



**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

69TH Sitting

Monday, 11TH December, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 2.22 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.,
*Speaker of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.*

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

Prime Minister (1)

+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,
*Prime Minister,
Prime Minister's Office,
Colgrain House,
205 Camp Street,
Georgetown.*

Vice-President (1)

+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
*Vice-President,
Office of the President,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.*

[Absent]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (16)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.
Government Chief Whip,
Office of the Presidency,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Lot 254 South Road,
Georgetown.

+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
Ministry of Finance,
Main & Urquhart Streets,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,
Minister of Health,
Ministry of Health,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Minister of Education,
Ministry of Education,
Lot 26 Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs,
Ministry of Home Affairs,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Minister of Agriculture,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.

+ Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P.,
Minister of Amerindian Affairs,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,
South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
Minister of Labour,
Ministry of Labour,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
Lot 96 Duke Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Lot 229 South Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.

+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini),
Minister of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Human Services and Social Security,
Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,
Lot 357 East and Lamaha Streets
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P.,
Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Main Street,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,
Minister of the Public Service,
Ministry of the Public Service,
164 Waterloo Street,
North Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

Junior Ministers (4)

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
Lot 41 Brickdam & United Place,
Stabroek,
Georgetown.

Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Fort Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

Other Members (15)

Hon. Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,
*Lot 71 BB Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,
*(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
148 Lethem,
Central Rupununi,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Lot 4 Public Road,
No. 66 Village,
Corentyne,
Berbice.*

Hon. Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,
*Lot 60 Section 'K',
John Street,
Campbellville,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,
*Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,
*Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,
Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,
*Lot 340 East Street,
South Cummingsburg,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

[Absent]

Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,
*55 AA Victoria Avenue,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

[Absent – on leave]

Hon. Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),
Lot 16-30 New Street,
New Amsterdam.
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Lot 290 Area 'J',
Tuschen, North,
East Bank Essequibo.

Hon. Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,
Paruima Upper Mazaruni,
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.

* Hon. Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,
South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

[Absent – on leave]

* Hon. Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.

[Absent – on leave]

Hon. Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,
Lot 32 Crown Dam,
Industry,
East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Nandranie Coonjah, M.P.,
(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),
Lot 69 Suddie New Housing Scheme,
Essequibo Coast.
c/o Freedom House,
Lot 41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)

(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)

Hon. Mr. Aubrey Norton, M.P.,
Leader of the Opposition

Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,
*Lot 10 Delph Street,
Campbelville,
Georgetown.*

[Absent]

Hon. Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.,
*Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,
South Ruimveldt,
Georgetown.*

[Absent]

Hon. Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,
*(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),
Lot 55 Henrietta,
Essequibo Coast.*

[Virtual Participation]

Hon. Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 13 A, New Providence,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.,
*Lot 48 Atlantic Ville,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,
*Lot 590 Good Hope,
East Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P.,
*Lot 7 Freeman Street,
Castello Housing Scheme,
La-Penitence,
Georgetown.*

[Absent]

Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P.,
*Lot 933 Block 1,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P.,
*Opposition Chief Whip,
Lot 609 Conciliation Street,
Tucville,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Vinceroy H. Jordan, M.P.,
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),
Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,
West Coast Berbice.*

C/o Christopher Jones

Hon. Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P.,
*Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P.,
*Lot 202 N, Fourth Street,
Alexander Village,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 40 Block 3
Craig Milne,
Cove & John,
East Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.,
*(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
Shulidnab Village,
South Central,
Rupununi.
(Culvert City Lethem)*

Hon. Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P.,
*Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme,
East Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.,
*Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue,
South Ruimveldt Park,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.,
*Lot 1110 Plot 'B',
Herstelling,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.,
*Lot 842 Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
*Lot 1282 Block EE,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P.,
*Lot 151 Durbana Square,
Lamaha Gardens,
Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P.,
*(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini),
Mabaruma Compound.*

Hon. Mr. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P.,
*(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 136 2nd Street,
Silvertown,
Wismar, Linden.*

[Absent – on leave]

Hon. Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P.,
*Lot 14 Plantain Walk,
West Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.,
*Lot 18 Public Road,
Johanna Cecilia,
(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).*

Hon. Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 88 Nelson Street,
Mocha Village,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Lot 80 Babu John Road, Haswell,
Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.*

Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,
Plantation Belfield,
East Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)
Lot 169-170 Stanleytown,
West Bank Demerara.
c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
*(Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)
Church Street Mahdia.
Lot 4 Public Road,
Stewartville,
West Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
*(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 90, Section C,
Wismar, Linden.*

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

Hon. Dr. Asha Kisooson, M.P.,
*Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,
Lot 855, 3rd Field,
Cummings Lodge,
Greater Georgetown.*

[Virtual Participation]

Officers (2)

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A.,
Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Hansard Division Officers (16)

Ms. Allison Connelly,
Chief Editor

Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor

Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor

Ms. Carol Bess,
Editor

Ms. Shevona Telford,
Editor (a.g.)

Ms. Tesia Ellis,
Editor (a.g.)

Ms. Indranie Persaud,
Reporter

Ms. Roseina Singh,
Reporter

Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,
Reporter

Ms. Lushonn Bess,
Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter

Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,
Reporter (a.g.)

Mr. Tafari David,
Reporter (a.g.)

Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician

Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician

Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Condolences expressed to the families of the five Servicemen who perished

Mr. Speaker: Good afternoon, Hon. Members. First, on your behalf and behalf of my family and I, it is with a very sad and sorrowful heart that I extend our condolences to the Hon. Member, Dr. Jennifer Westford, on the tragic loss of her husband, Brigadier (Ret'd) Gary Beaton and also to the families of Col. Michael Shahoud, Lt. Col. Michael Charles, Lt. Col. Sean Welcome and Sergeant Jason Khan.

Sentiments expressed for full recovery of surviving Servicemen

I also join you all in the prayers for the full recovery of Lt. Andio Crawford and Col. Dwayne Jackson, the two Guyana Defence Force (GDF) Officers who survived that ordeal.

Condolences expressed to the families of former Members of Parliament

Let us join in extending condolences to the families of the former Member of Parliament (MP) and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Rudy Insanally and former Member of Parliament from Canal, Mr. Dulchand. Please join me in standing to observe a minute silence for these fallen heroes and Members of Parliament.

Minute of silence observed.

Statement on Guyana's Sovereignty

Hon. Members, over the past three years, our National Assembly has been very active among the organisations that bring together the Parliaments of the world. We, Guyana, participate actively along with the executive level in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which was established in 1889. It has 118 members. The ParlAmericas is the Parliament of the Assembly of the Organizations of the American States (OAS), and we also participate actively in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). Last year, at the 146th Assembly of the IPU in Kigali, Rwanda, I addressed the plenary on the issue of peace. I will quote from part of that address; 'while the world may look at the Caribbean and Guyana and say that this is an area of peace, that it is a paradise, an example for the world, we have had our challenges. In the past 60 years of post-colonialism we have had ethnic conflicts in my own country; we have had a minister assassinated; in Haiti, we have seen the assassination of a President; in Grenada, there was political

repression and two coups; in Jamaica, in the 1980s, over 800 persons were killed in the general elections; and in Trinidad and Tobago, the Parliament was stormed by persons with their own agenda; MPs killed and a coup attempted.' I noted at least three countries in our region have border disputes that can ignite into aggression.'

2.29 p.m.

Hon. Members, I thank Speaker Woods of Belize for being involved in the Belizean Government issuing a strongly worded position in support of Guyana's sovereignty. Similarly, I thank Minister Pia Glover-Rolle and Foreign Minister Mr. Frederick Arthur Mitchell of the Bahamas for their involvement in writing its Government's strong support to Guyana. On December 7th ParlAmericas issued its own statement on our border controversy which I would like to read:

"Ottawa (Canada), December 7, 2023 — ParlAmericas, closely following the most recent developments in the border controversy between the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and in view of the consultative referendum held on December 3 in Venezuela on the Essequibo,

Calls upon the parties to settle their differences through the appropriate courts and tribunals of the International Justice system;

Recalls that international instruments such as the Charter of the United Nations and the Charter of the Organization of American States enshrine the sovereignty and independence of States, establish the faithful fulfillment of obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law, and affirm that the territory of a State is inviolable, and may not be subject to military occupation or other measures of force taken by another State, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatsoever, even temporarily;

And urges that, honouring the tradition of peaceful resolution of differences in the Americas and the Caribbean, any international controversies arising between states be resolved through peaceful channels."

That was the ParlAmericas and tomorrow we have a board meeting which again, our controversy will be discussed.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers and Reports were laid:

- (1) (i) Report of the Auditor General to the National Assembly on the Public Accounts of Guyana and on the Accounts of Ministries, Departments and Regions for the fiscal year ended 31st December, 2022.
- (ii) Performance Audit Report on an Assessment of the Ministry of Education's Hinterland School Feeding Programme.
- (iii) Performance Audit Report on the Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005).
- (iv) Performance Audit Report on a Review of the Ministry of Labour's Occupational Safety and Health Inspection Process.
[*Speaker of the National Assembly*]
- (2) Annual Report of the Public Utilities Commission for the year 2022.
[*Prime Minister*]
- (3) (i) Annual Report of the Women and Gender Equality Commission for the years 2021-2022.
- (ii) Audited Financial Statements of the Integrity Commission for the years ended 31st December, 2020 and 2021.
- (iii) Annual Report of the Ethnic Relations Commission for the year 2022.
- (iv) Audited Financial Statements of the Integrity Commission for the year ended 31st December, 2022.
[*Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance*]
- (4) (i) Mid-Year Report 2023.
- (ii) Government Notice No. 4/2023, regarding Notification Receipts of all petroleum revenues paid into the Natural Resource Fund during the period 1st July, 2023 to 30th September, 2023.
- (iii) Agreement on Support to the Poultry Sector between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and Republic Bank (Guyana) Limited, signed on 19th September, 2023.

