



# OFFICIAL REPORT

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2025) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN*

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6<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 17<sup>TH</sup> September, 2020

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**PARLIAMENT OFFICE  
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.03 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

**MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (70)**

**Speaker (1)**

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

(Virtual Participation)

**MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (37)**

**(i) MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE’S PROGRESSIVE PARTY/CIVIC (PPP/C) (37)**

**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.

+ Cabinet Member

\* Non-Elected Speaker

**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.*

**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.*

*[Absent - on Leave]*

+ 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.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

+ 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.

+ 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.

+ **Cabinet Member**  
\* **Non-Elected Minister**

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*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. Nigel D. Dharamlall, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),*  
*Minister of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
*Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
*DeWinkle Building,*  
*Fort Street,*  
*Kingston,*  
*Georgetown.*

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*(Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini),*  
*Minister of Housing and Water,*  
*Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

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*(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.*

+ 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.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

**Junior Ministers (4)**

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.*

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. 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.*

**Other Members (14)**

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

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

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

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.*  
Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,  
*Lot 340 East Street,*  
*South Cummingsburg,*  
*c/o Freedom House,*  
*41 Robb Street,*  
*Georgetown.*  
Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,  
*55 AA Victoria Avenue,*  
*Eccles,*  
*East Bank Demerara.*  
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.*  
Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),*  
*Lot 290 Area ‘J’,*  
*Tuschen, North,*  
*East Bank Essequibo.*  
Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,  
*Paruima Upper Mazaruni,*  
*c/o Freedom House,*  
*Robb Street,*  
*Georgetown.*  
\*Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,  
*Parliamentary Secretary,*  
*Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,*  
*Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,*  
*South Cummingsburg,*  
*Georgetown.*  
\*Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,  
*Parliamentary Secretary,*  
*Ministry of Agriculture,*  
*Regent and Vlissengen Road,*  
*Bourda, Georgetown.*  
Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,  
*Lot 32 Crown Dam,*  
*Industry,*  
*East Coast Demerara.*

**MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)**  
**(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)**

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Joseph F. Harmon, M.S.M., M.P.,  
*Leader of the Opposition,*  
*Lot 99 Mazaruni Street,*  
*Guyhoc Park,*  
*Georgetown.*

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

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

Mr. Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P.,  
*Lot 3202 Pricese 3,*  
*Providence,*  
*East Bank Demerara.*

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

Dr. Nicolette O. Henry, M.P.,  
*Lot 2227 Ozama Street, North Ruimveldt,*  
*Georgetown.*

[Absent]

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*(Virtual Participation)*

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Vincero H. Jordan, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),  
Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,  
West Coast Berbice.  
C/o Christopher Jones*

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

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

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

Mr. Lenox R. O’Dell Shuman, M.P.,  
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,  
St. Cuthbert’s Mission,  
Soesdyke Linden Highway.

**Officers (2)**

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A.,  
*Clerk of the National Assembly,*  
*Parliament Office,*  
*Public Buildings,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*  
Ms. Deslyn West,  
*Assistant Clerk of the National Assembly,*  
*Parliament Office,*  
*Public Buildings,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

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Ms. Bianca Cummings,  
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Mr. Rohan Ramjas,  
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Mr. Daison Horsham,  
*Audio Technician*

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Birthday Greetings to the Hon. Minister of Agriculture

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, first, my *As-salaam, Pranāma* and God’s best wishes to the Hon. Minister of Agriculture on his birthday today. We pray that all the choicest blessings will descend upon him and that he will continue to serve the people of Guyana.

Attention to Members – Rulings of the Speaker

Hon. Members, before we start today’s business, I would like to bring to your attention a few observations of mine which are serious. We have allowed quite a bit of it to pass, but, as we proceed, henceforth, we will have to abide by the existing Standing Orders, conventions established by Rulings of Speakers and by conventions established by other Parliaments which are well entrenched in documents that guide Commonwealth parliamentary procedures.

Firstly, I want to bring to your attention that criticisms of Rulings of the Speaker in the media are not allowed. Standing Order 46 speaks to this. If there is a question with respect to a Ruling of the Speaker, there is a procedure to follow and that ruling could be fully ventilated in the House and not in the media.

Hon. Members, I had, two days ago, to make mention of a very offensive post by an Hon. Member and that post is still up on his social media page. I am asking and pleading with the Chief Whips to speak to their Members. I expect that, after this announcement, with respect to that social media post, there will be positive action on behalf of the Member.

I want to say that breaches of privileges are serious offences, and while we do exercise fairness, patience and impartiality, we have to be guided by the rules that exist. I am, also, guided by one of the most respected Clerks in the Commonwealth and supported by parliamentary staff, who I personally know have been serving the Parliament and the people for decades.

Secondly, I also want to bring to your attention that displays in the House, and I remember this as if it was yesterday, are not permitted. These are from several Rulings by Speakers that go back many years.

Thirdly, as we continue the debate and hear from many new Members of the Assembly, I want to remind them and us that certain languages are unparliamentary for example: shut up, shut your mouth, lie and imputing motives on behalf of

another Member of the House. All these are well captured in the *Parliament of Guyana Handbook for Members of the National Assembly*, at page 67 and in several other Standing Orders.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2020

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

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2020 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2020 of a total sum of three hundred and six billion, two hundred and seventy-one million, two hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars **(\$306, 271,285,000), excluding twenty-three billion, two hundred and seventy three million, eight hundred and forty six thousand dollars (\$23, 273,846,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.

[Minister of Public Works on behalf of the Vice-President]

Assembly resumed Budget debate.

**Ms. Ferguson:** I rise from this side of the House to give my contribution to *Budget 2020* under the theme: ‘our plan for

prosperity’ presented to this honourable House on Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

I join with my Colleagues, on this side of the House, in expressing congratulations to you on your selection of appointment as Speaker. In the same breath, I offer congratulations to our new cadre of Members of Parliament and those who returned on both sides of the House. I do look forward to us working in the interest of all Guyanese to realise the ‘Good Life’ that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) advocated for under the astute leadership of His Excellency David Arthur Granger.

Mr. Speaker, you will agree with me that the debate on *Budget 2020* is being done at a time when our nation is still experiencing high racial tension after 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020 declaration of the General and Regional Elections with which many Guyanese are still unhappy and shocked because of the results after the national recount, which has proven massive electoral fraud. Also, compounding the aftermath of this election saga, is the gruesome killing of the Henry cousins, Joel and Isaiah, and, also, the death of Hareesh Singh of West Coast Berbice, which has grieved every compassionate heart in Guyana and further afield. To their parents and relatives, I express my condolences.

As responsible legislators and representatives of constituents and constituencies, we must ensure that justice is served. The families must be given the assurance and the commitment of our efforts to ensure that justice is not delayed nor denied. These murders should not add to the current statistics of cold or unsolved murders.

At this time, I would remind the honourable House of the vision of His Excellency Brigadier (Ret’d) David Arthur Granger on a united Guyana, where we live the reality of our National Motto as *One People, One Nation, One Destiny* forging onwards to ensure the manifestation of this vision. After the May, 2015 General and Regional Elections, he created the Ministry of Social Cohesion with the mandate to ensure cohesiveness, healing and reconciliation at the individual, community and national levels in our nation. I have recognised, with concerns, the abandonment of this critical Ministry and the non-allocation of funds in the 2020 Budget to forge unity in other sectors. This proves that this illegitimate Government has no interest in bringing Guyanese together, and I repeat, this illegitimate Government, sitting in the opposite side of the House, has no interest of forging unity in this nation.

The 2020 Budget, before this House, for our consideration, is one being presented by the illegitimate People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), as the biggest budget and an emergency one. In my close examination of the Budget Estimates, I was gravely disappointed. How can a party in Government boast about caring for its citizenry and, yet, little or much attention is given to address the global pandemic the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) that is ravaging our very small population at an approximate mortality rate of 7.8 per 100,000 population and a case fatality rate of 3%.

*10.18 a.m.*

These numbers are quite alarming for our country. Prior to this Government’s ascent to Office, it deemed the effects of this pandemic a hoax on Guyana. It showed little or no interest in working with the then Coalition Government, when invited to identify nominees to sit on the National COVID-19 Task Force (NCTF) response. The national interest was never its priority. It refused, just as it did, to sit on many State Boards. It disbanded the National COVID-19 Task Force response and created something, something which we are living with today.

The daily statistics reveal an increase of cases which, unfortunately, included Members of this honourable House. The nation expected an implementation of a robust plan to combat COVID-19 upon the Government’s assumption to Office. Guyanese are yet to see the plan. Due to its incompetence, I will recommend that this Government use the daily case reports to implement strict containment measures to curb the rapid spread of the disease, as is done by the recently re-elected Prime Ministers of Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, respectively.

On the other hand, during the past few days, Members on the other side boasted that this Budget, before this House, was completed in a mere 21 days and that announcement came after repeated reports stated that the treasury was empty. The APNU/AFC squandered the money, yet we saw moneys paid to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), which is a non-performing sector in the tune of \$5 billion. Moneys were, also, distributed to a few selected communities for COVID-19 relief. The question I will ask is: Where did the moneys come from?

This Budget has nothing for the ordinary man. There are tax exemptions and concessions for the private sector. It is known to this House that many private entities are indebted to this country by failure to pay taxes. Some of those same delinquent taxpayers are now Advisors to this Government. It

is a known fact that taxation must be balanced to ensure all essential services are adequately budgeted for this country to develop on a levelled playing field.

My view, and that of many, will not in any way be impactful, it can only be described as a private sector budget or a term being used for the Budget is ‘neoliberal colonial’. Simply put, it is for the elites.

The presenter of *Budget 2020*, Hon. Bishop Edghill, with his introductory remarks and other sections in the Budget speech, has failed to layout his Government’s five-year policy or to breakdown how *Budget 2020* will actualise into prosperity. In my view, I see *Budget 2020* as a plan for punishment.

It will be remiss of me not to remind Guyanese that during the APNU/AFC Administration, five budgets were presented to this nation by the then Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan. These budgets were people-centred. It focused on ensuring the fulfilment of the ‘Good Life’ for all Guyanese.

On the APNU/AFC’s ascent to the leadership of this nation on May, 2015, the first well thought out budget was presented on 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2015. It provided Guyanese with a clear vision, themed: *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. This is referred to in section 4 of page 15.

Imagine 2020 was a reflection of the APNU/AFC Government’s confidence in our people to function with a one nation mindset and to build this great land of ours for the benefit of all despite race, ethnicity, religion or creed. It envisioned sustainable socioeconomic development, good governance and human safety within a green economy. Under that Administration, we were all tasked with realising the vision of a ‘Good Life’ for all who live within our nation. We, the APNU/AFC Coalition, over the past five years, have set the foundation for sustainable socioeconomic development, good governance and human safety in a green economy.

I will now share with Guyanese, across the length and breadth of our 214,970 kilometres (km), our vision for the Co-operative Republic in the year 2020 by comparing *Budget 2020* presented by this PPP/C Administration. It lacks vision, it lacks futuristic capabilities and it is totally out of reach for the ordinary man, which we, on this side of the divide, considers to be the ‘real man’.

I had the distinct pleasure in serving as Minister within two Ministries, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and the Ministry of Communities with responsibility for Housing. For

the purpose of my presentation, I will briefly share the Coalition’s achievements since we are being lectured by the Hon. Members on that side of the divide that we did nothing, and that they have inherited poor infrastructure. All of us in here and many Guyanese have testimonies of the Coalition’s five-year stewardship. The Hon. Members, on that side of the divide, should continue to bury their heads in shame. What they failed to deliver in 23 years, we were able to do. My Colleagues in their respective presentations highlighted many of the Coalition’s achievements in five years.

As I am on this point, allow me to quote the famous biblical verse taken from Matthew 7:5:

“Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.”

For my presentation, I will briefly highlight a few achievements under the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. I know my Colleague, the Hon. David Patterson, will deal with that in-depth in his presentation. Cde. Speaker, I want to let you know that, prior to me leaving the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, we did tremendously well in the aviation sector and maritime sector. We would have boosted staff at the Transport & Harbours Department (T&HD). I think, on Monday, we heard that when the illegal Government came into Office, T&HD was in the red, but we inherited millions of debts from the People’s Progressive Party/Civic when we came to Office in May, 2015.

I wish to draw to this House’s attention a comment made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, three days ago. I do not see him here as yet. The Hon. Member reported on the sea defence at Content, Mahaicony regarding the performance of the following contractors: BK International and M&B Construction Limited. What the Hon. Member failed to tell us is that both contractors are executing the same measured works. However, BK International is being paid \$70 million for every 100 km and M&B Construction Limited is being paid \$168 million for the very 100 km. Therefore, it begs the question whether the additional \$100 million constitutes corruption. I would be grateful for the Hon. Member to respond.

I now turn my attention to the Ministry of Communities, the Department of Housing, for which I had a short stint. [**Mr. McCoy:** How many house lots do you have?] It seems to me that the Hon. Member knows a lot. I do not mind giving up two minutes of my time for him to say how many house lots I



have. He has two Members who are serving as Ministers in the Ministry of Housing and Water. The evidence is there.

When we came to Government in May, 2015, there were major challenges in the housing sector but, because of the decrease in the Government subvention and the sale of lands to private developers, still we were able to provide many units by way of housing units and, also, house lots.

I will need to quote from this report, Sir, though we were constrained as mentioned above. The Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA) was still able to provide housing solutions in the form of house lots. Yesterday, we were told that we did not give any house lots and housing units. The benefit of more than 7,000 households showed the commitment of the agency to deliver to the public, even with the challenges the agency faced. These lots were allocated mostly on the coastal regions of Guyana with the majority of the allocation in Pomeroon, Demerara-Mahaica, Region 4, Mahaica-Berbice, Region 5 and East Berbice-Corentyne, Region 6.

We further heard that the APNU/AFC Government failed to develop new housing areas, but I would like to share with this honourable House the following areas that were developed under the Coalition Government: Plantation Recht Door Zee – 25 lots, Parcel 123-125 Providence – 1,258 lots, Section D Non Pareil – 40 lots and Plantation Providence – 97 lots. I will not seek to derail the House further, but to say that we were able to... [*Interruption*]

**Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]:** Cde. Speaker, the Hon. Member was forced to discontinue her presentation because she is being distracted. It is not heckling, rather it is shouting from the Hon. Members. Could you please address it, Sir?

*10.33 a.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, just give me two minutes. I am getting some technical problems with respect to my microphone. I would like to appeal to Hon. Members to conduct themselves with decorum. Proceed, Hon. Member.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Hon. Speaker. When we took Office between May, 2015, up to the time we demitted Office, we were able to handover 27 housing areas to the respective local authorities. In Region 3, we handed over six areas to the La Parfaite Harmonie and Good Intent Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs). In Region 4, we handed over 30 areas to the Haslington NDC. In Region 7,

we handed over three areas to the Bartica Municipality. In Region 9, we were able to hand over four areas to the local authority. This is evident that the Coalition was committed to the empowerment of local democracy.

As I was preparing my budget presentation, I was able to go to the *Hansard* dated Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2011. I recall my Hon. Colleague in 2011, Mr. Aubrey Norton, asking the question whether proper planning was impossible under the Administration at that time, since it had no plan to use. It is well highly impossible to have a cohesive housing development plan if one does not have a proper land use policy.

It gives me great honour and pleasure this morning to report to this National Assembly that the Central Housing & Planning Authority was able to conduct a planning forum on 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2017. The critical output from the two-day forum was the submission of the National Planning Forum Report by Mr. Christopher Toppin who was the facilitator. This Report discussed and evaluated Guyana’s existing planning system and highlighted the framework for a reformulated planning structure for implementation.

Further, the Report provided a proposed action plan that itemised priority areas for implementation. We were, also, told that there was no national housing strategy. This was far from the truth. We were able, as a concerned Government, to conduct an assessment of the housing sector to determine what was causing many unoccupied lots, because these are lots in areas that we would have inherited from the PPP/C. These were the challenges facing Guyana’s housing programme of which my Friends on the opposite side of the House are aware: low take-up in housing schemes, cost of financing, inadequate public infrastructure and services, the need for strategic planning – and I just referred to a document that was done in March, 2018 – and the need for a revision of the current configuration of processing applications.

I wish to bring to this honourable House’s attention that, over the past couple of days, we heard that the Government did absolutely nothing for the housing sector. When we took Office, we met many houses; 1,000 homes were constructed in Perseverance, unoccupied and defective. We spent billions of dollars to fix those houses. Cde. Speaker, allow me to say this: many of the housing schemes we inherited from the People’s Progressive Party/Civic... I need you to take a drive to Tuschen, East Bank Essequibo, to Diamond, to Westminster in Region 3 or to Eccles and you will see the deplorable state of the roads. That is why many of our people

have failed to start their construction. It is because of the poor infrastructure that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic gave to them.

