



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

57TH Sitting

Thursday, 26TH January, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.09 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.,
*Speaker of the National Assembly,
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Brickdam,
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MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

Prime Minister (1)

+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,
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Vice-President (1)

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

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+ Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, M.P.,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (17)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.
Government Chief Whip,
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Minister of Health,
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+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
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+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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[Virtual Participation]

+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
Minister of Labour,
Ministry of Labour,
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+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
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* **Non-Elected Minister**

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[Absent]

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[Virtual Participation]

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

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Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
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Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre-Press Technician

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Audio Technician

Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**Air Conditioning Units in the Dome**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, firstly, we addressed the issue of cooling the electricals in the control panel last evening, and so we can take the air conditioning (AC) units down in the Dome for more prolonged periods. I know a couple of persons have now complained about it getting hot, but the majority of people have complained about the coldness. We will have to bear up with that.

Meeting of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply

As a reminder to the Members of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply, today, we meet immediately after we take the suspension for lunch. We will ensure that you have enough time to have your lunches. There will most likely be a prolonged lunch period. I am asking that when we hear the bell, we resume to the Dome so that we can have a prompt start when the lunch suspension is over.

Questions on Notice**[For Oral Replies]**

Hon. Members, there are three questions on today's Order Paper, and these questions are being asked by Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, I think you are going to deputise. No? Ms. Sarabo-Halley is not here. Hon. Chief Whip for the Opposition, do you have someone, who is deputising, to ask these questions in the name of Hon. Jermaine Figueira?

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Mr. Speaker, could we kindly ask for those questions to be deferred to tomorrow?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. These questions are now going to be deferred until tomorrow.

Questions on Notice for oral replies were deferred.

10.14 a.m.

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, we will now proceed with the speakers for the 2023 budget debate. Our first speaker today is the Hon. Member, Ms. Coretta McDonald. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, everyone. I stand here to make my contribution to the budget debate for 2023. Before I proceed to do that, I wish to add my voice to what was said two days ago by the Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand, when she reminded this House that our behaviour here sometimes leaves much to be desired. I also want to say to us, and I am sorry the Member is not here, and to remind us that everyday young people are watching, and they are listening to us. We should not come

here at convenient times to behave like Mother Theresa and *Holy Marys* to come to talk about young people watching us and young people listening to us, when we ourselves are guilty of some of the foolishness. I want to say to us that we are here to do the peoples' business and we should be serious about that. The Hon. Member, who spoke two days ago, spoke about all things. That same Member forgot that she stood right in this very House and called a Member *stupidly*. We have to be careful. For us to begin change, change must first start with me.

As I rise to make my contribution to this budget presentation, which came from the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Singh, on Monday, 16th January, I wish to immediately say to us that this budget of \$781.9 billion is a budget for friends, families and favourites. This is the fourth budget of this installed regime, and it does not really do any good for the small man.

It is important to note that, while we were having the big announcement about this budget, I had some encounters with a couple of persons. When I asked them about the budget being read, they asked which budget. They were not aware of it, and they were not interested. Some said to me that this budget had nothing to do with them, this budget is not for them, and they will not benefit in any way from this budget. I find this very disheartening when I hear people talk about the budget in this manner. I could remember when the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government ... When the Hon. Minister, Mr. Jordan, read his budgets speeches, persons were tuned into their radios, taxi drivers turned off their music and listened, and the vendors and lots of people galled around the Parliament Building because they wanted to know what was happening. Those budgets presented the 'good life' for the people of Guyana. We can say to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Guyanese people – the Guyanese man and the Guyanese woman – were real men and women because they knew that there was something there for them. Last Monday, Guyanese went about their business because they knew that the daily struggle would continue, and it will become even harder. Because of that fact, they were not interested in what was going on. I must say to us that when we come here to present budgets, our budgets must be encompassed with the interest of the Guyanese people. Our people here must be able to live a life that is comfortable. Our people here must not be saying to us that the budget is filled with illegal transactions for friends, families and favourites.

Mr. Speaker, the people on the Government's side, I can tell you, do not know anything about struggles. It is no longer a guessing game for the people out there. The people know it well. The people know about the propaganda that they are going to spread across this land. People are not bothered when they hear about the 'biggest budget'. At a glance, this budget would quickly reveal the trick. The money has been put into infrastructure. We know when it goes there, that is where the big 'binge', illegal party is, where the friends and families and all of them will enjoy it. We have recognised that coming out of these budgets, one would see friends, families and favourites forming shell companies. They bid for contracts and the moneys are directed to their pockets and the kickbacks to other places. This budget is all about the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and their friends. I want you to know that you are not fooling anybody; you are fooling yourselves. I want to say to the people out there who are listening to us, to the young people especially who are listening to us, that ...

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to interrupt my Hon. Friend. I rise on a point of order, Standing Order 41(6), in relation to imputing improper motive. The Hon. Member said that contracts are given to our friends and families and directed to their pockets.

Mr. Speaker: I will uphold that point of order because I was waiting to see where it comes, and it came in with the word "fooling". "Fooling" was the other word used about the Government – your side – "not fooling anybody". Hon. Member, you are now an experienced person in the House. I am sure you have better ways of delivering your opinion rather than imputing motive. You will strike that from the record.

Ms. McDonald: I am so guided. Mr. Speaker, I must let you know that Dr. Singh has yet again fallen short and has failed to satisfy – something I suspect might be the story of his life. We cannot ignore the contexts and the circumstance in which this budget is being presented. The context in which this debate is occurring should not be pleasing to anyone. As this nation grapples with the vindictive, evil and uncaring governance of the Government in Office, no facet of life in Guyana is safe. The carnage is everywhere. I take no pleasure in reporting to this Dome and to the people of Guyana that our education system is in crisis. It has fallen to the carnival of lawlessness. We have barely passed the first pandemic. Now, we are struggling with another pandemic. Every day, when children's bags are checked in schools, you are finding weapons of all sorts. Children are sitting in

classrooms hungry because they do not know from where their next meal is going to come. There are fights in and out of schools – teachers and parents and students against students. Teachers are reporting for duty under stress every day. They cannot afford to pay their rent. It is too high. Teachers are left to struggle through the month with their low salaries, as they watch other workers get increases.

The disrespect that has been meted out to teachers has added another layer of frustration to their plight. I must remind this House that it was the very Minister, the Hon. Manickchand, who told the teachers in New Amsterdam, a few years ago... When they complained about low salaries and increases, she said to them that if they do not like the moneys they were getting, they could leave the job. That is very caring and that is being very concerned. When we come here to talk about inclusivity, we need to turn on the other side to make sure that we are saying the right things. The teachers in the education system cannot look to the Ministry of Education for any help because the Ministry has become too politicised. They are only interested in taking care of their friends, their cronies and their favourites. Professionals are being sidelined and the full *Peter principle* is in effect. The most incompetent are rising to the top and it is a fact. This \$94.4 billion that was allocated to education cannot solve the confusion that we are having. What we need to have is a clear plan that deals directly with inclusivity, fairness, transparency and real love for the Guyanese people and their children.

This installed regime has not only disrespected our teachers, but its lawlessness exposes our teachers to daily dangers. Mr. Speaker, let me bring your attention to the fact of the issue we had at Queens's College not too long ago. We come here to play Jesus and Marys'. When a parent of a student of Queen's College abused the Deputy Principal and abused the Principal, there was silence from my friends over there. Do you know what is most disgusting? It is the fact that parent was a male parent and the Deputy Principal, and the Principal are females. We heard not a sound from over there. It is convenient, sometimes, when we want to talk about inclusivity and caring and all of these, but when things happen and our friends are the perpetrators, we say nothing about it. Where are our voices when these things are happening?

It is sad that this budget is being debated at this time when we are experiencing all of these problems that we are having. When it is not the burning of schools, it is the fighting in the schools. At this time, I want to publicly stand here to say we condemn the burning of schools. Do you know what is more

disgusting? It is the fact that these schools are being burnt every time the PPP/C is sitting in government...we get fires. It moves one to ask the question, therefore, why are we setting these fires? Why are these fires happening under the PPP/C? One would know that many of the lands that our schools are sitting on are prime lands. I want to say to us, and I want to plead with this uncaring Government to put measures in place to stop the fires. Stop our schools from being burnt. Do something to convince us that you care and that you are concerned. Do you know what? A school is not a place for education only. A school is also an economic zone for small vendors who operate little canteens and little stalls there. A school is a place where there is a social network that provides for that little community. What is even worse is that all we hear about is an investigation being ongoing. The carnage is everywhere, and it continues. The gangsters here could not care less as they continue to roll in their carnival of illegal transactions.

10.29 a.m.

Do not let me talk about the healthcare system because we have many mothers who are crying for their daughters when we talk about maternal deaths. We have many children who are crying for their mothers. We have many husbands who are crying for their wives. Do you know what we hear? An investigation is ongoing. These ongoing investigations are never completed. It pains my heart when I listen sometimes to children who have lost their mothers who went into the hospitals to give birth. In some cases, the mothers are dead, and the babies are alive. In other cases, the babies are dead, and the mothers are alive. In some cases, both are dead. What do we say? An investigation is ongoing. Our citizens are refusing to visit the public hospitals. Their families and friends have decided that they are going to make sacrifices to spend their moneys at private services. Yet, we boast of a budget that talks about \$700 and whatever billion. The dark days have returned. The dark days of ghosts, phantoms and the hired guns have returned. Guyanese are asking the question, why are these things happening every time the PPP/C Government is in Office. The *Stabroek News* has declared that extrajudicial killings have become a feature of the society. In its 12th November, 2021 edition, the newspaper pointed out:

“The environment in Guyana is one where State and non-State actors feel empowered to continuously take the lives of others, comfortable in the knowledge that they will bear no repercussions. Extrajudicial killings have simply become another feature of our society...”

The tears of mothers are being shed from Berbice to Essequibo. In Berbice, the Henry family is still crying. In Berbice, Hareesh Singh's family is still crying. In Essequibo, the Bostons' are crying. In Demerara, the Headley family is sobbing. Not too far from where we are right here, at Nabaclis, Quindon Bacchus' family cannot sleep comfortably at night. The Members on that side of the House, I want you to know that the tears of these people are on you. The tears of these people are on you.

I want to say to all of us, especially to my friends over there, in consideration of this budget, I cannot, in conscience, lend any support to it. It is woefully short on delivery to end the carnage and to satisfy anyone. I take no pleasure in supporting this budget because labour is in a state of disrepair, and it is the worst that we have ever had in decades. Workers have become sacrificial lambs in an environment where the labour laws are not being enforced. Workers cannot have access to labour laws and to assistance from the labour officers because we have a Minister of Labour who does not even understand what labour is and so he cannot labour for the workers whom he seeks to represent. Our folks are suffering. Our people are suffering. Every day, persons are being laid off and they cannot get any redress. This budget, I must say, is anti-working class. We, therefore, do not expect to see any improvement in the fiscal year that will encompass the budget. The fundamental flaw in this budget, as it relates to labour, lies in the Government's failure to understand what the ultimate liberation of the working class will be. This liberation does not lie with handouts and an increase of \$3,000 and \$4,000 in their salaries. You have to make the small man and the small woman a real man. The only way that can be done, I must assure you, is that it must be done through equity.

This Government refuses to understand that concept. I must say to you that this budget has no poverty alleviation programme for the working class. There is no affirmative action that addresses the economic disparities of workers due to historical discrimination.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will give you back your time. I am hearing words such as thieving and thief. These are unparliamentary words. We can keep that for outside of the House.

Mr. Patterson: You are not hearing anything from the other side.

Mr. Speaker: I am hearing in the House... Hon. Member Patterson, if you have a problem with my hearing, maybe

you can recommend a good hearing aid doctor. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, in this regard, just like the Hon. Member who presented the document, I must say that it falls short and fails to satisfy. Again, the story of his life. I have thoroughly examined this budget and nowhere in this document is the word equity mentioned in any significant way. Added to the absence of this word, there is no mention of the collective bargaining process. Workers' wages must not be subjected to the whims and fancies of the Government that decides what *freck* they wish to dish out here and wish to dish out there. The installed Government that functions for their friends and families could not care less about the poor people. The record will show that in 2016, the APNU/AFC Government restored collective bargaining in this country. I feel dutybound to remind this Government that this process stems from the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 151, which we have signed on to but conveniently do not use. The convention provides for the protection of public sector citizens, their right to organise and to collective bargaining, the process of dispute of settlements through negotiation, conciliation, mediation and arbitration.

I must say to us that this budget ought to represent the people of this country. The Minister of Labour, in so far as he has a voice, should be reminding his Cabinet colleagues about Guyana's international treaty obligations under international labour conventions which are baked into legislation such as the Trade Union Recognition Act, Chapter 89:07. This imposes an obligation on the union and the employer to bargain in good faith and enter negotiations with each other for the purpose of collective bargaining.

10.44 a.m.

However, we understand that this goodly gentleman seems to be lost in a masquerade of his own. There is no grand announcement by the Minister of Finance that the Government plans to restore this process, therefore, the little *freck*s that have been identified by this Budget failed to address the macro issues that are affecting the working-class. Therefore, *Budget 2023* has fallen short again and cannot by any stretch of one's imagination provide any satisfaction. This tone deaf and vindictive Government does not seem to get it right. They are rejoicing over the fact that they seemingly have made salary adjustments here, they have reduced the income tax threshold, they have increased old age pension and generally through a few measures here and

there. I understand that it is difficult to explain the economic hardship of people who are receiving \$1 million a month, they do not understand how it feels to cry when you do not have anything to eat. But my message today is not intended for the Members who are sitting on this side of the House, who could live well and do not care about anybody else, my message here today is to explain to the Guyanese people and our young people who are listening, that despite the measures that have been placed there, it will not do anything good to change the difficulties that they are faced with and wish to point out to them that it will not change as long as the Peoples' Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) is in power.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) pegged Guyana's inflation rate at 6.6% in 2023. This means that any increases in salaries would have been zero because the inflation would have already taken that up. So, you cannot rejoice because you have no increase. What is \$85,000? When you are finish dealing with your rent of \$50,000, what is left? \$35,000 is left. How do you go about living your daily life with that kind of money? You are left with nothing much because it is no longer a light bill, but it is a heavy bill and then you have the water bill and all the other bills to pay. Any Government in their right mind would not rejoice at that effort of seeing workers receive \$85,000 per month. Therefore, there is absolutely no reason to celebrate. The Guyanese people have seen the vindictiveness and uncaring regime in operation. There is no hope in change, things will not get better. The oil money will never reach the pockets of the small man under this regime.

There is only one hope, and that hope is the hope that the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) stands ready to rescue this situation and to see the People of Guyana live a different life. I want to say to this House and I want to agree with my Friends on that side, when they would have said that they have done so many things. Yes, they have done quite a lot and they have a track record. I must say that the PPP/C has a record of doing things for the People of Guyana. They would have resulted in huge changes in their lives, in their community and yes, this is their track record: burning buildings, they have done something; increased poverty, they have done something; unsolved mysteries, they have done...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, again you are imputing that they are burning buildings, you have to withdraw that statement.

Ms. McDonald: I beg to withdraw Mr. Speaker and I am so guided by you. Rampant discrimination, something

happened; the largest cocaine haul and the narco trade that would have been returned; blatant illegal transactions; providing for their families and favourites, those are what we get as their track record. Where could the average man receive a good life? It cannot happen under this Government. In service of that interest, the Hon. Member Winston Jordan, as the Minister of Finance, presented to the House in 2015, a Budget titled *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. When the Guyanese people listened, they were stimulated, growth occurred, their growth was restored and the good life was returned. In the next year we had another budget presented and it said to us, 'The Journey of the Good Life continues for the fiscal year'. We cannot transform the economy and empower people under this regime, what we see under this regime is blatant, daring, illegal activities, more and more cocaine finds, more and more criminal activities and the list could go on and on.

I hereby call attention to the words of Mr. Daniel Patrick Moynihan who stated that everyone is entitled to his own opinion but not his own facts. One could spin that narrative as much as one wishes, but the facts remain that this Budget, again, has fallen short and fails to satisfy all Guyanese. I must say that what we have seen here is a full play on the National Cultural Centre's stage which dramatizes the life of the honourable gentleman who has presented same. Having said that, I wish to say that I cannot support this fallen Budget which is short of satisfying the people of this country. *[Applause]*

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]: Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2023* is another demonstration of our commitment to the people of our country, our commitment signed in our contract with the people, that is, our five years manifesto. I said five years manifesto, but I can understand the impatience of the Opposition wanting to see more and more because of the pace at which the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government is working.

We made some serious commitments in our 2020 campaign trail. We made commitments that we are going to ensure that the new revenue stream, especially from the oil and gas and now from our carbon credits, will be used to benefit every single Guyanese, regardless of where they live, regardless of their political affiliation and regardless of any other differences that may exist among us. We are speaking about the people in Orealla, the people in Kwakwani, the people in North West, and the people in Aranaputa. Every single Guyanese will benefit from the People's Progressive Party/Civic's plans, programmes and policies. We promised transparency and accountability. We are serious about

transparency and accountability. Yesterday we heard from an Hon. Member who mentioned the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). We have ensured that we kept the same formula – government, civic society, industry – and today the multi-stakeholder group (MSG) is as strong as ever and is working with the EITI Secretariat to ensure that we prepare our third report. We cannot help it that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) placed in that position of director one of its members. We have gone through that. Not because we do not have an executive member of the APNU/AFC at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or EITI it means that there is no transparency.

For the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) Act, we promised that we are going to revise the Natural Resource Fund Act to ensure that there is proper transparency and accountability with regard to oil revenue, and we have done that. We have done that over one year ago to ensure that the Minister does not dedicate how much money flows into the budget from the Natural Resource Fund; the Minister does not make all the decisions on his own like the previous NRF by APNU/AFC. We have revised the Natural Resource Fund Act to ensure that the Minister reports to the Parliament, within three years, all revenue flowing into the Natural Resource Fund's account. If the Minister does not report to the Parliament, there is a penalty of 10 years in jail, and that is accountability. It is not like the \$18 million bonus that was kept in secrecy for over one year, and only when we came to the National Assembly and started to ask questions we heard from the former Minister of Finance that he thought it was a gift and that it was in a special account in the United States of America (USA) as money to help to fight for our territorial integrity. Up to today, there are so many secrecies surrounding that \$18 million signing bonus. Today, the very Members come to the National Assembly and boast about the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) that they signed. We are serious about transparency and accountability so that today every single Guyanese, any ordinary Guyanese, can know how much money will flow from the Natural Resource Fund's account into the national budget. They will know how much will flow next year and the other year; that is transparency, that is accountability.

We put into that Natural Resource Fund Act that any approval for spending from the Natural Resource Fund must be approved by the National Assembly, and that is why we are here today. We are here to approve the moneys that are flowing from the Natural Resource Fund into the national budget. Then, next week, the Opposition will have a chance to question it. Next week you will have a chance to question

every single project so you will have proper insight as to where the money is flowing from and what it will be spent on. That is transparency and accountability that we promised to the people of this country, and not hiding an \$18 million signing bonus. We promised that we are going to manage the oil and gas sector in a manner that every single Guyanese will benefit. We are serious about that.

We have been hearing, over the last three days and even this morning, that the PPP/C will only benefit, or its programmes will only benefit, its friends, families, and I think the word now is favourites. But I would like to add another one to that: the PPP/C programmes and policies will benefit the friends, the families, the favourites and our new friends. Our friends are the Opposition supporters who are coming over to the PPP/C now and who are supporting the PPP/C now; like the people in Mocha Arcadia (Mocha), like the people in Linden and like the people in Berbice who are supporting us now. They are our new friends. They will benefit from *Budget 2023* like every other Guyanese. If the Opposition is saying that our friends are the 9,000 from the Disciplined Services who benefited from the salary adjustments, yes, they are our friends. If they are saying the 5,000 health workers who will benefit from the adjustments in salary are our friends, yes, they are our friends. If they say that the public servants who benefited from an 8% increase in salary, retroactive in 2022, are our friends, they are our friends. They are benefiting further from the increase in the threshold to \$85,000; they are our friends. If returning the one-month tax-free bonus to the Disciplined Services makes them our friends, they are our friends. If we took off taxes on fuel, one of the few countries in this world to do that... I did a simple *Google* search this morning to check the price of fuel in New York City, one of the greatest cities in the world, and it is almost the same price as Guyana. We took off all taxes on fuel so that the loggers can benefit, so that the miners can benefit, so that the farmers can benefit, and so that the commuters can benefit. Those are all our friends. A total of 214,000 school children will benefit from an increase in the cash grant in 2023 – \$40,000 including the uniform allowance. Those students and parents are our friends.

Parttime jobs: A lot is being said about parttime jobs. I just want to speak briefly on it because over 10,000 Guyanese are benefiting from the parttime jobs today. They are our friends too. We have heard so much about the parttime jobs from the Opposition but was its alternative in Government? What did the Opposition do for the people when it was in Government? Imagine, we have employed over 10,000 people who were unemployed, mostly women. What did the Opposition do for them? Nothing, but come here and talk

about the \$40,000. The sum of \$40,000 is better than nothing. We are doing that. The parttime jobs were never meant to keep these people in parttime jobs forever. It is a transition, a stringboard, a stepping stone, for them to, at least, get something now until they move on, until they get a Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship, elevate themselves and acquire a better a job, and/or until they can find a job in the oil and gas sector after they are trained at the Port Mourant oil and gas institute. This is just a stringboard to help with the increase in the cost of living. I will speak about that a little later.

Let me just give a quick breakdown because there was a lot said that the part-time job is only for the PPP/C supporters, and only the friends and cronies are getting it. I decided that I am going to look at one region only in the interest of time; my time. I choose Region 6 because the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, knows that Region 6 is a predominantly PPP/C region. He knows that. He is from there and I am from there too. He knows that the region is also predominantly Indo-Guyanese. That is a fact. I did a quick breakdown. In Region 6, the population ratio of Afro-Guyanese is 21%, and the population of Indo-Guyanese is 66%. The parttime workers in Region 6 who are currently employed are: Afro-Guyanese, 1,719 representing 41%, and mind you, the Afro-Guyanese population in Region 6 is 21%, but in employment is 41%; and Indo-Guyanese, 2,239, 54%, and the Indo-Guyanese population in Region 6 is 66%.

When the Opposition comes here and talks about racism, favouritism and cronyism, this is the fact. This is what the Opposition does not want to hear. They do not want to hear the facts. They come here and try to distort the facts. I have listened, and most of the presenters came with a hate speech, with a speech of gloom and doom. We expected that from the Opposition Members because they are still licking their wounds from being in the Opposition; still licking their wounds that they only had five short years. The mighty APNU/AFC was overthrown by the PPP/C Government. It was destroyed by the PPP/C Government in just one term in Office. In three years, we had a successful no-confidence motion against them. So, we expect them to come here with hate speeches. We did not expect them to come all lovey-dovey to us. I want to say to them that while they probably hate us, the people out there love us. Go on the President's *Facebook* page and see when he is in Linden, he has a bigger crowd than the Hon. Opposition Leader; when he is in Albouystown, he has a bigger crowd than the Hon. Opposition Leader. Go and you will see it. This is the fact. If we are to do a rating, we will see that he is one of the most

liked presidents in the history of our country, in just a short two and half years. He still has seven and a half to go.

10.59 a.m.