(iv) Agreement on Support to the Poultry Sector between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and Citizens Bank Guyana Inc., signed on 31st October, 2023.

(v) Agreement on Support to the Poultry Sector between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and Demerara Bank Limited, signed on 21st August, 2023.

(vi) Agreement on Support to the Poultry Sector between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and Guyana Bank for Trade & Industry Limited, signed on 14th September, 2023.

(vii) Financial Paper No. 4/2023 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) - Advances made from the Contingency Fund totalling \$1,899,647,334 for the period 2023-10-01 to 2023-12-08.

(viii) Financial Paper No. 5/2023 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$24,044,095,908 for the period ending 2023-12-31.

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

(5) Audited Financial Statement of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority for the year ended 31st December, 2019.

[*Minister of Public Works*]

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Written Replies]

Hon. Members, there are 15 questions on today's Order Paper. Questions one to 10 are for written replies and questions 11 to 15 are for oral replies. For written replies, we have questions one to three in the name of the Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson and are for the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance. Questions four and five are in the name of the Hon. Member Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley and are for the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. Questions six to 10 are in the name of the Hon. Member Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir and are for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. The answers to all 10 questions have been received and in accordance with our Standing Orders been circulated.

1. OVERSEAS VISITS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT, DR. MOHAMED IRFAAN ALI

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Gail Teixeira, MP, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, inform the National Assembly of the countries visited by His Excellency, the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali from August 2, 2020 to May 17, 2023, and the costs associated with each visit?

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: See table below.

	<u>Airfares</u> <u>(GYDS)</u>	<u>Meals/out of pocket/</u> <u>accomodations/</u> <u>(GYDS)</u>	<u>TOTALS</u>
2020			
<u>Suriname</u>	<u>208,283</u>	<u>79,875</u>	<u>288,158</u>
2021			
<u>UNGA- USA</u>		<u>165,075</u>	<u>165,075</u>
<u>Scotland</u>	<u>3,658,275</u>	<u>814,725</u>	<u>4,473,000</u>
<u>Celac Mexico & SOA (USA)</u>	<u>706,521</u>	<u>74,550</u>	<u>781,071</u>
<u>Barbados - UNCTAD</u>	<u>365,070</u>	<u>74,550</u>	<u>439,620</u>
2022			
<u>Caricom Belize</u>	<u>1,808,086</u>	<u>186,375</u>	<u>1,994,461</u>
<u>Caribbean Investment Forum UAE</u>		<u>159,750</u>	<u>159,750</u>
<u>Caricom Suriname</u>	<u>335,953</u>	<u>53,250</u>	<u>389,203</u>
<u>Agrofest Barbados</u>	<u>188,636</u>	<u>53,250</u>	<u>241,886</u>
<u>TNT agro conference</u>	<u>223,247</u>	<u>133,125</u>	<u>356,372</u>

<u>United Kingdom</u>	<u>1 1,950</u>	<u>133,125</u>	<u>3,245,075</u>
<u>Toronto Canada</u>	<u>653,564</u>	<u>106,500</u>	<u>760,064</u>
<u>Los Angeles, USA SOA</u>	<u>1,981,075</u>	<u>159,750</u>	<u>2,140,825</u>
<u>Caricom Cuba Summit Bdos</u>	<u>21 1,909</u>	<u>53,250</u>	<u>265,159</u>
<u>Brazil</u>		<u>53,250</u>	<u>53,250 1</u>
<u>USA UNGA</u>	<u>1,008,154</u>	<u>239,625</u>	<u>1,247,779</u>
<u>Washington DC</u>	<u>1,288,380</u>	<u>527,175</u>	<u>1,815,555</u>
<u>Kigali, Rwanda</u>	<u>3,157,998</u>	<u>213,000</u>	<u>3,370,998</u>
2023			
	<u>6,483,320</u>	<u>138,450</u>	<u>6,621,770</u>
<u>TNT Energy Conference</u>	<u>225,000</u>	<u>26,625</u>	<u>251,625</u>
<u>Qatar</u>	<u>2,807,200</u>	<u>159,750</u>	<u>2,966,950</u>
<u>United Kingdom</u>	<u>3,732,802</u>	<u>159,750</u>	<u>3,892,552</u>
<u>Bahamas</u>		<u>53,250</u>	<u>53,250</u>
Totals	<u>32,155,424</u>	<u>3,818,025</u>	<u>35,973,449</u>
USD	<u>150,964</u>	<u>17,925</u>	<u>168,889</u>

**2. OVERSEAS VISITS BY VICE-PRESIDENT,
HON. BHARRAT JAGDEO, M.P.**

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Gail Teixeira, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, inform the National Assembly of the countries visited by Vice-President, Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P. from August 2, 2020 to May 17, 2023, and the costs associated with each visit?

Ms. Teixeira: See table below.

	Airfares (GYDS)	Meals/out of pocket/ accommodations (GYD)	Totals
2021			
Ghana	2,160,672	239,625	2,400,297
OTC Houston USA & Florida Diaspora	723,135	801,945	1,525,080
UNGA	430,473	165,075	595,548
Suriname	267,687	74,550	342,237
2022			
UAE (Egypt)	5,702,244	372,750	6,074,994
Washington DC	964,650		964,650
2023			
CERA week Houston Texas	1736,370	186,375	1,922,745
India	6,178,180	292,875	6,471,055
Total	18,163,411	2,133,195	20,296,606
USD	85,274	10,015	95,289.23

3. BENEFITS DERIVED FROM OVERSEAS VISITS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT, DR. MOHAMED IRFAAN ALI AND VICE-PRESIDENT, HON. BHARRAT JAGDEO, M.P

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Gail Teixeira, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, inform the National Assembly how Guyana and Guyanese benefitted from these overseas visits by His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and Vice-President, Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, MP?

Ms. Teixeira:

1. Repair the damage done between 2015 -2020 to Guyana's international credibility.

2. Successful promotion of investment opportunities and attraction of foreign investment.

3. Establishment of new embassies e.g. in Qatar, and soon the UAE.

4. Regaining global leadership status in climate services.

5. Positioning Guyana to be a global leader on food security, climate security and energy security.

6. Signed almost 50 MOUs, agreements or joint statements for various forms of international cooperation.

7. Garnering knowledge and experience of other countries on the development of the oil and gas sector.

8. On June 6, 2023 Guyana secured a non-permanent seat on the Un Security Council with the single highest number of attainable votes.

4. MUNICIPALITIES THAT RECEIVED SUBVENTIONS FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister inform this House of the names of the Municipalities that received subventions (in the form of cash transfer) from the Ministry

of Local Government for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, and up to June 2023? Please state the amounts for each by year?

The Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Persaud]: See table below.

MUNICIPALITIES THAT RECEIVED SUBVENTIONS FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Name of Municipality	2020	2021	2022	2023
Mabaruma	\$7,700,000	\$9,000,000	\$17,460,000	\$9,000,000
Anna Regina	\$9,300,000	\$9,000,000	\$15,795,000	\$9,000 000
Georgetown City Council	No request	\$30,000,000	\$30,000,000	No request
New Amsterdam	\$9,475,000	\$9,000,000	\$17,055,000	\$9,000,000
Rose Hall	\$9,175,000	\$9,000,000	\$16,515,000	\$9,000,000
Corriverton	\$9,700,000	\$9,000,000	\$15,660,000	\$9,000,000
Bartica	\$9,700,000	\$9,000,000	\$13,860,000	\$9,000,000
Mahdia	\$6,500 000	\$9,000,000	\$15,300,000	\$9,000 000
Lethem	\$9,075,000	\$9,000,000	\$15,795,000	\$9,000,000
Linden	\$9,475,000	\$9,000,000	\$15,795,000	\$9,000,000

5. MUNICIPALITIES THAT DID NOT RECEIVE SUBVENTIONS FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister inform this House of the names of the municipalities that did not receive subvention (in the form of cash transfer) from the Ministry

of Local Government for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, and up to June 2023?

Mr. Persaud:

Name of Municipality	2020	2023
Georgetown City Council	No submitted request by Council	No submitted request by Council

6. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF BIRTHS REGISTERED IN GUYANA BY THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Ms. Walton-Desir: Could the Minister indicate the total number of births, by region, registered in Guyana by the

General Register Office, for the period August 2021 to June 2023?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]:

REGION	August 2021 to December 2021	January 2022 to December 2022	January 2023 to June 2023	Total
1	117	162	78	357
2	530	1,113	524	2167
3	724	1,629	575	2928

4	3,890	7,981	3,412	15283
5	121	177	87	385
6	863	1,734	822	3419
7	141	274	136	551
8	4	25	21	50
9	109	234	114	457
10	417	930	423	1770
Total	6916	14,259	6,192	27367

7. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF LATE REGISTRATION PROCESSED IN GUYANA BY THE GUYANA REGISTER OFFICE

Ms. Walton-Desir: Could the Minister indicate the total number of late registrations, by region, processed by the Guyana Register Office for the period August 2021 to June 2023?