The other thing is: when we came into Government, the former President, Mr. Granger, knew exactly what he was doing when he brought together the Ministry of Housing and Water, along with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, and called it the Ministry of Communities. It was because his vision was to ensure that not only should Guyanese be given a plot of land to build their homes, but to ensure that they have cohesive communities with proper roads, electricity, water and also playgrounds. One could take a drive to the back of Perseverance where we constructed in excess of 384 houses in many styles – the two-flat and the bungalow. We even catered for those persons who are disabled. A plan that the PPP/C never had for the housing sector.

I am happy to report that, in reading the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s manifesto, this is what they quoted from their manifesto:

“One of the hallmarks of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic has been the housing programme, providing affordable housing to all Guyanese. The PPP/C developed and distributed 112,761 house lots to Guyanese families of which 80% went to low-income families.”

We had a financial assessment done to the Ministry of Communities and the Report by Ram and McRae revealed that developers between 2011 to 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2015, Government sold in excess of 359 acres of land. If a person should do the mathematics, one acre would give the person an average of five house lots. Let us do the Mathematics – 359 multiplied by five would give us in excess of 1,500 house lots that could have gone to poor low-income families. These lands were sold to developers and, in some cases, at the market value. These very house lots, today, have not even seen one development whether road, electricity, water or even the construction of houses.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. I would like to see you get some more time to conclude. Could someone move for the extension?

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you may conclude your presentation.

**Ms. Ferguson:** I will now take my attention to the water sector. I want to report to this honourable House that many of the areas are currently having water for the first time. It was under the astute leadership of Dr. Van West-Charles. What we noticed is: when this Government came into Office, rather than working together to see how best it can improve the water sector, it got rid of the competent staff. It got rid of Dr. Van West-Charles from the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) and Mr. Lelon Saul from the Central Housing & Planning Authority.

In Region 4, over 20,000 residents in ‘D’ and ‘E’ Fields Sophia benefitted from water for the very first time. This is not only in Region 4. We heard what was happening in Region 9 for the first time when my Cde. and Colleague, Mr. Vincent Henry, made his presentation.

I note my time is running out, but I want to remind the Hon. Members, on the other side of the House, about a scripture taken from Proverbs 6:16:

“There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue...”

In *Budget 2020*, we have been told of the many measures to help the less fortunate. What is of more concern to me is that the Coalition Government was accused of political gimmicks when we distributed house lots. It was the ordinary people who benefitted from those house lots: the public servants, the single mothers, the nurses and the Teachers. To hear the Hon. Members, on the other side of the House, say that when they came into Government, they will refund those people their moneys, it is an abomination. I am saying here to the people of Guyana that you have a right to proper housing and accommodation, and you must not accept any refunds from the Ministry of Housing and Water. It is your constitutional right and it is the right of the Government to ensure that proper housing is provided for our people.

*10.48 a.m.*

In the highly anticipated performance of our economy, due to the new resource that is oil, I would like to make a few recommendations. An additional \$5 billion should be injected into the housing sector, so as to ensure that the already available lands in the following areas are developed and persons can commence construction.

*Budget 2020* failed to address the reduction in value-added tax (VAT), and the extra burden, which was introduced by the PPP/C, in 2007. Promises were made, some years ago, by the then PPP/C Administration to establish a committee to review the VAT. It was under our Administration that we were able to see the reduction in the VAT.

The Government is saying that the people will be getting moneys back into their pockets because they are going to subsidise electricity and water. We know that many of the elderly folks, who live in Regions 1 and 9 and some parts of Region 2, will not benefit from the subsidies for electricity or water. There should be an additional \$25,000 grant for each household. The most vulnerable should be given an additional \$10,000.

Public servants must be given a salary increase for 2020. How can you say to public servants that they have no increase to get? How can you say to public servants that they have to go to bargaining before you can decide on a percentage to pay them?

Pensioners must be given an increase for 2020 even if it is an incremental approach on the \$5,000 they will receive in 2021.

In conclusion, I wish to categorically state that I cannot give my support to *Budget 2020* for the reasons advanced and I suggest that the Government seeks to amend the figures and reasons as outlined in the measures.

I thank you and may God richly bless us all. [*Applause.*]

**The Clerk of the National Assembly [Mr. Isaacs]:** Hon. Members, there is a problem with the internet; we have lost contact with the Speaker. We are trying to have it reconnected. Bear with us for one minute, please.

Hon. Members, we will put the microphone to the speaker, and Mr. Speaker will say something.

Go ahead, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Members.

Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, thank you very much for your contribution. I now call on the Hon. Member, Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall.

**Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Dharamlall]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Before I proceed into what I want to say in this debate, I would like to commend you on your office and I would like to share with Members of this House, including the legal Opposition, some words from the *Bible*. They like to quote the *Bible*, but I am also a baptised Christian. This is what Titus 1:16 states:

“They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.”

And this is what Matthew 23:28 states:

“So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

That is what we have as the legal Opposition in Guyana, the APNU/AFC.

I would like to commend the efforts of those who would have toiled to get this Budget together for us, in record time; led by, our Vice-President Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, Hon. Bishop Edghill and others.

As we are gathered here, today, in the hallowed halls of this auditorium, this auditorium has a lot of significance in the democracy of Guyana. Just a few months ago, in this very auditorium, was the tabulation centre for the recount exercise. In this very auditorium, is where democracy was defined in our country. In this very auditorium, democracy is now ruling over a dictatorship. In this very auditorium, I would like to advise the legal Opposition of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana that you have been rolled out by the citizens of this country. Buckle up, because you are going to have permanent residence in the Opposition of the Parliament.

Like my Colleagues before me, and on behalf of the citizens of Guyana, I would also like to express my gratitude of welcome to the Hon. Michael Pompeo, the United States of America’s (USA) Secretary of State. This country owes Mr. Pompeo a debt of gratitude. He has stood with us, he led the effort, he has been a bulwark against the APNU/AFC dictatorship, and we welcome him. We the free people, we the people, who honour the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*, welcome Mr. Michael Pompeo to Guyana because he was involved in the restoration of democracy in our country.

I know the APNU/AFC are very scared; they are very scared of democracy. It is a globally known fright that they have. Do you know what they have done? They have embarrassed this country, in no mean way, with their lawless conduct and, if

you permit me, their criminal conduct, during the course of the elections - the election rigging, the dismantling of our *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana* and their divisive behaviour.

As I am at divisive behaviour, Ms. Ferguson, this is also what the *Bible* states in Corinthians 11:14, and this goes for the warlord and others:

“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”

That is the level to which you are treated. You have done much wrong to this country; too much wrong you have done to this country. It is possible that many of those that sit over there, possibly all of them that sit over there, have been involved in egregious conduct towards the elections of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. They are now seated in Parliament, at the expense of other APNU/AFC leaders, seeking shelter from prosecution. But do you know what? Jail is jail and fraud is fraud.

As I am on fraud, do you know what happened? I was going through the reports of the ministries and the regions, and I found out that – and one of the leading, I think it was either *lampy* or *pampy*; it might be *lampy*... that \$12.5 million from Region 5 was used to rebuild the National Gymnasium. Do you understand what is going there? Region 5 rebuilt the tarmac at the National Gymnasium, so *lampy* has a lot to answer for, whilst these investigations are taking place.

As I am on that, do you also know that there was a Minister in this House, now sitting across the hall, in the Opposition... The staff at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development told me, when I took over there, Minister Nigel, we have to speak to you. So, I asked what it was about. They stated that persons came, one was a driver and the other a handyman; they both said that they paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for house lots and they were promised the house lots in November, 2020. That is fraud, and Ms. Ferguson will have to pay for it; that is fraud.

The egregious conduct in public office by the APNU/AFC is littered with scams: the house lot scam; the land grab scam; the airport scam; the scholarship scam that we have been hearing about it every day; the drug mule scam, Mr. Patterson; the constitutional scam, right, Mr. Forde; the elections scam that all of us know of and that is a globally known fact; the National Treasury scam, *et cetera*. As a matter of fact, in this year alone, up to the point of this Budget, the APNU/AFC, out of the \$330 billion Budget that

we have, have already expended over \$160 billion. You will be held accountable for it, so buckle up because we are going to roll out a plan to investigate every single corrupt activity, that all of you have been involved in.

There is also the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper scam. Do you know, Mr. Sherod Duncan, the *Guyana Chronicle* scam? And then there is the barbershop scam. We are going to be dealing with all of these scams.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order No. 41 - the Hon. Member is referring to a sitting Member of this House by his full name. I am asking that it be withdrawn, and that he refers to the Member as Hon. Member or Comrade.

**Mr. Dharamlall:** Alright, the Hon. *Pampy*, the Hon. Sherod Duncan.

I was highlighting to all of you, the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper scam. That is all I said, and I happened to mention his name.

Then there is the *wolf in sheep’s clothing* scam. Do you know what is also about the *wolf in sheep’s clothing* scam? Listen to this. Luke 12:2 states:

“Nothing is covered up, that will not be revealed or hidden, that will not be known.”

Everything is going to be investigated.

We have heard a lot of unhinged comments from the Opposition regarding this Budget and those comments are, of course, confused. They are obviously unaware of what has happened. One time, their leader was saying that the Budget is his; then, practically, every single Member across there said that the Budget is not theirs, and they have criticised their leader’s budget. The equivocation with which these people speak on the other side is totally confusing, lacking understanding and, of course, they have no idea of how an economy works.

Here are the facts: in 2019, Guyana, in the World Bank *Ease of Doing Business Index*, fell in the global ranking by 19 positions to 134, when compared to 2014. Notably, regarding construction permits – the last speaker spoke so highly of their housing programme, which I can tell you is a total waste of time – Guyana deteriorated from position 33 to 167.

11.03 a.m.

Do you know what that means? That means that this is verification that the housing industry collapsed in the last five

years under the APNU/AFC. They have been speaking so glowingly of their investments in the electricity sector. I concur with my Colleague, Minister Indar, on the electricity indicator status, which is an important element in enhancing the standard of living of people in communities. This is what the report states, and, by the way, this report is a World Bank Group flagship publication of *Doing Business 2019*, Guyana is ranked 170 out of 190. We are just above the crisis-stricken Venezuela.

The APNU/AFC did nothing for poor people. Ninety-one billion dollars increase in taxes; Minister Indar mentioned it as well. The private sector was also destroyed because of inefficiencies and overloaded and corrupt bureaucracy they had in Government. It is easier to do business in Ghana, Uganda, and Malawi, than it was to do in Guyana. It is easier to get electricity, a construction permit and to register a business in Sudan, than it was in Guyana, when the APNU/AFC was in Government. Shame! Shame! Shame on you!

The cost of living, as well, has increased tremendously. In the area of non-performing loans, we have been researching all of this, all the time. The was the closure of numerous businesses, especially small businesses; thousands have collapsed in our village economies and people are now poorer. And listen to why this is: excise tax on vehicles dropped 11.3% from \$8 billion in 2014 to just over \$7 billion in 2019. That means people cannot even afford to drive again. Do you know what happened? The APNU/AFC ran a *donkey-cart economy*.

On the issue of private consumption, none of you would understand what this means... it is the aggregate spending of ordinary people. It fell by more than \$70 billion between the 2014 to 2019 period, a 13% decline. People are poorer in this country because of the APNU/AFC and because of its taxation, borrowing and other policies to squander the resources of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Less money is now circulating in the lives of poor people in our villages. Do you know what? All of this is going to be reversed. We have already begun to reverse it in the last 45 days of being Government.

As a matter of fact, we have visited hundreds of communities and everywhere we go, people say Minister, we are so happy to have you. Minister, we feel so free now in our country. Minister, the things that the PPP/C Government has done in one month, the APNU/AFC could not do in five years and five months. They have nothing to show, except getting

caught trying to rig the elections on global media; that is what the legacy of the APNU/AFC is. Do you know what our President said? All those involved, we would get to the bottom of it, including *lampy* and *pampy*, and they will be brought to justice, so that democracy can reign in this country. We have to rebuild lives and our Government has been very clear about this. We have been very responsive in the last month and we intend to continue to be responsive to address the needs of all of the Guyanese citizens.

At the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, we will oversee the implementation of over \$51.232 billion and that includes the 70 NDCs, 10 municipalities and the 10 regions of Guyana.

Many of those before me, a few days ago, spoke about employment opportunities being denied, and how they would have provided jobs for people. I have some information to share with Guyana and the rest of the world. Just within the regional system, there are currently 1,690 vacancies, and I will tell you what the APNU/AFC did with them. Hon. Devin Sears, this is what they did in Region 10. Seven persons were employed in Region 10, just in my sector alone and I heard that another person, that is in this House, was a ‘petroleum jelly advisor’ to the former Minister of Natural Resources. The seven persons in Region 10 were earning more than \$1.4 million per month. Do you know what is worse about this is? There is no evidence of their work. These were freeloaders on the taxpayers. Instead of employing young people in Region 10, seven persons alone were employed. There are 183 vacancies in Region 10 and the APNU/AFC could have only employed seven persons.

Do you know what they also did in Region 2? Instead of employing the thousands of young persons in Region 2, this is what was done; they provided three staff. One was earning \$306,000 per month – maybe I should call their names – another was earning \$306,000 per month and the other was earning \$231,000 per month; only three staff. And do you know what? They did no work. I am amazed at how the Opposition can come here and stand in this House and defend the ineptitude, incompetence and corruption. You have no shame. But shame on you! Shame on you! Shame on you!

Do you also know that on that *lampy* and *pampy* show, there is one staff who was assigned as a ministerial liaison in the Ministry of Communities, now the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development? That staff was paid \$306,000 per month, despite sitting on the *lampy and pampy* show practically every day. His name is some Critchlow.

Do you know what else? There is a staff on the pensionable establishment of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, earning nearly \$220,000 per month, and is now sitting in the Parliament. This totally unprofessional and egregious. We need to ensure that those people, Mr. Mahipaul, are out. They cannot continue to serve the people of this country with that kind of behaviour. When they speak of employment, those are the facts on employment.

Do you know what they also did? I have been travelling this country, and one of the things that we have begun to quickly do is to clean-up. We have begun to clean-up the country. Now, everywhere, people are breathing.

In May 2015, when we left Government, we left over 3,000 Community Enhancement Workers (CEW). Right now, under the APNU/AFC when it was in Government, there are 1,579. This is why our villages are dilapidated. This is why one is finding the levels of destruction in our villages. I would like to let the public and the country know that, between now and the end of the year, when this Budget is approved next weekend, we will increase the CEWs from 1,579 to over 2,530. That is employment. An additional 951 persons will be employed to what we currently have. Whilst the APNU/AFC reduced the clean-up crew in Guyana by 50%, please, also note that they cleaned up the treasury by over 150%. That is what they did. They cleaned up the treasury.

We have to rebuild the local infrastructure by creating thousands of jobs in the 10 administrative regions of our country. Right now, we will be spending over \$4.8 billion to rebuild roads, bridges, and other infrastructure and buildings in our regions. This is only part of what we will do. Lots of development and thousands of jobs are going to be created. We are on course to ensure that 50,000 jobs are created in this country.

Imagine, the spinoff that has happened in this country. In this year alone, APNU/AFC has already spent \$160 billion out of the \$330 billion Budget. How many jobs have they created for persons in this country? Then they speak about sugar. But what I can tell is that, everywhere one goes in this country, the sugar workers need their jobs back. Their families need food on their tables. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic will make sure that local and village economies strive once again. With the reopening of the sugar estates, we will provide support to the sugar workers because they were victimised and discriminated. That is a travesty which has haunted you and will continue to haunt you. Because of the

sugar workers and the tears of the poor people, is why you lost the no confidence motion in December, 2018. Since then, the APNU/AFC has not been a Government, but illegal - *de facto* - and now the legal Opposition of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, and will remain there. So, apply for your permanent residence.

In terms of community enhancement on the infrastructural programme, we intend to spend tens of millions of dollars. The Mon Repos Market that the last Government refused to deal with, we will be putting resources there to enhance it. It is the biggest market on the East Coast of Guyana. We will be providing support to the Skeldon and Corriverton Markets too because we would like to see the services elevated, as we will do in Albouystown and East Ruimveldt.

One of the things we also have to do in our rebuilding of villages is to ensure that the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme is implemented in a way that ensures transparency and accountability. When this programme came to my Ministry, hundreds of millions of dollars, we noticed, had been missing. There is absolutely no record of the hundreds of millions of dollars, including, as is now common knowledge in our country, the famous barber shop. Whilst we will be providing support to small and microenterprises and to small persons to rebuild their lives, we will be investigating every single dollar and all those who stole will have to face prosecution, Nigel Dharamlall is saying so. Buckle up, as my Colleague Mr. Anand Persaud said, we will be buying lots of shackles and handcuffs for many of you.