As I continue, they speak about family and friends and our new friends. We have over 70,000 senior citizens as our friends who will benefit from an increase in pension; value-added tax (VAT) free on mining and logging equipment, agricultural equipment and machinery; VAT off education, medical supplies, food supplies. The Hon. Member who just spoke mentioned the water bill and the light bill. As we say in Guyana, it takes a lot of guts to come to the National Assembly and speak about light bill and water bill when you put VAT on light and water. When we are trying to bring down the cost of electricity in this country, you are criticising the gas-to-energy project every single day, and we will hear that from my honourable friend.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, if you speak to me, then I did not put any VAT on anything, and the Hon. Shuman is in that all... So, I do not know if he put anything on anything too.

Mr. Bharrat: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. I wish at this point and time to respond to a few misrepresentations. This one I consider as an excuse for the incompetence, as an excuse for not delivering to the people of Guyana during their term in Office in 2015–2020. I think we have heard from about three or four Members already on the Opposition side. We have heard it from the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, the Hon. Member Shurwayne Holder, and I think a few other Members mentioned it. The new excuse to the people of this country is that they did not have the oil and gas money when they were in Government. That is their new excuse to the people of this country. We could not do that because we did not have the oil and gas money; the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) can do that now because they have new revenue coming in. May I remind this House that from 1992–2015 we did not have oil and gas money. The very Member, the Hon. Ramjattan, was part of the PPP/C in 1992, so he knew the state of this country when we took it over, when Cde. Cheddi took it over as President. He was part of the PPP/C; he knew the state and he knew what we did over those 23 years with limited resources, prudent management and prioritising our developmental projects to ensure that Guyana is what it is today. I say that because after 2015 we have not seen any progress up to 2020. The progress that we have seen over the last two years, the oil money *ent* start spending really as yet. It is this year that we will see more oil money going into the budget.

For the record, in 2015 – \$221 billion, 2016 – \$230 billion, 2017 – \$250 billion, 2018 – \$267 billion, 2019 – \$300 billion, 2020 – \$329 billion, most of which was spent by the APNU/AFC after they lost the elections and refused to come out of Office. That totals almost \$1.5 trillion that the APNU/AFC spent. What do you have to show for it? Point us in the direction where we could go and see your achievement, please. Could we go to the monument in Mahdia? Could we go to the D'Urban Park? Where can we go to see one single project on which the APNU/AFC spent \$1.5 trillion? The money went to travelling and, as we say in Berbice and the Hon. Member knows, travelling with your *baraat*. [**An Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)] Not me. Travelling with your *baraat*. They stopped the cash grant and they started buying more food and refreshment. The APNU/AFC started buying more food and refreshment for themselves; fancy vehicles, fancy offices; and still they sent home over 7,000 sugar workers, sent home over 2,000 Community Support Officers (CSOs), sent home a number of public servants, and they are saying that today, and the capital budget decreases every single year.

They are claiming that oil and gas is the only revenue now, in 2015–2020 the APNU/AFC killed almost every single productive sector in this country. I would know. The Ministry of Natural Resources manages most of the productive sectors. Where was agriculture? Where was agriculture under the APNU/AFC? They said rice is private business. What did they do to bauxite? The Hon. Member Mr. Sears spoke – and we talk about this bareface thing – about Russian Aluminum (RUSAL), that the Government is not engaged with RUSAL to reopen. May I remind the Hon. Member that they closed, they pushed RUSAL out of operation. The APNU/AFC pushed RUSAL out of operation, putting over 500 persons in the Kwakwani/Ituni area out of jobs, and another 100 in New Amsterdam who were working with the Oldendorff transshipment point at the mouth of the Berbice River – over 600 workers – and most of them are their supporters. [**Mr. Ramson:** Were.] Were, because they are our new friends now. I see my honourable friend 'Ricky' smiling because he knows that I am coming to the forestry sector. The forestry sector, when we left in 2015, was a viable sector; it was one of the best managed sectors in 2015, bringing in export revenue into this country. When we took over in August, 2020, it was bankrupt. They owed utility bills; they owed salaries to staff for two months when we took over. We are still trying to bring back the Guyana Forestry Commission to what it was before, and we have seen that with an increase of 13.4% growth rate in the forestry sector this year. The 13.4% growth rate equates to

over 50,000 cubic meters increase in production at a value of \$2 billion. That is what the forestry sector is doing today. The APNU/AFC Government destroyed the forestry sector.

If I may come to Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) to take a quick look, when we left – this is in the records and I could hand it over to you, Mr. Speaker – in 2015, in the accounts of GGMC, there was over \$24 billion. A lot of people do not know this. When we took back Government in August, 2020, there was \$11 billion. The Hon. Member is saying we had to use more than \$13 billion, plus the revenue coming in for the five years. The Guyana Gold Board was in overdraft. The Gold Board was in billions of dollars in overdraft. That is their legacy. Today they come here with the excuse, ‘we did not have oil revenue’. If you do not have oil revenue, you have to incentivise the other productive sectors like we are doing now. You have to grow the other productive sectors – bauxite increased by 35%, diamond increased by 85%, forestry by 34%, aggregates by 12%, sand by more than 100%. You have to incentivise and grow the other productive sector, but what did you do? You did the opposite, and today you come here crying crocodile tears, ‘we did not have oil and gas money; we did not have carbon credits money’.

In the interest of time, I will move on to another sore point that the Opposition keeps mentioning over and over, and that is the cost of living. The way in which it is mentioned in this National Assembly is as if this is inflicted upon the people of Guyana by the Government of Guyana. There is a global crisis. Apparently the APNU/AFC is still in that balloon; they are still locked in the balloon that they do not know what is happening outside of them. We are witnessing a severe shortage of basic commodities around the world. We should be happy, as a matter of fact, that we still have in Guyana when in many countries there are severe shortages. We are seeing the economic impact of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) now, and the war did not help. It is very strange that, it should be a learned Member of this National Assembly, speaking about bora and *baigan*. The farmers need to have fertiliser. Where is the fertiliser coming from? It comes from gas. They have to use fuel to drive to the market. The war carried up oil and gas price; we know that. The fisherman needs to use fuel to go out to the sea to catch the fishes. How could you come to the National Assembly and ask about *baigan* and bora? What about catfish and cuirass. This is the exact attitude why the people of this country have condemned the APNU/AFC into the Opposition, and they will stay there for a long time because, apparently, they have not reformed, or they are still stuck in their cocoon.

They criticise the parttime jobs. The parttime jobs is a way of cushioning it. They criticised the cash grants that we give. That is a form of cushioning it. When many countries cannot do that, we are doing it in this small developing country. The cash grant to children, to pensioners, to children with disabilities, to sugar workers, to fishermen, to farmers; flood relief for households, COVID-19 cash grants, hinterland grants; we did that to cohesion the cost of living. When many countries could not do it, we did it. When many countries could not afford to remove tax off fuel, we did it in this country for our people, for every single Guyanese – our friends, our families, our favourites and our new friends, which is all of Guyana. We heard about reckless spending, capital projects and illegal transactions. Let them point us to one capital project that they did in their five years after spending \$1.5 trillion. D’Urban Park, we can go there and see the state of it. Today, they talk about reckless spending; you continued projects from us; they talk about reckless spending on capital project. How could you tell the people who have to commute the Demerara Harbour Bridge every single day, spending over one hour, that spending money on a new Demerara Harbour Bridge is reckless? How could you say to the North West residents that bringing a new ferry is reckless? How could you say to the Region 3 people that a new highway in Region 3 is reckless? How could you say to the people on the East Bank that the two new highways on the East Bank is reckless spending? How could you say to the people of this country, when they travel through that airport now, that was reckless spending? How could you say to the people of this country that building five new hospitals is reckless spending, that building a speciality hospital for children and mothers is reckless spending?

11.14 a.m.

How could you say to the people of Berbice that building a highway or improving the highway from New Amsterdam to Moleson Creek is reckless spending? How could you say to the people in Linden that recapping and expanding the Linden Soesdyke Highway is reckless spending? How could you say to our people in Region 9, that building the Linden to Mabura Highway is reckless spending? How could you say to the people in Guyana, that building a refinery in Guyana is reckless spending? How could you say to the people in Guyana that the natural gas liquids (NGL) plan, that will bring down the cost of cooking gas, is reckless spending? The only reckless thing that we have here is the Opposition, the APNU/AFC. That is the only recklessness that we have here in this country – the APNU/AFC with their reckless statements.

The Hon. Member of Parliament (MP), Ms. McDonald, spoke glowingly about education. Maybe the Hon. Member should spend a little more time to ensure that she works with the system, to ensure that we approve it, because educating our young population in this country is not the task of the Government alone; it is the task of all of us in this National Assembly because all of us are leaders in this country. Just how the education process is the parents, the teachers and the students, we have a responsibility to the children of this country, all of us here. When you come here and you hold a senior position and you criticise the education system, in reality you are criticising yourself too. Mr. Speaker, two misrepresentations were mentioned by the Hon. Member with regard to the Minister of Education. One, the Minister of Education went to New Amsterdam and told teachers that if they do not accept the salary, they can leave the job. Mr. Speaker, I will hand it over to you from *Kaieteur News*. *Kaieteur News* offered an apology to the Minister for misquoting her. Further – I will hand it over to you, Mr. Speaker – the Deputy Head of Queens College (QC) wrote and said that she is no longer pursuing the matter because it was misrepresented as well. Mr. Speaker, I have those letters that I will lay over to you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, staying on track and not misrepresenting anything, you have to get an extension to conclude.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I would love for my colleague to continue speaking for a long, long, time, but I do ask for an extension for him to conclude his presentation.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Hon. Minister Mr. Vickram Bharrat, you have five minutes to conclude your presentation.

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will now deal with the oil and gas sector because there has been so much said about the oil and gas sector by so many Members in the National Assembly. Let me remind this House that the expiration contract signed between the Government of Guyana and ExxonMobil was signed in 1999 by the then President, Ms. Janet Jagan. From then we moved to first oil in December, 2019. Since then we have moved to our second Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessel producing on average 380,000 barrels per day, and we are well on course to achieve the one million target in another

four to five years from today. Already we have approved the Yellowtail production license, which will see another 250,000 barrels added to our production figures. We are presently with our international consultant reviewing the Uaru project and, once we are satisfied, a petroleum production license will be issued taking our production to over 850,000 barrels per day. Already there are indications that the Whiptail development will be our fifth development coming on stream, at least by 2027/2028, which will take our production to over one million barrels per day – unprecedented. It has never happened in this world anywhere.

Mr. Speaker, we are blessed as a country, all of us, because we are all Guyanese. We live in a blessed country; we have natural resources, but we have the best of the natural resources. Our crude is the best crude, our gold is the best gold, our bauxite is the best, and our forest is our national treasure. We are blessed that 86% of Guyana is covered in forest. We are blessed that 90% of our forest is virgin forest still standing. We are blessed that we can earn a minimum of United States Dollar (USD) \$750 million from 30% of our carbon credits only. That is why I say, we are a blessed country.

In 2023, we will continue to improve on our local content legislation. I sat in the last Parliament from 2016 and I heard so much talk from the Government of the day about first oil, but what was done? What framework was in place to manage the sector? A Natural Resource Fund (NRF) that gave the Minister all the power to determine how to spend the money and a local content policy presented in January, 2020, which is in favour of the international company and not local company. In one year we moved toward having local content legislation in place. Today, we have seen over 600 Guyanese companies registered with the Local Content Secretariat, bringing in over \$700 million in 2022; getting the oil companies to unbundle their services so that Guyanese can participate in it; reducing the payment periods from 60 days to 45 days; we have achieved that in one year. We made a promise that, in 2023, we are going to reassess our capacity, our human capacity and our capacity in the private sector, in order to amend Schedule I in the local content legislation to add services to those 40 that already exist and to increase the targets that are already there in those 40. But it is based on our capacity and, of course, we will hold consultations to ensure that is done.

We have heard so much about the environment and what needs to be done, but when the 25-page Liza license was issued: one, it was never made public; two, there was no

provision for flaring; there was no provision as to how to deal with wastewater in the Liza 1 Permit. As a matter of fact, the APNU/AFC issued a 20-year environmental permit, which is illegal. The Attorney General went to court to ensure that we correct your wrong and issued a five-year permit because reassessment and studies need to be done to ensure that a further license can be issued. They are speaking about oil spill, but what was done as preventative measures to the oil spill? We have a capping stack in the Yellowtail license; we have training by the Civil Defence Commission (CDC) ongoing; we have real-time monitoring on the FPSO; we have the presence of the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS) staff on the FPSO today. We will continue to work to ensure that we strengthen the oil and gas sector so that there is proper accountability and transparency and that the monies from the oil and gas sector will be used to ensure that every single Guyanese benefits.

In closing, I wish to thank my staff from the Ministry of Natural Resources, some of them are here, who have worked overtime to ensure that we are at this juncture. I wish to thank, in particular, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, the Director of Budget, and the hardworking staff at the Ministry of Finance, who worked tirelessly to ensure that we craft a comprehensive budget that will benefit every single Guyanese. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Vickram Bharrat. After the next speaker, we will take the suspension for lunch because the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply will have to meet. So, after the next presentation, we will take the suspension. The next presenter is the Hon. Member Mr. David Patterson. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker, colleagues, as is customary, I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2023*. Allow me to extend thanks to the committed but underpaid public servants, for the hard work in the preparation of the Budget. The nation is aware and will not fault our public servants for the contents in this Budget, which is not fit to be associated with one of the fastest growing economies in the world. *Budget 2023* is simply a numbers budget. The PPP/C has a huge amount of money at their disposal, so they simply cobbled together some projects and announced the country's largest ever budget. There are no policy statements in the Budget; there is no planning or vision. Most, if not all, of the capital projects included were conceptualised and designed under the Coalition Government, but they shamelessly Sir, seek to take credit for...

Mr. Speaker: You are going to withdraw that, "shamelessly".

Mr. Patterson: Sir, before I proceed, I would like to address a few issues. Mr. Speaker, like you, I have an aversion to paper; I normally like to have everything electronic. Because we are ruling so far, I have walked with all the supporting documents. I will make all available to the Parliament on my completion, and I hope that you do not have to interrupt me to ask for source because they are all here. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to address an issue that the Government keeps repeating, the life and death of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. This project was mentioned in all four of the Government's budgets. However, it is no closer to commencement, with all efforts thus far falling short. It is time that the record is set straight once and for all, not for the Members on that other side – they do not care – but for the younger MPs on my side of the House and the general public. Here are some facts, and I am running through the facts very quickly. [**An Hon Member:** (*Inaudible*)] We are coming to that. In April, 1998, the PPP/C signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Synergy Holdings Incorporated, headed by Mr. 'Fip' Motilall – I hope I could use his name – to undertake feasibility studies on the Amaila Falls. He produced a report in December, 2001, and requested the issuance of a license. In July, 2002, an interim license to Synergy Holdings Inc. was issued, despite an adverse report on the soundness of the project from their own consultants. [**An Hon Member:** (*Inaudible*)] One of your consultants, Keane Consulting Incorporated, if you want to know Sir. Let us fast forward to 2009. In 2009, Synergy Holdings Inc. transferred the interim license to Sithe Global. In March, 2010, the PPP/C received four bids for the access road – I am just quickly going through – and they awarded the contract to Synergy Holdings Inc. for the access for \$15.4 million, even though that company had no previous experience in road building. The PPP/C consultant – we are not allowed to mention names but if they force me I will – indicated that the appropriate process was not followed as the evaluation was at best a qualitative assessment with too many unknowns as the recommendation cannot stand scrutiny.

11.29 a.m.

That is the recommendation to appoint Synergy Holdings Incorporated. They proceeded, nevertheless, to award the contract. Of course, the Synergy Holdings Incorporated's contract was terminated in July, 2012, having only

completed 30% of the work. That road ended up causing Guyanese taxpayers – by the end of 2015 when we came into power – US\$45 million. It was US\$30 million more. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** Reckless spending.] It was reckless spending, Sir. We are talking about their stewardship. In September, 2012, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) issued a mandate letter. However, it was subjected to certain caveats mainly, the financial and technical viability of it. Mr. Speaker, you must note from whatever they told you that it was never ever approved by the IDB's board. All the IDB agreed to do was to help them find financing. The IDB indicated it was unwilling to put any money into the project. The World Bank was approached and it flatly refused to fund the project. Maybe, that is why the World Bank was booted out in 2012. Moving forward to April, 2013, – the Minister is quiet – the National Assembly approved two Bills that came. The Hydro-Electric (Power) Amendment Bill was approved by the Opposition. There was a motion to raise the debt ceiling to \$130 billion but it was reduced to \$50 billion with a caveat – when all of the deficiencies are sorted out in the project, come back to us and the National Assembly will increase the debt ceiling. From whatever they said, we never voted it down, we reduced it. That was prudent spending. Of course, we know that Sithe Global Power withdrew.

I would like to move forward to July, 2015. This is where it gets interesting. A review of the project was conducted by the new Administration. There were three meetings with the Opposition, but some information was deemed too confidential to be provided to the Opposition – it had to be laid over. When they met us – the Opposition – they told us that it will be US\$858 million. At the time, they went around, and their Public Relations (PR) said that it was US\$10¢ per kilowatt (KW) hour. You know that, Sir because you were there. That is what they were telling everybody. When they shared the information with us, the tariff had risen to US25¢. It was US25¢. It is what we are paying right now. It is all here. It is all here and I can quote. They moved from saying it is a project to save energy and get cheap electricity and they describe it now as a flagship for the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). It is to reduce emissions; it is no longer about electricity costs. That is not the end of the issue. In addition to the \$558 million, we discovered that the Government of Guyana had to foot US\$138 million Capital expenditures (CapEx) for the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL). The Minister is there. It was CapEx for GPL, the cost for the transmission to be made available for distribution. There was US\$40 million to buy down the equity for the sponsor and US\$3

million for the relocation of 30 persons. When we did the competition for the cheap, flagship Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, the tariff ended up at US30¢. That is why the project is dead.

I will go to what their rebuttal will be on – Norconsult Telematics. The Ministry of Finance, Norway and the Ministry of Natural Resources, conducted a review of the project. They employed a consultant, Norconsult Telematics. Norconsult stated that it was the most viable project. It stated that the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was prioritised as the first hydropower plant because it was the only one with a full feasibility study completed. For the People's Progressive Party/Civic, it was the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project or nothing. It is just as we have the gas-to-shore but I will come to that.

In 2018, the Ministry of Climate and Environment of Norway sent a delegation to Guyana. They met with the Government of Guyana and the IDB concerning the US\$80 million that was in the fund. The Norwegian team came with the belief – as the PPP/C were shouting and telling them – that the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was the only option. The Government of Guyana presented our proposed transitional energy plan. The Norwegian team visited various locations and held discussions with stakeholders. It was a four-day visit and at the start of the third day, the team leader announced they had an epiphany. They discarded any idea of funding for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, and they fully endorsed the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change's (APNU/AFC) energy transition plan. The APNU/AFC's plan was to utilise the US\$80 million for a 30-megawatt (MW) solar farm with eight hours of storage. Despite the efforts of the PPP/C, they begged, pleaded and threatened. The Government of Norway refused to allow the money to go back towards the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. The project that is included in this Budget's document is what they are now boasting about. For the records, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was not killed by the Opposition – that is far from it – it was stillborn. It died from malnutrition. There was a lack of financial and technical substance as well as bad parenting. I have resolved this issue and demonstrated that the PPP/C is incapable of conceptualising and successfully executing any major project but is good at blaming others for their failures.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to address a few things in *Budget 2023*:

Public Works: the Hon. Minister of Public Works, in his presentation, regaled the House on the size of his budget for

miscellaneous and urban roads and made light of the money available to the then Ministry of Public Infrastructure, as opposed to what he has in the details. We, on this side of the House, readily acknowledge the huge amount of money now available based on the production agreement – the one that they criticised – signed by the APNU/AFC Government. As always, *the devil is in the details*. Mr. Speaker, let me give you some details.

The Special Projects Unit (SPU): it was the Coalition Government who established the Special Projects Unit. In 2015, when we assumed Office there was something called a Force Account Unit. It was under the direction of the Permanent Secretary (PS). It was there to provide general emergency works – patch a hole here, patch a hole there, fix a plumbing leak and repair a leaking roof. The creation of the SPU was done under the leadership of the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson. In 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, the Coalition Government purchased more than \$450 million worth of material every year; increased the staffing twofold with engineers, semi-skilled and unskilled workers; and placed it under the direction of the Work Services Group (WSG). That is what made it what it is today. Here is the crux. The Minister announced that the SPU completed several kilometres (km) of roadworks and regaled us for 2022.

Let us look at the Coalition's record which had one-fifth of this Budget. The Minister announced in 2020, they did about 300 kilometres of work – repairs. In 2021 there were 420 and in 2022 there were 520. This is the SPU, Sir. With one-fifth of the money, with one-fifth of the money, in 2017, the SPU did 410 kilometres. This is more than they did with double the money. In 2018, we did 450 kilometres of work. It is all here. Just for the record, I left this entire thing on the Minister's desk. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] No. You do not have to; it was on his desk. You can check it yourself. In 2019, we did 450 kilometres of maintenance. This is the SPU. There were less money and more work of better quality. There was excellent value for money.

The Minister boasted about the sums of money expended by the PPP/C on sea defenses. The Hon. Minister announced that since coming into Office, his Ministry completed 5.4 kilometres of new work; rehabilitated one kilometre of sea defense; and maintained 81 kilometres of sea defense. This was done to a loud applause from his Colleagues. Once again, *the devil is in the details*. Let us compare this to the APNU/AFC's Government 2017 to 2019 track record.

Without any oil money, with one-fifth of this Budget, we did 13.8 kilometres of new work; 50.3 kilometres of

rehabilitation work; and 253 kilometres of maintenance work. This is *chalk to cheese*; value for money and prudent spending – no kickbacks for the boys. For added measures, we also completed the Supenaam Waterfront Development Project. The PPP/C never had such vision. We did so much more, with so much less and to a higher standard.

I would like to move on to urban roads. It is the same thing. He regaled us with what he did. This is what the PPP/C did for urban roads with five times the Budget of the APNU/AFC. In 2020, there were 6.4 kilometres; in 2021, 3.6 kilometres; and in 2022, 18.3 kilometres. Here is what the Coalition did. In 2017, there were 20.22 kilometres and 21.1 kilometres in 2018. Of course, we fell in 2016 and we did 16.6 kilometres. In the three years, 2017 to 2019, it is all there – the Coalition Administration completed 58 kilometres of road works in urban areas. Compared to the three years of the PPP/C, with all the money it had, it only did 28.13 kilometres. How is that Minister for the lethargic and do-little state? One might be wondering, why such a lethargic approach to urban centres by the PPP/C. However, one must just look at the voting patterns in urban areas to understand why the citizens are not being served efficiently in this biggest-ever Budget.

We will go to miscellaneous roads. The Minister said that in the five years of the APNU/AFC, the Coalition only had \$8.54 billion correct, as opposed to his \$45 billion and he was triumphant. I admit that they did more than us but, as I said, *the devil is in the details*. Sir, in 2020, for miscellaneous roads, they did 80 kilometres, according to the Minister. In 2021, there were 117 kilometres and in 2022, 219 kilometres. With one-fifth of this Budget, here is what we did. In 2017, there were 32 kilometres; in 2018, 60 kilometres; and in 2019, 72 kilometres. Mr. Speaker, when you look at it, the Coalition, from 2017 to 2019 did 165 kilometres of road and that cost the people of Guyana \$46 million per kilometre. The PPP/C have done 562 kilometres at double the cost – \$92 million per kilometre. This is more than double the cost with half the quality.

11.44 a.m.

One can only wonder where the extra money is going. What makes it worse, in 2022, of the 209 kilometres of road, they said, as the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, said only 55 kilometres were actually....