Mr. Benn:

REGION	August 2021 to December 2021	January 2022 to December 2022	January 2023 to June 2023	Total
1	72	138	114	324
2	14	96	105	215
3	29	213	117	359
4	354	1789	1321	3464
5	17	102	68	187
6	78	369	126	573
7	23	77	98	198
8	11	118	73	202
9	19	32	28	79
10	66	73	49	188

Total	683	3007	2099	5789
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8. THE NUMBER OF VISITORS' VISAS ISSUED

Ms. Walton-Desir: Can the Minister indicate the number of visitors' visas issued on arrival for the period 1st September 2020 to 30th June, 2023, and the total number per nationality?

Mr. Benn: See table below.

Number of Visitors Visas Issued for the period of 2020-09-01 to 2023-06-30

NATIONALITY	Visitor's Visas on Arrival
Afghan	24
Albanian	nil
Algerian	nil
Angolan	1
Aregentian	2
Azerbaijani	nil
Bangladeshi	24
Belarusian	nil
Bolivian	6
Bosnian	nil
Bulgarian	5
Burmese	nil
Cameroonian	34
Cape Verdian	nil
Central African Republic	1
Chadian	1
Chilean	nil

Chinese	310
Colombian	32
Congolese	7
Croatian	17
Cuban	1
Czech Republic	16
Dominican (Re)	21
Ecuadorian	5
Egyptian	7
El Salvadorian	4
Estonian	1
Ethiopian	1
Filipino	23
Gabonese	nil
Ghanian	8
Guatemalan	20
Guinean	4
Haitian	100
Hondurian	5
Hungarian	nil
Indian	185
Indonesian	6
Iranian	4
Iraq	1
Israeli	5
Japanese	1

Jordanian	1
Kazakhstan	1
Kenyan	11
Korean	3
Latvian	nil
Lebanese	5
Lithuanian	1
Macedonian	2
Madagascan	nil
Malaysian	5
Malian	3
Maltese	nil
Mauritius	2
Mexican	45
Montenegrin	nil
Moroccan	1
Mozambican	nil
Myanmar	nil
Namibian	nil
Nepalese	6
Nicaraguan	3
Nigerian	168
Omani	5
Pakistani	63
Palestinian	2
Panamanian	1

Paraguayan	2
Peruvian	2
Polish	28
Romanian	4
Russian	6
Senegalese	nil
Serbian	
Sierra Leone	nil
Sinaporean	8
Slovak	3
Slovanian	nil
South African	2
Sri Lankan	6
Sudanese	1
Syrian	1
Thai	2
Tunisian	nil
Turkish	19
Ugandan	2
Ukranian	7
United Arab Emirates	8
Uruguayan	nil
Venezuelan	63
Vietnamese	1
Zambian	1
Zimbabwean	5

TOTAL	1382
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Walton-Desir: Could the Minister indicate the number of employment visas issued for the period 1st September 2020 to 30th June, 2023 and the total number per nationality?

Mr. Benn: See table below.

**Number of Employment Visas Issued for the period of
2020-09-01 to 2023-06-30**

9. THE NUMBER OF EMPLOYMENT VISAS ISSUED

NATIONALITY	Employment Visas on Arrival
Afghan	nil
Albanian	1
Algerian	3
Angolan	20
Aregentian	40
Azerbhaijani	17
Bangladeshi	270
Belarusian	2
Bolivian	15
Bosnian	2
Bulgarian	62
Burmese	4
Cameroonian	6
Cape Verdian	1
Central African Republic	nil
Chadian	1
Chilean	3
Chinese	690
Colombian	120
Congolese	1
Croatian	166
Cuban	38
Czech Republic	5
Dominican (Rep)	21
Ecuadorian	1
Egyptian	57
El Salvadorian	Nil
Estonian	5
Ethiopian	2
Filipino	957
Gabonese	2

Ghanian	32
Guatemalan	13
Guinean	nil
Haitian	nil
Hondurian	13
Hungarian	20
Indian	460
Indonesian	252
Iranian	1
Iraq	1
Israeli	nil
Japanese	nil
Jordanian	2
Kazakhstan	19
Kenyan	4
Korean	15
Latvian	nil
Lebanese	2
Lithuanian	21
Macedonian	11
Madagascan	2
Malaysian	126
Malian	nil
Maltese	1
Mauritius	nil
Mexican	172
Montenegrin	8
Moroccan	nil
Mozambican	1
Myanmar	2
Namibian	2
Nepalese	11
Nicaraguan	1
Nigerian	112
Omani	1
Pakistani	12
Palestinian	nil
Panamanian	1
Paraguayan	nil
Peruvian	14
Polish	118
Romanian	87
Russian	28
Senegalese	1
Serbian	4

Sierra Leone	1
Sinaporean	33
Slovak	nil
Slovanian	2
South African	17
Sri Lankan	3
Sudanese	1
Syrian	1
Thai	9
Tunisian	5
Turkish	11
Ugandan	nil
Ukranian	47
United Arab Emirates	41
Uruguayan	1
Venezuelan	122
Vietnamese	nil
Zambian	2
Zimbabwean	1
TOTAL	4379

10. THE NUMBER OF STUDENT VISAS ISSUED

Ms. Walton-Desir: Could the Minister indicate the number of student visas issued for the period 1st September 2020 to 30th June 2023 and the total number per nationality.

Mr. Benn: See table below.

NATIONALITY	Student Visas on Arrival
Afghan	nil
Albanian	nil
Algerian	nil
Angolan	nil
Aregentian	nil
Azerbaijani	nil
Bangladeshi	nil
Belarusian	nil
Bolivian	nil
Bosnian	nil
Bulgarian	nil
Burmese	nil
Cameroonian	1
Cape Verdian	nil
Central African Republic	nil

Chadian	nil
Chilean	nil
Chinese	10
Colombian	nil
Congolese	2
Croatian	nil
Cuban	nil
Czech Republic	nil
Dominican (Rep)	nil
Ecuadorian	nil
Egyptian	nil
El Salvadorian	nil
Estonian	nil
Ethiopian	nil
Filipino	nil
Gabonese	nil
Ghanian	1
Guatemalan	nil
Guinean	nil
Haitian	nil
Hondurian	nil
Hungarian	nil
Indian	89
Indonesian	1
Iranian	nil
Iraq	nil
Israeli	nil
Japanese	nil
Jordanian	nil
Kazakhstan	nil
Kenyan	nil
Korean	nil
Latvian	nil
Lebanese	nil
Lithuanian	nil
Macedonian	nil
Madagascan	nil
Malaysian	2
Malian	nil
Maltese	nil
Mauritius	nil
Mexican	nil
Montenegrin	nil
Moroccan	nil

Mozambican	nil
Myanmar	nil
Namibian	nil
Nepalese	nil
Nicaraguan	nil
Nigerian	nil
Omani	nil
Pakistani	nil
Palestinian	nil
Panamanian	nil
Paraguayan	nil
Peruvian	nil
Polish	nil
Romanian	nil
Russian	nil
Senegalese	nil
Serbian	nil
Sierra Leone	nil
Sinaporean	nil
Slovak	nil
Slovanian	nil
South African	nil
Sri Lankan	nil
Sudanese	nil
Syrian	nil
Thai	nil
Tunisian	nil
Turkish	nil
Ugandan	nil
Ukranian	nil
United Arab Emirates	nil
Uruguayan	nil
Venezuelan	22
Vietnamese	nil
Zambian	nil
Zimbabwean	nil
TOTAL	182

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Oral Replies]

Mr. Speaker: For Oral Replies, question 11, it is in the name of the Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson, unfortunately the Hon. Member earlier today had been

involved in an unfortunate vehicular accident, I am told she is okay but I have asked that this be deferred. The questions in the name of Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson will be deferred along with the motions in her name.

[Questions 11 and 12 were deferred]

13. MODERNIZATION OF INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS ASSOCIATED WITH MIGRATION IN GUYANA

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you Mr. Chair. Could the Hon. Minister state whether the Government has taken any steps to modernise the institutional and legislative framework associated with migration in Guyana since 2020?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members. I want to thank the Hon. Member for her question. With respect to the institutional framework related to migration, both the Immigration Department and the Immigration Services Department have been modernised; staffing has increased. The work they are doing now, particularly the Immigration Services Department, is being put on electronic platforms for proper recovery of information from the databases. With respect to the legislative framework, since 2020, we have not had a specific instrument or bill placed in the Parliament itself, but we are working on issues relating to the migration policy, out of which I am sure a bill or bills will be laid in this Parliament.

Mr. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, I struggled to hear half of what was said, so forgive me if my follow-up is seeking clarity on what was already said, but I was not hearing everything clearly. Could the Hon. Minister state whether any formal collaborative process has been established between the ministries of Home Affairs, Legal Affairs, and Foreign Affairs to deal with the changes that may be needed in the legislative framework as it relates to migration?

Mr. Benn: We have had discussions from time to time between the three parties the Hon. Member mentioned, but as we work on the issues of a total migration policy package, we have not made a sub-committee itself to deal with it in specificity.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Just a further follow-up, Sir, I understand that the legislative framework may take some time; that has not happened as yet, but has there been any new policy initiated by the Ministry of Home Affairs given the obvious influx and increase in immigration into Guyana since 2020, any new policy? **[Ms. Teixeira: (Inaudible)]** Yes. But you came into Government in 2020.