We will have to review the new dynamics in the different industries in our country, especially in the medical sector. We also intend to support the Local Democratic Organs (LDO). The Local Democratic Organs are in a state of total decay, disrepute and disarray because of the high-handedness of the last Government – the APNU/AFC.

Only recently, I met with some persons from Leguan – an island that is primarily farmers. Last year, the trenches were cleaned and that was worth more than \$8 million, which is still to be paid. Do you know what the last Government, which is now seated properly in the Opposition, did? It refused to pay those poor people in Leguan the more than \$8 million. Within two weeks of getting into Government, those people were paid their moneys. We will provide support. The subventions of \$350 million will be paid to the NDCs. The subventions of over \$100 million will, also, be paid to the municipalities to enhance services, and it will be done

equitably. It will be done with real supervision and it will be done to ensure that lives are enhanced in our villages.

One of the things that we have to do in our country is to decentralise investment. And one of the things that our President, His Excellency Dr. Irfaan Ali, has put forward in his manifesto is to ensure that regional economic development plans are in place. We will also begin consultations with our regions to ensure that the capacity, capabilities and the different characteristics of those regions are enhanced, so that they can start attracting investment.

*11.18 a.m.*

The problem we had in the last Government was that they, practically, stole everything out of the country. There was no money to invest in our regions. That is why one finds that people are still clamouring for jobs in communities across Guyana. As a matter of fact, 30,000 and more jobs were lost under the APNU/AFC. We will reverse that, and we will create, once again, I emphasise, 50,000 jobs for the people of this country.

Solid waste management – one of the things I noticed when I was going through the Budget is that the APNU/AFC littered this country with waste. They were not concerned about solid waste management. One of the things that we have to do is to review the Solid Waste Management Bill. It was sitting at the *dry coconut’s office* for five years. Luckily, we have the distinguished Attorney General, who is one of the best Attorney Generals in the history of this country. He will be leading that effort. We now have new industries in Guyana. Mr. Anil Nandlall will be leading that effort to make sure that the Solid Waste Management Bill is reviewed and put in place – the Hon. Attorney General - the real Attorney General. I am being informed that the people have already removed the solid waste out of Government; and they are now in the Opposition.

There are many interventions that we have to pursue. For example, interventions in Region 1, we will be doing the bridges in Mora and Thomas Hill. We will be completing the road from Kumaka to Kwabanna. We will be upgrading the roads at Kobarimo and Hosororo Hill. We will have to do it because it was not done properly by the last Government. We will provide electricity support for Manawarin and central Moruka.

We will be rebuilding many schools and if I am to go through the list, I will need three days. When the PPP/C was in Government, we built over 800 new schools in Guyana.

Under the APNU/AFC Government, not a single new school was built in any of the regions in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. I was in Yarowkabra the other day, where over \$800 million had been given to build the school. People are going to jail for what they have done with that construction.

Education has been destroyed in our country. Do you know what is the most popular thing in the capital budget of 10 regions? It is sanitary blocks. Those people across there have provided no sanitary blocks, especially for the Amerindian people of Guyana. They have no care for Amerindian people and that is why they voted against them and that is why they will continue to vote against them. We will uphold and uplift their lives. We have to rebuild and rehabilitate the Port Kaituma Secondary School’s dormitory and, also, the extension of the Pakera Nursey School. We will be providing quite a lot of support.

In Region 2, Charity, River Stone and Dartmouth are going to have massive work done. Also, roads in Affiance, Charity, Adventure and Dartmouth will done. We will also be placing toilets at Somerset and Berks, and Charity and Dredge Creek. Dredge Creek is one of the areas that the last Government totally disassociated itself from. We will have to build a landing so that sick people can have comfort in visiting the health post.

A few days before they were rolled out of Office, a COVID-19 hospital was commissioned at \$1.6 billion without any oxygen. People of Region 2, an oxygen support system will be provided in the Oscar Joseph District Hospital. It will happen very quickly within a few months.

In Region 3, we will be doing works in Morasi, Good Hope, Hogg Island, Leguan and Hubu. We will also be building bridges in Hague, Meten-Meer-Zorg, Belle Vue and roads in Cornelia Ida (CI), Windsor Forest as well as other villages.

I visited Wakenaam, and do you know what happened? I visited the hospital and it is painted in duck egg green. That is the investment that Mr. Mahipaul made in the last five years at the Wakenaam Cottage Hospital, painting the facilities...

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Standing Order No. 41, again, the Hon. Member is referring to a sitting Member by his full name. I made this objection before and I am doing so again, Mr. Speaker. Please take note that the Hon. Member is also using some unparliamentary language. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, you stood on a Standing Order which is correct. You have [*Inaudible*] given

a chance to decide what the unparliamentary languages of that Standing Order.

Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall, Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, the Standing Order does not permit you to refer to Hon. Members by their names, unless you put Hon. Member, or Mr. when referring to that Member. You can continue, Sir. And, as I am on the floor, I am giving you the two-minute announcement and then you could have the five-minute extension. Thank you.

**Mr. Dharamlall:** Very well, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Hon. Ganesh Mahipaul who is a junior staff of the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development and he is from the *blow blow* brigade.

In Region 4, we will be doing lots of work in Cane Grove, Golden Grove, Unity, Mon Repos, Victoria, Bare Root, and Friendship. Roads and bridges in Mocha, Herstellling, Covent Garden, Vereeniging, Craig... the new Diamond Primary School, and Bladen Hall Secondary School. Many of you do not know where that is.

We have to take our students to the cutting edge, and so, science laboratories are going to be built at Dora, Betterverwagting (BV), Friendship Secondary Schools. Mr. Shuman, a science laboratory will be built, also, at the St. Cuthbert's Mission Secondary School. We will upgrade those science laboratories.

Last Sunday, I was in Bath Settlement and I found out from the residents that every home does not get water pressure. Do you want to know why that is? It is because the engineer in Region 5, rather than working to rebuild the water system or service it, is protesting and creating havoc on a daily basis in the lives of the people of that Region. Is that right, Mr. Jordan?

We will be working on the sideline dams in Chester, Brahan, Golden Fleece, El Dorado and Foulis. We will also be working on doing the bridges at Jacoba and No. 40 Village. Many of you go to these places to protest and you do not know where you are. The people told us that. Mr. Jordon, we will also be doing the roads in Hope, Blairmont, Bush Lot, No. 8 and Lovely Lass Villages.

We are going to be rehabilitating the Mahaicony District Hospital. As I am on the Mahaicony District Hospital, do you know what the last Government did? They have totally misappropriated and mismanage the COVID-19 resources. I

found out that they were building two incinerators. As a matter of fact, two incinerators were built in Fort Wellington and Mahaicony, Region 5. Do you know how much it cost? I will tell you just now. The same incinerator was also built in Region 1. The Region 1 incinerator, built by the same contractor, cost \$5 million. It is more expensive to build stuff in Region 1 because of the logistics. The cost of building those two same incinerators, in Region 5 was \$12.5 million each. I am telling you that people are going to jail.

In Region 6, tremendous works will be done at Crabwood Creek. We will be doing a lot of drainage and irrigation works between No. 43 to 51 villages, Lesbeholden, Mibikuri, Letter Kenny, Bloomfield, and Johns Ankerville. We will also be building bridges at Cumberland, Lesbeholden, Yakusari and Johanna. We have to expand this country. The last Government was visionless. They were just sitting there earning taxpayers' moneys. We will be opening up more lands in the Upper Corentyne. The design for a road from No. 52 Village to the Canje Creek will be done this year. We have to rehabilitate roads in Engelenburg, No. 64 Village, Lesbeholden, Ankerville, Alness and Bush Lot. Every region we go to, secondary schools have to be rehabilitated. That last Government did absolutely nothing.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, every second is precious, so you are going to have to get an extension.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you can continue, with five minutes to conclude.

**Mr. Dharamlall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The maternity ward at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital is a travesty. We will have to do a lot of work at that maternity ward in the New Amsterdam Public Hospital. As a matter of fact, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of that hospital was also a staff of mine. He was being paid over \$360,000 per month as a ministerial liaison in Region 6. Many of you know the name of that person.

We will be doing some works on the Tuberculosis (TB) Step-Down Care Unit at the Port Maurant Hospital and Ophthalmology Center, as well as rehabilitating the Mibikuri Hospital. The APNU/AFC is going to like to hear this. Guess



what is also going to happen this year. We will expand the food court at the National Psychiatric Hospital, that is, the Fort Canje Mental Hospital or the asylum because a lot of those people are going to be residents there. We have to make sure that the Fort Canje Mental Hospital’s food court is expanded.

In Region 7, the Caribisi Hill road and the Kamarang to Waramadong road will be done. I recall when the Hon. Minister, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, as the Minister of Amerindian Affairs put resources there. So that road now will further be enhanced. We will also be building bridges from Kako to Kamarang, so Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams should not be scared to visit. In case they put her out of the village, again, she will have bridges to walk back to Kamarang.

The teachers’ quarters in many schools such as Elteringbang, Imbaimadai, Kako, Kangaruma and Isseneru... The last Government refused to deal with our teachers. The teachers were treated disrespectfully by the last regime and we have to make sure that their conditions are improved. We will improve the multicomplexes at Waramadong and Bartica.

In Region 8, millions of dollars will be going towards building the road between Monkey Mountain and Paramakatoi. The last Government refused to deal with the Amerindian people in the North Pakaraima. We have to complete the Chenapau and Mahdia Primary Schools. A well will be dug in Micobie. Hon. Sinclair, the El Paso and Princeville villages will now have solar systems at their health posts.

In Region 9, more than \$30 million will be given to enhance agriculture. The bridges at Mocomoco and Powisnawa and roads at Lethem, Nappi, and Hiawa... The male and female dormitories at Annai will be maintianed. Again, they have refused to deal with our children.

In Region 10, the bridge at Retrieve and the road between Karakara to Wismar... Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, revetments at Block 22... You were flooded out before, so, now, we have to make sure we take care of you. The nursery schools at Bamia, Amelias Ward and Christianburg... We intend to do rehabilitation works at the Mabaruma Regional Hospital and the Upper Demerara Hospital. Again, health and education... The last Government enrich themselves off of our taxpayers and had no care for people living in villages and communities in this country. We have to make sure that, on a daily basis, we interact with people so that we can address their concerns.

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will be filling the gap between the Government and the people and between the people and the Government. I can assure you that moving forward, the people of this country, in our villages and communities, are going to get enhanced services. They are going to live better lives and are going to be prosperous long before l.the five years before the next elections. We do look forward to their support, as we are looking forward to the support of the legal Opposition in the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, the APNU/AFC.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minster of Local Government and Regional Development.

We do have some technical issues, but the system seems to be working again. I would like to call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, to make his contribution.

*11.33 a.m.*

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by first congratulating you and all the Hon. Members of this the Twelfth Parliament of the National Assembly who were elected to serve the people of Guyana, albeit legitimately or otherwise. I must also express heartiest congratulations to my colleagues in the public service who went beyond the call of duty to ensure that we have *Budget 2020*.

Before I go into the meat of my presentation, it is necessary for me to respond to the Hon. Member, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall. He said in this honourable House that this is a very auspicious building, indicating that this is the area where the national recount took place and that we are sitting on this side of the House as the legal Opposition. I am saying that we are sitting on this side of the House with legitimate votes. There is no guarantee that they are sitting on that side of the House with legitimate votes. This is because I was a national recount agent for the APNU/AFC and I was a part of the process where we opened the ballot boxes and there was no...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, that matter is now *sub judice*. I would urge you to be careful how you deal with it.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am guided. Nonetheless, I must say that it was referred to in the presentation of the speaker before me. I guess the technical difficulties caused you not to hear it.

Many of my friends in the public service made contact with me. They expressed dissatisfaction with this document, since

it deviates, significantly, from the national objectives of a budget, which is bettering the lives of our people.

Hon. Member Susan Rodrigues, in her presentation, said that the preparatory work on this Budget started since December of 2018. Another Hon. Member said that it took five weeks and the presenter of this Budget said 21 days. The real truth is that this Budget took 14 days to be altered to suit a notorious plan. That notorious plan is to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

What the Vice-President, Hon. Jagdeo, did was to take a finished budget from Winston Jordan’s desk and alter it. According to several shared opinions, the well-created Winston Jordan’s budget that was on the desk of the Minister of Finance in August, 2020, was severely altered and because the ‘doctor of doom’ wants nothing to do with the irreplaceable Winston Jordan, the ‘great pretender’ took his place. From 1992 to 2015, we had 23 PPP budgets – ‘punish poor people’ budgets. In 2020, we are now getting PPP/C budget – ‘punish poor people children’ budget. Had the ‘punish poor people’ Government embraced consultation and collaboration, which is enshrined in article 13 of our Constitution, the Guyanese people would have gotten what they craved. That is, a better Guyana. The changes that were made to the Winston Jordan document were done without consultation. So, it is not a people’s budget; it is a Freedom House budget that will again make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The absence of those national consultations led to the presentation of a budget that was not only irrational but one that did not address the needs of all Guyanese. For this fundamental reason, *Budget 2020* should be renamed as ‘disaster 2020’. I say, ‘disaster 2020’ because, when one examines the theme of this document, with the words: ‘Protecting our people in a COVID-19 Environment’, we need to ask the question: why so many deaths and cases? This regime could not have protected their own Cabinet Ministers. Mr. Speaker, they could not have even protected you. We need to understand that this is really and truly not a people’s budget.

Let me now turn my attention to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, formerly named the Ministry of Communities and soon to be renamed the Ministry of Communities, because we will be over there in a short period of time. The mission of the Ministry in 2015 was to improve the quality of life of Guyanese, by promoting the development of cohesive empowered and sustainable

communities, through collaborative and integrative planning, good governance and satisfactory service delivery. Here in 2020, under a senior and a junior Minister, who are currently competing to see which of the offices they will occupy, and which one will look better... There is one who is refusing to sign at the back of the receipts after spending Government moneys. They changed the mission and it now reads: *To supervise and maintain the legal framework of a system of local and regional administration*. If that is not a signal of dictatorship, then tell me what is? It was under the same mission, pre-2015, Neighbourhood Democratic Councils, if they wanted to spend \$100, had to run to Mr. Norman Whittaker and Mr. Ganga Persaud. That is what we are returning to. That is what NDCs need to understand. They are returning to those days when the Ministers will control their spending.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that you are intervening on the food that we ate. I think you may need to also do some fumigation. I am hearing some mice in this honourable House. We may need to get rid of them; they are squeaking a lot.

The Ministry of Communities had two programmes, with several sub-programmes that worked positively across this country, with a staff complement of 207. Today, after less than two months, the staffing at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is 131. It continues to deplete because *suru* and *duru* are on a witch hunting exercise. From one department alone, more than 40 hard-working Guyanese were terminated. I do not know how you could categorise Drivers, Office Assistants, Sweeper/Cleaners and Technical Workers as political appointees. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that, upon your ascension to this high Office of Speaker of the National Assembly, you did not specify what race or what religion you wanted to work with in your Secretariat. That is because you, Mr. Speaker, like President Granger’s 2015-2020 Government, understand that, though we may be different, we are one People, one nation with a common destiny. I cannot say the same for the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. I am also there, so when they come to this House and say what people tell them, staff also speak to me.

The PPP/C spoke about creating 50,000 jobs. So far, they are in the process of taking away 50,000 jobs. Cde. Dharamlall, who spoke before me, painted a picture as though the Ministry of Communities did nothing in five years. Let me enlighten my Friend, starting with the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils. The annual subventions to NDCs moved from \$2 million under the ‘punish poor people’

Government to \$5 million under the APNU/AFC Government. The APNU/AFC Government removed the power of the Minister from the Local Authority Areas (LAA). We are not dictators, my Friend. The power of the Minister was removed from the local affairs. We pioneered several legislative amendments. Two of them are: Act No. 5 of 2015 – the Local Government Act and Act No. 10 of 2018 – the Local Authority (Elections)(Amendment) Act. Maybe Cde. Anand Persaud should ask one of his National Television Network (NTN) staff to interpret them for him.

Within one year of ascending into Office, Local Government Elections (LGE) were held, after a 20-year gap. Local Government Elections were held again, as constitutionally due, in November, 2018, which represented, for the first time in our post-independent history, consecutive Local Government Elections, constitutionally due.