Mr. Speaker: You are going to get back your time. I am hearing shouts of 'stupid' and 'are you stupid'. Those words are unparliamentary. I think the Chief Whips have to contain their people.

[Mr. Speaker hits the gavel.]

Mr. Patterson: This Ministry cannot even spend the money allocated to it and, yet, we are giving it more funds. There is money for friends, family and favourite. As I said in the 2020 Budget 'the boys are back in town'. Interestingly, one would have thought with such a great increase of money for roads in this Ministry that it would have an accompanying increase in staff. Mr. Speaker, if you look at the staffing details, the technical and the semitechnical people have bolted. It is not well; all is not well in the land of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. I think about 44 persons have bolted; they cannot work under the Ministers. That may explain why it took the Ministry eight months and a personal visit by the Minister to discover that a contractor after collecting \$22 million advance never one day turned up for work. Of course, we were not surprised to learn that the contractor is family of one of the Ministers. This Ministry should be renamed the Ministry of Friends, Family and Favourites, since every friend, family and favourite has been rewarded multibillion contracts no matter their experience.

In 2020, if a person is a race car driver no worries because you will be awarded a contract under the new ministry of friends, families and favourites. If the person was a dealer in gold and metals, there were no worries because he/she will be awarded a contract under the ministry of friends, family and favourites. In 2020, if a person was a joker on social media, there were no worries because the person will be awarded a contract under this Ministry. In 2020, if a person was a dancehall promoter, the person had no worries at all, because he/she would be awarded a contract under this Ministry. If a person's son, daughter or wife never build a road before, there were no worries, because they will be awarded a contract under the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, if time permits, I will come back here.

I want to go to the Transport and Harbours Department. The Hon. Minister, in his presentation, provided a report on the achievement of Transport and Harbours Department. He indicated that all its liabilities have been cleared. On behalf of the staff of the Transport and Harbours Department, I would like to commend the Government for their actions. However, what the Minister did not say, is that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) are clearing up the mess that they created and here are the liabilities of Transport and Harbours Department: at the end of 2012, there is a liability deficit of \$188.7 million... At the end of 2013... [Hon. Members (Opposition): *Inaudible*] It is here. Sir, they will get a copy of it if they want. \$296.3 million.

[Hon. Members (Opposition): What? What?] That was what they did. At the end of 2014, there was \$258.6 million in deficit. At the end of 2015, it was.... [An Hon. Member: *Inaudible*.] In the whole, Sir. You do not have to worry. ... \$195.4 billion in the red. It is all here. Transport and Harbours Department owed National Insurance Scheme (NIS) \$31.6 billion and the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) owed \$78.5 million. It does not end there; the Coalition Government took measures to reduce that. At the end of 2019, the arrears were under \$80 million. The extra \$390 million that the Hon. Member paid off was all down to his incompetence and all down to his mismanagement. They come and they want to be applauded for clearing up the *do do* they created.

Let us speak about dry docking of vessels because he made a statement. Under the Coalition, the MV Barima, MV Kimbia, MB Sandaka, MV Kanawan, MV Sabanto, MV Makouria, MV Lady Northcote, MV Malali and MV Parakeet were all dry docked and renovated. We even took out the MV Kimbia which was languishing for three years before we got there and put it back into operation. That is the records.

Going on, the speaker went onto talk about the Linden to Mabura road and we are pleased for the 116 persons who he said have been employed. We are pleased but their employment has absolutely nothing to do with the PPP/C. This project was executed and designed, package and financed by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Administration – locked, stocked and barreled. Even worse, when the Vice-President was the Leader of the Opposition and met with Department for International Development (DFID) in 2019, he reported to them that he will squash this project when they come to power and thankfully – like all our Norway region counterpart – the United Kingdom's Government said that if you squash it, we will take our money. That is why 116 persons....

Mr. Speaker: I will have to ask you to provide that evidence or else it is imputing.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I love the *[inaudible]* normally I will get lots of heckles. The Wismar and the Kurupukari Bridges: these designs for these bridges have been completed since 2019, public consultations held with the persons in Iwokrama, the citizens of Region 10 and Region 8 Potaro-Siparuni who give their inputs and their blessings. It has not started as yet.

Even more, the Hon. Minister was proud to announce that the PPP/C are building new offices to house 6,000 workers away from the city to ease the congestion. He did not say – nowhere in the PPP/C's Manifesto, nowhere in any document ever produced or can be produced prior to now – that this project was ever there. Where did they get this project from? It is from the Coalition. They did not have a development plan. The 2017-2025 Infrastructural Development Plan is here. They did not even change the location. They did not even have the vision at that time and it is right here. I challenge them to come and speak about it. We did this in 2016. They have the money and all they did was to pull out our programme.

Time is going, I move onto energy quickly. The Coalition presented a comprehensive... [An Hon. Member:

(Inaudible)] Yes, energy diversification blueprint and we left that in place. The PPP/C have slavishly been following this plan and are trying to take credit. All except the remodeled Gas-to-Shore project. All every single one of the energy projects have been conceptualise, designed, packaged with funding by the APNU/AFC administration. The 1.5 hydropower facility at Kumu and the 700 kilowatts (kw) rehabilitation of the Moco-Moco mentioned in the Budget, fully conceptualise, designed, funded and secured by the APNU/AFC. The 1.5 solar farm in Bartica, the 0.75 farm in Wakenaam, the solar farms in Lethem, Mahdia, Linden and Mabaruma as well as the solar panels for the hinterland community were all fully conceptualised, designed including being funded by the Coalition. The truth is, the PPP/C are visionless; they have no useful or progressive ideas but, like parasites they exist and they extract other people's visions and energies.

Ow nah.. What is the word? [An Hon. Member (Opposition): *Ow nah.*] *Ow nah.* The Coalition Administration included, I must admit, a gas-to-shore project in our energy expansion and diversification blueprint. Our proposal was the construct of 20-megawatt (mw) natural gas-powered plants connected with the Floating, Production, Storage and Offloading (FPSO) with the 12" diameter pipe also including a Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) plant. All of this for the total cost of \$700 million. Our proposal included every single aspect of the PPP/C Wales gas-to-shore project but at 25% of the cost.

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

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I think time flies when one is having fun. The same operator who would be constructing the pipeline for the PPP/C was constructing it for us. The same size of pipeline remains the same. The size of the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) plant remains the same, the only difference is the location and the PPP/C. These two factors combined has add an additional \$2 billion and counting to this project. In similar fashion, to the Amaila Falls, the PPP/C have announced when completed – the reason I went through it is to let the people know what they announced, facts verse reality – that the project will produce power at US\$0.25¢ when completed. They have excluded to mention a certain cost, which is the land acquisition cost. They did not put that down there. As always, they only use half of the equation.

The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL): Mr. Speaker, I just told you that the Capital Expenditure (CapEx) for GPL for the Amaila Falls US\$134 million. They have not included that in the computation. They have not included the cost for the redundancy. Every year the pipelines have to be down three to four days for maintenance. The country has to be kept powered. How would the country be powered? They have to include the redundancy cost but they did not throw that into the computation. Just like Amaila when they said US\$0.10¢ that is why they are throwing the US\$0.5¢. The country is no wiser on the gas-to-sale agreement with ExxonMobil. The cost associated with the operations of the LPG plant, the power plant and inland transportation of the LPG, we are going to move that around. The next necessary transmission grid upgrade, transmission lines; how are you going to get it across the Demerara River? There is no one who mentioned that. Oil Spill plans, Waste Management plans, Gas Leaks, Gas Disperse. With the limited time left with me, Sir, I quickly want to turn to oil and gas.

11.59 a.m.

[An Hon. Member (Government): (Inaudible)] I love the silence and I appreciate their adoration. Of concern to us in the Opposition is the announcement that Guyana is expected to receive 17 lifts in 2023.

In 2018, ExxonMobil presented to the Government of Guyana the cash flow analysis for Liza-1 – I restrict myself to that – which stated that the cost for the production of the Floating Production, Storage and Offloading (FPSO) and

other associated costs for Liza-1 were pegged at \$1.2 billion and, after this cost was recovered, Guyana's share of the profit oil would have been 50/50. ExxonMobil did this projection at US70¢ per barrel which would produce 120,000 barrels per day. It has now increased that by 20,000 barrels a day without even telling anyone. It is producing 140,000 barrels a day. The average price for a barrel of oil now which has a 16% increase between 2020, ... Mr. Speaker, I should mention that in this projection and which you would get so you do not need to ask, the full payback would have been at the end of 2023. ... which is more and obviously at a higher baseline than they were projected. I expected by now we would have been in the cost recovery stage of 50/50. The Government and the Minister have failed to even address that. They have not even addressed the audits. It is our contention that by now the cost for Liza Phase 1 should have been fully recovered and ExxonMobil should have fully recovered its production investment. The country by now supposed to be enjoying 50/50 profit share on profit oil. If this is not the case, as it is now, the Government should inform the House on the status of the oil recovery and cost oil for Liza Phase 1 and when are we expected to commence full equitable share on this project.

In conclusion, the Opposition will support the Government in any issue defining constitutional reform provisions which would result in a bipartisan approach to address our national challenges and opportunities. We will support the new systems of the Government which will facilitate an equitable distribution of our national patrimony. We will support any budget that does this and does not only look good on paper but could actually input and raise the standard of living of our people, in a real and tangible way. Unfortunately, *Budget 2023* falls short of these modest measures and cannot gain our support in its current format. I thank you, Sir. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: I thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Patterson. I will request to have the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. So, we are going to have the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Brindley Horatio Benn to make his contribution. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the Hon. Members. I want to first off congratulate the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, who has again exceeded all the expectations by bringing a national budget to this honourable House, which will clear the pathway for more and rapid development of our country. I want to thank his staff and all of the other

persons in the ministries, including mine, who have facilitated this Budget and its presentation.

Again, as was the last time, it is exceedingly disappointing to come and hear the presentations from the APNU/AFC, Opposition, in respect of this national Budget. Guyana is perhaps, again, at one of its most propitious moments in its development. The vision of the PPP/C in Government, based on our national motto too, and taking into account the challenges we faced over the time that the APNU/AFC were in Government and taking into account of what we need to do to carry this country forward, he speaks and we speak of *One Guyana*. We speak of *One Guyana*. We know that we will not fail in this mission and no person. In fact, I could even go biblical, that is: 'no weapon formed against us will prosper' in this mission – none. No weapon formed against us in the mission of *One Guyana* will fail.

The presentations again suggest that... [**Hon. Members (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] I do not want to say that perhaps the APNU/AFC have again lost their minds. I do not want to suggest so much so that we are getting responses from people who are suffering from schizophrenia, paranoia and jealousy. This is what their presentations have been about. I say again that these presentations on the floor of this honourable House from the APNU/AFC are disgraceful. Again, it is their standard mode of operation going along with... [**Hon. Members (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] Again, they have the young brigades parroting what they say. ...with their disgraceful attempts of stealing... [**Hon. Member (Opposition):** It is unparliamentary.] Let me say the word 'suborning'. I withdraw the word 'disgraceful'... and undermining our democracy and attempting to do things which a former Prime Minister of a country from another country who spoke of a 'sanctimonious gangster' who was the leader of that party.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I was checking for the word 'disgraceful', but I did not see it and I would not allow it. The words 'gangster' and 'criminals' are not allowed. Even if you are quoting, you cannot quote an unparliamentary word, Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand, in the House. I will stop allowing it.

Mr. Benn: Unlike others before who said they were guided, I will actually withdraw those remarks.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Benn: The facts are well known in relation to the difficulties we have had, in terms of restoring democracy to our country; restoring lawful authority, government and

governance to our country; and in preventing a situation where we would have lost proper accountability and governance of our country. Hearing the presentations here again suggest that we perhaps will never have an engagement where there would be rational presentations; where we would have a rational discussion or discourse based on facts and not alternative facts; but... [An Hon. Member: *Inaudible*] I do not want to say that word. ... on contrived truths in relation to the development of our country; the performance and intent of our Government in power now, the PPP/C; and in relation to coming together in a national mission to make our country whole, our people safe and secure, that we move deliberately and quickly on the path towards peace, prosperity and further development. I do not believe I will have enough time. I will have to take additional opportunities elsewhere to answer the load of inaccuracies and the monstrous statements which were made in relation, simply, to the development of our country, but also in relation to the overall question of governance in our country.

I do not want to spend too much time on the record of the APNU/AFC in Government. If I follow the statements made by the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, just now, I would need much more time. What I want to say, as was said before, in respect of energy and in respect of oil and gas, it was developed over a number of years by the PPP/C in government. Ms. Janet Jagan, who they excoriated and were beating dolls on the road in front of the Office of the President, signed the first agreement with ExxonMobil with ESSO Exploration and Production. I believe the Commissioner of the Guyana Geology and Mines signed that document alongside her. Now, we have all sorts of experts here on oil and gas, energy and development. When we were out there shooting [*inaudible*] the ocean and exploring the interior for oil and other minerals, we did not have any interest in it but we got all sorts of experts on the other side now. When we did all of those things, there were no interest in them. There were criticisms. When we brought a budget, the first time when the APNU/AFC I think had a majority of one, they refused to accept a national budget, national development budget. They simply stated that too many of the Hon. Members on that side of the House, the APNU/AFC Members, have a personal mission, the only mission in life, which is to not see development occur in our country.

12.14 p.m.

The Hon. Member David Patterson just spoke, and he had to vindicate all the things he undertook, not only in respect of

the signing of agreements for oil and gas along with another previous minister who was here but also in respect of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP). Norconsult supported the continued development of the AFHP. We have the documents. Hon. Member Patterson said that he would lay his own's over. We need to read them properly to understand what is being stated in those documents. The development in our country was largely interrupted under the stewardship of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) in Government. It is talking about jobs for the working class, it is talking about employment for all Guyanese all over, but some of the first things it did, along with imposing value-added tax (VAT) and other imposts on the people, was that it fired I think, 1,200 young Amerindian people. [Ms. Teixeira: 1,972.] One thousand nine hundred seventy-two young Amerindian people, community development workers all over Guyana. Our Amerindian people live the most precarious lives in Guyana. Our Amerindian people need the most resources in terms of their development. It angers and upsets me when people stand and talk here about what they do, what they intend to do, and what they should have done with respect to the Amerindian people.

What about the other people? What about protecting sugar? What about protecting rice during its term in office? The first thing it did was to knock off 7,000 sugar workers of all colours, stripes, races, ethnicities, and religions in Guyana. An export product. Each one of those persons who were fired had seven to 10 persons who they had to support in the sugar belt. [Mr. Dharamlall: 70,000 people.] Seventy thousand people were affected by the fallout onto the breadline. And here, it talks about the working class, and it talks about the Skeldon Sugar factory. It talks about sugar, an export product for Guyana, which had to do so much with the development of the country. Not to mention rice, where it promised \$9,000, \$10,000, and \$15,000 in Essequibo for a bag of paddy. It talks about buying votes. Impossible in any place. When it took over, the rice industry collapsed. Then we sold some rice, and the people could not have gotten paid for the rice. And it worries and talks about the working class and the working people and all of that. The APNU/AFC took away the cash grants from children in this country. *Tek money out the pickney dem mouth*, that is what it did. Now that we have increased it, it talks about how much more these things should go up and so on. We talk about sanctimonious.

I will tell you one more thing. I really love people. They encouraged the blocking of the river at Hururu, near Kwakwani, related to the RUSAL. It was said by Minister

Vickram Bharrat. Sir, it resulted in 700 people losing their jobs, workers in their prime, the loss of product for shipment for income to the country, and another 300 or more at New Amsterdam. It said it loves people. I do not think I need to say what race or ethnicity those people were. It talked about how it loves Region 10. By the convention of the House, Hon. Member David Patterson comes in here and excoriates against, justifies, and vindicates the positions that the APNU/AFC took on the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. It took the position, again, to denigrate the project. The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was designed to bring 165 megawatts (mw) of clean power to the first town at a port in Guyana, which was the port of Linden. It would have provided the opportunity for a reduction in the cost of power for industry in Linden. It would have provided the opportunity for us to bring back larger stripping machines into the area and also to open up a new \$1 million 200,000 tonne aluminium plant. That was what the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was ultimately intended to do, reduce power by half and bring back large industrial capacity in Linden. But Hon. Member Patterson would stand here again and excoriate the project, pull it down. It was no strange thing when the APNU/AFC was in power that the visiting committees from Norway and other places evinced that there was no Government support from the APNU/AFC for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and that the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was the precursor to a third *[inaudible]* project, which would have been bringing 950,000 mw of power into the country to reduce clean power completely.

I will not go into who built what. I know that we did the West Coast Road. I know we did the East Coast Road—it took over while it was being done. I know that the Ogle bypass project and the other places were conceptualised by us. I know that the Government of India had given us money for that bypass road project, and it was never used. I know that the money for the new and faster ferry to the Northwest District was there to be used, and it never used it. Hon. Minister Bishop Edghill stated that the ferry would come here just now, bringing relief to the people in the Northwest District and bringing back the Northwest District area to a place that will export food from the capital city to the rest of Guyana.

The Hon. Members of the APNU/AFC speak about the temporary rise in the cost of living. The Hon. Members talk about the prices of things in Bourda Market, and I would think that any challenges, any rise in prices, suggest opportunity. When people talk about bora, bhaji, bok choy, and these things, maybe it should get your people to go and plant some of these things to take advantage of the

opportunity of earning an income by reducing prices and making everyone else happy with respect to the situation. That is what will happen. I remember when it took over at Bath Settlement, it sent teams of people to count people's shallot beds and to say that it had to pay so much taxes for these shallot beds. It went into people's gardens. Some people got angry and dug up the shallot beds and threw some of them away. That is how it loves people. The former President of Guyana, in the last dispensation, went to a village on the East Coast where a young lady did fantastically well at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination and said that the place from where they mined the gold was great for them, but it is done now. There was a visible gasp in the room. It resulted in persons from Anne's Grove not going back to reengage in the fields. It resulted in persons, just after it took over, coming into the city and other places, going into people's shops, taking away people's stuff, and telling them that Granger sent them for it. They stole people's things at the markets in Robb Street and Regent Street, and it wonders about the question of collapse, the problem of youth, and the problem that we have in bringing back our society to a question where we would all be safe. **[An. Hon. Member (Opposition): (Inaudible)]** I want to remind the Hon. Member that I am a Geologist by profession, and I am legally, lawfully, and professionally required to carry a hammer.

Let us talk about public security. Hon. Member Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, in her delivery yesterday, said... **[An Hon. Member (Opposition):** Excellent delivery.] Excellent, that is why I am coming back to it. The Hon. Member said that people are being choked and robbed every second. The simplest of probabilities would mean that, as a female, Hon. Member Geeta Chandan-Edmond had been robbed 54 times in 2022—choked and robbed 54 times in 2022. **[Dr. Singh:** Numbers are not their strong point.] I am reminded that numbers are not the strong point of the APNU/AFC.

12.29 p.m.

That is the sort of stuff that it brings to this floor of the House. Of course, crime is a serious problem. Since you are raising the issue of crime, I will go to statistics. **[An. Hon. Member:** Who wants the statistics?] You do not want the statistics now? **[An Hon. Member:** You always hiding behind.] No. The statistics are ours and theirs. Robberies with violence in 2015 decreased. In 2017, it was 143. In 2022, it was 76. Burglary decreased from 177 in 2018 to 108 and break and enter and larceny reduced from 926 events to

496, almost by half. The overall decrease in the crime statistics between 2015 and 2022 is 20.6%. We have reduced overall total robberies, serious crimes, murder, and violence by an average figure of 20%. Of course, it would not have been reduced or recognised in the Opposition days because it was busy with other things.

I heard about firearm licenses. I am saying again on the floor of this House that I will review all those licenses which the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan signed off on in his period. We have always drawn the link between political activities, crime, and violence.

An Hon. Member who spoke before me on the floor here said something which would otherwise be monstrous. The Hon. Member said it is only when the People's Progressive Party/Civic in Government schools are burnt. It is a frank admission on the floor of the House. Apparently, at the political level, in our discourse in what we do, there is a rational beneficiary of the burning down of schools in this country, a rational and a logical beneficiary. It was admitted to at that podium over there this morning. It is no use coming here and expressing platitudes about the burning down of schools and the fact that thousands of school children and teachers and the other facilitators are at their wits end, particularly the Minister of Education, as to where to house the students, how to make sure they succeed at the examinations and all the other issues relating to the question of education. We could understand why we have some of these problems. It has to do with the example given by some of us in this House. If people see on *tik tok* or on videos a school teacher from St. Joseph's High School chasing people with a cutlass, we now understand why the school girls are fighting in St. Joseph's High School. We now know.

When at Mocha, people squat and take over and refuse for months to move from where development has to proceed for everyone, where they were given the offer for a house, where they were given money to relocate, and where they were given other issues to facilitate that removal, and they refused to move. When you move them when they are fighting with the police with a cutlass, ultimately, they are fired, then everyone is up in arms about the matter. Criminal behaviour is criminal behaviour. It does not matter where it comes from.

Mr. Speaker: On that note, Hon. Minister, I will strike criminal, but you will need an extension to continue.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would love my Colleague to speak for a very long time. I therefore seek additional time for him to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Benn: Given the issues I had to particularly deal with comprehensively of crime and violence, I said that it has reduced. I am saying that it has a lot to do with our support to the Guyana Police Force, with the provision of new vehicles, new training, with new efforts in respect of crime and violence, and the prevention and mitigation of that. I have said before that our approach now is a more empathetic approach that we have taken the resorts here on the floor of this Assembly to take less lethal resorts in the engagement between the police and the public. I am identifying that in respect of the Guyana Fire Service recently, and even now, we are working and bringing in, other than those which we brought in last year, seven new fire assets to fight fires, along with three modern ambulances. We are talking largely over the country that we are pursuing a programme called 'increase the peace,' coming out of the Citizens Security Strengthening Programme, which started under Mr. Clement Rohee, to increase peace in Guyana. The first place where peace has to be increased is on the floor of this honourable House.

We have had dramatic increases in the seizures of narcotics based on the work of Customs Anti Narcotic Unit (CANU). We have had more arrests done in respect of illegal lawful activities. We have had, and I have to admit, a tremendous increase in the prison population over the period by some 14 odd per cent of 2,156 presumably mostly bad people in the prisons. We are talking about putting in, with the new prison infrastructure we are building at Lusignan, a school, a health centre, and a new women's prison. We are talking about having education for them. We are talking about a release programme called 'fresh start' to enable them to move to gainful employment, re-engagement and rehabilitation with society and their families. We will do these things.

We identified again that the problems subconsciously engendered in some people's minds, with respect to lawless behaviour in not pursuing ambitious issues in personal self-development, have to do with political messaging of a negative kind. We say, and I ask before Hon. Members of the House of the APNU/AFC to separate themselves, disavow the remarks made by a certain person in New Jersey on whose stage some Members of the APNU/AFC were. It made presentations when it was said Georgetown must be burnt down if PPP/C does not come out of Office. I want the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan as a Leader remaining here, and I do not see the rest, to disavow those remarks, separate himself and his organisation. He must stand and say it here in this House. If schools are burnt and if public properties

are burnt down, whose taxes, whose moneys, whose effort over the years ... [An Hon. Member: Whose children are inconvenienced?] Whose children are inconvenienced? It is all of ours. Yes, we agree on that. Mr. Speaker, I will give way if the Hon. Member will disavow that. [Interruption] [Mr. Ramjattan: (Inaudible)] Violence and destruction of schools. You could write it for me, and I will certainly deliver it.