Mr. Benn: At the level of the Ministry itself on the question of policy, as it were, we have been working very hard to make sure that those who are purporting to be migrants to Guyana are indeed migrants to Guyana. We have had situations in the past where we inherited a situation where

thousands of persons were coming through Guyana purporting to be migrants but not staying in Guyana, and if I refer only to the year 2019, some 19,000 or so persons of a particular country came through the country and cannot be accounted for, and that goes across the board for a number of countries. We are working hard to make the work we do there efficacious and that it should have integrity.

2.44 p.m.

We should not have to resort to chasing down people and doing investigations. Even though we have a backlog in respect of that, if we want to properly understand what happened in the previous Administration with respect of this matter... We do not want to repeat that and we are working to make sure that the system is much better managed and is outside of the influence of corruption at all levels.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. We are at question number 15, Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Sir, did you skip question 14?

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry. Questions 13 and 14 are so closely linked, I thought he was answering question 14. I will give you an opportunity to ask question 14, formally.

14. Registered Venezuelan Migrants in Guyana

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Sir. Can the Hon. Minister inform this House of the number of registered Venezuelan migrants in Region # 9 as of 16th June, 2023 and in the other regions as of 11th July, 2023?

Mr. Benn: The question, Mr. Speaker, is in two parts. I want to thank the Hon. Member, again, for her question. For Region 9, during the period, it was 1,348 persons; for Region 1 – 10,671 persons for the referenced period; for Region 2 – 3,255 persons; Region 3 – 1,114 persons; Region 4 – 1,215 persons; Region 7 – 4,099 persons; and Region 8 – 80 persons.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister inform the House – from the number of Venezuelan migrants he just stated – if there is a process to determine whether any of them have any military background as Venezuelans?

Mr. Benn: Persons come to Guyana at different levels of former occupations. In a general sense, we would not be able to say for each of them who may have a background in military or policing services. Certainly, there are a few and we have some information. I would say that, indeed, some

checks are being made on persons who we are aware came into the country.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am just backtracking a bit. The Hon. Minister did not indicate for Region 10 how many.... [**Ms. Teixeira:** (*Inaudible*)] Good afternoon, Ms. Gail Teixeira. I hope you had a good day. Thank you. The Hon. Minister did not indicate for Region 10, so I just want to clarify whether there are any Venezuelan migrants in Region 10. And just to follow-up on what he said, does the Ministry has data which determines if the number of Venezuelan migrants here have any military background at all? Do they have the data to support that and are they following up with that information?

Mr. Benn: The data that we provided does not include Region 10 because it does not have a port of entry *per se* in relation to people entering the country. On the question of military background, I think I answered that question adequately.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, there is question number 15. You may ask your question.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Speaker, I had my microphone on.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, Hon. Member Ms. Fernandes.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is just a follow-up. Could the Hon. Minister say what is the Government's policy when it comes to documenting Indigenous Venezuelans who are living within Guyana at the moment? I do note that you said, for example, in Region 7, there are 4,099 persons in your record. What is the policy when it comes to documenting Indigenous Venezuelans living here and how many of the 4,099 are Indigenous Venezuelans?

Mr. Benn: In relation to the number of them who may be coming from specific Indigenous communities, I do not have it at the moment. We are aware of the Waraos who are in the North West District, particularly, and in Region 2. In Region 9, there are two groups of Venezuelan migrants who came from specific Indigenous communities. They are mostly the Waraos and [*inaudible*] who came from the southern part of the Kanawaima reserve in Venezuela.

Ms. Fernandes: I did not hear any specific method in which those persons are documented. I do note that you spoke about the North West and the Waraos there. I am asking about this specifically because, in Region 7 – Bartica, for

example, there is just one location with over 30 Waraos. So, it begs the question of how many other persons are there. The next follow-up question is: how is the Ministry working in collaboration with organisations – for example, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) – to make sure, as much as we possibly can, that when aid is given through such organisations, rogue elements are not given aid within our country?

Mr. Benn: In relation to working with organisations, we have been working with some organisations. They are allowed to, or we partner with them when aid is being given to those communities. Generally, I would say that if one goes to the big communities, aside from the work which the police might have done, one would not necessarily know who a rogue element in relation to that is. We are working with various organisations providing support to the communities.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Speaker, just for clarity from the Minister. A few months ago, we received information from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation that, in Region 5, there were no Venezuelan migrants. Could the Minister say from that time to now if there are any? Quite recently, the police arrested one Venezuelan migrant in Region 5 who was conducting a burger sales business. He had the map of Venezuela with the entire Essequibo there. Could the Minister further say, what is the position with that Venezuelan and if there are any other Venezuelans in Region 5?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, persons are registered as they come in and when they do renewals at the places they are. On the question as to where they are, once they enter the country, it is a different matter because their situations sometimes are quite fluid. So, it is of no surprise that one would find a Venezuelan migrant in Region 5. For the person with the cart, I am aware that the police took action to hold the cart and have the insolent depiction of Venezuela removed. They are able to move around the country too.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Minister say whether the Ministry has any record on how many Venezuelans are in Region 5 or does it stand at zero, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation informed us through this House?

Mr. Benn: I do not have any number here which relates to Venezuelans in Region 5. I am sure there are a few.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Could the Hon. Minister tell us, in the light of the present circumstance, if

the Ministry is considering any action to ensure that Venezuelans are not in heavy numbers in the Essequibo region?

Mr. Benn: Thank you to the Hon. Member for his question. I am not sure what ‘heavy numbers’ are, but Venezuelans and children of Guyanese who became Venezuelans came in the country as Venezuelans and are in the Essequibo territory. Other than certain measures we have taken again to identify how many people, who they are and where are there, the normal procedures are being followed. We have upped our identification of the communities and the actors – the persons in the communities over that area. I am pointing out that you may meet a person who you may presume to be a Venezuelan, but he or she is a descendant of a Guyanese. There was a time when we had difficulties in this country and thousands of Guyanese went over to Venezuela. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** Tell them we had people going (*inaudible*)] Yes. We are not under special circumstances now with respect to that. **[Interruption]** Anyway, if I am allowed to answer the question, we are speaking about Venezuelans in Essequibo. I am just pointing out that there are persons there who are direct descendants of Guyanese along with others.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Minister, there is a procedure for children of Guyanese coming from Venezuela to become citizens. They are citizens by birth, but they must bring a Venezuelan birth certificate. There is a procedure. **[Mr. Benn:** (*Inaudible*)] Could you allow me to finish the question?

Mr. Speaker: I am allowing you, Sir.

Mr. Norton: Could the Minister say how many people in Essequibo are children of Guyanese and are entitled and how many of them are not?

Mr. Benn: I do not have those figures at the moment, but I can say that the procedure is being followed when it is brought to our attention.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I just have one final question for the Minister. We note that there are a number of Venezuelans coming who do not have any documentation. The question for the Minister is: what procedure do those Venezuelans go through once they get here and what documentation is given to them when they are in Guyana?

2.59 p.m.

Mr. Benn: It is the same procedure which was established by the previous Government. The Electronic Identification

Card (e-ID) card, regularly stamped, verified and updated in respect of those migrants.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let me just bring your attention to this. We have another question and the time for questions is 40 minutes.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I have a follow-up question for the Hon. Minister. I have made the observation that Finland closed its borders with Russia and they did this on the premise that the Government of Finland was concerned that there was what they call the ‘Hybrid Operation’, tantamount to what they said was a soft invasion of the country. What they did was close the borders and redirected all the citizens to declare themselves at ports of entry. My question therefore is: could the Minister say to this House whether the Government is currently contemplating a system where migrants who are undocumented will be required to present themselves to the authorities so that they could be properly registered, issued with the relevant documentation and, therefore, numerically, we will have an accurate account? I say this because, in Region 10, for example, the statistics that were proffered suggests that there are no Venezuelans in Region 10. I happen to be a Lindener, and I know otherwise. There is clearly a disconnect between what we are saying in the House and what the reality is on the ground. My question is: how and what procedure will the Government put in place to ensure that we have as accurate account as possible and whether this mandatory presentation of migrants to authorities to be duly registered is on the cards.

Mr. Benn: I did say that the records we have relate to persons who come to areas where they would contact immigration officers. In Linden itself, there is not a place. It is not at the frontier or places where people come through. If people come through from the mouth of the Orinoco to Moruka or Parika, they would be able to present themselves, be recorded and given the appropriate e-ID cards with information. It is a bit different. Perhaps, there would be Venezuelans in Linden, Region 10 itself who might have gone there for other various reasons. In respect of what the question has asked for, I have given the answer already. In relation to people going to particular areas to be recorded on entering the country, those places already exist. We have chorus as a cliché that our borders are porous and so forth. We are making efforts. In fact, to a certain extent, through the Ministry itself, we have to set up little patrol groups to go through areas to identify people and route them to areas where they can be properly documented. That work is ongoing but as I said, we are not in similar circumstances as some other countries.

Mr. Norton: Minister, could you say if there is an immigration centre or office in Mabura where Venezuelans pass through and what did the records show in terms of Venezuelans coming through the Mabura area?

