. We have been emphasizing that so that we can start off life from the smallest level, hale and healthy, and there would not be chronic diseases in the population after a time. There is better management, too, of the health centres. We have over 400 health facilities and many of them are health centres. What has happened, colleagues, is that because of the massive number of doctors we have, we have practically a doctor in every health centre, and in some cases more than one. In the not-so-distant past, there was a Medical Examiner (MedEx) or a senior nurse. That is another thing we

need to congratulate the Ministry of Finance on for allowing, for understanding that health helps build seawalls and health helps canals. In some cases, when you deal with certain other ministries, they do not think health is so important. They do not realise that we keep the workforce healthy, therefore they are able to use the workforce to make health centres and so on. It is an integrated approach, and I am putting a thank you plug to Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his team for ensuring, even at the health centre level, that funds are there and are adequate.

I mentioned maternal health and I mentioned the vaccine programme, but I would like to come now to mental health. Mental health is going to be very much integrated. As I pointed out, when I was the Minister – twice I was the Minister of Health – we put it on the agenda for the first time. We expanded the Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) Commission to include mental health, and we have had several indications that this is the way to go. We have been able to add that on, and training is becoming more and more popular among the young doctors. Initially, mental health and such issues were not so romantic and not so exotic. Now, they are understanding. As a result of the work we have done among the doctors, they are coming forward now to be specialised in mental health. The NCD Commission is a very powerful Commission where there are not only medical people involved. It is a Commission which includes the private sector in terms of the merchants, traders and so on and hospitals. You are having an overview of the entire economy and you can then make your interventions prophylactically.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to keep you away from your nightly rest, so I will close here. I recommend that this budget be taken on board quickly and, because we have lost the month of January, that we start implementing it forthwith. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran. Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. I call on the Hon. Prime Minister (ag) and Attorney General, Mr. Anil Nandlall, to move the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs performing the functions of the Prime Minister [Mr. Nandlall]: Mr. Speaker, I move that the business of the Assembly be moved to tomorrow at 10 a.m. for the continuation of this budget debate. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, we now stand adjourned to tomorrow at 10 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 8.10 p.m.