Mr. Speaker: With due respect to two of my long-standing Colleagues, I will allow that exchange which you did not give me a chance to say yes, or no to. It will be in the records. Thank you, Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan for that statement. Hon. Minister, you will get back your time.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, for that specific statement which is now in the *Hansard*. I want him to make sure that he maintains that posture and that attitude and that he spreads the message with those whom his organisation relates to. [Dr. Singh: All five of them.] All of them. That this message is spread.

I want to close on one particular point in terms of the overall aspect of how we develop our country and the National Assembly. Many years ago, even when the political debate protracted dangerous even, there was a shining moment when the two political leaders of Guyana – Burnham and Jagan had a tryst, a discussion, and agreement on a certain measure. That was to allow troops from a certain country to land in Guyana to be refueled and to fly to Angola and Mozambique to pursue the eventual successful fight against Apartheid – a single important and precious memory in the history of our country. It grieves me, thinking of those things that persons would stand here in this House, from APNU/AFC and say that Guyana is an apartheid state.

12.44 p.m.

Something was codified in the laws of the Boer Republics of South Africa. Something that volunteers from Cuba went to fight so that Southern Africa is free today and we assisted in the initial response to fight against the Apartheid regime in South Africa when it invaded Angola. I would like to say, when I was a little fellow, I wrote on a slate. I am sure Mr. Ramjattan and others also wrote on a slate. People who jump up and say... [Mr. Mahipaul: Hon. Member.] He is still honourable. He is even more honourable today. An apartheid state. You could *Google* it. You do not have a slate to write... You could *Google*. Go to *Wikipedia* and see what apartheid means. I am amazed that in this day and age, people who have the benefit of *Google* and who could get

instantaneous information will stand on the floor of this House and say that Guyana is an apartheid state.

It is an insult to the memory of the people who fought. It is an insult to Mandela. It is an insult to all those who fought in Southern Africa for the freedom of those countries. An insult to many of our Guyanese who supported the position to allow those troops to go. Some Guyanese even went there, and a few died. It is an insult to their memory. If the Members on the other side want to know how the battles for the liberation of Southern Africa and the release of Mandela and how the battle of Cuito Cuanavale was won, they must *Google* it. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

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

Sitting suspended at 12.47 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. Thank you, Opposition Chief Whip, for the quorum. You may be seated. We now invite the Hon. Member Mr. Sherod Duncan, to make his contribution. Hon. Member, your clock starts at 2.15 p.m. and 43 seconds.

Mr. Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to lend my voice and stand resolutely with my Colleagues of the parliamentary Opposition as we interrogate *Budget 2023*, presented by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh.

This Budget is themed, '*Improving lives today, building prosperity for tomorrow.*' The Hon. Member says that this Budget is supposed to be capturing the essence of simultaneous attention being paid to both the immediate issues and irritants of the day, as well as the longer-term investments needed to secure the wellbeing of all Guyanese people well into the future. Who knew that the Hon. Member had such jokes? Who knew?

By the time one gets to the end of the Budget, one understands why the Hon. Member Dr. Singh was so heavily medicated during the initial presentation two Mondays ago. The average Guyanese, however, is not so lucky with fast access to drugs as any visit to a health centre would inform you. Three years on, four budgets later, the shelves at the health centres are bare. I disagree with the tenor of *Budget 2023*. I disagree with the timbre of *Budget 2023*. I disagree with the economic underpinnings and the outlook of *Budget 2023*. I definitely disagree with the political philosophy of *Budget 2023*. I most definitely turn my face *like a flint*

against its moral philosophy. *Budget 2023* is hypocritical. *Budget 2023* is a contradiction. *Budget 2023* is anachronism. It is a big projects budget. We have no issue there with big projects, but the People's Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C) history with big projects is a sordid one. Forgive me if we are not backflipping on this side over big projects.

It is the accountant *par excellence*, Anand Goolsarran, who was taking us through the failed projects we have had as a nation. Incidentally, all of them belong to the PPP/C. Failed projects. The Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), US\$138 million. The Skeldon Sugar Factory, a big, failed project that started out at US\$150 million and ran up to US\$200 million. This is Anand Goolsarran writing for the *Stabroek News*. The One Laptop Per Family (OLPF), another big, failed project according to the learned accountant. Then we come to the fibre optic cable. He did not only tell us it was a failed project, but he also told us why. He said that nothing was achieved but the country is saddled with debt. Anand Goolsarran stated in the 19th April, 2022 edition of the *Stabroek News* that these projects:

“...failed completely” to deliver in terms of their objectives, outputs, outcomes and impacts, thereby “encumbering the Guyana’s public debt in the tune of US\$115.4 million, with little or nothing to show for the expenditure incurred”.

We apologise if we are not backflipping on this side over the big projects laid out in this *Budget 2022*. [Mr. Jones: *Budget 2023*.] *Budget 2023*. Thank you. It is not a good budget. One commentator stated that it is not an economist budget, it is an accountant’s budget. After hearing some of my Hon. Colleagues on the other side, one gets the impression it is only the parliamentary Opposition that has issues with an otherwise brilliant budget, as stated by the Hon. Member, Vindhya Persaud. The independent commentator posited in the 19th January, 2023 edition of the *Kaieteur News*, and I quote:

“...notwithstanding that the Budget is a one-year programme of the government, it should be informed by a larger vision of the government. It should be anchored in the government’s national development strategy and, at least, in a medium term fiscal plan. Regrettably...”

The commentator says:

“...the government does NOT have a national development strategy.”

In which to tether *Budget 2023*. Further contending, the commentator says:

“The International Monetary Fund had emphasised the importance of such a framework...”

The fiscal policy, to anchor such a budget. It is the 2022 Article IV Consultation Report of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in which the IMF had recommended that budgets are set within a medium term macro-economic framework. Further, it was the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) which offered similar advice.

“A June 2018, Policy Brief had underscored that the magnitude of the country’s oil revenues not be understated and that work should commence on a rule-based fiscal framework.”

I think what the commentator really meant is that *Budget 2023* has no soul. The Budget simply has no soul. I managed to ask an accountant his own impression of the commentator’s refrain that it is not an accountant’s budget... It is not an... [An Hon. Member (Opposition): Economist’s.] It is not an economist’s budget but rather an accountant’s budget. That accountant says that that is an insult to accountants everywhere.

The great poet William Butler Yeats wrote in his epic ballad, *The Second Coming*, much like this dispensation of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, the words right true today as they ever were:

“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world...”

These words are prophetic. As I said, as relevant as they ever were. Things fall apart because the centre cannot hold.

“Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold...”

In Guyana in 2023, things fall apart because the centre just cannot hold, and mere anarchy is loosed upon our world. The honourable accountant is finding out the hard way that throwing money at problems, does not mean that you are solving them.

In 2020, we threw \$329 billion at the problems we have and then we mopped up with a \$17.4 billion supplementary. Those were thrown at some of the problems we have as a nation. Yet, things are still falling apart because the centre just cannot hold.

In 2021, we threw \$383.1 billion at some of our issues and then a supplemental of \$21.3 billion, and another of \$26

billion, respectively. Those problems yet persist because things are still falling apart. Why? The centre just cannot hold.

In 2022, \$552.9 billion and then we topped that up with a \$44.7 billion supplemental budget followed by another \$47.3 billion and here we are. Things falling apart, at their worst in 2023. By this time, one would think the Government would understand that throwing moneys at the problems alone will not fix them, will not solve them. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, noting how persistent these issues are that bedevilled him, resorts to a new categorisation of these troubles, irritants of the day, he says because he started with them in 2020, yet they persist. He now categorises them as irritants of the day. Similarly, we have a similar categorisation for the Government – irritants of the day. The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, does not realise that things fall apart because the centre cannot hold. In Guyana, the centre is not holding. The centre is not holding. It is rotten. That is why it is not holding. It is wicked, it is stink, and it is *dutty*. That is why it is not holding.

Take housing, for instance and this issue of squatting. Take housing and this issue of squatting. If our brothers and sisters in Charity can go from squatters on that land to legal landowners, then our brothers and sisters at Cane View/Mocha, can go from squatters to landowners of that very same land but the centre in Guyana in 2023, is not holding. If Pigeon Island squatters can go from squatting to owners and ownership of their land, then the Success squatters must have the same opportunities.

2.26 p.m.

We have different strokes for different folks in Guyana because the centre is not holding. If the squatters of Uitvlugt Side-Line Dam and Tuschen Railway Embankment can receive their land titles, and the squatters of Amelia's Ward have their houses torn down, how can we say the centre is holding? After 25 years of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) in housing, it is about time for a coherent policy on housing, or things will keep falling apart and the centre will definitely not hold.

Mr. Speaker, let me detain you here for a short while on the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh's phrase, irritants of the day. Four budgets later, three years in, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh said this means ensuring decent quality community infrastructure, including community roads, and drainage and irrigation structures. We have had enough of these here today-gone-tomorrow roads. That \$100 million Burma Road was here one day and gone the next. They are still battling to

understand Carifesta Avenue. It was there one day and gone the next. Silvertown Road in Linden was there one day and gone the next. Hauraruni access road was there one day and gone the next. It is enough. It is time we stop giving these contracts to friends, families and favourites producing these here-today-gone-tomorrow roads. Let us bring back qualified contractors and get on with the job of building this nation.

Irritants of the day: crime is all about over taking us – four biggest budgets later. Criminal elements operate with impunity. Where is the crime prevention...?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been testing my patience. You used the word 'wicked'. I did not want to correct the young Chief Whip from the Opposition when he said it was not there. You will get back your time. Then, there are words, if in the Speaker's opinion... Yesterday, I do not know if you were here, I spoke about considering imputing the words 'giving contracts', that was the second one, and you just used 'criminal'. I now ask that those words be struck, and that you continue to observe the parliamentary practice.

Mr. Duncan: Mr. Speaker, crime prevention plan...

Mr. Speaker: You went back again. If I say you cannot use it, you cannot even try to explain. You do not use it.

Mr. Duncan: I withdraw the truth, Mr. Speaker. Where is the crime prevention plan that was promised in the extract of the People's Progressive Party/Civic's Manifesto, four biggest budgets later? Al Madina Supermarket, right in Kitty around the corner from where we are, was robbed twice last week. Where is the crime prevention plan? The Hon. Minister Benn seem asleep at the wheels. Where is the crime prevention plan? Choke-and-rob bandits have returned unchecked, pouncing anytime of the day, anywhere, on unsuspecting victims. Of course, Guyana seems to be characterised by the *Wild Wild West*, of people being shot under dubious circumstances by police. Cecil Sampat, Sherwin Fileen, Peter Headley, Orin Boston, are just a few of the names that come to mind.

It seems as though whenever this Administration comes back into power cocaine comes back. On 5th September, 2020, two planes found with cocaine in Region 7. On the 5th November, 2020, Belgian police seize 11.5 tons of cocaine, a shipment from Guyana. On the 21st May, 2021, a foreign aircraft with over a 100 lbs of cocaine was found in Region 6, East Berbice-Corentyne. Also, on 15th July, 2021, there was a burnt out illegal plane found in the trail of Bissaruni also suspected to be involved in narcotics. On 14th August, 2021,

a Caribbean Airlines plane was intercepted at Miami with cocaine emanating from Guyana. On 4th November, 2021, two foreign men, a Colombian and a Venezuelan, were nabbed with a small plane with cocaine. On 1st December, 2021, the law enforcement in the Netherlands intercepted more than 1100 lbs. of cocaine in a shipment that emanated from Guyana. On 20th January, 2022, Guyana flagged three containers, this one is different now, with arms and ammunition to the tune of US\$5 million in Dakar, Senegal emanating, again, from Guyana. One would get the impression that the national flag carrier is cocaine.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, 26th January, 2023, at 2.32.08 p.m. you need an extension.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. I do move that if the Hon. Member could be given 10 minutes to conclude his presentation, but it is your discretion, Sir.

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, you have five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Duncan: Thank you, gracious Speaker. People are being gunned down in the streets of the *Wild Wild West*, Guyana with impunity. Delon Josiah, just recently; Anthony Charles, just recently in Durban Street; Rondel Haynes; Peter Gonsalves; we have Delron McKenzie; Devin McLennan; Odinga Anthony Yearwood; Jildy Low; Ricardo Fagundes; Seon Landon; Ronald Umar Smith; Euclid DaSilva; Daniel Fraser; and Shanicka Ford, are just a few of the names since 2nd August, 2020, who have been gunned down. If the Hon. Minister Robson Benn is not up to the task, let us send him off to spend some time with his family for this posture of strategic patience with criminal elements cannot continue.

Mr. Speaker: I will have to do like a schoolteacher. Do you see where you went wrong? I ask that you withdraw the word.

Mr. Duncan: I withdraw it.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Duncan: Let us arrest crime now and protect our citizens. Things have fallen apart, and the centre just cannot hold. Things fall part, as I said, the centre is not holding. We learnt, very early, as students of law, the Latin phrase *audi alteram partem*. This translates into ‘hear the other side’. It takes a certain kind of maturity to meaningfully hear the other side. We do not have to agree on all points. I want to

believe that we all genuinely want the development of this country, but we disagree on how we could get there.

In 2020, the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, had a *Plan for Prosperity: Protecting Our People in a COVID-19 Environment...* Four biggest budgets later, COVID-19 needs \$2 billion now. How is that working out for us? Maybe we should listen to the other side. In 2021, economic dynamism and resilience was the aim, well 8% inflation has now eaten that up folks from 0.9% in 2020, decimating those utopian hopes. In 2022, the intent was steadfast against all challenges, resolute in building ‘One Guyana’. Today, the nation stands more divided than ever. Maybe we should listen to the other side. President Barack Obama, in his first inaugural speech in 2009, speaking to an equally divided nation said:

“...those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent...”

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am not allowing the use of that word and I ask that you continue to refrain from introducing words that we do not use in this House.

Mr. Duncan: President Barrack Obama, in his first inaugural speech in 2009, speaking to an equally divided nation stated:

“To those who cling to power through... and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.”

That unclenched fist could begin to open by simply beginning to listen to the other side. Not just the Parliamentary Opposition. As I conclude, *Stabroek News* in its editorial of 2023 notes:

“With the bountiful good news there will inevitably be cautionary tales about the way forward. The oil bonanza continues to show early features of both the Dutch Disease and the Resource Curse.

The man and woman in the street continue to be at the mercy of the market forces that have pumped up the cost of living particularly since oil production began. Increased demand in the food sector associated with the oil and gas industry has driven up prices for basic items and nothing that the government has done since its terms began has had a lasting effect on easing this burden. In the 10th instalment of the SN cost of living series in today’s

edition of the newspaper, ordinary folk have set out in excruciating detail how difficult it has become to make ends meet.”

Finally, as I conclude...

Mr. Speaker: But, *beep beep* your time is up, but I will allow you to conclude.

Mr. Duncan: Thank you very much, gracious Speaker. Ram and McRae analysis: *Focus on Budget*, National Budget 2023 is required reading, at least for anyone desirous of hearing the other side. The publication states:

“Despite the PPP/C’s Manifesto commitment to better contract administration and renegotiation, the Government is now so accommodating to the oil companies that the country’s already weak laws are completely ineffective. Indeed, the failure to increase the 2023 Budget allocation to the Environmental Protection Agency, its slothfulness on updating the 1986 laws or establishing an independent Petroleum Commission seem motivated by a desire for control and secrecy in the Government...”

Finally, the publication states:

“One feature of this Administration has been its increasing reliance on Cash Grants as a poverty cushioning measure. With the Government’s stubborn refusal to raise the national minimum wage, it seems that for some long time into the future, cash grants will be the principal tool of poverty reduction. That the world’s fastest growing economy is being sustained by one of the lowest minimum wages in the world sits uncomfortably with each other.”

Mr. Speaker, things are falling apart in this country because the centre just cannot hold. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Dharamlall]: I think speaking after Mr. Sherod Duncan, the Hon. Member, I have the privilege of saying the Opposition has just fallen apart. As I was listening to Mr. Duncan, I was contemplating what is it that I have to say during the course of this debate. I said a silent prayer. I was told just moments ago, fear not the PPP/C is here to stay. Over the last few days, we have heard quite a lot of arguments on this budget. I think that when I listen to what

has transpired on the opposite side of this House, their arguments are filled with paradoxes.

2.41 p.m.

Just now, the Hon. Member Sherod Duncan spoke out against cash grants, but at the same time was reading or quoting in support of cash grants. Many of his Comrades on the other side wanted to share the oil money out too. Then they spoke out against the Dutch Disease. So, I do not understand how to configure the context of their criticism of *Budget 2023*, but I could tell you that, this budget, a lot of hard work went into. Unfortunately, you did not want to participate in the preparation of this budget but what we have done, over thousands of hours, thousands of meetings led by His Excellency the President of Guyana, we have gone to practically every single village of this country, across every single demographic and we have gotten the support of every single person and, in some cases, some of you as well. I will tell you why in a few moments, why some of you support this budget but publicly, you are disagreeing because you do not understand the nuances of the budget. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible).] Yes, fear indeed. They fear to speak publicly against the little league values of their leader.

Mr. Speaker, when this budget was coined, we did a lot of hard work. The context of this budget, the policy framework of this budget rests solidly on a ‘One Guyana’ platform, irrespective of the pernicious language of Members of the Opposition on race baiting against poor people and their vicious attacks against Amerindian development. We are going to steadfastly work on developing this country and that is why our prayer and my prayer, especially, been guided – fear not, the PPP/C is here to stay.

Mr. Speaker, the budget encapsulates a number of things. It is pro-poor – all the way it is pro-poor. Since 1946, when we started to become an entity and take life to this point, we have always been a pro-poor organisation. Our values, our guiding principles, have always been pro-poor, so when we spend money, we spend money for poor people in villages. That is what we do. Most of this budget will be spent in villages across Guyana, including the wards of the different municipalities across this entire country. Listening intently to the criticisms of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), especially some of the regionally based Members of Parliament (MPs), saying that nothing is there for regional development. Outside of the sectoral Ministries, the 10 regions of Guyana will spend in excess of \$68 billion. More than \$33 billion will go towards

regional health, more than \$13 billion will go towards regional education, and more than \$17 billion will go towards regional agriculture. Who are the people that live in these communities? More than \$35 billion will go towards Amerindian development across the budget. Who live in these areas? They will never be able to stand and listen, but I will quote from a good friend of democracy, the Hon. Mr. Ralph Gonsalves ‘*tek yuh* licks like a man’. Of course, they will be unable to stand the truth because this is what we stand for. We stand for speaking the truth.

When this budget was designed, it was not just designed with the paradoxes of the APNU/AFC. We actually listened to people. We spent a lot of time across many hours, like I said, day and night, in treacherous circumstances in many cases, just so that we can get the values of our people in *Budget 2023*.

It is for me, as Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, I have had the honour over the last two and a half going to three years serving people across this country. A lot of these issues that are catered for, that are addressed in this budget, are issues that are alive, but the Opposition will not understand that. This is because they are never amongst people. They are never there listening to anyone because budget does not speak to personal aggrandisement. As I speak of personal aggrandisement Mr. Speaker, you know there is this famous Jamaican Reggae artiste called Popcaan and Popcaan said ‘Numbers don’t lie’. I know they are listening to me, and there are staff of the Government that sit on the other side. They claim that this budget does not help public servants, the working class and poor people. They will not tell you that the Secretary General of the Guyana Teachers Union (GTU), a non-qualified mistress, in addition to a Parliamentary stipend nearly \$250,000 a month, also earns as a non-qualified teacher an additional \$213,000 per month. They would not tell you.

There is another teacher who spoke about the development on the East Coast in the Grove-Haslington Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC). Earns again, nearly \$250,000 a month in this Parliament but, also, earns as a headmistress over \$282,000 per month at one of our nursery schools in Georgetown. Then there is another one who teaches at St. Josephs High School, earns again here, nearly \$250,000 a month and then, as a teacher at St. Josephs High School, earns \$243,000 per month, additionally. Then there is one from Linden of the famous virtual pig farm, in addition to the salary here, earns, again, over \$200,000 per month being one of the absent teachers at the Christianburg Wismar Secondary School – Hon. Minister of Education. Then there

is one from Region 1, who claims that Ministers do not go out, but we have always been out in Region 1 and we have never seen him out, Hon. Ramjattan. The President was there just a few weeks ago. A massive crowd, the biggest crowd ever in Region 1, in terms of an outreach. The MP was not there but you know what? He earns nearly \$250,000 per month here in this Parliament and an additional nearly \$233,000 per month as an absent teacher in Region 1, again, depriving the hinterland and, especially, Amerindian children. There is another one who comes from Region 6, who is the Chief School’s Welfare Officer in Region 6, earns nearly \$250,000 per month in the Parliament, and, again, they come and regal us about their views on working-class people but also earns nearly \$240,000 per month as a Member of the Regional Administration of Region 6. These are people on the other side who personally benefit. Then all of them have a duty-free that I believe many of them may have already sold for millions of dollars, more than \$10 million....

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, that is imputing, so...

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Speaker, thanks for the guidance. Also, there are others who criticise us about a friends and family budget. There are Members of Parliament, in the Opposition, when they were in Government, one of them spoke yesterday, earned more than \$80 million in Region 7 on contracts. More than \$80 million on contracts and came here and spoke about friends and family. There is another one... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*) And no school was built indeed, and, yet, he built them. Then there is another one, a very senior member of the People’s National Congress (PNC), who always comes here and says some of the most demeaning things towards the leadership of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic in Region 2. People closely associated to them, when they were running the Public Works Department of the region, earned over \$53 million in 2019. Those are the kinds of people that poor people out there must know who are in the Opposition. They are the ‘friends and family business’ with what they are doing.

Then, of course, Mr. Speaker, if you permit me, in the rumour mill of the country, there are some who have multi-million dollar United States (US) bank accounts, like Capital One Bank. I do not know... And it is purported that they have been selling a certain type of licence, a very coveted licence in this country. Then there is another one... You know, the last Government was a Government of licences because there is another one who has always been... [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] Mr. Kwame McCoy referred to them, Mr. Speaker. In whose account,

one of the biggest companies in Guyana, is reputed to have put tens, maybe hundreds of millions of dollars. They are going to speak tomorrow. I am getting under Mr. Ramjattan's skin, Hon. Member. Then they claimed, and they want to question our accountability. They want to question our good governance. We are practising good governance that is why we are in Government.

For three years between 2015 and 2018, they crushed this country; they crushed the economy of Guyana. For two years after, 2018 to 2020, they imposed themselves above the Constitution of our country and for five months, they rigged the elections. Unfortunately for them, they rigged themselves out of Government. Do you know why? Numbers do not lie. We are so happy for technology. All of these things that we are speaking about, they are recorded and the PNC, the APNU/AFC, they are globally known. They are a pariah to the people of Guyana. They are a pariah to the Caribbean. They have no credibility to come even in the Parliament to speak about good governance. We are going to work for the people of Guyana. That is a commitment of President Ali; that is a commitment written in the manifesto of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. We are going to build this country, with or without your pernicious language.

2.56 p.m.

In 2021, I went to Mocha, as they have been speaking so eloquently and fluently about Mocha Arcadia. [Mr. Ramson: Regular, do not use those kinds of words.] Yes, regularly too. When I went there, I was invited by the residents of Mocha Arcadia, and members of the Mocha Arcadia Farmer's Group. We had this meeting, and the building was jam-packed with people who spilled over to the outside. Whilst we were confabulating, I recalled that there were some projects done during the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change's (APNU/AFC) period, approximating to about US\$10 million in four villages – Mocha Arcadia, Beterverwagting (BV), Buxton and Ithaca. I have had the privilege of going to all four of those villages during the course of our Government. When I went to Mocha Arcadia, we enquired about this agricultural project. They speak about having a heart for the concerns of the people of Mocha Arcadia. They spent \$500 million dollars, and as I stand before you, Mr. Speaker, there is no evidence – absolutely no evidence – of even a single plant. [Mr. Hamilton: There was not a pak choi.] There was not a pak choi, as my colleague, Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton said. Do you know what happened? It was not the people of Mocha Arcadia who benefitted. They gave a contractor from Region 2 \$500 million to go to Mocha Arcadia to dig drains.