Mr. Benn: Usually, when persons are going through Mabura or Linden on the Highway, there is a manifest and a record, and they would have to show their documentation as they go or come. There is that record. In terms of entry, the record would have already been there in respect of their entry into the country. That would be in Region 9, of course, or in the other regions to the west of the country where they would have initially entered the country.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, could you please say how much time is left for questions?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. It is seven minutes.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I heard the Hon. Minister allude to a process. I am not sure he answered my question. What I wanted to know and I may have missed it but, could the Minister advise whether there have been any advertisements, for example, in the local news, or a newspaper of wide circulation requiring Venezuelan migrants who may be undocumented to present themselves to the authorities to be documented?

Mr. Benn: In the press itself, if I remember, there has not been any specific thing relating to Venezuelan immigrants. We have said and have put on social media and the websites of the Ministry the request for people to come and be documented. They put it out to those persons who are leaders or influencers in the various communities that they must come and document themselves. In fact, I would say that over the past three or four weeks, the number of persons coming to be re-registered or to be documented again has increased, perhaps, 10 folds.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, on the issue of notice – and the Hon. Attorney-General could properly guide his Colleague – the standard is a newspaper of wide local circulation. I want to strongly recommend that a notice is...

Mr. Speaker: This is a questioning period, not a recommending period, please...

Ms. Walton-Desir: I will come to my question.

Mr. Speaker: Come to the question.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, let me come to my question. Mr. Speaker, I want to be advised by the Hon.

Minister whether there are any legal consequences that will be attached to persons failing to present themselves to be registered.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, there are, of course, legal consequences. I want to remind the Hon. Member that we still have thousands of Guyanese who are still in Venezuela and in other places and we should not be in a position where we seem to be going off any particular group, particularly, with respect to this group at this time.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member, Sarabo-Halley, could we move on to question number 15?

15. Scholarships awarded to citizens through the GOAL and GROW Initiatives

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Sir. We shall move on. To the Hon. Minister of Labour, can the Hon. Minister state whether there has been any collaboration among the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Public Service to ensure that the scholarships being given to train, retrain or upskill our citizens through the GOAL and GROW initiatives are relevant to the skills needed in the short-medium term?

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: The answer to both questions is yes.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you very much, Sir. I cannot say that I expected better. Could the Hon. Minister state what data or analysis was utilised to determine which areas people should be trained in, were retrained in or upskilled in? Could you say what data was used to determine the skills that we are training persons in?

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, what data was developed? The question is whether there was collaboration and I have answered yes. The question is whether the collaboration has to do with the skills needed in the short term and medium term and I will dare say that we are also dealing with the long term. That is the answer to the question that has just been asked.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister state whether there is any attempt to conduct a skills gap analysis of the local labour market?

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, just to say that we work as a whole of a Government and, therefore, it is not just collaboration amongst the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education and the other Ministry. We have engaged and we

are paying attention to all Ministries where training is being done. That is the whole of government policy regarding training and development.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much. I will allow you one more question and then we will have to move on.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Minister is not doing any skills gap analysis. That is obvious. Based on the training that has happened from 2020 to now, I am wondering whether there is any monitoring and evaluation being done to show what percentage of the skills training being done is leading to actual employment of those being trained. If there is data that suggests that, can you share that?

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is yes.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am not going to ask another question, but I am just letting you know that the Minister just said that there is data, and he is willing to share it, so we are going to look for that data. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: No, the Minister did not use your words.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: He said yes which encompasses everything that I asked.

Mr. Speaker: It does not. I could have stopped you because it is not the Minister who keeps those records. I could have said that it was wrongly directed, so, please.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

Update on the aggressive steps taken recently by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela against the Cooperative Republic of Guyana

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present an update on the developments relating to the aggressive steps that have been taken recently by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela against the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. In this House, on 6th November, 2023, the Parliament of Guyana unanimously passed Resolution No. 66 of 2023 reaffirming the recognition of the 1899 Arbitral Award and the 1966 Geneva Agreement. The National Assembly most significantly resolved to:

1. Affirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

2. Reaffirm its recognition and acceptance of the 1899 Arbitral Award as a 'full, perfect and final' settlement of the boundary between Guyana and Venezuela and Article IV (2) of the 1966 Geneva Agreement as giving the mandate to the United Nations Secretary-General to select the means of resolving the controversy.

3.14 p.m.

3. Denounce as provocative, unlawful, void, and of no international legal effect, the purported referendum in Venezuela that was scheduled for 3rd December, 2023.

4. Support the Government in its pursuit to ensure a peaceful and lawful resolution of the controversy before the International Court of Justice and reject the proposal to return to any form of dialogue with Venezuela on the controversy outside of the process before the Court.

5. Support Government's formal approach for the urgent protection of the International Court of Justice, with the filing with the Court a Request for Provisional Measures for an Order preventing Venezuela from taking any action to seize, acquire or encroach upon, or assert or exercise sovereignty over, the Essequibo region or any other part of Guyana's national territory, pending the Court's final determination of the validity of the Arbitral Award.

6. Call for the deepening of engagements among all national stakeholders on issues relating to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, particularly within the context of the meetings of the bipartisan Ministerial Advisory Committee on the Guyana/Venezuela controversy.

7. Encourage the citizens of Guyana to remain fully engaged on developments surrounding the controversy.

8. Express its appreciation to the partners and friends of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for their support and expressions of affirmation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana.

Following the application made for provisional measures, the Court heard pleadings from both parties, on 14th November – Guyana and 15th November – Venezuela. On 1st December, 2023, it gave its order, which was unanimous, with all of the sitting judges voting in favour of it. The Order stated:

“1. Unanimously,

Pending a final decision in the case, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela shall refrain from taking any action which would modify the situation that currently prevails in the territory in dispute, whereby the Co-operative Republic of Guyana administers and exercises control over that area;

2. Unanimously,

Both parties shall refrain from any action which might aggravate or extend the dispute before the Court or make it more difficult to resolve.”

The Court’s ruling is legally binding on Venezuela. Both the UN Charter and the Statute of the Court, to which Venezuela is a party, require its strict compliance. The Secretary-General confirmed this in his statement of 6th December, 2023.

Mr. Speaker, despite the Court’s Order, on 5th December, two days after Venezuela conducted its referendum on 3rd December, President Maduro announced a series of measures to give effect to the results of the referendum. Amongst those measures are: the creation of a High commission for the defence of *Guayana Esequiba*, led by Vice President Delcy Rodríguez; the proposal of law to the National Assembly to promulgate the organic law for the defence of *Guayana Esequiba* that includes the implementation of the five responses of the referendum which are: (a) rejection of the 1899 Award; (b) the Geneva Agreement of 1966 as the only legal instrument; (c) non-recognition of the jurisdiction and competence of the International Court of Justice; (d) a mandate to secure the maritime border with a line of azimuth 70 degrees starting from the mouth of the Essequibo; and (e) the creation of the *Guayana Esequiba* state.

The other measures include: the publication as a decree in the *Official Gazette* of 6th December, 2023 the creation of a new Comprehensive Defence Zone – ZODI - *Guayana Esequiba* that will depend economically and militarily on the Strategic Comprehensive Defence Region of *Guayana*; designation of Major General Alexis Rodríguez Cabello as the sole authority of *Guayana Esequiba* with political administrative headquarters in Tumeremo, Bolivar State; proceed with the granting of licence by Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) and the Corporacion Venezolana de Guayana (CVG, minerals) for the extraction of oil, gas and mineral resources in the territory of *Guayana Esequiba*;

dissemination of the map of Venezuela incorporating *Guayana Esequiba* into the national territory; installation of an office of the Administrative Service for Identification, Migration and Emigration (SAIME) in Tumeremo, Bolivar State to carry out the census and give Venezuelan citizenship and national ID cards to the population; promulgation of a special law to prohibit concessions in Venezuela to foreign oil companies that operate with Guyana in the disputed area of undelimited waters in the Essequibo with a three-month deadline; and promulgation of the creation of environmental protection areas and national parks in the territory of *Guayana Esequiba*.

Mr Speaker, this is in blatant defiance of the Court’s Order, which made clear that Venezuela is prohibited from annexing or trespassing upon Guyanese territory or taking any other actions, regardless of the outcome of its referendum on 3rd December, that would alter the *status quo* in which Guyana administers and controls the Essequibo Region as an integral part of its sovereign territory under the Arbitral Award of 3rd October, 1899. Venezuela’s actions also violate the most fundamental principles of international law enshrined in Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, which makes it unlawful for any state to use or threaten force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another state. The acquisition, or attempted acquisition of another state’s territory constitutes aggression, which violates obligations under peremptory norms of international law. Venezuela is now guilty of breaching all these obligations, and the actions it has announced will only further aggravate the situation.

Faced with the direct threat of invasion of our territory, His Excellency, President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, reached out to his colleagues, Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Brazil, Cuba, France, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), as well as to the Commonwealth and the Organization of American States (OAS). He spoke with the United Nations Secretary-General and informed him that Guyana intended to bring the matter to the attention of the Security Council. A formal communication was sent to the President of the Security Council on 6th December. We believed that we were on good grounds to approach the Council because under Article 94(1) of the United Nations Charter, Venezuela is obligated to comply with the decisions of the International Court of Justice that are legally binding on the parties. Under Article 94(2) of the Charter, if any party to a case fails to perform the obligations incumbent on it, the other party, in this case Guyana, may have recourse to the Security Council,

which may, if it deems necessary, make recommendations or decide on measures to be taken to give effect to the judgement.