In 2015, there were 65 NDCs and six towns. There are now 70 NDCs and 10 municipalities, increasing the coverage of electorates under a Local Authority Area to approximately 91%. In 2018, President Granger convened the National Conference of Local Democratic Organs (NCLDO). The inaugural conference brought together the leadership of all three layers of Government. This forum had the objective of learning from LDOs, specifically NDCs, the challenges faced in delivering services to their communities. Secondly, it examined the relationship among, central, regional and local levels of administration. Thirdly, it determined how the budget for the financial year 2019 could be more effective at the local level. One of the recommendations of this forum was for the strengthening of the leadership of councils through the payment of stipends. Cabinet endorsed this recommendation and, from January 2019, the leadership of all municipalities and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils, for the first time, received a stipend paid by the central Government and leadership of Regional Democratic Council.

Regional chairpersons, including the ones that you control, started to get \$300,000 per month; five State persons got \$240,000 per month; Mayors of coastland – \$75,000; Mayors of hinterland – \$110,000; Deputy Mayors of coastland – \$60,000; Deputy Mayors of hinterland – \$85,000; Town Clerks coastland – \$55,000; Town Clerks hinterland – \$78,000; NDC Chairman – \$10,000; and Overseers – \$40,000. These moneys were in addition to the salaries they were already receiving. It was an additional money to them. Between 2015 to May 2020, \$3,349,436,000 has been spent under Project Development and Assistance.

11.48 a.m.

This programme facilitated, among other activities, the Capital Fiscal Transfer Grant programme, which provided funds to all local organs. Funds were used by council for drainage and irrigation, institutional strengthening and infrastructural development. Since 2015, the financial support to all councils benefitted from an increase in annual subventions.

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

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be given an extension of five minutes to conclude.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. Hon. Member you may continue. You have five minutes to conclude.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [**Mr. Persaud:** Tell us about the University of Guyana Student Society (UGSS).] To the Hon. Member who is asking about the UGSS money, it was used to hold programmes at NTN.

Since 2015, the financial support of all councils benefitted from an increase in annual subvention. These increases from 2015 to 2019 were as follows: the Mayor & City Council of Georgetown (M&CC), from \$22 million to \$30 million; the New Amsterdam Mayor & Town Council, from \$14 million to \$18 million; the Corriverton Town Council, from \$13 million to \$18 million; the Rose Hall Mayor & Town Council, from \$12 million to \$18 million; the Linden Mayor & Town Council, from \$14 million to \$18 million; and the Bartica Mayor & Town Council, from \$14 million to \$18 million. The new town councils received \$18 million, \$17 million and \$18 million, respectively.

The Georgetown Restoration Programme: between 2015 to May 2020, \$988 million was spent under the Georgetown Restoration Programme to assist in building and strengthening the capacity of the Mayor & City Council of Georgetown to deliver better environmental services. This programme focused on three areas which were: infrastructural development, institutional strengthening and community participation, and public awareness. Several programmes were completed, including the rehabilitation of the Kitty Market, Phase One and Phase Two; the rehabilitation of the East Ruimveldt Market, Phase One and Phase Two; the rehabilitation of the Bourda and East La Penitence Markets; funding for constituency-led community development works, including cleaning of alleyways, installation of streetlights,

construction of bridges, repairs to roads and the upgrade of the parks; and provision of equipment and the construction of a new administration building. Georgetown, under the ‘punish poor people’ Government, was known as the *garbage city*. We began the process of restoring it to the ‘Garden City’.

The Community Enhancement Initiative was developed to assist Local Democratic Organs in maintaining the access and aesthetics of communities’ social and economic facilities. It was initially catered for under the Project Development and Assistance programme in 2018, after which it was moved to the recurrent programme. Approximately 1,571 persons were employed across the NDCs; approximately 1,098 at NDCs and 473 were at municipalities. They were employed to carry out works within the Local Democratic Organs. This programme contributes to environmental enhancement and job creation. You cannot stand in this honourable House as Hon. Members and tell untruths; you have to be honest. This Government had five short years and what we did in five short years cannot be compared with what they did in the 23 years, which was to break the system of considering the poor people.

We have to understand that developing a country requires inclusivity, togetherness, harmony and us focusing on the people of Guyana. If the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, and the Hon. Member, Mr. Anand Persaud, are to understand that there is need for collaboration and consultation, then we have a far way to go as a country. It was this APNU/AFC Administration that focused on education. We focused on education and our country is enjoying good results. I hope that it will be better, once the Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand, dares to continue. We believed in education...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, unfortunately, I have to focus on your time, so you need to conclude now.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Mr. Speaker, because of the time constraints, understandably imposed upon me, I wish to turn my attention to the Essequibo Islands/West Demerara region. That is the region where a large amount of work was done for the bettering of our people in the field of public infrastructure. I must let you know, Mr. Speaker, that, in this House, there are several Members on the other side who are living in Region 3, who are supposed to be representing Region 3 and none of them could have said a word, a little word about Region 3. That is because it is this Government, the APNU/AFC Government... The Hon. Member, Dr. Tandika Smith, knows that the West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH) is in a

better state because she works there. That is the environment in which she functions in. She knows that the maternity ward and a number of other places were fixed.

In the field of public works, the people of Leguan and Wakenaam are enjoying 100% asphaltic concrete roads. We built...

**Mr. Speaker:** Unfortunately, Hon. Member, you have to conclude. Your time is up.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** In conclusion, I appeal to the Hon. Members on the other side of the House to recognise that, on this side of the House, we are representing legitimate electors. We are representing more than half the population of this country. I am asking them to recognise that, for the short period of time they will be in Office, they need to resort to consultation and collaboration, so that we can move Guyana forward and better the lives of all Guyanese. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Members. Let me apologise to you. We have had quite a bit of a challenge over the last hour and a half. The internet at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) has been down. It is up again. Also, we have had some other issues but thanks to the staff’s quick thinking, we were able to follow most....

**Minister within the Ministry of Housing [Ms. Rodrigues]:** Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a correction under Standing Order 40 (b).

**Mr. Speaker:** Unfortunately, Hon. Member, I will not allow that correction. Points of Correction, in my view, and I have been well advised, should happen while the person is speaking. If you check that Standing Order, if it is a Point of Correction/Elucidation, I have to ask the speaker who is standing his permission to allow you to elucidate. I am not going to open the Standing Orders for corrections after a person has spoken. I am sorry, Hon Minister.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** I am guided, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, I would again apologise for the connectivity. I was saying thanks to the quick thinking of the staff, I was able to follow both Minister Mr. Dharamlall and the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, *via* a WhatsApp connection from the staff. We

are working assiduously to restore permanency to the connection. I am assured that, by the time we come back, as we take the one-hour break for lunch, it should be ready. This is a good time, Hon. Members, for us to take the suspension.

*Sitting suspended at 11.56 a.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 1.19 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, before I take the next speaker, let me apologise for the internet connection. We have had an internet shut down at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre this morning. Our technicians, along with E-Governance, have done a lot of work to try and restore it. Hopefully, we should now proceed uninterrupted. We may have to go a little later than normal.

I want to give notice that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply will meet at 4.00 p.m. at the suspension.

**Ms. Veerasammy:** Good afternoon, everyone. Before I venture into my presentation, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of this illustrious House. I wish you a speedy recovery from the COVID-19 and I wish you the very best in your further endeavours in here.

I would like to congratulate our Amerindian brother, Mr. Lenox Shuman, on his election as Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. This is significant since we are celebrating Amerindian Heritage Month. What an excellent way to respect and recognise our First People. I would also like to congratulate all of our newly appointed Parliamentarians and wish them well, as they represent their constituencies through this highest decision-making body.

I stand here as a proud PPP/C Member of Parliament (MP), representing the women through the Women’s Progressive Organisation (WPO). I stand proud because our women voted solidly for the People’s Progressive Party/Civic to, once again, lead this country. This is because they know that, with the PPP/Civic in Government, life was easier and will once again become easier.

I am a proud mother whose son, Dr. Michael Veerasammy, was trained in Cuba - a Jagdeo scholar. When asked, he left willingly to work on the frontlines in the war against the global pandemic, COVID-19. He was sent to a community called Eteringbang in Region 7. When he went there on 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2020, the situation he found was most unwelcoming. Can you believe that he was not even given something as basic as Panadol tablets to give his patients? Let me not even

tell you about his living and working conditions in that remote corner of our country. That is the reality that some of our young doctors face on the frontline. He is still there because of my encouragement.

*1.24 p.m.*

I was advised that, sometimes, the Coronavirus takes up to 14 days for the symptoms to show up. Under the APNU/AFC, there was limited to no testing done. By the time the PPP/Civic Government took over, COVID-19 had already spread all across Guyana. But guess what, Sir? No trace of testing was done to ascertain the truth behind the massive spread. Now that testing is being done on almost everyone, it is exposing the mismanagement of the APNU/AFC’s COVID-19 political task force, which was made up of their members and politicians.

This spread virus did not increase under the PPP/Civic, as it is made out to be. This pandemic was already there in our society and, as testing continues, it is revealing the true picture of the spread of the pandemic in Guyana. The Coronavirus disease is our business. It can affect any of us at any time. We have to continue with the aggressive testing of our people and enforce the COVID-19 restrictions, while encouraging, through actions, our people to take all the necessary precautions to ward off this most serious virus that has the capacity to hurt all of us.

Allow me, at this time, to congratulate Bishop Juan Edghill, Minister of Public Works, for presenting, in my estimation, a people-oriented budget, one that has something for every Guyanese, notwithstanding occupation, gender, race, class or geography. I would, also, like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Finance for their hard work in helping to prepare *Budget 2020*.

Before I go further into my presentation, I would like to commend our young, dynamic and thoughtful President, His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. Just weeks after taking his Oath of Office, he has begun to deliver on his elections campaign promises. If one has the aptitude to assimilate, then one can easily recognise that *Budget 2020* is for all of us.

On 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2016, I took my oath in this National Assembly as a Member of Parliament. It is a day I could never forget. It started off as one of the most rewarding days of my life to be given the opportunity to serve my county at this highest level. Unfortunately, that day was marred by the events that followed. That day, the APNU/AFC Government imposed several tax measures on our people to further bleed

their already empty pockets. I worked fervently with my party and Colleagues for a day like 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

Today, I can say to our people with pride that our ‘Plan for Prosperity’ has begun a journey that would change their lives and that of their families for a better Guyana in the years to come.

The APNU/AFC did have large budgets, but they were grossly disappointing and did nothing to improve the quality of people’s lives or encouraged growth and development for our country. One of my Colleague Member of Parliament said earlier that Guyanese lived in fear, wondering what the next APNU/AFC budget would have taken away from them. Those days are gone. Guyanese can now look forward to a better quality of life under the PPP/Civic Government in real sense. Not a promise of the ‘Good Life’ but, indeed, promises that we will keep, to ensure that your lives get better.

In my 2019 budget presentation, I requested the Minister of Finance to take his budget back to the drawing board to include content on women in it. In turn, I was rudely asked by one of APNU/AFC’s former Minister of Government who am I to make such a request. I am one of the people’s representative in this honourable House. I have the right to make my observations known. My observations were objective. I criticised and I made recommendations. The PPP/Civic Government knows that women make up more than half of our population and, as such, *Budget 2020* allocations have begun the journey that will allow wives, mothers and single parents, the vulnerable and the underprivileged, to have more disposable income in their pockets, to improve their lives and conditions of living. Recognising women’s worth is valuing creation.

The Hon. Joseph Hamilton, Minister of Labour, already outlined, in his presentation some of the programmes that will be offered by the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) to provide skills, retrain and to make our women competitive in this age of science and technology, to meet the demands of our new petroleum economy.

The Guyana Women’s Leadership Institute (GWLI) is very dear to my heart. The huge capacity of this institution was underused and misused for the benefit of a selective few across Guyana. The GWLI was the first institution of its kind to be established in the Caribbean for women to be trained to take up leadership roles in our society at all levels, for them to influence decisions that affect their lives and for them to become economically and financially independent.

The PPP/Civic Government does not *pay lip service* to women. We have been known to *talk the talk and walk the walk*. We have instituted some of the most modern legislation to protect women. The PPP/Civic Government established the National Commission on Women, which gave way to the constitutional commission on Women and Gender Equality. From a paper on women, the PPP/Civic Government developed a policy on women; from women who could not have gotten a loan to start a business, to the Women Of Worth (WOW) programme. It was because of its understanding of poverty that the Difficult Circumstances Unit was established to help not only women but men who found themselves in dire circumstances and needed financial support. There is so much more that I can go on and on, but time will not permit me.

In 2015, the PPP/Civic Government achieved the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of providing potable water to Guyanese. This Budget will start the process of ensuring that families get treated water from their taps. When women do not have to spend money to buy bottled water, they can save moneys to buy essentials. There was a time in Guyana, under the People’s National Congress’s (PNC’s) 28 years of dictatorship, when women spent hours fetching water from far-off places or paid hefty sums for a black tank of water. Now, women can turn their taps on and get water because this way women can spend quality time with their children. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic made that possible long before APNU/AFC took Government in 2015.

Vision precedes the transformation. When policymakers understand people’s pains and sufferings, they will work long and hard, beyond the call of duty, to transform the society to benefit all. That is what this young, energetic, dynamic team of PPP/Civic Ministers of Government and MPs will be doing in the next five years and beyond. We are not here to use divisive methods to divide this nation. We are here to build a country for all to benefit.

Over the last five days, the APNU/AFC Government has been beating down the Budget claiming that it is a private sector budget. Over the past five years, due to poor or no policies, several businesses shut their doors on thousands of workers, while others cut back on the numbers in their employment. What was worse was their poor negotiation skills for the workers’ benefits. Can you remember the teachers’ strike? More than that, was the callous manner in which the APNU/AFC, after promising that sugar was too big to fail, closed the sugar estates in contradiction to the findings of a study which they themselves had undertaken. They fired

thousands of workers in the most vengeful manner without a backward glance to check if those families were starving, surviving or if their children were going to school. I am blessed to be part of a process that will see the reopening of sugar estates at Enmore, Rose Hall and Skeldon. What is more heartening is the work that has commenced already by the newly-established Wales Development Authority to create opportunities and employment for more than 1,600 workers who were fired by the APNU/AFC in January, 2016.

Families of sugar workers are now hopeful that their futures are no longer looking bleak. They are hopeful for a future where they can put food on their tables and send their children to school. Their tears have turned into smiles. I would like to remind this House that some of those sugar workers voted the APNU/AFC into Government in 2015, based on the promises that they had made. Those very people voted them out in 2020.

The incentives identified in this Budget will encourage businesses to reopen their doors which, in turn, will stimulate economic growth and prosperity. Indeed, the private sector is the engine of growth. The private sector, as it grows, will provide more jobs for our people.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, said that she hopes that putting moneys into the sugar estate is not putting it into a black hole. I remember those very words from the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan. I would like to say that sugar grew tens of thousands of Guyanese into the men and women they are today. I would like to remind my Colleague that sugar was one of the largest foreign exchange earners and, given the right impetus, the right guidance and enough financial support, sugar will, once again, become a viable entity. The PPP/Civic is the only Government to do it and we will work hard to make production competitive, while all of Guyana will benefit.

Aspiring homeowners, especially young people, were left with empty dreams, not knowing if they could ever be able to access a plot of land to build their dream homes. The previous Government shut down the Ministry of Housing. *Budget 2020* outlines Government’s commitment to ensuring that, over the next five years, 50,000 house lots would be made available to Guyanese. This is what we call promise kept for dreams to be fulfilled.

More so, VAT has been removed from construction materials. This is one of the single largest employment sectors of our economy and one of the ways through which 50,000 jobs will definitely be created. Moneys used to pay

rent in the past will now be used to pay the loans of new homeowners.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century brought with it new ideas, innovations and aspirations. Everyone dreams of becoming the owner of a motor vehicle to take their families out in comfort. Over the past years, Guyanese lamented their frustrations over the imposed age on imported vehicles. *Budget 2020* reverses this draconian requirement which had brought smiles on the faces of aspiring car owners; and you say that this is not a ‘people’s budget’. When I think about the poor, the vulnerable and the unemployed, I feel encouraged. When I think about the pensioners whose subsidies were removed and who were forced to pay VAT on their utilities, I remember my disgust. Our pensioners have the right to live their old age with dignity. This Budget will allow pensioners to save more money to spend on things they need. I also feel relieved knowing that steps are being taken by the Minister of Human Services and Social Security to ensure that they receive their pensions at home or in their immediate communities, without the stress of long lines in rain and sun at the post offices amidst COVID-19.

To be part of history in the making is indeed a great feeling. I would like to commend the PPP/Civic Government for the well thought out measures proposed to bring immediate relief to our people’s lives and our ‘Plan for Prosperity’ has begun.