That is what they did. Now, they are speaking on behalf of the people of Mocha Arcadia. Do you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? Hon. Member, Ms. Flue-Bess, was in the meeting, and she did not get up to say a word to defend her regime. As a matter of fact, when I was leaving, I saw this woman with her head fully wrapped walking up and down like she was crazy.

Mr. Speaker: There are two things. I was very stern about the words, giving awards. Secondly, I think the word crazy might be unparliamentary.

Mr. Dharamlall: That is all right – mentally unsound. Then, do you know what happened? I went to BV. The Vice President, based on some complaints the residents made to him last year, sent me to BV, just beyond the mid of last year. At the Beterverwagting-Quamina Primary School we had the meeting and there were scores of people. As we were again speaking to each other and discussing the development of BV, we raised two things. Members of the public in BV raised with the Vice President this issue of them selling out the lands of the people. If it were not for the Vice President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, Dr. Jagdeo, this country would not have known that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) run Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) of BV/Triumph was selling out the lands of the people of BV. [Mr. Ramson: It was not ancestral lands then.] Yes. It was not ancestral lands then, but they had already signed agreements and collected money in their bank accounts. Thank God for Dr. Jagdeo that the people of BV were saved.

Do you know what happened too, Mr. Speaker? Another \$500 million from the last Government was put into an agricultural project in BV. Do you know what the residents said? They said, Minister, Mr. Dharamlall, tomorrow morning we want you to accompany us to BV's backdam because nothing was done. Where is the \$500 million? When you go to Ithaca it is the same thing. The Prime Minister led a delegation to Buxton, and it was the same thing. This was US\$10 million, \$2 billion. This is the real Prime Minister too, the real Brigadier, in flesh and not on cardboard. When we speak of friends and family, when we speak of good governance, when we speak of transparency and accountability and when we speak of genuine development in all villages of this country, we speak on the platform laid by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, continued by Mr. Sam Hinds, Ms. Janet Jagan, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, Mr. Donald Ramotar and now Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. This is not a stop-gap budget. This has been in the making for decades and we are going to get better next year. We are going to get bigger next year. Do

you know what is the only thing that is getting smaller? It is the Opposition to the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). That is what is getting smaller, the Opposition. I am sorry, there are two things getting smaller. The Alliance for Change (AFC) is also getting smaller. The AFC is getting smaller.

We are moving where the people would like us. This is a budget that had national consultation. This is a budget that is going to build, repair and extend 30 schools outside of Georgetown during the course of 2023. This is a budget that will extend, repair, or reconstruct more than 13 dormitories in our country. This is a budget which, outside of seven hospitals, the six regional hospitals, the maternity and paediatric national hospitals – all of international standards – will also intervene in more than 38 health facilities in the regions of our country. As I said, in addition to what the sector agencies are spending, we are spending more than \$33.5 billion on regional health. You can go to any health facility across this country – a health post, a health centre, a cottage hospital, a district hospital, a regional hospital, or the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) which is the national research facility – and we have adequate drugs and medical supplies. This is quite unlike three years ago when most of the facilities were either empty or stuck with expired drugs. Naturally, we know how those were acquired. One of the reasons they are so afraid of discussion on the Reports of the Auditor General is because a lot of financial mismanagement... [Mr. Hamilton: Irregularities.] ...and irregularities occurred during that period.

There is one of them from Region 9, an Hon. Member, who is always coming here and making some very baseless statements. I want to tell the people of Guyana, particularly the Amerindian people of Guyana, that the person, during the course of the APNU/AFC... Just in Region 9, more than \$169 million of grant support that was supposed to go to small business people and small households did not get to those people. I do not know if it stopped where that person was. I could tell you also that the records will show that a member of that person's family earned millions of dollars from that grant. This is similar to the multi-million-dollar barbershop. They like to come here and always sound important. In Number 7 Village in Berbice, when they want to come and sound important, we call them hoity toity. We will expose them. The people of this country must know that the APNU/AFC, whether by the Hon. Members, Mr. Norton or Mr. Ramjattan, would not be allowed to rewrite the history of this country. We will not allow them to rewrite the history of this country because Popcaan said that numbers do not lie. We are going to tell people every day.

They did not come here to debate the budget. You would have noticed that they were speaking glibly about everything else but the budget. This is because they know the pain that Guyanese people went through. They know how people suffered for five years and I know that people still have challenges. The Minister of Finance knows that. The Members of the Cabinet know that. The Vice President, the Prime Minister, and the President all know that. That is why so much money is going to address these concerns – concerns that affect the daily lives of people. There is nothing wrong with us giving cash grants to anyone. If something was wrong, Hon. Member, Mr. Norton, and Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, would have all refused the cash grants, but we have evidence that they all signed for them. [Mr. Ramson: This is including David Granger.] Yes, including him; they all signed for it. So, do not come here and preach about something of which you are guilty. You are collecting, and you are still coming and speaking out against it. They have done so much damage to this country. There is this disease. I do not know if the Minister of Health could configure a medication to treat this disease. It is called plausible deniability. That is how the APNU/AFC used to govern. For the problems that this country has – the things that we have to fix now, the structural damages that they caused to the national psyche, the legal system, especially in the Constitution, and the daily lives of people – this budget is addressing some of those things, but we have a far way to go to addressing all of them. We are dealing with all of these.

When Mr. Ramjattan spoke, a few days ago, about retrenching, he used a very fancy term – it is called rightsizing. For the people of Regions 6 and 5, where I come from, and for those of us who have had the honour and dignity of sharing a history with the sugar workers, Mr. Ramjattan's rightsizing means, 'knocking off' our family. They knocked off our family – 7000 persons. It hurt me because my grandparents, including my grandmother, were either shovel gangs or cane cutters. To see him look so excited to say that they were rightsizing... They were happy to say that they were 'knocking off' sugar workers. How can people countenance that kind of hypocrisy? [Dr. Singh: That is why the people rightsized them.] Exactly. The people have rightsized them. Later, they are going to come and speak about all the things that they have done.

When they spoke here over the last few days, not a single one of them could provide a shred of evidence. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, from Lovely Lass village, West Coast Berbice (WCB) spoke about what is happening in Region 5 – that 135 streets are being done there. He did not say that

for five years...The first thing they did in Region 5, in 2015, was to take away the street lights from Bath Settlement, Bush Lot, Cotton Tree and Blairmont. They took them away, but they left the ones in Hopetown, Belladrum and elsewhere. They took the ones from Bath Settlement, Bush Lot, Cotton Tree and Blairmont to Linden. That is where they took them. They are not going to come here and say that. Do you know what happened too? He spoke again about the roads in Number 7 Village, where I am from, and said that a few roads are going to be done this year. Number 7 Village is the only constituency in the Woodlands/Bel Air NDC that the People's Progressive Party/Civic won. Between 2015 and 1st August, 2020, there was not even one brick in No. Seven Village. I left that village at 10 years old, and we used to walk with our big toes sinking into the dams.

3.11 p.m.

Now these streets are being built. Do you know what he did not say? In Lovely Lass, the streets were done. He did not say that. He also said that we are building streets in Blairmont. In the year of 2019, a street of \$8.5 million...a meagre \$8.5 million was spent in Blairmont. He said we are building in Shieldstown. People of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, APNU/AFC spent just over \$5 million on the people of Shieldstown. Do you know why? It is because they vote People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C).

Mr. Speaker: To shield you from an incomplete presentation, I will have to ask someone to move an extension for you to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my honourable colleague be given more time to conclude his very informative presentation.

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

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Then, they spoke of Bath Settlement. Bath Settlement is the biggest village in West Berbice in Region 5. There are thousands of people, thousands of supporters of the People's Progressive Party/Civic and hundreds of streets, but only 10 are being done this year. Do you know what? In 2019, they spent \$14.7 million on part of a street in Bath Settlement, West Coast Berbice. And they come here and speak to us about what we are doing for 'One Guyana'. Every single village of this country has seen attention from every budget of the People's Progressive Party/Civic and since President Ali has been the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

They speak out against the employment programme, but we are employing people as a commitment. They were rightsizing people; they were knocking off people. That is their legacy so it must hurt them.

We have a lot of work to do. We have to build these regions. More moneys would be going into our Local Democratic Organs (LDOs). Every single region, this year, received more money than last year and a lot more than 2019, 2018 and the years of the APNU/AFC. This is including the line item 6211, where the chairs of the regions...As a matter of fact, Region 7 has \$60 million this year in the line item 6211 and Region 10 has \$47 million. This is much more than Regions 2, 3, 5 and almost as much as Region 6 and Region 9 which the People's Progressive Party/Civic won. They did not read the budget. I do not know how they represent people; they did not read the budget. Also, we are going to be spending a lot of money on community infrastructure because we have to build this country to take it forward. We have to remove garbage; we have to make sure that we keep the place clean. I know they do not come out and support the removal of garbage but with or without the APNU/AFC, we are going to get the place clean. We are going to clean our drains. We are going to build our roads and our communities are going to look different. Our country has to be modern. That is the type of country President Ali wants, and not a country with a cardboard president. We have a President who people touch, feel and speak to and he responds on a daily basis.

They speak about the elderly, and they speak about what they have done or what more we should do for the elderly people and for students. Again, my colleagues have already said what they have done or what they could not do or what they refused to do for the children. Imagine the children of this country...imagine old people of this country, the elderly people. In two and a half years we have increased pension by more than 60%, much more than they did in the five-year period.

Moving forward, I believe that the people of Guyana understand and know much better than what the 31 Members in the Opposition have been saying. We continue to look forward to their support. They know that they have a Government that is working for them and a Government that is always going to be there alongside them. We also have a country that has profile now. Everywhere someone wants to speak to President Ali. Mr. Hugh Todd is arranging meetings around this world. Why? It is because Guyana has an image now. We are now competing on the global stage. We could not do that three years ago. The only thing we were known

for three years ago, on the global stage, was rigged the elections. We have a democracy now and we will continue to work with our people to build this country. More tractors are going to go to the Local Democratic Organs. City Council is going to get more money, as we will do with all the Municipal Councils in the country. As a matter of fact, at the end of last year, when we were balancing the books at the City Council, Hon. Minister of Finance, \$216 million they had from this Government waiting to be spent at City Hall. We will rebuild City Hall. It is a historic structure; it is one of the landmarks of our country. They could not do it; we will do it. The things that they could not do and that they are now casting shadows on we are going to make them a reality. On behalf of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development's 17,099 staff, compared to 12,715 when APNU/AFC was in power...That is employment. Thousands of people more are employed, plus 11,000 part-time workers, and thousands more are going to be employed during the course of the next few weeks.

The vision of President Ali and the commitment of our manifesto...we are working for the people of Guyana. I want to say, once again, to the people of Guyana, fear not, the People's Progressive Party/Civic is here to stay. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister Dharamlall. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, to make her presentation.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to join my colleagues on this side of the Assembly to contribute to the \$781.9 billion 2023 Budget debate under the theme, *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*.

Before I proceed further, Mr. Speaker, kindly indulge me for a few seconds. I take pleasure in extending best and warmest wishes for 2023 to you, your family and all Members of Parliament (MPs) and their loved ones. I also wish to commend my colleagues, who came before me, for a job well done. I know those coming after me will continue the excellent performances.

It is my desire to see behavioural change and a collective relationship between the Opposition and Government Members of Parliament this year. It is time, Hon. Priya Manickchand, we get it right. Let 2023 be the year of renewal and repositioning. Let us operate with maturity. Let us exude a high degree of professionalism and impartiality. We need to remind ourselves, Hon. Manickchand, that we were all elected by the electorate to address their issues and

not to attempt to score cheap political party points. The struggle is real out there, Hon. Priya Manickchand, and it is in this House that we, as responsible representatives, ought to find common ground for bettering the lives of our people and moving Guyana forward in accordance with our motto, *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. This 'One Guyana' farce continues to divide our people and country. Let us stick with our National Motto, which has been the focus of all political parties and our citizens since Independence. Quoting from the first paragraph of the poem, *Still I Rise*, by the great civil rights activist and poet, the late Maya Angelou, this is what she had to say, Hon. Speaker:

"You may write me down in history, with your bitter, twisted lies, you may trod me in the very dirt...."

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have been stopping people from using unparliamentary words, even when quoting, and you have actually used that word twice. I think farce was the first time.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

".... bitter twisted..."

Beep...beep

"...you may trod me in the very dirt but still, like dust, I'll rise."

Well, today, I am here to participate in *Budget 2023*, after being away from this honourable House for six months due to the injustice meted out to myself and seven....

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are now imputing. The matter was taken to the Committee of Privileges, a position was adopted, and you have returned. I do not know about any injustice. What about the injustice you caused, the broken Mace right here before me? You may continue now, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: We are all here today. To God be the glory. This 2023 Budget is yet another for the enrichment of friends, families and favourites aligned to the PPP/C regime. It has absolutely nothing for the ordinary public servants, our teachers, low-income workers and other vulnerable communities. This year, I am asking whose lives did Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh have in mind to improve? Last year's budget was delusional and hopeless for the poor. It is crystal clear that only friends, family and favourites benefitted. These included huge contracts for friends, many of whom have neither the experience nor expertise for the huge contracts awarded to them. Just last week, I had the

opportunity of being on the Corentyne and I heard that barbers and vendors from the market became overnight contractors and were building roads and bridges. That is why we are having the substandard works before us...and those who benefitted from undocumented cash grants and other handouts. These beneficiaries seem set to continue, Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, on the path of building prosperities for tomorrow. In essence, those whose lives improved last year will continue to benefit to prosper tomorrow. That is the reality, Hon. Priya Manickchand.

I was anticipating seeing in *Budget 2023* how this PPP/C regime will address the 48% of our population already living in poverty, according to the World Bank report of Guyana, October, 2022. Notably, also, is the information provided by the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO's) report.

3.26 p.m.

I guess my colleagues on the opposite side of this House dealt with that particular issue where it spoke to the undernourished. This should be of concern to the regime since, from all indications, Guyana's population is catered for in the total population size. Yet, the biggest budget to date, from oil revenues made possible by the Coalition Government, is not addressing the needs of the vulnerable communities.

The 2023 Budget is heavily focused on roads. Ms. Manickchand, it is focused on bridges. Ms. Manickchand, it is focused on other infrastructures, gas-to-shore project, the new Demerara River Bridge, and the construction of hotels – we have one behind here – but it lacks input for the human and social development needs of our citizens. I do not know whether Members of the Government have read or taken note of the recent comments on this budget by right thinking Guyanese. However, I would like to draw the Hon. Members' attention to GHK Lall, and this was what he stated about *Budget 2023*: He stated that *Budget 2023* had a measly 1.7% relief for struggling workers. This was carried in the *Village Voice* on 17th January, 2023. The *Peeping Tom* also added his voice, and this is what he stated in his columns dated 18th and 19th January:

“Budget 2023 was crafted in La La Land.”

“...An accountant's rather than an economist's budget...”.

Additionally, the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), in a headline report carried by Kaieteur News, dated 21st January, 2023, stated:

“Budget 2023 does not cater to the poor, working class.”

There was a letter to the editor, dated 19th January, 2023, and this is what Mr. Norman Browne had to say:

“2023 Budget is the heist of the century.”

The budget is true PPP/C style, and it only focuses on macro and not micro. The APNU/AFC was always a ‘good life’ for all, which was achieved. The PPP/C is only about the private sector and the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. This was a text message sent to me from a very good friend of mine after the reading of *Budget 2023*. This is what another member from civil society had to say. This too was shared with me. It is 62% growth, yet the tax threshold increase only gives persons 0.5% increase in take home salary. As I stated in a letter to the editor some time ago, Guyanese should no longer be taken for granted. People read widely and they internalise things, hence the interesting comments I just shared. The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, in his introductory remarks, went down memory lane, peddling misinformation to cast aspersions on the People's National Congress (PNC) and the Coalition Government. He, however, failed to include the many atrocities and infractions that were committed on Guyanese by the PPP/C between 2010 and 2014, which include the coveting of ancestral lands at Sparendam at the East Coast Demerara (ECD).

The forensic report of 20th October, 2016 tells it all. A copy was laid in the National Assembly by yours truly during *Budget 2022*. If not all the allottees who paid below market value, there were extra judicial killings, victimisation, discrimination, flawed projects and we have heard it throughout my colleagues' presentations. With regard to the Skeldon Sugar Factory expansion project, US\$220 million was spent. What an embarrassment. With regard to the Amaila Hydropower Project – US\$840 million; the Marriott Hotel – US\$58 million; the One Laptop per Family (OLPF) programme – US\$27 million; the E-Governance fibre optic cable – \$32 million; the Speciality Hospital – US\$18 million; the ongoing troubled Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) expansion – US\$150 million; and not forgetting, the troubled Berbice Bridge where US\$ 48 million was injected. That engendered public criticisms. He also failed to mention all of the infractions committed by his regime since their illegal installation into office in 2020. No mention was made of the weaponizing of the courts, abuse of the Constitution, the famous revelations of Mr. Su Zhirong and Dr. Jagdeo.

Mr. Ramson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order, 41(6), in relation to imputing improper motive once again. I cannot have on the record that the Hon. Member said that there was an illegal installation into office.

Mr. Speaker: An illegal...

Mr. Ramson: Installation in office. I cannot have that.

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear that, but I will check the records.

Mr. Ramson: I do not want to interrupt her. I understand that she may be in a fragile state...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I will check the record.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: If it is so, I will make the proper decision. Hon. Member, you may continue, but again that particular word may have slipped me, but we will check it. Please continue.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: When you leave out the words that are unparliamentary, you will be going really, really good.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And how his regime intends to address the inhumane treatment of our brothers and sisters who were dismissed from their public service jobs and replaced with friends and family of the PPP/C.... Also included were those who had their personal properties bulldozed and demolished at Cane View, Mocha and who were removed from ancestral lands that they had occupied for over 30 years. At Paragraph 4.37 of the Budget Speech under the subhead "Sugar", there is a stated figure that:

"...Over 7,000 workers were severed..."

If one examines the budget speeches of 2022 and 2021, he or she would get varying figures. I want to set the record straight when it comes to the number of persons who were severed from the sugar industry. Yesterday, my colleague challenged the Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha to produce to the National Assembly a list detailing the 7,000 workers who were severed. For the record, may I remind and point the Members on that side of the House to the *Official Report of the 85th Sitting of the National Assembly* of Friday, 19th January, 2018? Page 5 of that record reveals that the services of 4,763 sugar workers were severed from the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). I am going to repeat that 4,763 sugar workers were severed from GuySuCo. The

disaggregated figures are as follows: 1,851 workers from Skeldon Sugar Estate, 1,181 workers from Rose Hall Sugar Estate, 1,480 from the East Demerara Sugar Estate, and 251 sugar workers from the Wales Estate. That gives us a total of total of \$4,763 persons who were severed from the sugar industry. The records are there, and I am going to lay it over.

Additionally, I, like many Guyanese, am disgusted at the repeated chorus being sung by the PPP/C of 200 new taxes being imposed on Guyanese by the Coalition. After eight years, it is yet to make public the list detailing these so-called 200 taxes. On the other hand, the Hon. Member, Mr. Alister Charlie, during his contribution to the budget on Tuesday stated:

"Increase taxes, value-added tax (VAT) on hinterland fuel and travel..."

May I encourage the Hon. Member to verify facts and not to involve himself in being immersed in other people's work? However, to dispel the misinformation provided by the Hon. Member, allow me to provide the information. It was carried in *Guyana Chronicle*, dated 31st January, 2017, and this is what the headline read:

"No VAT on air travel for hinterland residents

... gov't warns against price gouging."

I am going to lay it over so that it could be circulated to the Hon. Members. Also, the evidence is there to substantiate that, in 2018, the Coalition Government granted amnesty to delinquent taxpayers. Also, there was a reduction on the excise tax on the importation of land transportation where hinterland regions benefitted. We can find this in the Budget Speech of 2018, pages 78 through 79. The imposed 16% value-added tax (VAT) Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand, by the PPP/C in 2000, was amended to 14% by the Coalition Government. Public servants benefitted from a 77% increase in less than five years. The Coalition, without oil wealth, did far more in less than five years compared to what my fellow colleagues on the opposite side did not do in 23 years, pre-May 2015. Therefore, the Coalition Government was prudent and better managers of our nation's resources.

I now turn my attention to the housing and water sector, a sector which affects every citizen in Guyana. It is apt to remind ourselves that it is a constitutional right for affordable housing to be made available to our people.

3.41 p.m.

The provision of housing is pivotal to the achievement of larger development goals such as economic development,

social equity, and social cohesion. Therefore, the robust implementation of an excellent strategic plan on housing and land use is critical to the alleviation of poverty and improving the quality of life for our people. Since being installed into Office in August, 2020, the PPP/C Government has sought to give the impression that nothing was done in the housing sector between 2015 to July, 2020. In 2017, an assessment was done to determine the state of the housing sector. The findings were quite disturbing, since the housing programme implemented over the previous two decades focused primarily on divestment of land and development of the services and schemes. Despite the intended purpose of the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA), there was no robust strategy for the housing of low income and those at the lower end of the middle-income earners bracket. Further, what the Hon. Members who sit at the helm of this sector will not report to the nation is that the model used pre-May, 2015, was unsustainable, thus causing approximately 28,000, which is equivalent to 45% of the 63,257 lots allocated, to remain unoccupied. This was because of many factors, such as affordability issues, lack of social facilities and services, inadequate and incomplete infrastructure, proximity to economic opportunities, and the challenges associated with households accessing finances to undertake their own home ownership.

Members of the House should know that the 2011 to 2015 period, because of the model I alluded to earlier, witnessed a far lower occupancy level of approximately 18.7%. [Ms. Rodrigues: *(Inaudible)*] Listen and learn, Madam. While we constantly hear the drumming and the beating of 50,000 house lots by this PPP/C Regime, and the billions invested thus far, we are yet to see and hear of a housing vision or a housing policy. Contrast this with the Coalition Government's approach to housing. We had a plan. From 2017 to 2020 it was to avail 10,000 housing units. We also charted a new policy direction for the housing sector, premised on the following: higher density schemes which speaks to the issue of construction of town houses, apartments, *et cetera*; relocation and resettlement of persons who occupy unregulated lands; consolidation of existing housing schemes, that is to ensure that the incomplete infrastructural works, Mdm. Rodrigues, that were left pre-May, 2015... That is what we were going to do. [Mr. Ramson: Tell us what you did, Ms. Ferguson.] Mr. Speaker, I know I am getting them hot when it comes to housing. I am tickling them. Partnership with cooperative societies. [Hon. Members: *(Inaudible)*] A picture tells a thousand words. We are hearing about La Bonne Intention (LBI), that they distributed lands at La Bonne

Intention (LBI), but this is the state at LBI, a pasture at the moment.