Mr. Speaker, Guyana is pleased that its request to the Security Council was treated with urgency by that body. The Council met on 8th December in closed consultations to discuss the concerns raised in Guyana's communication to it and was briefed by the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs of the United Nations, Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo. We have also requested a special meeting of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States. On 8th December, 2023, CARICOM Heads of Government, including our President, met in an emergency session to discuss the situation. They agreed on four significant points. I will read the first four paragraphs of their Communique:

“CARICOM Heads of Government met in caucus on Friday, December 8 to discuss the situation with regard the Venezuela-Guyana border controversy and agreed to issue the following statement:

CARICOM firmly supports Guyana in pursuance of the resolution of its border controversy with Venezuela through the process of the ICJ.

Further, CARICOM urges Venezuela to respect the conservatory measures determined by the ICJ in its recent ruling until a final resolution.

CARICOM reiterates its commitment to the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace and the maintenance of international law...”

You will see that CARICOM Heads agreed on the essential elements of Guyana's position. In that framework, they concluded as follows:

“...Accordingly, CARICOM calls for a de-escalation of the conflict and for appropriate dialogue between the leaders of Venezuela and Guyana to ensure peaceful coexistence, the application and respect for international law and the avoidance of the use or threats of force.”

It is in this framework that the President has agreed to CARICOM's call for a de-escalation of the conflict through an:

“...appropriate dialogue between the leaders of Venezuela and Guyana to ensure peaceful

coexistence, the application and respect for international law and the avoidance of the use or threats of force.”

This House is unanimous in its resolve that the land boundary is not up for bilateral discussions and that the settlement of the matter is properly in the International Court of Justice where it must remain until the Court gives its final ruling on the merits of the case which will be fully respected by Guyana. The President and Government has reiterated this on numerous occasions, and it was underscored again by the President to the CARICOM Heads of Government that the case before the ICJ will not be an issue for bilateral discussions or talks. The Government was therefore pleased that the statement issued by the Leader of the Opposition on 9th December, 2023 supported its position.

3.29 p.m.

Venezuela continues to deliberately misinterpret the Geneva Agreement and, even more fallaciously, accuses Guyana of disregarding it. They claim that the Geneva Agreement is the only legal instrument to solve the controversy, and further, that Guyana should negotiate this solution with Venezuela. Venezuela has never offered any credible support or evidence for its contention of nullity and invalidity of the 1899 Arbitral Award, which settled the boundary between then British Guiana and Venezuela, nor has it offered evidence to contradict the validity of the 1905 agreement, signed by both parties, which fixed the boundary along the line established in the 1899 Arbitral Award. To the contrary, between 1899 and 1962, Venezuela accepted and recognised that boundary as the international boundary between the two states, as reflected in all official maps of Venezuela published during this 60-year period. It is Guyana that has scrupulously adhered to the Geneva Agreement, and it is Venezuela, by rejecting the Court as the means of settlement, which is in breach of its obligations under that Agreement.

The Geneva Agreement plainly does not require endless negotiations perpetuating a permanent stalemate. It expressly provides assurances of a final settlement by vesting in the Secretary-General (SG) the authority to choose the International Court of Justice (ICJ) as the means of settling the controversy in accordance with international law. That is what he has done. The parties are bound by the Geneva Agreement to accept the ICJ as the means of settlement and to accept the judgment of the Court as the final settlement of the controversy. Let me reiterate. Guyana will not be engaging in any dialogue with Venezuela on the settlement of the controversy that has been brought about by

Venezuela's claim that the 1899 Arbitral Award, which settled the land boundary between then British Guiana and Venezuela, is null and void. As explained above, the method has been tried, tested, and has proven to be futile. It is now before the International Court of Justice which allows both sides to present their case. Guyana is prepared to speak with Venezuela on any other aspect that may contribute to repairing the relationship between the two countries. The Court's Order of 1st December, 2023, also stipulated that:

“Both Parties shall refrain from any action which might aggravate or extend the dispute before the Court or make it more difficult to resolve.”

Guyana is acting in accordance with this expectation of the Court. It is in this context that the proposal to engage in dialogue on deescalating tensions was considered. A lack of good neighbourliness can only lead in one direction; one that, as a responsible member of this regional fraternity and the international community, we feel is our duty to prevent, despite the fact that Guyana did not start that by which we are now all consumed. Let me reassure this honourable House that the Government has not relented on its diplomatic efforts to explain the justness of our position and to reach out to regional and international partners to solicit their support in the face of the direct threat of invasion by Venezuela. We have intensified these efforts and remain appreciative of the solid and principled support, collective and individual, of our Caribbean Community (CARICOM) brothers and sisters, as well as from our traditional allies and partners in the international community.

In reference to the migrant population from Venezuela, there was a wide-ranging discussion on this issue in this House at our last sitting when we debated the Guyana/Venezuela matter. The Government has put forward its position on the several measures being taken to receive migrants from Venezuela. It was explained that the Government has put systems in place to ensure that these migrants are treated humanely, that they are provided with all the social benefits that are available to the Guyanese population and that they are not discriminated against. I wish to reiterate, as was done by the Government at the last sitting, that there should be no xenophobic tendencies displayed by our citizens. Furthermore, public allegations of the Government giving citizenship to Venezuelan migrants for election purposes, in violation of our laws, should be rejected as baseless and mischievous. We are heartened by the national pride that has been displayed over the past weeks, where Guyanese at home and in the diaspora from all walks of life have banded together in heart and hand to show their love for this land

and to demonstrate loud and clear that Essequibo belongs to Guyana.

I close by assuring this honourable House that the Government will not rest in ensuring that it takes every measure to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana, and in doing so, will ensure that there is full consultation with the Opposition, the private sector, and civil society. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Prime Minister and Hon. Members, while a lot has been said outside of this House, I want to thank the Prime Minister for putting those facts on the record as the official position on this issue. Hon. Prime Minister, I understand you have another statement to make.

Update on Guyana Defence Force Helicopter Crash

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker and fellow Members of the National Assembly, today, we gather here with heavy hearts as a nation that continues to be in mourning as we find ourselves grappling with the profound loss of our valiant servicemen. These heroes dedicated their lives to the defence and protection of our beloved Guyana. Today, I stand before you, both in my official role as Prime Minister and as a fellow citizen, deeply affected by the tragic helicopter accident that took the lives of Brigadier (Ret'd) Gary Beaton, Colonel Michael Shahoud, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Charles, Lieutenant Colonel Sean Welcome and Staff Sergeant Jason Khan, and injured Lieutenant Andio Crawford and Corporal Dwayne Jackson.

Firstly, I wish to take a moment to extend my deepest condolences to the families and relatives of the fallen soldiers, and deepest sympathy to the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) for the loss of their comrades. Their loss is immeasurable. In this time of grief, we come together as a nation to share the burden of sorrow and support those who need it the most. My condolences also reach Chief of Staff, Brigadier Omar Khan, and the entire GDF community, including Hon. Dr. Jennifer Westford, Member of Parliament (MP), the wife of the late Brigadier (Ret'd) Gary Beaton. In solidarity, we share in grief, offering thoughts to the leadership and colleagues of the fallen soldiers. May the GDF find strength, unity, and solace in the memories of these heroes. May the legacy of the fallen soldiers endure as a symbol of valour within the force and provide strength and inspiration during this profound sorrow.

I also wish a swift recovery to Lieutenant Andio Michael Crawford and Corporal Dwayne Jackson and offer sincere condolences for the loss of their comrades. We are grateful for their courage and resilience. It will be remembered with great respect and gratitude from our country. We are thankful that, despite the adverse conditions and against the odds, they were able to return home to their families. Their commitment and duty to our nation will not go unnoticed.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Gary Beaton, Colonel Michael Shahoud, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Charles, Lieutenant Colonel Sean Welcome and Staff Sergeant Jason Khan were not just members of our armed forces but the embodiment of courage, dedication, and selflessness. They served with valour and love of country, ready to defend Guyana against any threat. Their bravery was not just a profession but a way of life. The incident unfolded as our forces were engaged in a vital mission to support troops on the western border. The challenges faced during the search and rescue operation were immense with adverse weather conditions hindering progress. Yet, the perseverance of the search and rescue team, involving three helicopters and seven fixed-wing aircraft, eventually led to the successful extraction of survivors and the fallen.

The following is an outline of the rescue mission undertaken following the accident. On 6th December, 2023, helicopter Eight Romeo Alpha Yankee Alpha was conducting a command visit to troops on the western border, transporting a small amount of ration. Following the activation of an emergency locator transmitter (ELT) signal, a search and rescue team comprising special forces was promptly deployed. Unfortunately, adverse weather conditions on 6th December led to the suspension of the rescue mission. The crash site was located on Thursday, 7th December. Despite two unsuccessful attempts to insert the search and rescue team due to bad weather, two rescuers were eventually placed 0.8 miles from the site using an Omni helicopter. Hindered by weather conditions, the survivors, the deceased, and the search and rescue teams spent the night together at the crash site. With improved weather on Friday, 8th December, the search and rescue operation resumed. The survivors, deceased individuals, and the search and rescue team were successfully extracted by winch on Eight Romeo Mike India Alpha and flown to Blake Slater airstrip. The survivors and deceased were further transported to Ogle using a GDF Highlander and Skyvan aircraft. The search and rescue team was extracted from the Blake Slater airstrip on Saturday, 9th December.