The PPP/C Government...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, our push off for time will require you to get five minutes to conclude.

**Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her speech.

*Motion put and carried.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Member, you may continue to your conclusion in five minutes.

**Ms. Veerasammy:** Thank you. The PPP/Civic Government reversed some of the draconian taxes imposed to what they were prior to 2015, especially for the farmers and the miners, including land tax and fees at the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agricultural Development Authority (MMA-ADA).

1.39 p.m.

It removed the value-added tax from drugs, medical supplies and educational items; it reinstated and increased the cash grants for our children; it doubled the uniform vouchers for our school children; it granted free water to your elders; and it removed the VAT from electricity and water. There are so many more bold measures taken that are simply there to fulfil our promise to the people. It is all in our manifesto, which is a five-year macro plan for our country’s prosperity.

Some are saying that this Budget has not given enough as promised, while others are saying that it is not pro-poor. I would like to remind this august House that this is an emergency budget, one that should have been tabled as early as March, if the massive attempt at rigging the 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020 elections had not taken place. An earlier budget would have prevented the APNU/AFC from squandering approximately \$164 billion, which had to be covered in this Budget. Do you want to know why our people were not given more in this Budget? It is because taxpayers’ moneys were spent as if it were taken out of people’s pockets.

Domestic and gender-based violence remains a serious problem that affects each and every one of us. We are surrounded by perpetrators of violence and victims of violence. Many attempts were made, in the past, to reduce this scourge in our society. Even though there is a zero-tolerance policy regarding gender-based violence, it continues in our midst and around us by the very people we know.

Government has taken steps to enhance the physical infrastructure at all police stations, where men and women who are victims, and even perpetrators, can go and speak about their situation and seek redress. This is a programme that started about two decades ago. For more than a year, the Spotlight Initiative team has been meeting, consulting and putting together a plan of action for Guyana to find solutions and provide rehabilitation to victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence. I have been fortunate to have attended several of those meetings. Some €4.5 million support from the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) partners to fight domestic and gender-based violence in Guyana deserve our gratitude. Domestic violence and gender-based violence is our problem. Together, we have to stand up against it.

We all need to work together as leaders against the following: to end the COVID-19 global pandemic in Guyana; to eradicate racism and racial discord among our people; to reduce and eliminate domestic and gender-based violence from our society; and to further reduce and eliminate poverty.

We all have the golden opportunity to work together to build a society of which future generations can be proud.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s policies are definitely different from those of the APNU/AFC. We do not believe in *giving with one hand and taking it away with another hand*. The former Government must be commended for raising salaries year after year, but what followed the increase in salary was the more than 200 taxes and fees that operated like a silent *thief in the night*.

Every Opposition Member in this House, since Monday, has been chanting one mantra, that *Budget 2020* is pro-private sector and not pro-poor and that it is all *gloom and doom*. I have a question for our Brothers and Sisters on the opposite side. I want to know if the APNU/AFC leaders are telling their supporters to refuse the benefits coming their way from the 2020 Budget. I want to know if you are telling your supporters to not accept the \$25,000 COVID-19 relief. I want to know if you are telling the parents of your supporters to not accept the \$15,000 cash grant, plus the \$4,000 uniform voucher.

I would like to, therefore, say to our Guyanese brothers and sisters, that your PPP/C Government prepared *Budget 2020* with you in mind. The endless benefits outlined will directly and indirectly enhance your lives, so do not listen to the voice of doom. Under President Irfaan Ali’s Government, as it takes you into a future, there will only be progress and prosperity.

I would like to commend this Budget for this House’s approval. I thank you.

**Mr. Figueira:** I rise to lend support to my Colleagues on this side of the House, in our quest to demonstrate to fellow Guyanese that *Budget 2020* does not reflect their needs and interests.

Before I address the reasonably credible fallacies and broken manifesto promises of Government, presented by the proxy Minister of Finance, the Hon. Bishop Edghill, who was very bombastic in spewing the venom, not only of the Budget but, most recently, against one of the most consummate professional and qualified Guyanese woman, the Hon. Lindener, Ms. Walton-Desir... His cabaret show was despicable and juvenile. Shame on you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to offer congratulations on your election as Speaker of the House. I do appreciate your remarks in your debut speech, and I am very optimistic that



your words will be epitomised by your actions of fairness and impartiality, in this august House, for the next two years.

I also offer congratulations to all new Members of Parliament on both sides of the House. Indeed, it is a fresh outlook. Let us serve our people and country well. I am thankful and most humbled for the opportunity to serve the Coalition and people of Guyana at this level once more. All praise to Almighty God.

Mr. Speaker, I join with you in offering birthday wishes to the big youth, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture.

I have been entrusted with the responsibility to shadow the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, but before I delve into the shallowness of what was offered to the Ministry, and the Minister publicly saying that he is pleased with this paltry sum, I believe it would be remiss of me not to make some needed comments on some of the baseless utterances of some Members of Government.

We were regaled by my Friend, the Hon. Minister of Labour, about his organisational skills for his Ministry and his masterful plan to re-employ and train retirees, a plan that will put thousands of qualified, unemployed youths out of jobs. What a vision of this youthful Cabinet. Is this part of the 50,000 jobs that were promised?

The Attorney General (AG) aspirant, Hon. Sanjeev Datadin, informed the House and all Guyanese of the weaponization of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) towards the APNU/AFC. In his search to find presentation, he provided us with his layman understanding of the law and how to make bread, while failing to provide us with comments on the Budget. But it was understandable, for it does not offer much.

The Hon. McCoy’s theatrical presentation diluted the importance of his office at a time when leadership is needed to commence the Order to bring the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector intact. Guyanese in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century need multiple options to source cheap and reliable data. The Coalition passed the Bill into an Act. You must now run with it. Tell the House what time and when this will be done.

A budget is the nation’s statement, birthed out of consultations with the citizenry, and intended to add to the country’s social, cultural, political and economic development. This Budget does not reflect that. *Budget 2020* presents an avalanche of political rhetoric, sugar-coated speeches and broken manifesto promises. It is nothing but a

betrayal of the public’s trust while, at the same time, honouring campaign promises to private sector donors. This big supercilious boast about the completion of this Budget is puerile. There is a big difference between being a human being and being human. This Budget was forcefully prepared by human beings, but it lacks the human touch. This Budget is punctuated with deception and backward policy measures that will endanger the lives of Guyanese road users and presents a clear an imminent danger to our environment.

No forward-thinking Government, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, would opt for its country to be the dumping ground for used tyres and old vehicles under the guise of promoting business. Is this the Government’s plan for Guyana to be the Dubai of South America? Is this the ‘Plan for Prosperity’? Reversing the ban on used tyres is backward. It increases the risk of accidents and potential loss of life. Have we not had enough carnage on our roads already? Is the Government so blind that it cannot see the wisdom in using new tyres, or even reducing the import tax by 50% for importers of new tyres? We believe that not only the Ministers’ vehicles should have new tyres, but all road users’ vehicles should. We support the used vehicle business because it is a lucrative endeavour, but we believe Guyanese deserve the opportunity to be drivers of safe and environmentally friendly vehicles, such as electric cars, which resulted in the measures we implemented in allowing only cars eight years old from its manufactured date, along with concessions for the importation of electric cars – cars of the future. Why did the Government not opt to further reduce the taxes for the importation of newer vehicles? It is a lack of vision.

This Budget claims to speak of a ‘Plan for Prosperity’, but I am compelled to ask: prosperity for whom? It certainly does not reflect a plan for creating prosperity for the poor, the working class, doctors, lawyers, teachers, policemen and policewomen, the military or Sweeper/Cleaners. I read this 91-page document, seeking to find the 50% increase manifesto promise to our public servants in the Government’s 100-day plans, but I found none. Where is the increase for our senior citizens? This Budget is the Grinch of Christmas; it has taken away the gifts of many little children that a mother, a father and grandparents wanted to buy. The hope for turkey, chicken, pepperpot, beef, and baked chicken on many Christmas plates will be missing because this Budget has shown no love to hard working public servants. The Government has the audacity to say that this Budget is a people’s budget.

This big hullabaloo celebration of this \$25,000 COVID-19 relief for households is being given much fanfare by so many of the Government presenters, but it is a measure we welcome. I do not know why they are making a big fuss about this. We do, however, believe that more should have been given.

1.54 p.m.

Additionally, it should not have been a one-off measure because this pandemic has really affected the lives of many households. How the Minister of Health is handling this crisis is a matter for great concern. If the Minister of Health continues to manage this situation, as he did as the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, we are heading for serious trouble.

All who are honest will agree that the \$25,000 one-off assistance for families in need is grossly inadequate. Why not offer all public servants non-taxable wages and salaries until we return to normalcy, and offer the families who are not on the fixed establishment, \$100,000? That is a ‘we care’ measure.

Additionally, the \$15,000 branded ‘Because We Care’ programme for school children is another one-off disbursement plan. This will not provide the needed help for our students and their parents. All parents and teachers know that the David Granger’s Five B’s programme was a much more superior one to this sham of a ‘Because We Care’ programme. If the Government really cares, it would do the sensible thing.

Sir, I call on the Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Priya Manickchand. I urge her to appeal to her motherly instinct and continue the Five B’s programme that brings real, tangible benefits to the nation’s children. Any rebranding should be the Five B’s plus c - computers for all students.

The Hon. Charles Ramson, your turn. Most of Guyana’s youths held the view that the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports needed someone who understands and could have a greater appreciation for the multiplicity of wants and needs of this important demographic within our society. Many held the view that a more youthful person would have been a better fit, but it is quite obvious that not every youth is a good youth, and not every youth is a fit and proper youth. That hope we had was short-lived.

Even though the youthful Minister is in his embryonic stage, I must confess, he started off well. He visited and had

consultations with several associations, federations and some athletes and sports journalists to garner ideas and, certainly, photo opportunities. But to what end? What good are those ideas, if proper representation by the Minister cannot be made for a respectable budgetary allocation? I know you have tried, Mr. Ramson. You are a person like that, but you are not respected, my youth. It is not only a disrespect to you, but it is a disrespect to every Guyanese youth.

I put it to the Hon. Ramson that, had it been the PPP/C’s former Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony, arguably, one of the not so impressive Ministers to hold this portfolio, he would not have been given the least of the budgetary allocations. Guyana’s youths are so important to this Administration that the word ‘youth’ in this 91-page document, referred to by my Learned Friend, as the *fraud-get* document, is mentioned only eight times. The young people are so important that they only got \$2.7 billion or a mere 0.3% from a \$329 billion Budget – the largest to date. And the Minister is saying he is pleased with this pittance. What a shame!

Youth: It is a national imperative that we aggressively engage our youths in skill-training programmes to prepare them for the new and emerging industries in our country. That is why the Coalition Government expanded and enhanced the training facility and its programme at the Kuru Kuru training centre. I note, with great interest, the visit to the facility and I am confident that the Hon. Minister will see the merits in not only keeping that engine running but in expanding it to offer more to our young people.

Our youth must also be afforded with an enabling environment and State support to venture, innovatively, into the cultural industry. The Minister should make representation to establish a fund to benefit youths, who can imagine and develop business concepts that seek to alleviate poverty, through inward community tourism, by utilising both the built and cultural heritage resources existing in and around their own communities.

I urge the Hon. Minister to go even further and establish a national innovation and imagineering centre that will serve as an incubator for the development of ideas into viable business models. He should set up a supporting mechanism to harnesses corporate social responsibility funds from the existing and emerging private sector, so that growth would emerge out of the ideas generated into viable, youth-driven businesses. The direction of the Ministry, along with the promise for Guyana’s youth, is blind. As a football

enthusiast, I give the Hon. Member and his Government a red card, and as a basketball fan, a technical foul.

As a lover of the different genre of music, I say that the Hon. Member and his Government are off key when it comes to matters relating to culture, youth and sports. We all know, including the Hon. Member, that his interest is not here, and it could be served better elsewhere. Vickram Bharrat, your name is calling, Brother.

As a Minister for more than 40 days, he is yet to appoint a Director of Youth.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, earlier today, someone – and I think it was someone from the Opposition side – spoke to the Standing Order with respect to calling Members by their names, without using ‘Hon. Member’.

**Mr. Figueira:** I did say ‘Honourable’.

**Mr. Speaker:** Sorry, Sir. I did not hear ‘Honourable’; I heard ‘Vickram Bharrat’.

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you. I am so guided. As Minister for more than 40 days, he is yet to appoint a Director of Youth, a Director of Sport and members for the National Sports Commission (NSC). What is taking you so long to do this simple task? If you have to seek permission, then do so. We have waited long enough, Mr. Minister.

The PPP/C had over five months to embrace a new paradigm for sports in Guyana and it did zero, as reflected in the size of the budgetary allocation which seeks to rival that of Ministry of Labour. We are happy that the Government has endeavoured to continue our planned programme of building three multi-purpose facilities in Regions 2, 6 and 10, as well as completing the two synthetic tracks, as is evident.

This Budget and the Ministry are bereft of new ideas and the budget is propped up by rollover APNU/AFC projects, some of which are labelled as new. A case in point is the two synthetic tracks in Regions 6 and 10, where the resurfacing is deemed as a new activity, as if the project was designed without a track surface.

The PPP/C formed a COVID- 19 committee and were parading on television for months, but, to date, the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports cannot announce a protocol for any sports discipline in Guyana. It is no surprise, however, that the present Minister of Health was once the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, and his performance always stood out as far from positive. Presently, the number of COVID-19

deaths and hospitalisation in Guyana, in the last 40 days, are telling.

To the Hon. Ramson, I must say, in addition to the multi-purpose facilities in Region 10, it could only augur well for all of our athletes, who have excelled at the National Schools Championship and captured the crown for many consecutive years... It is an established fact that Linden has always been Guyana’s cradle for culture and youth development, youth movement and, it goes without saying, athletic prowess in all sports discipline.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports would do the nation a great service if it were to find the merits in the notion of leveraging sports as a platform and a vehicle for social change and social cohesion in Guyana. This Ministry, along with the National Sports Commission, should work with the Guyana Football Federation (GFF) to persuade them to follow the lead of their own world governing body, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). The Fédération Internationale de Football Association has been partnering with the UN agencies and other international civil society bodies to leverage the sport of football in promoting the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and broader social change issues. The Ministry should forge relationships, partnerships and Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with local, regional and international organisations to tackle issues of hate, crime, drugs, racism, violence and injustice, through the different sports disciplines and cultural activities.

Tourism is multifaceted and sports tourism has its own *niche* market, which the Ministry can help to promote, and which will contribute to the building of the economy. There are already two major sports disciplines that have the potential – football and cricket – but we can also use basketball and athletics. It is evident in this private sector Budget and this anti-poor Budget that it rather promote golf in the new pradoville apartheid community. What assurance can the Ministry give that a youth from Linden, Tiger Bay, Agricola, Buxton or any other community for that matter, will get an opportunity to try his or her hands at golf? When I read this Budget and peruse the Estimates, I see no sports.

Culture: Like sports, we must recognise we live in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society, and the need for social cohesion among our people is staring us in the face and it is calling for an answer. I put it to this honourable House that the answer is in Guyana’s youth and sports and culture. I urge the Hon. Minister to go beyond the mere

celebration and promotion of traditions and norms of the Guyanese society. Let us develop a country with a robust cultural industry, with the requisite institutional framework that supports the growth of existing businesses and brands and facilitates the emergence of the new exciting business ideas and platforms in culture. There is no harm in taking a page out of the book of our sister State, Jamaica. It is time for the emergence of brand Guyana in music, dance, poetry, craft, sculpture, *et cetera*.

Would it not be sad if just one colour was the colour that one saw? If everything was red, white or green and was the only thing that could be seen. Could you imagine how dull Guyana and the world would be if one colour was all we saw? Mr. Speaker, I put it to you and this honourable House that the beauty of us, as a people, is in our cultural diversity.

2.09 p.m.

When I read this Budget, I see no culture. Linden represents the microcosm of the plethora of talented, young people in Guyana who long for copyright legislation to protect their craft. This demand was asked for at a youth forum promoted by us in Linden and it was a plan that was indoctrinated in our plan of a ‘Decade of Development’. I trust that the Hon. Minister would use his two years to do so.

Additionally, our cultural product is a tourism piece, a tourism magnet the world as well as the creators of this visionless Budget are yet to discover. I trust that the Minister not only provides the needed training to enhance the potential, but also invest in the needed infrastructure. When I read this Budget, when I peruse the Estimates, I see no culture.

I must add that I must bear witness for the people of Linden and Region 10. The PPP/C pointed to an increase in the region’s 2020 budgetary allocation.