[*The Hon. Member displayed pictures.*]

This is what ordinary people are going through – lowlands. Rather than taking the bulldozers and all the machines you took into Cane View to bulldoze people, you should have taken those very machines to LBI and to get the peoples' lands ready. Mr. Speaker, look, the cow is grazing. Look, a waste of taxpayer's money. There is no infrastructure. I was the photographer on the ground. All the pipelines are on the ground. On entering the area, I noticed six piles of wallaba posts, the lantern posts that are implanted for electricity. Up to now, the people who got their titles, who got their allocations, cannot access those lands. Do you know what is happening? Do you know where the moneys, close to \$29 billion for 2022, are being spent? The moneys are being spent on the Mandela to Eccles Road. Look what is happening there.

[*The Hon. Member displayed pictures.*]

Huge structures are going up when there are the ordinary Guyanese, the ordinary public servants, who cannot access their lands to start construction. This is a bridge in the LBI area. This area is currently under water. Another picture tells the story. At Number 75, this is what is happening, Mdm. Susan Rodrigues. All we are hearing... [Ms. Rodrigues: *(Inaudible)*] I am telling you, there is no work currently ongoing where these lands are concerned. This is what is happening.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, this is what is happening now, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. While I applaud the Government for building a few houses in the Cummings Lodge area, I did a site visit, and this is what currently exists in the Cummings Lodge area. There are no contractors on site. This is what is happening while our people are waiting for housing. The Hon. Members said that we did not do anything in the housing sector, but let me just run through quickly. They were able to inherit from us US\$34.5 million. This was to provide subsidies for core home support and home improvement subsidies. We also

had the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funding for the National Housing Strategy. That is to show that we were thinking. We were a government that really had the ordinary people at our hearts. They are saying that we never developed housing schemes across this country. It would be unfair of me not to, at least, highlight the achievements of the Coalition Government. We were able to develop 22 new housing schemes, Mdm. Susan Rodrigues. We were able to expend close to \$3 billion in electrical installations. We expended \$2.7 billion to fix the substandard works at the 1,000-housing project there in Perseverance. We upgraded roads in CH&PA schemes in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10.

I know my time is running, but I know for a fact that we did a whole lot of work in the water sector. We improved water quality and testing countrywide. The Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) negotiated and executed a smart meter plan. We replaced over 100 manholes and 100 sewage chambers across the capital city of Georgetown. And the list goes on.

I now briefly turn my attention to the high cost of living. But do you know what? I was able to examine *Budget 2023*, and in the budget, I could not find any provisions for Silica City. But Guyanese are being romanced, Guyanese are being told about this new city, Silica City. Is this Pradoville 3? I am just asking a question. The high cost of living is killing our people. For the mortgage relief ceiling, I would like to recommend to this Government... You love public servants so well; you speak so highly of them. You said that 12,000 of them will now move from the threshold. I am saying that it is time the Government find workable solutions to help our public servants access loans. If you have to call in the banks, work with them so that our people can have access. For someone who is earning \$81,000, the take home might be \$20,000. That woman cannot go to the bank with \$20,000 to access a \$20 million loan.

In concluding, the PPP/C regime must act responsibly in the use of our financial and other resources for the benefit of all Guyana. The Opposition has, throughout this week, made several brilliant recommendations which the Regime should consider and have included in the budget. Let us work together to make this \$781.9 billion Budget one that begins the positive transformation of the lives of all Guyanese. Therefore, for the reasons advanced earlier, with a heart of compassion and love, I cannot give support to the Budget in its current formation. Finally, I leave Galatians 6:7 for us to meditate on. This is what it says:

“Do not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

Simply put, what this scripture is saying to us is that if you sow evil, you will reap evil; if you sow good, you will reap good. I think you very much, Mr. Speaker. May God continue to bless us and may God continue to bless our dear land, Guyana. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Amen. Thank you, Hon. Member. And now for the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, Hon. Minister Collin Croal.

3.56 p.m.

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to stand in support of the national Budget for the fourth time in less than three years. *Budget 2023*, presented by my colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, provides this nation with a precise blueprint of the future that is to come under this PPP/C Government.

It balances infrastructural developments with modern systems for the delivery of social services that will significantly and positively impact the quality of life enjoyed by all citizens. More importantly, it puts the needs of our citizens at the centre of every project, of every social intervention and every policy. It is truly a representation of the vision of this PPP/C Government for our beloved country. If nothing else, the onset of the pandemic and the subsequent ramifications it visited to the world, taught us that in a flash everything can change. Though it took the folks on that side of the aisle five grueling months to give up the power they were stealing from the people, many lives were...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I do not think “stealing” is one of the words we will permit.

Mr. Croal: Though it took the folks across the aisle five grueling months to understand what democracy means and not to take away, in front of the eyes of our citizens, what belongs to them, that is, they expect nothing better than good governance and democracy. Many lives were lost, livelihoods were wiped out, but still, we can boast of the gains that we have made as a Government and as a people despite the odds. Our achievements are worth repeating.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson. Put on the microphone, please. Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 41(6). This is what it is saying:

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

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member just made mention that “many lives were lost.” From my interpretation, it sounds as though we on this side of the House were involved in the lives of persons, as he claims. He may need to clarify that.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. We have seen many general statements being made. In this particular instance, I cannot rule in your favour. Continue, Hon. Minister. Your time is not lost.

Mr. Croal: Our achievements are worth repeating as in just under three years, through the vision of His Excellency, Dr. Ali, and the incomparable strength in leadership of this PPP/C Government, we are chartering the course of the fastest growing economy in the world. Unlike the Opposition who, for five years, wasted hundreds of opportunities to harness the powers from the oil and gas sector to better position our people, to benefit every citizen, we have gone full steam ahead to craft, for example, a better local content policy; amended the Natural Resource Fund Act, to make managing our oil wealth more efficient; we have successfully accessed carbon finest market; became the world’s first jurisdiction scale country to be issued carbon credits from our forest; we have awarded 14,000 scholarships to students of every race and region of Guyana; and we have increased home ownership by 20,500. These achievements are only a few of the biggest gains we have made in under three years. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Stood up*)] Please sit, I am coming to you just now.

On this note, I wish to congratulate the Hon. Vice President, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, for recognising all those years ago and championing the cause for payment for our forest, so today we are reaping the benefits of his vision for the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). By 2025, Guyana will have a modern four-lane bridge across the Demerara River, an on-shore gas and natural gas plant, new more-developed roads and water networks, our skyline will be transformed with an influx of modern architecture, and the people of Guyana will benefit from better and more immediate access to social and health services. The manifesto promise of 50,000 house lots will be kept and, above all else, the people of our country will benefit from a more comfortable life. The point I wish to emphasise to this honourable House is that we on this side of the House did not just win the 2020 Elections, we are building, we are fortifying and consolidating the confidence

that the electorate has placed in us, and the evidence of our competence to guide our nation is all around to see.

The 2023 budgetary allocations for the Ministry of Housing and Water builds on the gains that the Ministry has made in 2020 and 2021. To this end, the Ministry has allocated, as I just said, over 20,500 house lots. We have established over 50 new housing areas. We have upgraded and installed infrastructure in 43 existing housing areas. The reference to 22, a few minutes ago, that is over a five-year duration, I challenge that figure while I am speaking here of under two years. We have built 827 low, moderate, high-income houses – young professionals; a further 527 are in various stages of construction. The investment cost for these houses saw an injection of \$7 billion. We have enacted the Condominium Act of 2022, which was assented to by His Excellency and the Regulations were gazetted, which now gives legal protection to the owners of the very duplexes that the previous Member just spoke about. They are now able to come to the Ministry and sign up for their titles. The duplexes that were just boasted about, none of the 80 beneficiaries could have signed for their titles. The Condominium Act, which received partial support from the Opposition, will also see an opportunity for those persons to introduce more modern methods of housing. It is long overdue, and it has brought tremendous relief to more than 40 owners, as I said.

We have also regularised many areas and we have reduced squatter settlements from 19 to 13. We have processed over 4,265 Certificates of Title and Transports. We have injected over \$50 billion into the Central Housing and Planning Authority. We have commissioned – reference was just made about a policy – and we have completed the study on the regularisation for squatter settlements. Very shortly, we will be bringing that report to the House. We brought legislation to this House for the establishment of the ‘single window’ system for development permits. This piece of legislation was highly anticipated and paves the way for a more cohesive, less bureaucratic, and a more efficient system for the submission, processing and approval, for all planning and development applications.

I want to thank the office of the Attorney General, the staff of the Central Housing and Planning Authority, especially the Planning Department and the Legal Department, and the partner agencies that are involved or affected by this activity, for the work they have done to allow us to bring this legislation. As we speak, the information technology (IT) consultants are here, in Guyana, conducting meetings with the technical staff as well as the 16 other partner agencies,

which are named in the legislation, as they are part of the application process. This legislation, in simple terms, will end the burdensome, will end the bothersome, will end the endless running around, that home builders, contractors, investors and the private sector face when seeking to construct a building. They lose valuable time and expenses from printing and reprinting, chasing after a piece-meal approach to various agencies to enquire on their approval. Shortly, we will be conducting sessions with various agencies and our partner agencies so that they can be familiar with the new process. This new system will bring more efficiency and therefore will be more effective. It will lead to greater transparency. This project is on schedule. It is expected that by the end of June we will be going live to fully launch the IT platform. The coming on stream of the 'single window' is the testimony of the vision of transformation that this Government is promoting. We are using technology to implement processes which can develop outcomes that are people-focused and cost effective. Our transformative projects are not like the D'Urban Park; our vision has four-lane highways and superhighways.

In Regions 3 and 4, we will also have construction for modern bridges across the Demerara and Corentyne Rivers; stadiums; malls; and new agro-processing, for example, in the various regions. New processing facilities in the hinterland, more airlines, modern hospitals, new schools and the very brand-new Silica City for which we have already commenced the clearing of lands for the construction of the first set of houses. Since the previous Hon. Member knows how to take a picture, I invite her now, both of us can go and I will show her that the land is being cleared as I speak.

If there ever was a time to get excited about the future of Guyana, it is now. The work of the Ministry of Housing and Water is centred on providing subsidised housing for every citizen. It has been so since the PPP/C returned to power in 1992. It is the commitment of every President of the PPP/C and every Government of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. We have not wavered from our commitment. We understand and we appreciate the citizens aspirations for home ownership. We are equally aware of the disparities that exist in the earning power. Added to this, is the cost for the land and construction. The burden of buying or building a house is not a phenomenon. The demand for housing is not new. It has increased exponentially as a result of the success stories of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government to ensure that we can fast-track home ownership and home building. It is at an all-time high, and although the times have changed we have not stopped subsidising housing. We have continued to implore and explore new ideas and new

ways. We have done this by allocating house lots at significantly reduced prices.

4.11 p.m.

We have also introduced interventions to make owning a home easier. Also, we have addressed the bugbear issue of regularising a number of old squatter settlements and resolving the issue of squatters who occupy lands that are on government reserves, whether it is to be used for sea defence, whether it is to be used for drainage, whether it is to be used for expansion of road networking or other similar national projects.

Much has been said already about the most recent issue with squatters. However, as the Minister responsible for this sector, I wish to make it clear to the citizens of our country that we are not in the business of disenfranchising citizens – we are in the business of ensuring that every citizen has an opportunity to own their own home – nor did we, in the case of Cane View, decide overnight that those squatters had to be relocated. You may recall, Mr. Speaker, in the previous budget debates right here last year, 2022, during my speech, I provided clear information on this matter – that was one year ago – in response to some photographs that were provided by the Hon. Nima Flue-Bess. She waved those during her speech. At that time, I detailed our engagement with those squatters and indicated, in very clear language, the steps that were being taken to resolve the issue. Those facts trump the story that the Hon. Members are now trying to sell. They are now trying to sell that to the public when that was one year ago. For five years this Opposition sat in Government and did nothing to assist those squatters. They did nothing to educate them about the uncertainty of their situation. In fact, may I remind this nation, it was their former Member of Parliament (MP) and the then Minister, Ms. Valerie Patterson who, while serving as the Minister within the Ministry of Communities with Responsibility for Housing, told the residents of Sophia, and I quote:

“I know we will not be able to be rid of squatting in the next five years, maybe not even in the next ten years because it is so extensive here in Guyana and it is in all the regions.”

All areas. Every community is complaining about squatting.

“It is now at the stage where even our reserves that are...”

Being identified for educational purposes and...

“...for the building of schools, health centres, police outposts are fully occupied by squatters...”

“...if people continue to squat they are going to hinder their communities from receiving necessary services...”

The quote was by the then Department of Public Information (DPI). What has changed? That was the APNU/AFC while in Government speaking about the removal of squatters from reserves. What is different with the case in Cane View? It left us to find ways to resolve the impasse with the Cane View/Mocha squatters. Quite unlike what we have done for any other area in this country, we went beyond. I have with me an entire file that time will not permit me to go through. We spent millions of dollars outlining the steps that were taken, step by step, for us to get to that point. This matter did not start overnight; it started way back in 2008. I went to the community of Cane View. I went as Minister of Housing and Water on 2nd September, 2021. The Hon. Member Flue-Bess was there. But do you know what? Because we did not utilise or engage the APNU/AFC leaders, that is why they try to cause disruption. Unlike any other area, in addition to offering compensation, in addition to offering the lands in Herstelling and Farm free of cost, in addition to processing the title immediately for their new location, all seven that refused to remove from that area, were offered by this Government, by this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, a house free of cost so they could have removed as a last-ditch effort.

I am going to expose something today that has never been said. I see the Hon. Member of the Opposition says that there was some member from the APNU/AFC that was trying to negotiate with the Minister of Housing and Water. That is far from the truth. Throughout the process, the APNU/AFC were telling the people not to move, not to relocate, not to engage. Eventually, 30 of the 35 engaged our community development and we went to that point, but we could not hold anymore. Even the night before, there is an Hon. Member from that side of the House, sitting here now, who called me late in the night and I said that it is now out of my hands because we cannot wait anymore. I said, please, we can wait until the next morning because no one was going to go and break in the middle of the night, despite the impression that has been given. I said to that Hon. Member, since I knew the team was going the next day, you have until 9.00 a.m. to ask those persons to kindly engage us at the Ministry as well as the Community Development Department. That Hon. Member called me back five minutes after and said that the Leader of the Opposition said, no, that

they are not going to tell those persons or encourage those persons to move because we can do what we need to do. I am an Hon. Member so I would not disclose who that person is.

Similarly, I need to respond... Let me deal with the other Member who so loves and thinks she is passionate about the housing sector. You cannot come here and present, and not sit and listen to your rebuttal. As late as the last day of 2022, that Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, even wrote a letter to the editor accusing this PPP/C Government of not being honest with our allocation figure. Accusing the housing Ministers of this PPP/C Government of utilising allocations that were done in their period. Let me give them some of their stories. The Hon. Member tried to take praise, but the allocation of those 20,500 house lots, it is for all classes. Members heard the statistics that were presented by the Hon. Minister Rodrigues yesterday so I will not repeat. What we did in two years, they did in five years. We delivered in keeping with our manifesto commitment. We said to the people of Guyana that it will be 50,000 in five years. For the period August to December, 2020, we delivered. In total – I will give the categories – as late as last year, 2022, over 7,000 low to moderate income lots, over 2,000 middle income lots, over 1,000 high income lots, bringing the total allocation to over 10,000.

In essence, in this short period we have allocated over 15,000 low and moderate income lots. That is the highest bracket where we have the demand for house lots and housing. That is what we responded to. The high income bracket in that 20,000 allocation was only 1,927. Do not come and preach to us here about not catering for the low income bracket and of not catering for the ordinary masses. We have the figures to prove otherwise. They have a problem with Mathematics. The Hon. Member Ferguson too. When we took over in 1992, there was no housing policy or programme. They could come here and tell us about mythical tales of structured housing plans pre-1992 then 2015 to 2020. It should be known that it was, in fact, a lacklustre plan by the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) that led to the development of over 200 squatting areas and settlements. We have managed to rein that in to about 158 areas while creating new housing developments. The Coalition, between 2015 to 2020 – I want the Hon. Member to listen – only developed three housing areas at Peters Hall, at Prospect and at Providence. The Hon. Member Ferguson boasted of those figures. We are talking about 1,258 for housing areas that they developed. In five years, the APNU/AFC allocated 7,534 lots and come here and talk about housing policy.

In two years, we have built more than 800 houses in Regions 3, 4, 6 and Region 10. The Hon. Member sought to take credit for LBI and Cummings Lodge but failed to mention that the Coalition Government did not even pursue ownership of those areas. The areas they allocated had no form of infrastructure. It is us in this PPP/C Government that is developing both the Cummings Lodge and LBI areas. As I speak, all those persons who were allocated prior to 2020 can now go to Cummings Lodge and have their land identified. All those persons for LBI, all persons that have been allocated in LBI, as a matter of fact, can now go to LBI and have their land identified. In fact, we have already signed the letters of agreement for all of those lands for LBI. Do not come and lecture us and provide false information. It is this PPP/C Government that, in 2020, immediately after being back in office, allocated \$8 billion for housing development and new infrastructure. In 2021, \$15 billion; in 2022, \$25 billion; in 2023, \$50 billion. It is, therefore, another futile attempt to graft, to misinform Guyanese. The facts are there for us to see. Therefore, we want to continue to implement new measures to assist low income applicants to own their own homes.

The very poor and vulnerable are already benefitting from Home Construction Assistant Programme which makes access to loans easier. So far, close to 200 applicants have prequalified and have accessed loans on favourable terms from our partners in the banking sector. They want to speak about beneficiaries, and they want to talk about low income, and they want to talk about the masses. This is information they need to listen to: We have already introduced the cement and steel subsidy, which is available to any new home builder, for which, to date, we have approved over 302 applicants who, in the new week, will begin to collect their vouchers for the steel and cement for the foundation to commence their home. In Region 9, we have commenced a subsidy programme in Lethem where 600 allottees will benefit from a grant of \$1 million each. They will also be offered loans at concessional rates for the additional \$2 million. Under the Adequate Housing and Urban Accessibility Programme (AHUAP), 125 core homes will be built. Likewise, over 600 subsidies for the vulnerable will also be issued.

These interventions favour any qualified applicant for a house lot. It does not favour any one community. It does not favour any one class. The demand for housing is so high, to begin building houses we have started a robust programme, and in this year, you will see our continued construction of houses because we want to ensure that it is not only about allocating lots but it is providing an opportunity for persons

to immediately have their own homes. We have houses that are under construction in various categories. We will be expending \$50 billion for new and existing areas. These include, for example, areas such as Met-en-Meerzorg in Region 3, Stewartville, Leonora, De Endragt on the East Coast, Hope on the East Coast, Nonpareil, Great Diamond on the East Bank, Block 3, 7, 11, 13 – you name it. The very Silica City that the Hon. Member is saying that we are doing a pipe dream. Burma, Region 5, Balthyock, we have already allocated.

4.26 p.m.

Shieldstown, Prospect, Palmyra which will be the new development that will be the hub for economic activity. In Region 6, there are Number 75 village and Number 76 village and even in the town of Bartica, we will be commencing the construction of the first set of houses this year.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you need to commence the extension to conclude. Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira, you have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given more time to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Croal: The acquisition of lands will continue. The laying of infrastructure for utilities, both water and electricity, will continue. The Ministry has outgrown its pace. It will commence the construction of its new head office in Houston this year. Likewise, there is the four-lane road that is under construction. By the middle of this year, commuters including the Hon. Member who lives at Eccles will be driving from Diamond all the way to Mandela on a new four-lane highway. The work has already been started. Very shortly, we will be going out for tender for the continuation from Great Diamond to come out at Craig. Likewise, in Region 3, work has started at Schoonord to Crane. By the middle of 2024 commuters in Region 3 and, likewise, those who are going to Parika, *et cetera*, will be driving on a brand new four-lane as the first phase of infrastructure for our highway's development. Similarly, we are working on an alignment for the East Coast of Demerara that will see Aubrey Barker Road continuing all the way up with a new alignment that will end in the initiative phase at

Enmore/Hope. All of these are an aid towards ensuring, as communities grow and our people have more disposable income and there is more importation of vehicles, likewise, we ease the time one spends in traffic.

In Water, we have recorded a 97% increase in access to water. Our financial targets were surpassed by 17%. Over 28,000 pensioners are receiving free water of subsidy for \$523 million. Transmission and distribution networks and mains are being extended. There are a number of new wells to be constructed. A total of 15 wells will, immediately, commence in the hinterland for over 8,000 persons. We are investing in seven wells. We have already signed the contract. Works have commenced for the construction for a total of 13 new water treatment plants, therefore, will address all those complaints on the coastland about the quality of water. We want to move that percentage from 52% to 90% by 2025.

In conclusion, I want to say to the people, the intervention and the practical work within the housing and water sectors have brought tremendous benefits to the people of this country. In closing, I want to wish to report that we have begun the infrastructure work to ensure that all those persons who were allocated lots last year will, before the end of this year, be accessing their new locations. All those persons who were allocated house lots under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government where no infrastructure work was done have now started to access their new land and have already started the loan portfolio to borrow. The very low-income bracket that the APNU/AFC is talking about has seen, for example, at the New Building Society, from 1st September to date, over \$4 billion in the low-income bracket for over 600 new persons who have been approved for low-income loans. I cannot leave without telling the citizens of this country that we are going to be constructing over 660 kilometres of new roads for those new areas that I spoke about. We will also be constructing 81 bridges and 1,620 culverts.

I want to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to the staff at the Ministry of Housing and Water; the hardworking staff who have worked day, night and tall to ensure that we clear some of the arrears and clear the backlog because nothing was done under the previous APNU/AFC Government for this sector. We are on a fast track. We are on a train to ensure that we are able to respond and provide an opportunity for the many young people who could see hope and a lining that will see them having a home to start their family, owning their own house so they could have a space and they could have a document to signal, this is my

title, this my transport and this is my land. This is the difference that we bring. At this midpoint, in term of Office, I am happy about the progress across all the sectors that we are seeing today. We have demonstrated that we have a plan for Guyana's development. We are always ready to find solutions that will improve the lives of our people. Our commitment to this is evident by the level of confidence that we have received from our people. They are not uncertain about their futures. They are supporting us on every project and every policy because they know that we will deliver on our promises and will help them realise this new *One Guyana* under the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali.

It is my absolute pleasure to support *Budget 2023* under the theme: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*, presented by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the hardworking staff of the Ministry of Finance who ensured that we are here today to have this Budget debated in a timely matter which allows us enough time to implement our projects. The people of Guyana, for the housing and water sector, could expect grander activities. The people of Guyana, in the housing and water sector, can see changes in their lives. The people of Guyana, under the housing and water sector, could see the improvement in the quality of their lives. This is what we committed to do for the people of Guyana and this is what we will deliver. Thank you, very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, the Hon. Member, Mr. Colin Croal. Now, we will have the Hon. Member, Mr. Dinesh Jaiprashad. Hon. Pandit, you may proceed.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Pleasant good afternoon, brothers and sisters. I stand to give my portion to the *Budget 2023* debate so the people of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana could be able to understand that a budget is presented for all people. What we have been observing is that there are situations since 2020 that dictate us to understand that some communities and areas are more privilege and fortunate than other.

I wish to extend happy New Year's greetings to all Hon. Members of this honourable House. I hope that in 2023 we will be able to foster cooperation and cause us to represent our Guyanese people at all levels. I wish to state that the affairs of this nation are not in the state in which we want them to be and, more so, the people of East Berbice-Corentyne are expecting more since 2022. There is much room for communication, more consultation and more

linkages between the Hon. Members of the two sides. The ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) of the Government must realise that the revenues of this nation belong to all Guyanese. It is hoped that can be taken into consideration when infrastructure work and all services are being provided to the people of the Cooperative.