The two surviving servicemen have both been receiving medical attention following their extraction. We are thankful that they are both recovering, and their prognosis seems optimistic despite the dangers they faced. Lieutenant Crawford can walk and move unaided. He is receiving appropriate treatment and remains fully conscious, oriented, and coherent. In good spirits, Lieutenant Crawford is accompanied by relatives during this time.

3.44 p.m.

Corporal Dwayne Jackson, following a comprehensive examination over the past 48 hours, has been found to have a broken right fourth rib and second degree burns on both glutei. While these findings are not life-threatening, Corporal Jackson is undergoing treatment, including dressing, antibiotics and pain relief. He remains fully conscious, oriented and coherent, able to move around and in good spirits, surrounded by family at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). I must express our gratitude to all who played a crucial role in this operation. The Ministry of Health, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), the Regional Security System (RSS), Omni Helicopters Guyana, Inc (OHGI), Air Services Limited, Trans Guyana Airways, Guyana Defence Force and the Guyana Police Force (GPF). The success of this operation is a testament to the unity and collaboration of approximately 60 dedicated individuals who worked tirelessly to bring closure to this tragic event. As a country, we find ourselves standing together in the face of adversity, bound by grief, and yet, united by an unbreakable spirit that defined us as a nation.

We have since named the new road on the East Bank Demerara (EBD) "Heroes Highway". We will continue to remember and honour the lives of our fallen heroes. As I close, may the souls of Brigadier (Ret'd) Gary Beaton, Colonel Michael Shahoud, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Charles, Lieutenant Colonel Shawn Welcome and Staff Sergeant Jason Khan rest in peace. May their families find strength and solace in the memories of their loved ones. And may our nation, united in grief, emerge stronger and more resilient in the face of challenges. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may have the floor.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, the Opposition in this House, from the inception, indicated that we wanted Government and Opposition to work together to deal with this issue.

Unfortunately, while there is talk about consultation, there is not much of it in practice. Out of respect and appreciation for the importance of this issue to the people of Guyana, we have indicated that we intend to work together. I want to state here, at the outset, that I was briefed by the President on the visit or the meeting in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I consider what happened to be more of a *fait accompli* because by the time Prime Minister Gonsalves spoke, it was evident that this meeting was in the making months prior. [An. Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] I am just saying that based on what Mr. Gonsalves said; he said it was from September. The English language is very explicit and could be lucid. Prime Minister Gonsalves said that. May I continue to ask that and hope for the same kind of appreciation and respect that we gave to the Government when they spoke be given to the Opposition? [Mr. McCoy: (Inaudible)] Intelligence is not a word that is associated with you. [Mr. McCoy: (Inaudible)] The word intelligence is not associated with you, Mr. McCoy. There are certain ramblings you just leave.

I was saying, Mr. Speaker, that the President did brief me on the meeting. At that point, I said to the President that we are supportive of dialogue. I want to remind this House that we were in the forefront of saying there could be and must be dialogue but not on the Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy. I want to turn to the Resolution that we passed in this Assembly. It states:

“Supports the Government in the pursuit to ensure a peaceful and lawful resolution of the controversy before the International Court of Justice and rejects the proposal to return to any form of dialogue with Venezuela on the controversy outside of the process before the Court;”.

We agreed to that position. It is in that context that when I spoke with the President, I said to him that we agree that there should be an engagement that is aimed at bringing peace and deescalating the conflict. We believe that we were on good ground, and we continue to be on good ground. We are encouraged by what Sir Shridath Ramphal, a doyen of diplomacy in Guyana and the world, said:

“There was no call for any discussion on the Venezuelan controversy over the Essequibo Region of Guyana”.

We want to state here and now that we expect whatever discussion will occur, it should not involve the Venezuela/Guyana territorial controversy. In fact, we

indicated that you could focus on bilateral issues. It is our sincere hope that the summit will result in peace. Mr. McCoy, common sense is not in your vein. I did fore warn. We support dialogue. [An. Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] When people allow themselves to be made a Pitbull, it is bad. Cde. Speaker, we support dialogue. We believe that there is a place for dialogue. Like we said, we hope that, at the end of this summit, there is the movement in the direction of peace and the de-escalation of conflict, but we do not compromise our position on the Guyana/Venezuela territorial question. We would like to see a clear agenda before the meeting. I believe it is in the interest of the people of Guyana – not the People’s Progressive Party (PPP/C) and not the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) – to have a clear agenda moving forward, so that when we arrive for discussion, there is little or no scope to bring anything in that is not part of it.

May I remind this House that Venezuela, over the years, has tried a number of ways of getting this matter in the way they wanted it, with joint environmental actions, among others, which we rejected over the years, and we should continue to reject them. May I also tell this House that if by any chance the Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy is discussed, it would mean that there was a breach of our common agreement. As the Opposition, we will not support such an outcome. We hope that Government pays careful attention to what Sir Shridath Ramphal had to say because he made it very clear that there was no place for that kind of discussion there. We are not bound to support if the position is contrary to what we agreed. There are many issues that confront us if we are going to talk about consultation. We have consistently called for a border security commission. It is not because we just want to be part of the process. We believe that if we are going to deal with this crisis and deal with it efficaciously, then we need to work together, at least at the policy level, so that the decisions made enjoy the support of both sides of the House.

We have not only advocated for the Opposition. We said that we want other stakeholders. We identified the professionals that could be there, and we did not limit it to those professionals. We even said, ‘other relevant fields.’ While we are not a powerful nation militarily, one cannot but underscore the need to develop our national defence infrastructure. As a country, we must show our willingness to defend ourselves. We must show the people who support us that we are prepared to take the requisite actions to support ourselves. In this regard, I wish to remind the House that article 33 of the Guyana Constitution states clearly that

all Guyanese are duty-bound to defend our country, and I hope we move in that direction. That is why we have been calling for the upgrade of the defence architecture.

Our understanding of foreign policy is clear. We believe that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation should be equipped to handle these issues. While we know that foreign policy is part of the preserve of the President, when you are dealing with an issue like the Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy, you need every layer of involvement. We need our senior public officials to be involved. In fact – and I do not want to go too far – even before I recognised that the summit was already planned, I said to the President – and I want to say it accurately – that I believe we should have first had senior officials meeting, then the ministers of foreign affairs meeting before we arrived at the Head of State. Having recognised that the summit was already planned, we believe, based on our analysis, that we should not and could not say no to such a summit. It is on that basis that we agree that the summit must go ahead with certain conditions. Guyana needs a comprehensive campaign to reject every talk about the *Guayana Esequiba*. We need to have every mission... We need to identify envoys who we will send out to put out there the justness of our case and reject Venezuela's... May I also say this: I worry sometimes that when we repeat everything that Venezuela says, we are giving them some legitimacy. I want to warn against that.

3.59 p.m.

The least we say about those measures the better. What we need to do is reject them out of hand and have a proper campaign to ensure that they get no legitimacy. As Venezuela pursues its spurious claim, we have to be much more focused. I heard the Minister of Home Affairs talk about how you want to welcome Venezuelans and give them the treatment they deserve. We agree, but we are not stupid. We have to recognise that Venezuela is an adversary. We are not involved in any xenophobia. We are not involved in any anti-Venezuelan sentiments. We are involved in the protection of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity. To protect our sovereignty and territorial integrity, we need more from the Ministry of Home Affairs. We believe that it must gather accurate information. I would have felt much better if the Minister could have said that 30 people are here; this is the condition they are under; these are entitled; and these are not. Any attempt to link it solely to things like xenophobia, I think is misplaced. We are responsible to the people of Guyana, and the people of Guyana are concerned.

No longer is international relations and politics related to hard power. There is what is called soft power, made popular by Kwin Nye, I think it was. As we deal with the soft power issue, we must recognise that we are a small population, and we have to be very careful with the number of Venezuelans that we allow not only in Guyana but especially in Essequibo. There is little or no sense in saying 'Essequibo belongs to us' but there is an increasing population of Venezuelans in a contested area. I repeat that we are not being anti-Venezuelan; we are not being xenophobic; we are being realistic. If we are realistic, we will accept that we need those measures. We need to have accurate information. We need to know where they are located. When you say to me that there is not this person here and this person there, I travel the country just like you. I was just in Dartmouth. In Dartmouth – and we have video evidence of it – the neighbourhood did not know who lived in a house. When we checked, it was 17 Venezuelans, none of whom said they could speak Spanish. With my limited Spanish, I spoke to them. Now, that is just one indication. I believe they were Warraus who knew no English. They have no connections. One of the pieces of evidence of some form of connection to Guyana is that they tend to speak English. Whether we like it or not, one of the... [Ms. Hughes: Trends.] ...trends that we could note is that those with Guyanese parentage tend to speak English because they grew up in a house in which English is spoken. We are talking about Venezuelans with no connection whatsoever to Guyana.

We believe that this issue needs to be treated as a national issue in which there is proper consultation. Let me say why I say this to you. I do not want to be involved in Government, but I want us to be able to exchange ideas so we end up with the best policy positions that can promote and protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of this country. That is all we ask. I have no interest in sharing power on this issue. We have an interest in being consulted to ensure that we reflect the will of the Guyanese people and that we move forward. The fact that we could have passed a resolution unanimously in this House that prohibits us from discussing the Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy is an indication that when we work together, we are better. This House has given guidance to the President in the form of that motion. I acknowledge that he accepts it as guidance. But it is not guidance from the Opposition; it is not guidance from the Government; it is guidance from all of us and that is what is critical. I would like to say here that consultation is critical. We are, in fact, in a crisis. If you accept that we are in a crisis, then we need to work together to get ourselves out of the crisis. It is always the tendency of governments to

believe that they can do it alone. We must sometimes forgo that urge for the greater national good because, in the final analysis, if this goes wrong, it is not the PPP/C that will be affected; it is all of us that will be affected.