Economic growth is largely associated with capital investment. Thus, the APNU/AFC ensured that the region got the necessary investment. However, pages 702 and 703 in Volume 1 of the 2020 Estimates of the Public Sector tell the real story about the PPP/C. Region 10 received \$150 million less in capital investment in 2020 than in 2019.

When one looks at the legend on pages 702 and 703, one sees that more than \$100 million or half of the 50% in the 2020 capital budget for Region 10 are all rollover projects of the APNU/AFC. This demonstrates that the PPP/C did not care to invest where it matters in the region. All the increase in

spending, reflected in the 2020 Budget for Region 10, are in the expenditure, such as housekeeping, supplies for cleaning, electricity costs and normal everyday things. That is the price we have begun to pay as a region under the PPP/C Administration.

We shall not be fooled by the cheap talk from a proxy Minister. There is no allocation for the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN), which is assisting the real man in this depressed community. There is no budgetary allocation for the Linden Enterprise Network, which is helping poor people, young people and women in our community. This is the type of Government we have.

In closing, I am compelled to offer my own version of one of the most heart-stirring quotes from the late Martin Luther King Jr., combined with the timeless remembrance poem in moment of the Henry boys. This afternoon, as we continue our debates in these hallowed halls, we remember, quite passionately, that just a few days ago, we paid our last respects to two of Guyana’s young sons, heinously snuffed away in the prime of their lives. They entered the stage of Guyana’s history, just a few years ago, and in the brief years they were victims of a sordid act. They played their part well within the space of social and economic confines. Now, the curtain has fallen; they have moved through the exit. The drama of their early life has come to a close. But, be not foolishly mistaken; to us, they have thrown the torch. It is ours to hold in the highest corridors of justice, for we know if we break faith with our murdered youths, Guyanese shall not sleep though poppies grow in Flanders fields.

I call on the Hon. Minister, Mr. Charles Ramson, to be different, to be magnanimous and embrace the battalion of ideas, good ideas, I have offered for the benefit of all of Guyana, especially our youth people. I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. I want to offer you a good idea: keep your mask on, please. What we are telling people to do, we should also practise. Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira.

**Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]:** It is a very great pleasure to be able to have the opportunity to stand here as the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports and to be able to support the budget that was presented on behalf of the Government. In so doing, I would like to pay tribute to all of the hardworking, dedicated people who put this budget in place in record time. It shows what good leadership and good collective will can do in setting records.

Mr. Speaker, you know that, generally, a budget would take about 150 days to prepare. The PPP/C was able to have this Budget prepared in a matter of about five weeks, and so I pay tribute to the team that has been able to put this together. Its emblematic of the leadership that we will get from the President, Dr. Irfaan Ali, and the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

Allow me, respectfully, to congratulate all of the Members who have been appointed to this House and also, to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker. I join with all Members on both sides of the House in being able to commiserate and express my condolences to the families of Isaiah and Joel Henry and Haresh Singh. Our prayers remain with them.

As the Minister with responsibility for youth, I stand here, also, to say that it is a national disgrace for anyone in this country and anyone in this House to use the deaths of those three teens for cheap political points, to stoke and inflame racial hostility in this country and, in the process, to see innocent people get hurt; private and public properties get damaged; and create the hostility amongst people and villages that, potentially, can resonate.

I want everyone in the country to know that young people are not tools to be used for cheap political points. On behalf of all of the young people in this country, I say that we do not buy in to the race rhetoric. The race inflammatory situation is going to end with our generation. We will never allow anyone, regardless of who they are, to destroy our country because it is us who have to inherit this place.

Mr. Speaker, this is not an ordinary Budget. As you know, it is not an ordinary Budget because most times when one is examining budgets, one examines a budget from the position of one year relative to the year in which it is coming. The last budget we had was in November, 2018. More importantly, the reason it is not an ordinary Budget is because the Government has changed hands. As a result of the Government changing hands, it is important for us to be able to examine the leadership of the Government, relative to the position it had taken and inherited Government and to where it had left off.

I would like to just do a transposition of where we are now and where we were then and to compare and contrast the record. In doing so, I would like to establish facts.

The first important fact that I would like to establish is that, in the last five years, the APNU/AFC Government spent over \$1.4 trillion, with nothing substantial to show for it; \$1.4

trillion of our moneys with nothing to show for it. Since we are examining records, I want everyone to know, both in this House and all across Guyana, that, in the entire 23 years of Government under the PPP/C, if one were to add all of the budgets, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic never spent \$1.4 trillion. But, in the five years that the APNU/AFC was in power, it spent over \$1.4 trillion and they have nothing to show for it.

Meanwhile, under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, we have spent less in those 23 years and we have had roads, bridges, airports, schools, hospitals, health centres, canals, sea defences, stadiums, aquatic centres, community centres, five-star hotels, housing schemes, and over 100,000 house lots. So, the question is: where has the \$1.4 trillion that has been spent by the APNU/AFC gone?

The second fact that I would like to establish is that the APNU/AFC has left the country in a financial hole. Many times, one can look at the Estimates, but one has to go to the Bank of Guyana (BoG) figures to really get a good understanding of the overall health of the financial system and the macroeconomic position.

When the PPP/C left Office in 2015, we left over \$10 billion in the Central Bank. Right now, there is an overdraft which is a deficit of over \$92 billion. That is a swing of over \$100 billion. Where has the money gone? When we left Office, there was close to \$20 billion in our gold reserve sitting in the central bank. Right now, it is under \$500 million. Where has the money gone?

The third point is that our total stock of external debt is higher now than when we left in 2015.

The fourth point is that we now have to run a larger fiscal deficit as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as a result of the poor financial management of the APNU/AFC. I heard one of the young Members mention trading economics, but trading economics is just being able to take those Bank of Guyana figures and put them into an easy, accessible version on the website. Go and have a look at your current account deficit.

*2.24 p.m.*

Your current account deficit is a record just like your balance of payments. It is your record and your financial transactions with the world. Your current account deficit, which is one of the most important trading records with the world, shows

that, when we left Office, it was about \$400 million in deficit. Now, it is about \$1.8 billion in a deficit.

The fifth thing that I would like to give a good assessment of is the financial health of the country relative to when the People’s Progressive Party/Civic left it. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Let us have some order.

**Mr. Ramson:** You must be able to examine your export earnings of your productive sectors. If one compares 2014 into 2015 to where it was in 2019, sugar is down to 68%, rice is down to 11%, timber is down to 37% and diamond is down to 20%. The only sector that is propping up the productive sectors is gold. The only reason that is happening is because of the big investments that were made by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. If one were to extract gold from the equation of the export earnings, the entire productive sector, with its export earnings, is down to 15%. If one is to really examine who has had better financial management of the country and where the country is in terms of its financial health, it is the People’s Progressive Party/Civic that has succeeded.

I heard one of the Members from the other side mentioned the word ‘democracy’. The APNU/AFC should never mention the word ‘democracy’ unless the preceding words to the word ‘democracy’ are ‘we do not believe and support democracy’. I was particularly surprised by the young Hon. Member who mentioned the word ‘democracy’. I would not call her name and I would not call any of the young Members’ names here because I know that they have a future. As the Minister who is responsible for youths, they fall under my care and responsibility too. I know that they are not getting the good leadership on the other side, but they can get the good leadership from this side.

I was particularly surprised when the young Hon. Member mentioned the word ‘democracy’ because it was the Leader of the Working People’s Alliance (WPA) who had said that we should burn the ballot boxes. I want all of the Members of the other side to know that all of what they are saying really does not matter because they have lost the elections. I have no idea why you are trying to sing praises about your record. The *proof of the pudding is in the eating*. The election happened on 2<sup>nd</sup> March and the people have determined that they do not want the pudding that you were cooking. None of what you said will have any traction or any credibility, whatsoever, because the people of this country witnessed, before their eyes, what you did. To date, there has not been an apology or an admission of what was done. That is why

nothing that will be said from the other side will have any relevance or traction with the members of the public. You can say to me whatever you want. You can say to this side of the House whatever you want but, let me tell you something, the only people who will be the true judge, and who really matter, are the people who we took an oath to serve.

I would like to take the opportunity, since we are on the subject, to congratulate all of the people who, both national and internationally, supported our defence of our democracy and the preservation of our Constitution. Why was it important in the first place? The empirical fact is that countries that are democratic and that uphold the rule of law have the proven pathway for a better life for their citizens. The economic policies that you would like to discuss and that we are discussing... the fundamental basis of an improved life for everyone is having a democracy. You do not have to go very far to look at it and to find out whether that is true or not. Our very own history with what is our record and our economic growth is proof of that.

Maybe, around the 1940s to about the early 1970s or the mid-1970s, Guyana was one of the most prosperous countries in the region. Because of the rigging of elections and the dictatorship that took a stranglehold on our country, Guyana became the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Nonetheless, the APNU/AFC, despite this fact, was prepared to take all of Guyana there to see the entire country become isolated. I must tell you that some people are still so upset about the fact that they did not succeed in rigging the election. Some Members from the other side are so upset that they are discussing amongst themselves, and they believe that this is a legitimate conversation to have, that Guyana must be split up, where one group of people must go in one area and another group of people must go in another area. I want you to know that just like the People’s Progressive Party/Civic and the people of Guyana stopped you from rigging this election, we will stop you from dividing and splitting this country. For the people who are still upset about it, there is an easy solution for that. You can buy a plane ticket and you can go, but you would need a visa for that. I am sorry.

I heard one of the Hon. Members on the other side, or a few Members on the other side, mention youth budget and young people. Young people were betrayed and neglected by the APNU/AFC. Over 60% of this country represents young people. Before APNU/AFC took Office, they campaigned on young people. They promised that young people would occupy positions of authority in the Cabinet, in the Parliament and would be Ministers. When Mr. David Granger

became President and the APNU/AFC got into Government, not a young person was appointed to the Cabinet, not a single young person was appointed a Minister and not a single young person was appointed to the Parliament. Why does that matter? [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Mr. Ramson, it was a department.] I am not finished with them as yet. In this country, democratic and political power is held in the President, the Parliament and the Cabinet. That is what article 50 of the Constitution states. All of the decisions that are made on behalf of people are made in those organs. It is when you have the young representation, at the level of decision making, that those decisions are tailored to affect their interest. That is why you would have seen the following.

When they campaigned for young people, they promised that young people would be in leadership. It never made sense to me that young Members like Mr. Christopher Jones, Mr. James Bond and Mr. Jermaine Figueira were left out in the cold from those executive bodies.

Mr. Winston Jordan, in his 2016 Budget presentation, said that young people are not ready for leadership. After hearing the criticism about the budget for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, I would like the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, to hear what those figures were from the APNU/AFC: for 2015 it was \$2.4 billion, for 2016 it was \$2.3 billion and for 2017 it was \$2.6 billion. The point that I am making is that none of your encouragements and advocacies came when you were sitting in the seat of the Government; none. Not a single word was said. What was the result of the absence of young leadership in this country? The \$10,000 cash grant, which they called a political gimmick, was taken away from the people. For all of the young moms who had young kids, whether they have three, four or five kids, ask them if they thought it was a political gimmick. Value-added tax was added on education, University of Guyana tuition fees went up by 35%, young people got very few house lots, the 2.00 a.m. curfew was added, VAT was added on data, electricity and water and there were no jobs for young people. When Mr. Granger was asked about jobs for young people, he said that it is not the job of the Government to create jobs but that they must sell plantain chips and cook-up and make pepper sauce.

Let me tell you what the People’s Progressive Party/Civic will be doing for young people in this country: We are returning the \$10,000 cash grant and will increase it to \$15,000; we will double the uniform voucher; we will have the \$25,000 COVID-19 relief for all families; VAT will be removed from electricity, water, cellular phones and medical

supplies and building and construction materials so that young people could build their own homes; education will get \$52 billion in this country; we will remove corporate tax from private education and from healthcare; there will be 20,000 online scholarships; there will be 50,000 house lots; we will see the decrease in the interest rates in this country; there is the increase of the tax relief from \$8 million to \$10 million on low income loans; and the mortgage interest relief (MIR) ceiling has been returned to \$30 million. The APNU/AFC had reduced it to \$15 million.

2.39 *p.m.*

To the Hon. Member on the other side who said that we were being disingenuous by saying that it was a \$2.8 billion Budget, I would like to say that there is a new Ministry which was created and, because there is a new Ministry, those programme heads already had allocations or had already spent moneys. Those moneys have to be accounted for in this 2020 Budget, as the law requires. Out of the \$2.8 billion, the allocation that you see is \$1.2 billion, which is for the remaining three months. The rest of the money from the \$2.8 billion is in the 2020 Budget, but it must be accounted for. If you are talking about capital projects, Mr. Figueira, you must know that there is a procurement process. The Ministry of Finance will not give you...

**Mr. Speaker:** It is the Hon. Member Mr. Figueira and not Mr. Figueira.

**Mr. Ramson:** Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, there is a procurement process. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic brought the Procurement Act into being and, as a result, the Ministry of Finance will never give you money, which cannot be spent before the end of the year. We are now in an emergency budget situation, so the money can only be spent by the end of the year, which is in three months.

I have prepared a little note for you. It is not your fault that you do not know and that do you do not understand it. You have bad leadership on the other side that is not teaching you.

I would like to give an update on what is happening at the Ministry. The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, which was created by President Janet Jagan in 1998, was relegated to departments within ministries by Mr. David Granger and the APNU/AFC. First it was relegated to a department within the Ministry of Education, which was a complete failure. Then it was relegated to a department within the Ministry of the Presidency (MotP), which was headed by Dr. George Norton. They had two Ministers in five years; one Minister

wanted to be the Minister of Public Health and the other Minister felt as if his position was a demotion to have responsibility for culture, youth and sports.

I would like everyone to know that I consider the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to be the most important Ministry in this country, since it spans across all areas. If you were to add all of the budget allocations that go to young people, it is this Ministry, and the advocations that are being made on our behalf and the advocacy points, that the largest amount of money is being spent.

Imagine, young people communicate through social media and when I got to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, our *Facebook* page had 6,000 likes. Within one month, it has increased to 10,000 likes. There was no *Instagram* account and no *LinkedIn* page. When I met with the officers of the Ministry, I said to them that we have one mission: to develop and showcase young Guyanese talent. [**Ms. McDonald:** He told them not to use their phones.] That is not true.

I want everyone to know, as well, that, other than the Department of Social Cohesion, I have over 400 persons working at my Ministry. I have fired two persons only. There have been two persons, only, whose services have been terminated, and one of them is already gainfully employed; he is the Opposition Chief Whip.

The Department of Social Cohesion is just like everything else we have had in this country from Mr. David Granger.

Mr. David Granger said that he came up with this plan called the Department of Social Cohesion and that he had this plan in his back pocket. The problem is that his pants never had any pockets, so the plan never existed. When I checked to see where the allocations were for the Department of Social Cohesion, in 2015, there were no allocations for the Department of Social Cohesion and in 2016, there were no allocations for the Department of Social Cohesion. The Minister who was appointed in 2015 is one of the most divisive political figures in this country. How can you rear the country by having one of the most divisive political figures in the country? Out of the funding that was received in 2017, of the \$88 million that was received in 2017, only about \$58 million of that was spent on administration. No money was spent on the Department of Social Cohesion.

As one of the Member’s has spoken about President Granger’s legacy, I would like to speak about President Granger’s legacy. Since you spoke about his legacy, I am going to mention it. President Granger’s legacy is, and

forever will be, the Leader of the People’s National Congress (PNC) who lost in five years what the PNC took 23 years to get back. The margin was not slim; it was 25,000 votes combined and six out of 10 regions.

He is the first President in Guyana to have a court rule that he has breached the Constitution; the first President of Guyana to lose a no confidence motion; the first President of Guyana to fire 7,000 sugar workers; the first President of Guyana to have 30,000 jobs lost under his watch; the first President of Guyana to give away US\$55 billion in one deal; the first President of Guyana to have three press conferences in five years; the first President of Guyana to not give up power in five months after losing an election; and the first President of Guyana to practice social distancing before we had COVID-19. Even his own Ministers could not get in touch with him.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I do not want to social distance from you, so please ask someone to provide you with five more minutes to conclude your presentation.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of asking for five more minutes for my Colleague and we are social distancing. Thank you.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Ramson:** There is one other thing that he will enjoy the record of for the rest of his life. Mr. David Granger is the first President of Guyana to have his picture shown in *Google* images, when ‘rigging president’ is typed in. Go into *Google* images right now and type in ‘rigging president’ and pictures of Mr. David Granger will come up.