I bring facts from the County of Berbice and, more so to be specific, from East Berbice-Corentyne, Region 6. There are many service agencies that are not providing services up to standard. We were hoping that *Budget 2023* will bring more to the people of this Region. The people of East Berbice-Corentyne deserve more from the *Budget 2023*. I wish to set for the record that since this Budget Debate started, the ministers and MPs from the Government have been repeating the 7,000, the 7,000, the 7,000. I want to recall and I want to set for the records that we must not be bias in our deliberations and we must acknowledge the fact that from 2015 to 2020, indeed, we had a lot of growth and development. It seems as though the 7,000 sugar workers' story was the only story that came speaker after speaker, from Hon. Members of the opposite side.

I wish to recall that as a child growing in the East Berbice-Corentyne, I went to the New Amsterdam Passport Office and got my first passport. Then, when the Government changed, in 1992, that Office was closed. For 23 years, the people had to travel to Georgetown to get a passport. These are the facts that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) must bring out as well. It was in Government. It closed the passport office in New Amsterdam. The APNU/AFC came to Government in 2015 and a passport office was built for the people of Berbice. We were hoping that from the 2023 Budget, a passport office will be built for Region 5 and all the other regions in this country. This is so that it is not centralised and that people do not have to travel to Georgetown. All Berbicians require the services.

We must not come to this honourable House and state that from 2020 to 2023 the PPP/C is doing this and that, we need to get the facts right. I wish to state that a team of ministers, MPs and parliamentary staff went to visit some health facilities in Region 6. To begin with, the model health centre for this country comes from Port Mourant. It is not the Government alone initiative, it is the people as well as the Government that established this health centre that is second to none in Guyana. We are very much pleased with what was happening there. Then, we went to the Fort Canje National Psychiatric Hospital. It was brought to the attention of the team that the sewage system there was overflowing. It was brought to the attention of the Hon. Members Dr. Mahadeo

and Dr. Vidhya. To date, more than six months, that is not fixed. When we come here and try to paint a different quote of what really is happening, we need to get the facts right.

For health in the region, the people of East Bank Berbice were suffering for 23 years without health facilities. The Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, would know that once a week a team would go down to the East Bank.

4.41 p.m.

Coming of the APNU/AFC to Government 2015–2020, a new health facility – health centre – was commissioned on the East Bank Berbice.

The dilapidated buildings of Central Police Station, Albion Police Station and Whim Police Station – all these buildings – were in a very bad shape. No work was done for 23 years. Thanks to the leadership of the APNU/AFC the Central Police Station was constructed, which is a new police station in New Amsterdam. Albion Police Station – brand new. [Mr. Ramson: New brand.] Or new brand which ever one wants to say. Springlands, Number 51, and Flatbush we come here to say, nothing was done under the APNU/AFC.

We know that it is not in the PPP/C's Manifesto to provide free transportation for our children and 23 years our schoolchildren had to pay public transportation. The parents had to bear the cost. The APNU/AFC came on board in 2015 and started to provide free transportation for Region 6. There are a lot of comments about the quality of the buses, the made of the buses and the age of the buses, but these are free buses. We did not put our hands in our pockets and buy them. These are donations that came to the people. They were providing a huge service to the poor people of Region 6. Yes. We agree that they had machinal issues and maintenance costs. [Mr. Datadin: They never used to work.] Who said that? They always used to work man. I am in Region 6. You are not living there in Region 6. I know.

The PPP/C came into Office and because the buses marked 'David G' at the top that was removed. We do not have a problem with that. We do not have a problem if you want to change the colour as well. What we want is that you increase and expand that service. We see now that the PPP/C is falling to it and they are expanding that service, because of the pressure of the people of East Berbice-Corentyne. It is a good cause. I will commend the PPP/C for purchasing new buses with the oil money. I want to commend the PPP/C for purchasing new buses with the taxpayers' money. This is a service for the people. Services to the people of Orealla,

Baracara; land and registry building at Bryman's; Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) office at Whim; Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) building, New Amsterdam...
[Mr. Mustapha: How many people from your area does catch the bus?] A lot from Broom Field would catch the bus though, where the Hon. Minister is from.

When we come here and talk about the APNU/AFC did not do anything for 2015–2020, we must remind ourselves about the piracy situation that we had in the Corentyne. Who worked and reduced that? It was the APNU/AFC. Thanks to the Hon. Former Minister, Mr. Ramjattan. That was just to name a few, basically, to highlight for the records that indeed the APNU/AFC delivered services to the people and, if given the opportunity, would have expanded on same.

Mr. Speaker: I would give you the opportunity to get five minutes, Hon. Member, with an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As it relates to education, we know that the services of the buses are very much important. The regional administration withdrew 60-seater and replaced it with 30-seater. We know that the Mathematics is a bit difficult but we want to say to the honourable House, if you are pulling out a 60-seater, then you must replace it with two 30-seaters or two 60-seater, so that we will be able to ensure that the children get to go to school. The 30 children who have been discriminated against now, when we come here and say that we are giving – \$35,000 plus \$5,000 – \$40,000 to them, let us do the mathematics. A child travelling from Skeldon to New Amsterdam pays about \$2,000 per day, which is \$10,000 per week and that is \$390,000 per academic year. You are giving them \$40,000 to say *hay tek dat*. I am asking here as representative of East Berbice-Corentyne, let us have two 60-seater buses travelling and transporting our children from Skeldon to New Amsterdam. Then, we will support the Budget.

We have introduced nursery education since the 1970s...
[A Government Member: We?] Yes, we, the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R), not you. ... and to date, we have not put efforts to make it compulsory. I am asking the Hon. Members from both sides to ensure that we put

systems in place so that nursery education becomes compulsory. That is one.

Two, we are still operating with an ancient law as it relates to the Education Act. I am proposing that... The current Education Act holds it at 14 years nine months, which ends compulsory education. From that time – 14 years, nine months – it causes our children to drop out of school. I am pleading with the Hon. Minister and Members of this honourable House that we need to dialogue so that we could be able to amend the 39:01 to cause our children to be in school until the age of 16, so that they could have a proper secondary education. There is a gap between grade six results achievement and grade 11, which is Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). The number of children who are graduating from primary schools are not matching to the numbers graduating from secondary schools. We are seeing that there is a gap. Our children are falling through the crack, which is why we need to ensure that proper policies are put in place so that we could be able to ensure that our children have the proper education.

In closing, I want to bring a very sensitive issue to the House. A child in Black Push Polder who was born handicap is on the public assistance list. When the \$100,000 was sharing that child did not receive it. I made representation to the relevant authorities and up-to-today... I am saying Hon. Members of this House, we need to ensure that the services of the people are given to them. I tried to raise it, I raised it with the Hon. Minister, supplied pictures and all the information, but it is... I am saying to all of us, let us ensure that we... good.

Finally, there are a lot of talks about the Guyana Technical Training College at Port Mourant that is to be built for hospitality training and all training for the Co-operative Republic. I want to say for the record that it is proven that works are being done on this spot which is an old cemetery and our slaved and indentured servants were buried there. We are appealing to the relevant authority to ensure that this cease immediately, because we cannot permit the PPP/C or any Administration to dig up a cemetery and say that is development work. These are the ancestors from the community. The first set of people who went there at Bound Yard were buried there. It is indicating to us that proper assessment was not done by the Government to ensure that a proper piece of land is being done. As it stands, if the Budget remains as it is, then I am having difficulty supporting same. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. The next Member is the Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the Hon. Member, Mr. Anand Persaud.

Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Persaud]: Mr. Speaker, pleasant afternoon to you and the Hon. Members of this House. If that is the level of representation from Mr. Jaiprashad, the Hon. Member, in Region 6, APNU/AFC you are in serious problems – serious problems and I do not mean to really hit you hard this afternoon. Just to let you know that you will see a slew of developmental works that will transform Region 6 this year 2023 from this year's 2023 Budget. Sometimes we must be truthful to ourselves and do not bring to this honourable House untruths.

I rise today to make my presentation to the debate on this years' Budget which was presented in this National Assembly by my Colleague, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, under the theme: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. From the outset, let me thank the Hon. Minister and his competent staff at the Ministry of Finance for their hard work and dedication towards ensuring that the process and delivery of the Budget was smooth and successful. The *Budget 2023* comes at a time when Guyana is finally standing strong and firm on its two feet as truly democratic and law-abiding nation after years of hardships and political unrest brought on by the APNU/AFC Administration. Of course, endured by the ordinary folk as a result of the policies, plans, greed, vileness and political pettiness of the APNU/AFC in this House and outside. The *Budget 2023* also comes to this August House, when Guyana is still reeling from the consequences of the 2020 elections which was almost snatched by Members of that side of the House from the Guyanese people. We have a Presidential Commission of Inquiry going on at this time into the conduct of those elections. We will have the truth and justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done in the courts too where there are a barrage of charges facing Members of this honourable House from the APNU/AFC's side.

4.56 p.m.

Guyanese and the world will never forget what the APNU/AFC Politicians and Parliamentarians did to Guyana by taking it to its knees and making it hang its head in humiliation. Mr. Speaker, it was a dastardly and mischievous act trying to disregard the democratic process and steal a

whole election from the Guyanese people. It was a watershed moment...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please proceed on your Point of Order.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Point of order 40. I am looking at Clarification, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: On 40(4), I think it is.

Ms. Ferguson: At 40... 41 (4), no Sir.

Mr. Speaker: The particular Standing Order that you are going to stand on will require the honourable person on the floor to cede time to you to give clarification and I will have to ask the speaker on the floor, if he would cede to you. Hon. Minister?

Mr. Persaud: No, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker because the matter concerning the elections is *sub judice* and it ought not to be mentioned in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Persaud: ...when Guyana swore in its first rightful Head of State and President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and his Cabinet defeating the dictatorship and autocratic style the – APNU/AFC – Regime displacing them and sending them packing. They were defeated then, and I am confident that they will be defeated at the end of this debate and consideration of the estimates. My honourable friends in the Opposition, you will be defeated again at the upcoming Local Government polls because God does not like ugliness and there is nothing beautiful about being engaged in telling a different story or giving the public alternative facts and deliberately peddling misinformation. We, on this side of the House, will work hard at night and day as we are doing to ensure that the riggers and the Opposition Parliamentarians warm those seats for an extremely long, long time. Guyana was held hostage by the APNU/AFC political culprits. I say never will they get close to power again. Before I get into the meat of my presentation today, I wish to state that this Budget is well balanced, pro-poor and pro-development. It is for the working-class population. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FITUG) and the Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) have sent their commendations of the PPP/C 2023 Budget. They have lauded the Government's prudent management of the

economy as well as the measures included in this year's Budget.

I believe the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), Guyana Teachers Union (GTU) and Guyana Labour Union (GLU) cannot bring themselves to grips with the resounding allocations that were contained in the medic salary adjustments in the disposable income of the many Guyanese. They will criticise the Budget by saying that the worker should get more, well we also on this side of the House believe the workers deserve more. Even the public servants, in particular, they deserve more. Each measure in the Budget is realistic and practical. The PPP/C took all the measures and vast development that each and every worker would benefit from and the PPP/C Government is 100% convinced that it did the right thing by offering the workers what we cannot afford. In any event, it is not the cost of living and inflation that workers are facing, but the unions will not put politics aside when they are ready to negotiate with the PPP/C Government. Negotiations must be based on evidence and facts and not by mere emotions. They continue to give the workers union a bad name. Why were they not complaining when the APNU/AFC Administration did not honour the collective bargain agreement process and imposed wages on poor working-class workers from 2015 to 2019?

It is the private sector who drives the engine of growth in any society. I have statements of the Budget being well received by the Georgetown Chambers of Commerce, the Berbice Chambers of Commerce and Development Agency, the Essequibo Chamber of Commerce, the Guyana Private Sector Commission and the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association, among others. If you want the evidence, Mr. Speaker, I have them here. It is for the ordinary Guyanese quoting from a news piece done by *News Source Guyana* aired on *Facebook* on 22nd January, 2023, where they interviewed persons about the Budget, one:

“vendor, a 36-year-old Manesseh Primo also applauded the Government and the measures and projects proposed in the budget.”

She said that the Budget in her opinion is good because the pensioners, schoolchildren and all the people get something. She is not alone. Many people who are right-thinking Guyanese have said that there is something for everyone in this year's 2023 Budget. Why is the Opposition saying that they were left out of the consultation process? They choose to be left out. The Hon. Member, Mr. Norton, was busy fighting with the PNC/R, Mr. Granger, Ms. Geeta Chandan-

Edmond and Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon fraction to keep his job. He did not have the time but now he comes to this National Assembly to cry foul. I want to stop and ask the Senior Minister if he received any written or oral submissions from any of the APNU/AFC Parliamentarians on this Budget. I am pretty sure, I will receive a resounding no.

I do not trust the APNU/AFC Opposition; something is amidst. Just like how the APNU/AFC suffered about of selective retention or had forgotten the US\$18 million signing bonus. When we found it, they came and said they were sorry. This 2023 Budget, we can truly be proud of. It will definitely propel this country's growth and development to greater heights. It is historic because it is the largest budget that has ever been presented in this National Assembly. This, the fourth Budget in three years, is \$781.9 billion of plans and policies that can only benefit the hardworking people of this country. Let us look at some of the plans and measures which will put more money and dollars directly into the pockets and hands of people.

We will establish a regional food hub to further our aim in achieving and advancing food security. There is also the use of science, research and technology in agriculture to advance the innovation capabilities in this respect. Hinterland agriculture will also be boosted. All of this will be accomplished with the \$2 billion project for 2023. The sum of \$4 billion is for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) to further the revitalisation of the industry. A sum of \$300 million will be injected in the industry to further research and development. The sum of \$353 million is budgeted for high-volume crops, spices, citrus and fruits production.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have to tell you but I will. The APNU/AFC paid no attention whatsoever to the sugar industry and allowed agricultural areas to deteriorate and the workers had to fend for themselves. They did not support the growth and buoyancy of the sugar and rice sectors. Do I have to remind you, Mr. Speaker, of what they did to sugar? They disrupted the whole industry that was sorting itself out and finding its feet in challenging circumstances. We will never neglect the sugar industry and its workers. Now, they want to put their failures and wrongdoings at our feet. Agro-processing, coconuts, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture, corn and soybean all this year are getting major injections of funds in *Budget 2023*, which will aid in the growth and development.

A total of \$84.9 billion is budgeted for health sector improvements this year, in a Budget with one billion going towards to retrofit and upgrade health centres and health posts across the country. This is significant because of what APNU/AFC did to our health sectors and hospitals when they were in power. They left them starved with resources and they barely surviving. Need to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that they stored drugs and pharmaceuticals in a two-storey house on Sussex Street. A sum of \$500 million is allocated towards training for medical and health sector professionals. This Budget is beneficial to our people and it is development driven. We are thinking about the future and beyond, not only today.

I now turn to education. We are policy-driven and work oriented, which is why our children are outperforming the regions and that is why are achieving literacy and numeracy. Similarly, there is an increase in the Because We Care cash grant, which would move from \$30,000 to \$40,000 and would benefit more than \$214,000 children across this country.

A sum of \$4.7 billion is budgeted for Amerindian development programmes and activities keeping our commitment to make the first people a priority. A sum of \$2.7 billion is allocated to the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) with another \$5 billion going to repair the hinterland roads.

5.11 p.m.

This is what a government that cares does for its people. This is not like the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), which had one and a half Ministers who were not in sync with the priorities of the people. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) will serve all the needs of our Amerindian brothers and sisters.

There is \$5.6 billion that will be spent on public security to keep our country safe and secure. This is a realistic Budget. This is a Budget that makes sense. This Budget is all about putting our people first. *Budget 2023* features increases in disposal income, of which \$3 billion will be spent on salary adjustments to benefit \$14,000 healthcare and Disciplined Service employees. This is more money in the pockets of our people. Additionally, workers will benefit this year from an increase in the income tax threshold – from \$75,000 to \$85,000. After all, this increase may look trivial and small, but it has a big impact on the workers who will benefit from them. It is small but powerful. This is how the PPP/C proposes to tackle poverty and income disparity by making deliberate and policy-driven interjections of financial

resources in the sectors that matter. I listened throughout this debate, and what I found is that the Hon. Members of the Opposition pick, choose and try to elaborate to fool the Guyanese people. Let me assure you that *Budget 2023* is not about picking and choosing. It is not a buffet like what takes place downstairs. This is a Budget to transform this country. This Budget is about compassion, love, and understanding. Let them talk about how this Budget is not addressing the poverty situation in Guyana. I dare them to do so.

It is now time to turn my attention to my sector. In 2020, the Local Government system that myself and my Colleague, Minister Mr. Dharamlall, inherited from the APNU/AFC Administration was in chaos and shambles. It suffered from the bout of lethargic energy practised by some Local Democratic Organs (LDO). Our Government has been able to revitalise and streamline this sector focusing on putting back in place a robust, Local Government architecture and systems to support more sustainable communities. I now turn to the Hon. Mr. Mahipaul who came to this House with half-baked, inaccurate, and misleading stories of what happened in this sector. I do not want to say that the Hon. Member was lying through his teeth. So, I will say that he has become a stranger to the truth. The PPP/C Government has a zero-tolerance approach to skulduggery, corruption, malpractice, and illegality. If one is doing what one is supposed to do, then one does not have to be fearful or intimidated by my Colleague or me. We are not like the Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul and the APNU/AFC Cabals, who smiled and were in bed with illegalities. No, we will continue to aggressively target the work of the Ministry.

Perhaps if the University of Guyana Students' Society (UGSS) had been harder with Mr. Mahipaul, the Hon. Member would not have misappropriated an excess of \$800,000, and that is a fact. That is a fact. As for the Mayor of Georgetown, who was using the vendors and fanning the flames of racial and ethnic insecurities in front of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC)...Local Government Election is budgeted for this year. This election will see the Local Government systems finally breathing. The PPP/C Government will win, and it will win handsomely. The APNU/AFC cabal should stop exciting the people with those tales and stories of perceived discrimination and racism. It should do what is good and wholesome. Stop its negativity and political opportunism.

The Local Government and Regional Development sector has indeed grown in the past year. We are now prudently managing our affairs by promoting democracy and governance at the local and regional levels. We at the

Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, are not interested in the many scandals of the Opposition's Members of Parliament (MPs) or the telephone recording in which the Hon. Mr. Mahipaul and Mr. Forde seem to be plotting to overthrow the Hon. Member Mr. Norton. Do you recall the blank cheque fiasco? Those allegations or the story behind the blank cheques were revealed in that conversation. We are interested in the improvement of our roads, bridges, and health centres within the framework of our Local Government structure.

Budget 2023 was crafted and is based on the underlying principle of infrastructural development which is a key factor in stimulating growth and enhancing the quality of life for our people. I wish not to lament any longer with the Opposition Parliamentarians, as old habits die hard. So, it will continue to tell tales and concoct things about Guyana and the PPP/C. It will continue to ride the dirty politics bandwagon instead of practising the politics of development. It will serve to criticise everything in the Budget but will offer no suggestions or recommendations for positive economic growth. Every time it gives the public, alternative facts, the PPP/C Government will set the record straight. We will fix all the falsities just as we have to fix the country's woes with prudent, economic, and fiscal management. We are committed as a Government to the idea of having safer communities and building them back to the point that they will be stronger than before.

We will ensure that Guyana has the local and regional governance structures that will work, thereby creating a *One Guyana*. This *Budget 2023*, as the locals put it, is bad for days. Inherent in this Budget are the wins of prosperity. I wish to now commend this Budget to the National Assembly for a safe passage. Thank you. [Applause]

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj, Presiding Member, assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to give my contribution to *Budget 2023* – not my support. I would have been that man at the corner there. I am quoting now from the *Budget 2023* document that was circulated in this National Assembly. It stated that *Budget 2023* comes at approximately the mid-point of the PPP/C's current term in Office. It, therefore, presents a timely opportunity both to look back at – I am doing like the previous speaker now – the first half of this term and, even more importantly, look ahead at what is yet to come.

We have seen the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) enchanted with promises for all revenues to be spent wisely and scant regard for whether that spending has actually resulted in progress. This is the end of the quote from the Hon. Dr. Singh's presentation. I tried to emulate the speaker before me. They built roads at frantic paces, but the moment the roads are laid down, they began to crack and crumble. It throws billions of dollars at education but achieve lower pass rates in the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Mathematics – of course – than what the Coalition did with far less money. Huge sums are allocated for healthcare each year but has Guyana's life expectancy improved substantially? The answer is no. The PPP/C believes in output – spending – but has little interest in outcomes. These concerns barely scratch the surface, but I will turn my attention now to the major issue of the day – the cost of living.

It is the worst that we have seen in 40 years. Guyana's hinterland region still suffers the most when prices soar. The transportation cost for bringing goods into the region rose by 20%. Can you imagine that a 12-ounce bottle of water on the coast here which costs \$100 – it is a bottle not even as big as this – will cost \$500 in some parts of the region? When it comes to essentials, can you imagine that cooking gas costs three times as much as that on the coast? In fact, I spoke recently with a resident who lamented that gasoline now costs \$2,500 per gallon. Filling a car will cost a shocking \$40,000. It is no wonder the mining industry has suffered so much that the output contracted by 2.5% last year.

5.26 p.m.

Of course, despite the poor performance, can you believe that gold prices are increasing by over \$3,000 per ounce and \$300,000 per ounce in 2022? If the Government had implemented the Opposition's recommendation on the fuel cap, it would have safely guaranteed that we would get more gold production. What a tragedy. I want to remind this House that the Government of Guyana earns approximately \$60 billion of unexpected oil revenue from the same high oil prices, and that also could have assisted in depressing the price of gasoline.

Region 8 has been hit by a contraction in one of the primary industries and the painful effects on food prices because of higher fuel prices are having a strain on ordinary citizens. No wonder the price of a bread transported into Region 8 costs \$1,000. This budget comes at a time when the country can boast of how fast its economy is growing; however, despite all these resources, it cannot improve the lives of the

ordinary citizens of the region. The PPP/C never talks about inequality because it likes that. It believes in its elite friends, families, and favourites; therefore, if you want to doubt that, come to Region 8.

The PPP/C likes to say that it is a fair party, but I have good news for you, one which does not discriminate in awarding contracts licences. Mr. Speaker, you could go there, and you will find it. Other Government assets are distributed by that so call, should I say the word, or should I skip it? ‘Beep beep’ Vice President, and you know this ‘Su’ friend thing? He gets all the support. Who gets all the support? We are still to hear what law empowers a Vice President to provide any form of Government assistance on the basis of friendship. Most Guyanese are not Mr. Jadgeo’s the Vice-President’s personal friend. Does this mean that because we are not or those people are not the friends of the Vice-President, they should not get support? Nowhere is this attitude more prevalent than in Region 8 which is being treated as it belongs to the family and friends of the elite PPP/C supporters, and I can vouch for that. I must stress PPP/C elites because the average person who gets a contract there or who gets a place to stay are members of that elite group. For example, a certain board member uses that authority to guarantee contracts in a certain direction and job opportunities at a certain location. I can talk about that because I once sat on that board. All the benefits they get, but they give back nothing to the community. Is that the sort of tomorrow we want to build? This sort of prosperity?

Moreover, according to our colleague, in this year’s Budget, if we are to divide a total sum, that is, that budget figure that was given to us last week Monday by the population of the country, every citizen can at least get \$1 million. My sympathy goes out to the families in the more remote of remote areas of Region 8. Those families have not felt the impact of the relief on tax measures in the year 2020, nor was it felt in the year 2021, and also in the year 2022, and now we are getting another Budget, and it will not impact them. Where I am living, there are people around there, and they are people in more remote parts of that community where they only, I am talking about Campbelltown, the mountains, go to the creeks to get their supply of fresh water. So, I cannot see how this tax relief on the water will benefit them.