We have put on record our objection to Venezuela. Venezuela has accepted for 124 years that Essequibo is ours – from 1889 to present. We urge a campaign to tell the world that. When I say tell the world that, I do not mean speaking in Guyana. I mean an orchestrated campaign in Venezuelan newspapers, Columbian newspapers and newspapers all around. As you engage Venezuelans, one of the things one could recognise is that they only know that this territory is allegedly theirs. They do not know about an arbitral award, and that says something about us. I am not here blaming the PPP/C. You know we were in Government before. Why I am raising it now is because now we have the resources to do it and so we should do it. The President will make his efforts but there is nothing in this world like when one touches down to an audience that is responsive to the facts. If we put it out there and have that structured campaign to put information where it matters, then we will be in a much better position. I am also suggesting that the rejection of this so-called *Guayana Esequiba* is something we should carry to every diplomatic person or institution we meet. I will say to you, simply, it is important that we state it here because I can tell you that we were told that all the data on migration was there. The evidence does not suggest that. The evidence suggests that the information has migrated. [Mr. McCoy: A lot gone with Felix.] They should have carried you.

On the migrant issue, we have to repeat that we need some form of control on Essequibo. We cannot continue as is. We have to curb the influx. Additionally, we have to put the procedures in place to ensure the correct thing happens. I am aware that if one is a child of a Guyanese and he/she returns home, he/she can become a citizen, but he/she must produce his/her birth certificate and other evidence that his/her parent was born in Guyana. He/she then has to produce a birth certificate from Venezuela which is lodged. When that happens, then one could establish that person is entitled to Guyanese citizenship. We are very concerned that we need to handle these in a much better way. We operate based on good faith. Firstly, when I agreed with the President that we would give support, we then met. When the meeting was held it was agreed that there would be an active Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations that will address these issues. I want to say to this National Assembly that there has only been one meeting after the President and us met. Since then, there has been none. At a

time of a Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy when you need to be meeting to crystallise ideas, how could you have one meeting and not call another? Sometimes, I believe people come to this Assembly just to produce a façade about democracy. Democracy is deeper than the façade. It has to have active consultation. It has to have proper discussions. It has to have compromise for us to arrive at a consensus.

I want to say this: Venezuela will pay attention to us. It will look for the cracks between the Government and the Opposition. I warn the Government not to show cracks. Some of the actions are showing a crack in that unity. This issue is too big an issue to be partisan. This issue is too big an issue for trivial heckling. We have a glorious opportunity to work together on this one issue – the Guyana-Venezuela territorial controversy. There are other issues that we have to deal with, and we will deal with them, but we undertook to work with this Government in a united way in the interest of the people of Guyana. Let it be understood that this unity that we talk about, we have no intention of letting it be cosmetic. We have no intention of promoting ourselves. We want to promote the interests of the people of this country. I spent the weekend of the referendum in Essequibo. The Sunday I was there. Firstly, I must say that I was glad that everybody I engaged in Essequibo was united in the position that Essequibo belongs to us, and they do not want to be ruled by Venezuela. They were all united on that. It is in this context I see the summit; I see the summit as reducing tension, working towards peace, and creating the kind of environment for Guyana and Venezuela to peacefully co-exist; that is critical.

4.14 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am of the view that we need to develop an Essequibo policy. We seem not to have a clear policy as to how is it we will fend off whatever form of aggression Venezuela wants. We hope that it is understood that one of the elements of policy should be the peopling of that area with Guyanese, which would mean we have to put more significant types of development in the area. In the Pomeroon, the people complained that the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) allows the Venezuelans to pass without any records, but they are subject to having to give a name, where they are going, *et cetera*. That does not send a good signal to the people who belong to the Essequibo, and so it is an issue that should be addressed. We have said before, we believe that Venezuela's approach is to seek to people the area so that it can carry out its nefarious actions. We have to counter that. I anticipate that the Government and us will engage at the policy level on 'how do we deal with these issues in

Essequibo' to ensure Essequibo not only continues to be ours but we are actively in charge, in control, and creating little or no space for Venezuelan invasion.

Mr. Speaker, I really had preferred that we had debated based on the motion we proposed, because I thought the debate would have provided for a good exchange on... [An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*)] Why *yuh* did not tell Mark *duh*?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, under personal explanation there is an issue, your position could be adumbrated or something you want to bring to the attention... but I have allowed a lot of latitude. I think now we should come back to the issue at hand and move forward. Go ahead.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, you need to protect me, and I will help you. Yes, I am saying, Mr. Speaker, we need to address these questions in a serious way. It will be remiss of me if I do not do a few other things. I am in support of the naming of the highway after our Martyrs, if you want to call them the heroes or whatever you call them. But it would have been a good signal of consultation and working together if the Opposition was invited. It is one thing to come and say you want unity, you want us to consult. [Hon. Members: (*Inaudible*)] Mr. Speaker, your protection. I hope it would be acknowledged... [Hon. Members: (*Inaudible*)] When you are finished, I will continue.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, on behalf of the Opposition, express our condolences to the families of the dead. We did it before and we endorse that element of the Prime Minister's statement. But I also want to suggest that we might be doing the two alive a disservice. There were seven people in an accident – unfortunate – five of them died and we expected them to be honoured, but we also expect that those two who have survived and who have contributed to them recovering the people, *et cetera*, to be given similar honours and respect. We come over sometimes as only paying respect to the dead. I also believe that we should put the supportive mechanisms in place. [Hon. Members: (*Inaudible*)] Could you...? Mr. Speaker, am I not entitled to put on the record the similar things that the Prime Minister put?

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Leader of the Opposition, I am hearing you loud and clear; please.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, we urge that our actions not just be restricted to the heroes that died. We accept them as heroes, but we also need to see a significant focus on those

who have survived, giving them the requisite support to ensure...

[An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*)] You are suited for a menagerie. I want to jump out of this *menageric* behaviour by that person; not be part of a menagerie. We need to pay careful attention to the unity we promised here, and I want to urge all...

[An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*)] When they bray you stay silent. Mr. Speaker, after the braying I will continue. As I am saying, we have to pay careful attention to consultation and unity. They are the two things that will allow us to move forward as one against Venezuela. The President has engaged me and, I think, on behalf of the Opposition I have been cordial. I think we have taken the high moral ground on this issue. I think there are in place the conditions for us to work together, but it has to be manifest in here and out there. Therefore, I want to say, we support the Government of Guyana and the people of Guyana on our general positions moving forward. It is our sincere hope that our Guyana/Venezuela territorial controversy will not be sacrificed or even mentioned at the summit because it is before the Internal Court of Justice; and it is rightfully there, and it should stay there.

I want to say, in closing, that we have to become a matured people and approach things in a matured way; and sometimes sensible parents keep their infants away from 'big people activity'. You are guaranteed our support in this process. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Mr. Speaker, I just want to put on the record, I think that this is a very important discussion. There are a lot of hurt families. We have seen His Excellency the President and Commander-in-Chief lead not only with strength but with enormous compassion and empathy. I think it is important for all listening to know that the two survivors are being treated as our precious resource, and that there are to be honours in their name. I think when we have survivors it is a good thing for us to give them a choice about how they might like to be honoured. There is no need to call on us to do that. You are pushing at an open door; we are as one on that issue. The President was clear in His public speech yesterday, for all who want to hear and who are receptive to this kind of commentary, that all of the persons who served as heroes on this flight will be honoured; all of the persons will be honoured. I want to say at this time that it is important... I echo the Leader of the Opposition's call that we should be one on this issue. But we should not be one in this House and then mount a platform at Stabroek and say something else. We have to be one all the time.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Leader of the Opposition because of the particular impact of this I have allowed that comment. I will give you a few moments to make your...

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, just to say, at Stabroek we did everything in support of the Guyana/Venezuela territorial question, but it does not remove the fact that we are an Opposition that has to speak on other issues, and that we did. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTING OF THE ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence and your guidance.

Mr. Speaker: Honourable Chief Whip for the Opposition [*inaudible*].

Mr. Jones: The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) submitted a motion of urgent public importance last Friday. Could you guide us in terms of how we proceed with that motion, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. I discussed that with the Leader of the Opposition, and we had agreed that I will allow him to make a statement and that motion will not go forward. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bills were introduced and read the first time:

(1) Arbitration Bill 2023 – Bill No. 18/2023

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to facilitate domestic and international arbitrations by encouraging the use of arbitration as a method of resolving disputes; and for connected purposes.”

4.29 p.m.

(2) Criminal Procedure (Plea Discussion, Plea Agreement and Assistance Agreement Bill 2023 – Bill No. 19/2023

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to establish a system of plea discussions and plea agreements in criminal procedure and for matters connected thereto.”

[*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

Private Members' Business

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are several matters under this heading that are on the Order Paper by Members of the Opposition. They have asked that these matters be deferred. Hon. Members, this would conclude our business for today. Hon. Prime Minister, you have the floor.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the House be adjourned to the 14th December at 10.00 a.m.”

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I ask that the House be adjourned to the 14th December at 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House stands adjourned to 14th December at 10.00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 4.31 p.m.