I would like to deal with culture. Since the Hon. Member had mentioned culture, I would like him to know that, of course, culture is important. Culture is the fabric that gives a people its identity. The APNU/AFC’s version of culture is... Instead of him having to look at Jamaica as an example, why did he not look to one of the APNU/AFC Ministers who had responsibility for culture? You should not have to use examples from another country to set a precedence. Why did he not cite what was done by Colleagues on his side? Your version of culture is to buy \$50 million worth of Buju Banton tickets and to have him come to Guyana and ‘big up’ Roger Khan.

“It is not an easy road.”

Even though we are in the COVID-19 pandemic, I am happy to announce that, as it relates to culture, we are going to be proceeding with, under safe guidelines, virtual and



broadcasted features of the dance festival, the drama festival and the song festival. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of this month, we are going to be having the Amerindian exhibition, so you can look forward to that, Mr. Henry. We are also going to be having the *One Guyana* concert, as well as the launch of Mashramani.

I am also happy to be able to announce that, our budget allocation is likely to double or maybe even triple, as a result of the three multipurpose facilities, as you mentioned Hon. Member Mr. Figueira. Those facilities are going to be international facilities; they are going to be world-class and we are currently preparing the concept notes and proposals. So, once that is done, we should be able to get the allocations for the next budget.

One thing I would like to be able to speak about as it relates to sports... We have a very exciting sports programme, but there is an issue that I must bring to the House’s attention in relation to cricket. In 2014, an irregular situation had occurred where the Guyana Cricket Administration Bill was passed with the support of both sides of the House. The APNU/AFC had supported the PPP/C, since it was in a minority Government situation at that time. Lo and behold, there was a challenge to that Guyana Cricket Administration Bill.

A few years after that challenge, the Minister who had responsibility for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, at the time, went to the Court of Appeal, along with the Attorney General and consented to the provisions being suspended in that Act. The lawyer who they consented to for the suspension of the Act, that they had agreed with upon its passage, is none other than Mr. Roysdale Forde.

**Mr. Forde:** Mr. Speaker, I stand on Standing Order No. 41. Firstly, I am a Member of this honourable House and I ask the Hon. Member to refer to me as such.

Secondly, in relation to what was said, it is factually incorrect. No consent could be made to an Attorney-at-Law.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Forde, firstly, when you stand on a Point of Order, you ought to give the Speaker a chance to rule that you can continue.

Secondly, you can only proceed on a Point of Elucidation, or in other words correction, if the current Member speaking gives way to you. I note the first Point of Order you raised, and I ask the Hon. Member to refer to Members as honourable, and honourable Mr.

**Mr. Ramson:** My unreserved apologies to the Hon. Member, Mr. Forde.

He will have an opportunity to respond to this, but I would like him as well as the public to know that, through the Attorney General, a motion has been filed and we will be having the Guyana Cricket Administration Act restored to its original condition, where it will be fully enforced in a matter of days.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, to stick within the time frame, can you please conclude?

**Mr. Ramson:** I have heard a number of statements being made on the other side, about their electoral prospects and their political prospects. I would like you to know that it is the same leadership that told the people that they had won the no confidence motion. It is the same leadership that said to the people that 33 was not the majority of 65. It is the same leadership that said that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic was not going back into Office. It is the same leadership that said that it was going back into Office. It is the same leadership that said that when the ballot boxes were opened it would have confirmed Mr. Mingo’s declaration.

2.54 p.m.

It is the same leadership which said that Mr. Lowenfield’s numbers must be used. It is the same leadership which said that it was going to be back into Office. After all of what was said, they are still standing here and saying that they are going to be back in Government soon. It defies belief and let me say something else, the same persons who lost all of those cases, on behalf of the other side, are the persons who are fighting that petition. Do you know that the Government has a petition that is pending since 2015? I would like to put a challenge to the Members of the other side, especially the young Members who are parroting that they are going to be in Office. Ask your leadership to show you the party’s Statements of Poll. They will never show you the Statements of Poll. If they really want to show you why you should believe them, then ask them to show the Statements of Poll. I want you to have a very good look at the Members on this side of the House when you speak about going back into Office. This is the same crew that put you out of Office in the first place and we have legions and legions of people who are *waiting in the wings*. So, when you think about going back into Office, just keep remembering that you were running the Government at that point in time and you had control of the Parliament, the Executive, the Cabinet, the Guyana Police Force (GPF), the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), the Elections

Commission (GECOM) and we still put you out of Office. We told you that we were coming for power and never ever, in this country, will the people believe and trust you again. It will be a long time that you will be in the Opposition.

Thank you very much. Mark my words. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Jones:** Let me quickly take this opportunity, like my Colleagues before me, to congratulate you, Sir, on your appointment as Speaker of the National Assembly. Of course, I would equally want to extend belated birthday greetings to the Hon. Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly and birthday greetings to the Hon. Member, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha.

I would first want to respond to the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Hamilton. I see that he has exited the Dome. Essentially, on Monday, when the Hon. Member spoke, he made reference to the young Members on this side of the House. He made a statement that no Member on this side of the House has any barber chairs in their homes. I would like to say to the Hon. Member and this House that I am indeed happy that none of the Members, on that side of the House or even this side of the House, have any barber chairs in their homes, even if those chairs would have been legally obtained, because if they did, they would have experienced first-hand State terrorism which myself, my seven-year old daughter and my 13 and 17-year old sons experienced.

To have 49 policemen – some heavily armed and some with bulletproof vests – nine police mobile patrol units, the street blocked off with police barricades, and the immediate community, in which I reside, plunged into blackout... Yesterday, the Hon. Dr. Vindhya Persaud spoke about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I want to say to this House that if the Hon. Members on that side of the House have their wives, husbands or children and they had experienced what I did on that fateful night, they would understand why, just yesterday, while we were debating this Budget, my wife had to take our seven-year old daughter, for the fifth time, for psychological treatment. What is noteworthy to mention in this House is the mere fact that, ever since this debate began on Monday, one has heard Members from the Government side of the House making reference to these barber chairs, *et cetera*. It tells you, or rather it confirms, that it was a clear case of political victimisation.

Despite the courts of this country...because the Hon. Member spoke about democracy. The courts, on that fateful night, issued an order restricting and restraining the police from entering my premises and when they were served with that

Order, they said that they do not abide by that and that Order was thrown on the ground. So, when the Hon. Member, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, made reference to the point about Guyana being ‘back on track’, we asked the question what track is he referring to because Guyanese, across the length and breadth of this country, can refer to the days, under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, when democracy did not exist and where the Guyana Police Force was been used to victimise Opposition Members. Guyana being ‘back on track’, in the days that we know of, is not what the people of Guyana want.

I turn my attention to *Budget 2020* or, as expressed by the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, the *fraud-get*. For the last four days, I sat in this House as a Member who served in the Tenth Parliament for a very short stint and, of course, who worked in the Parliaments before that as a mere Public Relations Officer (PRO). It was expected that we would have heard the Members of the Government side defending this document. But rather, all that we heard was political platform *gaff*. The Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, who just spoke, spent 33 or 34 of his allotted 35 minutes on political *gaff* and provided this House, the nation and the young people he professed to represent, no vision for that Ministry that he serves. One was expecting, save and except for the learned senior Members on that side of the House, that the young people whom he spoke about would have come with vibrant energy to represent their respective Ministries. We heard nothing. All we heard was *let they tek meh shoe off* and another Member who discovered leaks and patched a hole within a month.

This *Budget 2020* has no vision. The young Hon. Ministers who spoke earlier between the days past, spoke of no vision for their respective Ministries. Proverbs 29:18 states:

“...where there is no vision, the people perish...”

The Hon. Member who presented the Budget to this honourable House is very familiar with the *Bible* and the verse I just quoted, or so I would want to believe. He ought not be surprised at the pain we felt for the more than four hours that the Hon. Member read from a 90-plus page document. In that document, there was absolutely no mention of the Government’s vision for this nation. This Budget, front to back, bottom to top, left to right, is devoid of any vision. It will only bring more punishment and agony to the people of this country. In their haste to disassociate with everything the APNU/AFC did, the PPP/C has dispensed with vision. It has never been a party of vision.

In 2015, the APNU/AFC Government produced a national budget, which provided hope for the Guyanese people and envisioned a Government that was working to provide the people of this country with a ‘good life’. This hope materialised into tangible development for the people of Guyana, which was the step in the right direction. The people of Guyana enjoyed a higher standard of living under the APNU/AFC Government. This Budget is seeking to reverse the gains of the Coalition Government and plunge the people of Guyana back into an era where they cannot afford basic amenities, while the PPP/C friends and families within the private sector stand to benefit significantly from this Budget.

The PPP/C has departed from the prosperous path paved by the Coalition Government and is now parading half-fulfilled promises under the guise that this is a ‘people’s budget’. When one compares this *fraud-get* to the manifesto of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, several questions at large come to mind. I will give the House some examples. Where is the 50% increase for the public servants? It is missing in action; they deceived Guyanese. Where is the free University of Guyana education? It is missing in action; they have deceived Guyanese. Where is the \$50,000 cash grant? It is missing in action; they have deceived Guyanese. Where is the one-month non-taxable bonus for the Joint Services? It is missing in action; they have deceived Guyanese. And let us talk about the Guyana Police Force. I mentioned just earlier my personal experience. What a travesty that unit has now become.

Instead of a real Minister of Finance, we are saddled with a fake Minister of Finance who read the Budget and his only experience is, perhaps, collecting tithes from the church. Front to back, top to bottom, left to right, this Budget is shrouded in deceit. It is deceptive to the people of this country. I refer this House to the Official Report of the Parliament, dated Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2015, in which the then Minister of Finance, the Hon. Winston Jordan, presented the APNU/AFC’s first budget in Government. This Budget is a total of 48 pages which was allocated to articulating the APNU/AFC’s vision for this nation. This document is titled, *A Good Life: 2015/2020*.

What should be more frightening to every Guyanese is that this Budget is devoid of a COVID-19 recovery plan (CRP). What this Budget has is another handout; no CRP for Guyana. As a nation and as Guyanese, we want to know how, as a country, we will emerge from this global pandemic. It appears as though the Minister of Health has been ex-communicated and shutout from the Budget. There is no

input from him, in terms of a COVID-19 recovery plan, which can be detected, but that is not surprising. The Coronavirus disease in Guyana is now spiralling out of control. There are huge numbers of confirmed cases every day and more deaths in one month than in the previous five months under the APNU/AFC.

3.09 p.m.

Cde. Speaker, Guyana is now contending with two pandemics, COVID-19 and the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. But one ought not be surprised at the absence of a COVID-19 recovery plan in this Budget. Those who prepared the Budget, which was given to Hon. Bishop Edghill to read, were not only too ashamed to read it themselves, but are clueless when it comes to a recovery plan. When the PPP/C came into Office in 1992, they plagiarised and utilised the People National Congress’s Economic Recovery Programme then, and, now that they are back in Office, they are at a loss for a COVID-19 recovery plan.

Perception versus reality: I have often said that, in life and politics, there is perception and there is reality. The PPP/C is now operating in that reality, and the reality is that its term in Office is short. They know that there is an election petition before the court and, once heard, this country will be back to fresh elections. As such, they have no medium or long-term plans because they know what is coming.

The elections petition, once heard, will make clear the words “so long bye bye”. Those hundreds of public servants whose jobs have been terminated, those contractors whose contracts have been terminated and, of course, the villages that have seen unrest and the shedding of blood in just 40 days of the PPP/C being in Office, will all be able to say or sing these words, “good bye to my pains and my sorrow, so long bye bye”.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I do not want to say “so long bye bye” to you, so please seek an extension to continue to conclude.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five more minutes to complete his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Jones:** This Budget brings nothing to the people of Guyana. It offers scant expenditure to benefit the ‘fat cats’ of the PPP/C, hence the lack of vision and specificity, because the PPP/C is not for national development, but only seeking to appease its financiers. It is reciprocity time and the PPP/C

has to pay. The people of Guyana will, apparently, have to wait their turn.

I want to speak directly to our young people in this country. This Budget has little to nothing for them. The Budget disregards, disrespects and discards them. When the APNU/AFC Government was in Office, on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2020, it launched its vision, *A Decade of Development 2020- 2029*, which articulated a plan for national development. The young people at institutions of higher learning, Guyanese in the diaspora, young entrepreneurs and the private sector, all want to know what is your five, 10, 15 or 20-year plan for the nation. Could you answer this, Mr. Minister of Finance? My apologies, the Hon. Minister of Public Works. A young person who is studying or is about to pursue studies wants to know that, in the next five years, upon the completion of his or her studies, his or her skills are desirable. This is basic social and economic planning; nothing new.

The Guyanese in the diaspora, persons in Canada, England, United States America (USA), parts of the Caribbean, French Guiana and other parts of the world working in various fields, want to return home to the motherland. Of course, they need to know if, within the next five, 10 or 15 years, their fields of work will be available in Guyana with the appropriate remuneration so that they could start making preparation to remigrate. Hence, the need is for a vision for this nation of which this *fraud-get* does not have. A vision is not what only guides but it drives a nation.

The APNU/AFC Government’s *Decade of Development 2020- 2029* boasts of a first-rate growing economy that is innovative and competitive, which generates jobs for everyone willing to work; a world class education system in which every child attends and graduates from school; every eligible person is accorded free tertiary education at the University of Guyana; every teacher is trained and satisfactorily paid; a superior public healthcare system providing the best treatment and care available; communities in which there is a roof over every head, playfields and recreational facilities where children can play freely, and where citizens are free to walk without molestation; a country with modern infrastructure which would allow someone to drive from Crabwood Creek on the Corentyne to Sand Creek in the Rupununi; and with every household, community, region and business having access to the internet.

In closing, it is important to note that all the budgets presented by the Coalition Government could be dubbed ‘people’s budget’, with balanced measures to satisfy the

needs of every citizen of this great country as compared to this impulsive and feeble Budget presented by the Hon. Minister of Public Works for 2020.

There was a caricature which featured a lion and a monkey. The monkey, when it woke up one morning, with its eyes closed, stretched its hands, yawned and shouted, ‘I can eat a lion now.’ When it opened its eyes, standing by its side happened to be a lion. That monkey closed its eyes and stretched its arms and said again, ‘when *yuh* wake up in the morning *yuh* does talk some real stupidity.’ That caricature reminds me of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. While the Hon. Members were on their campaign trail, they promised everyone across this country gold, diamond and silver. Now that they are in the seat of the administration, they cannot present those promises that they made to the people.

To close this Budget presentation, I will refer to the words of the now deceased, the former television host, Mr. Laurie Alexander. The pages in this document feature nothing more than *pota pota lall poop* in it. I cannot support this Budget in its entirety. With those few words, this *Budget 2020*, as presented by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, is lacklustre, uninspiring and, of course, visionless. I cannot support it in its entirety. I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member and Opposition Chief Whip. You closed three times and I almost cut you off. Thanks for setting a good example to other Hon. Members. The Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Frank Anthony, you have the floor.

**Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Allow me first to congratulate you and to congratulate your Deputy, and all other Hon. Members of this House. Our presence here today is a reflection of the triumph for democracy in Guyana.

I want to recognise our international friends, big and small, who came to observe the elections and to ensure that it was free and fair. Their roles and presence were pivotal to safeguarding democracy in Guyana. Our nation remains grateful to them all. We want to extend a special thank you to the United States of America and, in particular, the Secretary of State, Mr. Michael Pompeo, for his proactive role in defending democracy in Guyana. We would like to welcome him to our country, and we are sure that he would have productive talks with us.

It was a long and arduous journey to restore democracy to Guyana. I would like to thank the people of our country who stood steadfast on the principle of free and fair elections, justice and the rule of law. As one of my Colleagues said, it was right here in this hall that we spent 34 days recounting those ballots. Every single ballot we looked at.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Mr Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order, Standing Order 41(2). I remember you told me that the matter is before the court and it should not be brought here. On that same Order I am standing, that is, Standing Order 41(2).

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, please be careful.

**Dr. Anthony:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a fact that right here in this hall we had a recount that was witnessed by the people of this country. That recount proved, conclusively, that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic won the elections, and that is why we are sitting on this side and you are over there. There were a reckless few who tried to game the system, who tried to disturb the outcome, and their irresponsible behaviour has had an impact economically, socially and mentally, on us all in this country.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020, when His Excellency Dr. Irfaan Ali was sworn in, this nation gave a collective sigh of relief. Their mental anguish was over, and they were, once again, imbued with hope and optimism for a better Guyana.

I want to congratulate my Colleague, Bishop Juan Edghill, Minister of Public Works, and the budget team for putting the Budget together in a record-breaking time. This Budget provides a sensible plan to lift us out of the APNU/AFC’s quagmire, to injects a stimulus for the private sector to protect the vulnerable among us and to lay the foundation for a better Guyana. This is a Budget for everyone whether young or old, on the coastland or in the hinterland, the private sector or the public sector, APNU/AFC or PPP/C; there is something in here for everyone.