In the region, we do not build buildings like these that would require steel, yet we are expected to benefit from steel for building homes under construction. It is a far cry. When it comes to Public Works, and I am glad and happy I am seeing the Hon. Member, the one and only... Could you recall last

year Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member recalled a contract for a road because he spent the total contract volume. He paid for a whole road but could only get half of the road. Up to this day, the road is still not fixed. During the three years before the no confidence motion, in Mahdia, \$1.8 million was invested in internal roads. The Hon. Member could attest to the fact that he walked on those roads, which have gutters, and the other one that is incomplete has no gutter and further. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I said internal roads, Mr. Kwame McCoy, Hon. Member – \$1.8 billion. In that process, some wooden bridges were converted to a concrete bridge. The one from Wrong Turn to the airstrip is still to be completed, and moneys were paid.

In fact, when it comes to the lapidary in Monkey Mountain, a major economic venture for indigenous peoples, we are very concerned about the state of affairs of that investment. Similarly, the Coalition remedied the massive and very costly Kato Secondary School after the PPP/C incomplete it. The building was unsafe and could not have been occupied. Kato was a national embarrassment, and we fear there might be others that the PPP/C would reproduce this year. Let us see the Christ Church Secondary.... [**An Hon.**

Member: (*Inaudible*)] I do not use state funds to move around Mdm. Hon. Minister. This contrasts with the advances we brought in the region, like introducing access to potable water, which was done at Paramakatoi. A water catchment was constructed, and equipment was installed, but as usual, the PPP/C Comrades of this House and the install Regime oversaw the collapse of that facility. Sad.

What has happened to the sun-dried tomato project in the Pakaraimas (PK)? This created self-employment for farmers and further employment for processors. It was a landmark project which brought in revenues for the village. We believe in growing businesses and business opportunities where we see products that have great potential. The PPP/C only believes in crony capitalism, where nothing innovative is ever developed. Last year, a very distinguished member of this House publicly stated that the Government paid for a whole road, and I alluded that earlier, he is sitting right there, the Hon. Member. Our roads are unbearable, and I can attest to the fact sometime back, I was going into Mango Landing, and before I could get there, I had to assist in pulling a truck from a hole. Our roads are unbearable.

Presiding Member: Hon. Member before you continue to tell us about these roads, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Sinclair: When it comes to the Region 8 education system, that is going to get a flogging. The Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship programme needs to be revamped so as to ensure that recipients can get a gadget and the necessary data so they would not fall off the programme. We need more than just the hubs in the schools; we need them in the villages, and we need them now. We have the resources. Between the years of 2015 to 2020, teachers were given gadgets to deliver education; therefore, I am asking that our students be given the gadgets with the necessary data so they can do their School Based Assessments (SBAs) and what have you and do their research in their homes. Some members of this House may recall that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) commenced the 5 B Programme, a programme that was terminated under the PPP/C. What we are saying is, because of that 'Because We Care' programme should have complimented that.

Mining and logging bring a lot of revenue to this country; therefore, the only tertiary institution we have here is the teachers training college. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Never mind, but what you need is more than that. We need to get a tertiary institution for the training of our young people in the technical skills because all the boys and girls, if they need to get a technical education, they have to come to either Linden, Georgetown, or New Amsterdam. Can we not have it in the region? We have the money.

Another issue and I will say a little more on this, is teacher accommodation. I was a part of the teaching community, and I can safely say that family members have to stay in a room, in a two-room apartment, where you are not comfortable and cannot perform. We have the money, and therefore, we have to build comfortable accommodations for our teachers so they can deliver for the people in the region, not only teachers. People from the health sector have to live in the teacher's quarters. It is not fair. [**An Hon.**

Member: (*Inaudible*)] Well, I am coming to that, APNU/AFC had built a station by the airstrip, but you did not continue with that to make the police lives comfortable; instead, you abandoned that and built a fresh station in Mahdia. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Hon. Minister Robeson Benn provide proper accommodation for our policemen so they would not collect gifts. Please, Mr. Speaker, I need to give these recommendations very quickly. We need to have better salaries for our public officers.

5.41 p.m.

They worked hard to help prepare this Budget. I must compliment them for that. [**Mr. Bharrat:** Where will you get the land to build the police station?] You will get it. Once these measures that we have recommended here is not involved in this Budget, I have a difficulty allowing myself to support it. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Datadin: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. I rise to offer my humble contribution to *Budget 2023*. Permit me immediately to extend congratulations to Dr. Ashni Singh. I wish to offer my warmest congratulations to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and his team for their hard work compiling the 2023 Budget.

The previous speaker, Mr. Sinclair, made mention of the school in Kato. Maybe he could tell us when it was completed. I could help him with the answer. It was completed under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). There were defects. The people there want to know why, although the school was within the defects period, there was no defects liability period, and there was no claim to have it fixed. Mr. Sinclair has disappeared.

This budget is about growth. It has been a clear message from His Excellency, the President, and as we have heard over the last four days, from the Members of Cabinet. This budget is about doing not only the big things. It is about doing the small things in each community and doing those things at every level. It seeks to build infrastructure whilst at the same time improving the lives of its citizen. It seeks to increase the standard of living of every Guyanese. In the short term, it hopes to improve the standard of living while, at the same time, taking care of what would be the longer term. That is why we need to do transformational infrastructural projects. Just to name a few from the Budget itself that is the short term are the adjusted salaries for 5,000 healthcare workers and 9,000 Disciplined Service workers at the cost of \$3 billion. The increase in the tax threshold from \$75,000 to \$85,000. The cash grant increased from \$25,000 to \$35,000, which incidentally benefits approximately 214,000 children. This adds, of course, to the \$5,000 uniform grant. The excise tax is reduced to zero. It would cost \$17 billion in revenue collection. Freight charges are extended for another year. Part time work is extended, and a further \$10 billion is committed to that. Pensions have increased at a cost of \$28 billion. Public Assistance has increased. The mortgage ceiling has increased from \$15 million to \$20 million.

These projects and measures are based on sound economic policy and sound economic philosophy. We all know that there could be several economic philosophies and policies, but these policies are set to build the foundation of our country and the foundation upon which our country is going to be built. It is about balancing the task of the immediate needs while providing for the security of future generations and future needs. Make no mistake, Guyana is a poor country trying to find its way with its resources to prosperity. The development of Guyana with this budget is underway. The allocation of resources is such that it is balanced. It provides relief immediately to the citizens while providing the infrastructure to take us into the future. Guyana is not immune from the economic issues of the world. Inflation, supply challenges, and the high cost of shipping are all immediate measures which are being dealt with by the measures in the Budget. In terms of what will be for the future, the 2023 Budget will provide for a Demerara River Bridge, a northwest ferry, the East Bank highway, the Berbice highway, hospitals, the Linden/Soesdyke highway, the Linden to Mabura road and the gas to shore energy project.

There were public comments made by the Leader of the Opposition, who is, of course, not here, and Members of the Opposition that this has nothing for them. His Colleagues have been coming here for the past four days and preaching about friends, families, and supporters. The Hon. Coretta McDonald said that this morning. Do the Hon. Members, Ms. McDonald, Ms. Ferguson, and the Leader of the Opposition not know of anyone who would use these roads and are using these roads? Do they not know of anyone who would need the river bridge, nor do they cross the bridge? Do they not have any intention of using any of the energy from the gas to energy project? Mr. Speaker, the thinking is like that, and you may wonder if the Leader of the Opposition might very well be a bungalow.

Our leaders in the Government have taken a prudent and responsible path for the development framework of our country. This is the preferred path, and there are other paths, as I had mentioned. Allow me to highlight those possible paths by telling you about a fictional place called 'Bam Bam Alley'. This is a mythical place. It is characterised by professors who espoused a unique philosophy. Its principal motto seems to be growth is not economic development, and economic development is not growth. As preposterous as that would seem to us mere reasonable immortals, it recommends itself and characterises its fiscal management by the use of blank cheques. We pray that this fictional place does not ever take route in the real world. The 'Bam Bam

Alley' philosophy is to ignore every fact. It only deals with rumours and innuendos. Perhaps inspired by this philosophy, we have repeatedly heard the call for feasibility studies—the poster child of the feasibility studies, the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson spoke this morning. In the last Administration, when the Hon. Member was a minister, a feasibility study persuaded him about a bridge across the Demerara River with three lanes. This is a grown man who went to school and university managed to have someone persuade him that his best option for his people is a three-lane bridge. We all know that every bridge everywhere in the world are in even numbers, but no. The philosophy is that we should have a three-lane bridge. As if that was not enough, we spent more than \$100 million of taxpayers' money for that advice. [**Mr. Nandlall:** One hundred and sixty.] The sum of \$160 million. Thank you, Hon. Attorney General.

Additionally, in the vein of the poster child of feasibility studies, a feasibility study was commissioned that said to the people of Guyana that they cannot have a refinery. It is not worthy. A refinery, as we all know, there would be a public advertisement for a request for proposals. Guyana will certainly have its refinery. The 'Bam Bam Alley' economic philosophy is dangerous. To reach the apex and pinnacle, it appears that you must be a bungalow. Mr. Speaker, one might ask why a bungalow? There are no upstairs in a bungalow.

[*Mr. Seeraj left the Chair.*]

[*Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.*]

The Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, speak about things he does know about such as apartheid and he lectures about roads in Region 5. He fails to tell this House that there were no roads in Region 5 during the time of the APNU Government. Mr. Shurwayne Holder, the Hon. Member, an exponent for schools and a constant preacher of racism and hate, seems to have forgotten that under the last Administration, the favourite contractors were Mr. Larry Singh who he rented a bond that held nothing except condoms and lube. Mr. Lloyd Singh, Mr. Hardat Singh...

Mr. Speaker: I know there are thousands of Lloyd Singhs and Hardat Singhs, but we have a Standing Order that states we should not call people's names who cannot defend themselves.

Mr. Datadin: I appreciate that, but we do not want to forget the letter that was written for a particular contractor to be paid \$1.8 billion for the Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill. All of a sudden Mr. Holder did not notice anything about race

then. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan spoke about the allocation of health and the drugs. When we speak, we must speak about the record. The record for the Material Management Unit (MMU) in the Ministry of Health showed that just under 50% of the drugs were supplied to Region 5 and today it exceeds 85%. It appears that a particular drug by the name of Pethidine is never short in Region 5. The Hon. Member also spoke, that is, Mr. Jordan, about the x-rays being down. He did not tell us about the repeated written request for maintenance under the APNU Government. He did not tell you that there were new digital x-rays and digital ultrasound that were procured in 2022 in Mahaica, Mahaicony and Fort Wellington. We speak of the process, but we like to take only half of the story.

5.56 p.m.

The Hon. Member made no mention, absolutely none. If he had looked in last year's budget, he would have discovered that the Trafalgar Health Centre was allocated \$1.6 million, and it was used to improve that health centre. Number 7 Health Centre, \$2.1 million, which was used. Dundee, Strath Campbell, Belladrum, Biabu, Britannia, Experiment, Ithaca, Mora, Rosignol and Woodley Park Health Centres. These were all contained in last year's budget, and these were the allocations made. The Hon. Member who wants to say they are not completed needs to read the reports. The Member spoke about a river ambulance that was from Moraikobai. He did not tell this House that, in 2019, the APNU/AFC made an upfront payment of \$26 million for a river ambulance for that community. That ambulance has, to this day, not been delivered. It is still in Lethem. Since this Government took Office, the Moraikobai Health Centre has a modern 4x4 ambulance. The same community is able to transport patients to Linden with efficiency, and there is also a new ambulance for the Mahaicony Hospital.

It is important that we understand that when Members speak in this House and pluck ideas about what they require to be in agreement with the budget... The Hon. Member who spoke yesterday – Mr. Sears, was it? He said that he thought - it must be the 'Bam Bam Alley' economics school of philosophy - that \$1 billion should be allocated to the Wismar Bridge, used by approximately 900 people a day. Now, in excess of 30,000 travel one way on the Demerara Harbour Bridge (DHB). This is what leadership is about, and this is what we need to understand leadership is about. It is about having a budget and making decisions, making decisions for the population. Everything cannot be done. It is like managing any institution or household. You have to prioritise and spend your money on what comes first.

Mr. Speaker: *Bam bam*, your time is up.

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, Hon. Minister Teixeira. Hon. Member, you may proceed to conclude in five minutes.

Mr. Datadin: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. When the projects that have been provided for in *Budget 2023* are looked at, one can see across the board infrastructure works that are going to last a long time. But they are needed. Every Guyanese citizen has seen, everywhere, a road is built within six months, on the two sides of that road, one sees the development taking place. It is required. The Government's obligation is to provide the roadways and the pathways to our vast land. If we want to develop that land, we have to allow people easy access. Hence the reason highways are required; hence the reason bridges are required. What that does is that it has a *knock-on effect*. What happens, as long as access is secured, the development, private citizens and private entrepreneurship, can develop those lands to produce businesses that will be to the benefit of the entire nation. Part of what we must do here is to not play games with the truth. Do not say that you care about the people, that you want them to have all of the increases that you speak of, but you never did it. Do not say that you want to improve their lives when you tax them to death for five years. You went after things that nobody knew existed. You had to get a licence to ride a bicycle. You needed a licence if you had more than two dogs. Things that have never cost a citizen before, you maliciously not only went after taxing them, but you raised those taxes on what should be paid.

In 2020, with the return of the PPP/C Government, that was thankfully reversed. Allow me to say to the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, that we thank him for his hard work, we support the budget, and we support the measures in the budget. I do humbly commend this budget to the House for passing. [*Applause*]

Mr. Jaffarally: I am disappointed that Hon. Member Vinceroy Jordan has decided to depart. [**Mr. Ramson:** Pastor Jordan.] Pastor Jordan. I rise on this side of the House to lend my full support to *Budget 2023* as presented by our distinguished and brilliant Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Allow me to congratulate the Hon. Minister and the staff of the Ministry of Finance for a well-crafted budget, under the

theme: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow.*

Budget 2023 focuses on the developing priorities that will elevate this nation. Clearly, the resources allocated in critical areas include agriculture, food security, health care, housing, education, transportation, water and sanitation, increased direct household income, supporting the Guyanese in need, and continuing to improve the lives of all Guyanese. *Budget 2023* is a demonstration of this Government of Dr. Mohammed Irfaan Ali's ability to prudently manage our country's diverse resources as well as making a conscious investment in sectors that will immediately have an impact on the daily lives of our people. These critical investments will go a long way to ensure that our people benefit from steady development. The massive infrastructure programme will also enhance Guyanese's comfort as well. The significant resources allocated to community infrastructure are efforts to hasten to build a cohesive and strong community. *Budget 2023* will see the resources of this country equitably distributed across the 10 Administrative Regions. Every region, every town, every village, every community will benefit from our infrastructural development.

While I was making notes for my presentation last night, I was trying to compare the development that is taking place over the last two and a half years under the PPP/C Administration with what took place for five years under the APNU/AFC Coalition. Honestly, I could not find any development, absolutely nothing, that took place in Region 5 under the APNU/AFC Coalition. That is what the records are. That is the legacy they left; except they squandered \$200 million on a so-called model farm. I have news for you, my Colleagues on the other side of the House, we are building a modern, state of the art hospital at that very venue. Two years ago, after I listened to Hon. Member Vinceroy Jordan, I referred to him as deaf, dumb and blind. Two years after, the Hon. Member is deafer, dumber, and blinder. This Administration, led by His Excellency and these Hon. Men and Women on this side of this House, believes that there is a time for politics in this country and there is a time that we have to take our responsibilities very seriously. We take our responsibilities very seriously, that is why we are governing this country that every single Guyanese must benefit from the resources of our country. Whether you live at Ithaca, whether you live at Belladrum, whether you live at Bath Settlement, whether you live at De Hoop, whether you live at Number 28, every Guyanese must benefit from the resources of our country.

We are a very proactive Government. In Region 5, we had 286 ministerial and Members of Parliament visits across Region 5. You can follow me on Facebook. When we go to these communities, we are not going for photo ops, we are going for serious consultations. We do not look at the texture of one's hair or the colour of one's skin. We see people; we listen to their issues; we listen to their concerns. We come back to our offices, discuss with our technical people and ensure... I want to draw a few examples. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, and I were invited to go to Number 28, a predominantly Afro-Guyanese community which voted for the APNU/AFC, but they invited us, and we went there. I called Hon. Member Vinceroy Jordan, wanting to be inclusive, to join us. But do you know what the residents told us? They told us, Mr. Jaffarally, do not let that Gentleman come here because for five years they did nothing for the Number 28 community. The people raised two or three concerns with us. They raised the desilting of their community drains.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand on Standing Order 46. I just heard the Hon. Member referring to an unparliamentary term, "Shame" is being used and no one is being upbraided in the House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, with respect to the term, I did not hear "Shame", but if you did, we will strike it. Continue please. We will check the record for you too.

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, the villagers raised three or four issues with us: community drains, roads, and that they needed some assistance to start small businesses. In less than two days, we had the machine desilting and cleaning the community drains. In less than two days, we provided 1,000 'Black Giant' chickens to 17 farmers in Number 28, and it went more. We are employing people from the very community to maintain the drains. We are maintaining the drains in the very community.

6.11 p.m.

The Hon. Member Nandlall engaged the community of Plantation Hope. The residents of these communities had wanted titles and, in less than a year, just after Christmas, we went, and we delivered the titles to the people of Plantation Hope. That is how we operate. The Hon. Member Susan Rodrigues... for two years the residents of Sweet Lips Street, Rosignol were knocking at the door of Guyana Water Inc. (GWI) in Region 5 just for 20 lengths of pipe so that

they can enjoy potable water. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan was the Manager at that time. In less than two weeks, the residents are enjoying that. That is what we are doing.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Croal and others went to the Burma Housing Scheme. We distributed 300 additional house lots in Region 5. That is how we operate. While we were going there, they were subtly telling their supporters not to go to our community meetings.

The Hon. Juan Edghill and others, just before Christmas, went to Ithaca. We were trying to make the children feel nice for Christmas. We took 1,000 toys and 1,000 bags of goodies. They went around the village telling their people not to send your children. Do you know what the people came and told us, they said, Mr. Edghill for five years when those people were in Office, they never came to Ithaca. **[Bishop Edghill:** Never came.] They never came to Ithaca. This is how we operate.

When we were launching the Guyana Online Academy for Learning (GOAL) scholarship in Region 5, the Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally, we have a point of order by the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on Standing Order 40 (1). I am seeking clarification on what the Hon. Member just ...

Mr. Speaker: Actually Hon. Member, it is 40 (b).

Ms. Ferguson: Standing Order 40 (b).

Mr. Speaker: Right. Standing Order 40 (b) states that for clarification, I would have to seek the permission of the person currently on the floor. Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally, would you allow the Hon. Member to seek clarification from you? I am not hearing you.

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, I will proceed with my presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson ...

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Unfortunately, the Hon. Member ...

Ms. Ferguson: He is misinforming the House.

Mr. Speaker: You will have somebody else speaking, you can correct that based on your information. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Jaffarally: As I was saying, when the Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand, and the Hon. Member, Ms. Parag, were going for consultation for the GOAL project, they went around telling their people not to worry with those people, that the PPP/C will not give them anything. I am happy to report, for the last two years, more than 1,200 young people have been able to gain the GOAL scholarships from Region 5. This is how we operate in Region 5.

The Hon. Member Deodat Indar – at Good Faith, for five years 12 families were not receiving electricity. One visit and they are now enjoying electricity. Our Hon. Prime Minister went to a Masjid at Woodley Park and in less than days, they are enjoying free internet. This is how we operate, Mr. Speaker.

The Hon. Member Vinceroy Jordan buffed and puffed for 25 minutes and did not say anything. He said that the laboratories in Region 5 are not working. I just want to share with this House, for three months of last year, that is October to December, 2022, there were 22,366 tests done at the laboratory at Fort Wellington. Two thousand, eight hundred and twenty-six patients visited that laboratory. At the Mahaicony Hospital, from October to December, 16,103 tests were done at that hospital, with 1,981 patients. This is how they are misleading the people of this nation. The gentleman said there is no ambulance in Region 5. There are three ambulances in Region 5 that are operating. He said the electromagnetic radiation (x-ray) machines at Fort Wellington and at Mahaicony are not working. Both x-ray machines are working. Our surgical theatres are in order. Why are these people misinforming this nation?

Agriculture has been the backbone for Region 5. Region 5 is the largest agricultural region of our country, with more than 100,000 acres of rice, and all of that. The Hon. Member was trying to tell us, tell this nation or this House, that rice farmers are not benefitting in a significant way from this Government. Between the period 2015 to 2020, the majority of farmers were forced to leave the agricultural lands because they destroyed the infrastructure. The infrastructure collapsed. They increased revenue by over 600%. **[Ms. Manickchand:** Taxes.] Taxes. When we took Office in 2020, in the first three months, the Ministry of Agriculture had to spend hundreds of millions of dollars. Today, we continue to rebuild what the APNU/AFC has destroyed. We rebuilt dams, drainage canals, bridges and sluices. We purchased machinery. Today, if anyone of the Hon. Members on that side of the House should go to the agriculture community, they will see that every square inch of land is occupied. In addition to that, we have started the

distribution of breeding bulls in Region 5. Look, this is at Belladrum.

[Hon. Member displayed an image.]

Talking about Belladrum, these people are very disgusting. They want to claim a community building. If it had not been for the intervention of the residents of Belladrum who told them that the building belonged to all of them and not to the PNC group – that it belongs to the community. I want to assure the people of Belladrum that this Government, led by Dr. Mohammed Ifraan Ali and by our Ministers will not allow a community building to be occupied and become a PNC office. Mr. Speaker, ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, as you took a pause there, it is a good time to seek an extension for you to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Colleague of mine gets additional time to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Jaffarally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thirty-eight farmers and ordinary people benefitted from 5,000 ‘Black Giant’ chickens in Region 5. Another 38 benefitted from ducklings from the Ministry of Agriculture. The Hon. Member Ganesh Mahipaul was telling us that he saw some vehicle going house-to-house assisting poor people. Let me say this, in Region 5, and it is public knowledge, we were able to assist 60 poor persons to start their own small business. Let me give you a breakdown: from Ithaca, and I want the Hon. Member to hear, five persons; from No. 5, eight persons; from Belladrum 14 persons; from Fellowship, another 12; and in the heart at Perth, another 4. This is how we operate. We do not see people based on race. We are all Guyanese. We are a government for every single person.

In education, the Hon. Member Vinceroy Jordan, again, attacked our teachers and the education system. I am happy to report that Region 5 is the first region to attain universal education at the secondary level. We have already acquired universal education at the primary level. We have modernised and created an environment that is both conducive to learning and teaching. That is what the Ministry of Education is doing.

In concluding, I would like to remind the Hon. Member on that side of the House, you have a unique opportunity to join

us, to join the ‘One Guyana’ platform. This is because they will never ever sit on this side of the House in a long time to come. The 2023 Budget will make a difference in the lives of our teachers, our public servants, our farmers, our school children, our nurses and policemen and women. Every single Guyanese will benefit from *Budget 2023*. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally. Unfortunately, the Hon. Prime Minister is back, so former acting Prime Minister, we would not be able to call on you tonight to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 27th January, 2023.

[Prime Minister]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you for acknowledging my absence from this House on duty. At this stage, I rise to seek your permission to adjourn the sitting of the House of Assembly, to 10 a.m. on Friday, 27th January, 2023.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, the Assembly stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. tomorrow. Please let us be on time.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.25 p.m.