3.24 p.m.

Listening, over these few days, to the negativity that has been oozing from the Opposition, speaker after speaker, it shows that, instead of them atoning for their sins and owning the atrocities and scandals that they have committed, they are now busy trying to deflect attention. Try as they may, the people of Guyana know of their corruption, their mismanagement and incompetence.

In every sector and in every community, there is a tale of woe. The public health sector is no different. This sector is emblematic of corruption under the APNU/AFC. Recall the Sussex Street bond, recall the HDM Labs Incorporated drug procurement deals and recall the constant shortage of drugs and medical supplies. In 2018, when we raised these matters in the Parliament, the then junior Minister, the Hon. Dr. Karen Cummings, said that we have toiled and rustled with this beast called procurement, and under the sagacious watch of my Colleague and Comrade, the Hon. Volda Lawrence, procurement at the Ministry of Public Health was brought under control. She went on boldly to assert, again, that this perennial cry of drug shortages will no longer reverberate across this country. Imagine my utter disbelief when a quick survey of the Materials Management Unit (MMU) showed that, on 5<sup>th</sup> August, there were 206 items of medicine and medical supplies that were out of stock. There were 156 items of drugs with zero stock level. Put a different way, it meant that the APNU/AFC Government did not buy medicines for the people with high blood pressure in this country. It meant that the APNU/AFC did not buy medicines for the people who have heart problems in this country. It meant that the APNU/AFC Government did not buy medicines for the diabetic patients of this country. The APNU/AFC Government did not buy medicines for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) patients in this country. The APNU/AFC Government did not buy medicines for the tuberculosis (TB) patients in this country. The APNU/AFC Government did not buy medicines for the malaria patients in this country. Right now, as I speak, there is a shortage of antibiotics in the system, thanks to the APNU/AFC Government.

In addition to all of these medicines, these 156 medicines that are at zero stock, right now we have about 50 types of medical supplies that are also at zero levels. These are things like electromagnetic radiation (X-ray) films, oxygen nebulisers, bandages, thermometers and insulin syringes, just to name a few, all of which we now have to procure on an emergency basis.

To immediately rescue this situation, this Government had to allocate \$3.2 billion to make that emergency purchase of drugs and medical supplies. The tenders are opening today. To further stabilise the situation, the PPP/C Government has put into this Budget \$14.3 billion which would ensure that we have an adequate stock of medicines and medical supplies.

Another travesty, in the mist of these shortages and stockouts, is that drugs have expired and are sitting at the bond. Just an

example, from January to August of this year, about 1,663,032 items valued at \$742 million have expired. Another \$200 million worth of items are scheduled to expire by the end of December. It would mean that close to \$1 billion would be wasted on expired medicines and supplies. As if this was not bad enough, to get rid of these expired drugs, it would cost the Materials Management Unit at least another \$3 million to move the supplies and take it to the dumpsite.

It is a known fact that the previous Administration spent hundreds of millions to rent subpar facilities to store medicines and medical supplies, at places such as the Sussex Street bond, the Princess Street bond, and the Ocean View International Hotel before they renovated it. Do you remember the Auditor General? He said they were using Ocean View International Hotel to store drugs and medical supplies. When they went in to do the verification, what did they find? They found cobweb, cockroaches, rodents and other pests among the drugs and medical supplies that were being stored at the Ocean View International Hotel.

The MMU medical warehouse at Diamond was filled to the brim, with no space for the equipment to move around to do efficient stocktaking and picking up of the medicines and supplies, because of expired, obsolete and unusable stock items taking up the space. As of the middle of August, about 60% of the space of the MMU warehouse was taken up with expired medicines and medical supplies or items deemed unfit for human use.

The story of stockouts, of medicine shortages, of expiration of medicines and medical supplies, and of bond rentals tell, not just of incompetency, not just of recklessness, but is a tale of heartlessness and of indifference. It is a story that constitutes misconduct in public office.

Yesterday, I sat and listened quite intently to the Hon. Dr. Karen Cummings as she spoke passionately about the immunisation programme. What is mind boggling is that, if this Member cares so much about the immunisation programme that was being run by the Ministry of Public Health, then, why is it that a container filled with things for the immunisation programme was sitting on the wharf for 24 months? Why was it sitting there when we came into Office? Apart from the 24 months sitting there, it cost the people of this country \$4.1 million and counting in demurrage charges. It took us 36 hours to talk to the relevant people and to get that container off the wharf and to the MMU.

When we come here and we pontificate about these various programmes, we must come with our facts. That is why, if I

am permitted to rename this book that was published by Mr. Lewis Carrol, I would say that in our midst we have ‘Karen in Wonderland’. They do not know what is happening with the sector.

The APNU/AFC flagship programme for the COVID-19 pandemic was to spend \$1.6 billion on the Ocean View International Hotel. When President David Granger declared open the facility on 30<sup>th</sup> July, he must have known that the facility was a shell. Instead of holding Ms. Volda Lawrence accountable, he participated in the charade of trying to fool the people of this country that his Government had a comprehensive plan to respond to the pandemic. They did not have any plan. On 10<sup>th</sup> August the Auditor General, issued a preliminary report on the Ocean View International Hotel. It stated that the facility is currently inoperable and that the works on the electricity supply network for the main building and the backup generator were still in progress; that elevators are yet to be installed, along with the medical gas installation, while interior finishing works were still in progress. [**An Hon. Member: Inaudible.**] Here is the report. This state-of-the-art facility that is supposed to rescue us all from the COVID-19 pandemic, the APNU/AFC said would have 197 beds. When we went there, we could not find a single bed. The APNU/AFC said this hospital would have an intensive care unit (ICU). When we took it over, what did we find? We found a space there; nothing that resembles an ICU. They told us that we would have an X-ray unit in this facility.

3.39 p.m.

When we went there, we looked for the X-ray unit and we saw an empty space; not one X-ray unit was in the hospital. We were told by the APNU/AFC that there was going to be an operating theatre in that facility. When we went there to check... we are still trying to see where this operating theatre is. They told us that there would be a pharmacy in the facility; up to now we cannot find where the pharmacy is. The APNU/AFC said that there would be water in the building; up to when we took it over, there was no connection to the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI). The APNU/AFC said that they added electricity to the building; when we took it over it was not even connected to the Guyana Power and Light (GPL). They said that the building had a sewage system; when we took it over, there was no connection to any sewage system. We have to build one now. They said that the building had medical equipment; when we took it over, we could not find a single piece of medical equipment in that building. This hospital that is supposed to rescue this country from COVID-19 was supposed to have staff; when we took it

over, there was not a single staff assigned to that facility. Yet, His Excellency the President, on 30<sup>th</sup> July, unveiled a plaque and told the world, here is the hospital that is going to rescue this country from COVID-19. There was the hospital, but it was nothing more than an empty shell.

While I was listening to the Hon. Member, Dr. Karen Cummings, during her presentation, she refused to refer to this abomination that the APNU/AFC created. She called it by a nice, mild name; she called it a facility. She did not call it a hospital. Perhaps, she was too ashamed to be associated with it, and I do not blame her. **[Mr. Sinclair:** Tell us about your plans for COVID-19.]    I am coming to that.

This state-of-the art shell seems to be a cesspool for corruption. Could you imagine that eight contractors were hired on 16<sup>th</sup> June, and on the same day that the lots were awarded, papers, certificates and valuations were done for each contractor, ranging from 67% to 90% of the work completed? **[Bishop Edghill:** The same day.] The same day they signed the contract and collected. Payments were made in such a hurry that contractors were paid days before the accounting officers signed and certified the vouchers. There was no evidence of any of the contractors submitting any performance bonds or guarantees. There were significant overpayments on the contract. In one case, there was an overpayment of \$70 million while another contractor received \$14.7 million as an advance payment to install an elevator. Up to now, there is no elevator in the building. This is the legacy of His Excellency President David Granger and his APNU/AFC regime. He has left this country with a broken healthcare system amidst a COVID-19 pandemic. From the top to the bottom, the response of the APNU/AFC was a flawed one. At the top, they had a political directorate that was clueless.

In August when we took over, there were less than 5,000 N95 masks in the MMU. They were about 38 face shields. Gowns, shoes and hair covers were in short supply. At the regional hospitals, there were no working ventilators. Some of the ventilators that the APNU/AFC actually bought were not ventilators to be placed in an intensive care unit, but ventilators used in an ambulance when transporting patients. Those ventilators do not last for more than two hours. Those were the types of ventilators that they bought for the ICU. It is no wonder that, when they started to put them in the ICU, after a couple of hours, the ventilators were shutting down.

Testing was another area where they made significant blunders. The National Public Health Reference Laboratory

(NPHRL) lacked the capacity, equipment and personnel to do testing. When we took over, there were less than 1,000 testing kits. That is why when they were sending testing kits to the regions, they were giving very few kits. In some cases, they gave about five to 10 kits per region. We were wondering why they were not testing. It was because they had very few kits.

One of the other things is that, when persons who had all the clinical symptoms of COVID-19 passed away, the staff were instructed not to take samples from those patients so that they would not be tested. Therefore, those deaths would not have been accounted for as COVID-19 deaths. There is a methodology that the World Health Organization (WHO) would use to determine what is now called excess death during the pandemic. We would be using that methodology to show you all the mistakes you made then; we will be bringing it to light.

Not only that, the official cover-up of statistics is the reason the office of Minister Lawrence was so integrally involved in collecting and managing the distribution of people’s test results.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, what I want to bring to light is that you need an extension.

**Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]:** Mr. Speaker, I hereby apply for a five-minute extension to allow the Hon. Member to complete his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Dr. Anthony:** What did we do when we got in? The People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government took aggressive steps to strengthen our response by: ensuring there was an aggressive laboratory testing programme; expanding contact tracing; providing exposed persons with testing and counselling; and providing for an effective hospital treatment and care programme for the critically ill. We have been able to engage a number of international partners such as the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Bank, the International Development Bank (IDB), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Governments, the United States of America, Canada, the European Union (EU) and so forth. Because of these engagements, we now have an adequate stock of personal protective equipment (PPE) for all our frontline workers.

Testing – One of the things that was happening between March and the 31<sup>st</sup> July was that the average number of tests being done was 25 per day. We have increased this dramatically and are doing close to 200 tests, and, in some cases, 300 tests per day. How were we able to achieve this? We were able to achieve this by training more staff. We were able to train 30 Medical Technologists and put them to work at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory. Instead of working one shift, they are now doing three shifts in that facility.

When we got into Government, there was a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machine that was lying on the wharf. We had to take it off, put it in the laboratory and now we are trying to get it to work. We have already expended \$52 million to bring in an automated PCR system so that we can expedite the processing of samples. When we get that piece of machine, we will be able to do at least 96 samples every two hours. We are now working to have three PCR machines operating simultaneously. Even while we are waiting, if there is a backlog, we have made arrangements with CARPHA to take off that backlog. We have made arrangements with the United States of America to send samples to them if it is necessary. We have already spoken to the people in Brazil so that samples from Region 9 can now go across to Brazil and be processed over there.

When it comes to ICU beds, our main ICU is at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). All the regional hospitals across this country were ignored. I can stand here and tell you, now, that we are going to retool all those regional hospitals so that they will have ICU beds for any patient in any region who may need them.

It is not only that; as for treatment for persons who need it, we have been able to make sure that all those ICUs and hospitals have all the medications that persons with COVID-19 would need. One of the sought-after medications, which is an anti-retroviral – Remdesivir – we have been able to bring into this country so that critical patients would be able to get that. If we are going to exit this pandemic, then it means that we have to get a vaccine. I can stand here today and tell you that this Government has been working assiduously to get a vaccine in this country. We have spoken to COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX). We have signed a letter of intent with the COVAX programme. The COVAX right now has 15 candidate vaccines that they are looking at.

3.54 p.m.

Once COVAX passes the Phase 3 trial and goes into manufacturing, then Guyana would get vaccine from that programme. We are not only working with COVAX. We have already spoken to the Russians and once Sputnik V is deemed to have passed the Phase 3 trial, we are going to get vaccines from them as well.

In addition to that, we have spoken to the Government of Indian and, through the Serum Institute of India, the Government will be doing one billion doses. When those vaccines become available, we will be a part of that programme as well. It is not only that; while we are trying to get vaccines, which would be sometime next year, we have already started to plan how we are going to rollout the vaccination programme here in Guyana. We are going to buy the equipment, on all the things necessary, so that we can roll that out and train our technical people. Once we get that vaccine, we will be able to immunise our population against COVID-19.

When we hear some persons on the other side trying to make cheap mileage about COVID-19, I know that they do not know what they are talking about. This is not about one set of people. Every single person in this country can be vulnerable to COVID-19. We all have to work together to make sure that we prevent COVID-19 in this country. That is why, when they talk about endangering people’s lives, when they went and encouraged people to come on the road to protest... What were you doing to those persons? What were you doing to them? What you were doing to them was endangering their lives and putting them at risk for COVID-19. You must be more responsible. That is what you must do. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(Inaudible)*]. You for one should be responsible. You should lead by example. We have a plan.

Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that I do not have more time to tell you some of the other things. Apart from COVID-19, I just want to say one more thing. Yesterday, the Hon. Member spoke about the HIV programme and do you know what? This country would have been able to achieve the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, but suddenly this Government has the samples for 109 babies that were never tested. Because of that, those samples are sitting in the laboratory and those mothers who are HIV positive do not even know if their child/children have HIV or not. That is the legacy of this Government and that Government came here and tried to lecture us. We would not accept those lectures. Go! You were there before, and you failed miserably. Therefore, we are going to clear up the mess and move this country forward. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]



**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Minister of Health. Let me inform the National Assembly that I spoke with persons from the National COVID-19 Task Force, in particular, Dr. Payne. He called last evening. He said that, once I continue not to display any symptoms, the WHO’s rule is 10 days from testing plus three days. On Saturday, that period will expire, and God spare, I should be back in person on Monday, once I get my certificate of clearance. Thank you very much.

This is a good time to take the suspension. A reminder to the Business Sub-Committee is that we will meet in the Dome at 4.05 p.m.

*Sitting suspended at 3.58 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 5.17 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Before I call on the next Hon. Member to make his presentation, I understand that the Assembly was very noisy when I made an announcement at the end of the last session. That announcement was that I had spoken with Dr. Payne from the National COVID-19 Task Force, last evening, who did the testing. He had enquired whether I had symptoms. I do not have any symptoms. He said that the WHO protocol is that, if after 10 days there are no symptoms, then one waits an additional three days to be cleared, and for a certificate to be issued. The 13 days period should end on Saturday. With all being well, I should physically be in the National Assembly on Monday. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Ramjattan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations on becoming the Leader of the legislative branch of our Government in this Twelfth Parliament. No doubt, I am certain that you are going to perform that function with distinction, notwithstanding, the very many challenges and sometimes the rowdy calls of being unfair. Do not bother with it. We are going to, at least, ensure that your tenureship here is one that will see that this Parliament function and function well.

Under your stewardship, thus far, I have already seen some signs of that. Hon. Member Bishop Edghill has not misbehaved himself, thus far, and that was an extraordinarily difficult thing that your predecessor attempted to achieve to no avail.

I wish to make a preliminary remark, which should not go unmentioned, and that is: We have had some very lucid, eloquent and vigorous presentations from our fresh faces, especially those on this side, and that is a good thing for our new Parliament. All the Members and the fresh faces have

made it evident that our next generation of membership will make our Parliament very proud.

I am compelled to commend the effort of the presenter of this 2020 Budget. Not that it is characterised as emergency in nature, but because his effort was merely to read it and to be the mega (*inaudible*). The preparation and manufacturing of it, we were told, was done by the Minister of Finance, Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, I want to be a little distasteful here and say, who is serving his third term.

Apparently, the Minister of Finance was not too proud to read what he had prepared. Indeed, there are many major jarring faults and weaknesses of this 2020 Budget, which probably motivated him to do that. My Colleagues, on this side of the House, have dealt with a number of them and I will deal with three of them as best as I can.

May I remind my Hon. Friend, Ms. Priya Manickchand, I will be speaking on agriculture, good governance and a number of other issues, including environment. On this side, do not expect me to deal with security.

Firstly, I wish to deal with good governance, a matter which has significance in this instance with the environment. At page 22 of the Budget, the Government hails and heralds its commitment to improve governance, because it is indispensable, as it says, for a strong, fair and democratic Guyana. I agree. Hon. Mr. Bharrat, in giving his explanation as to the meaning of that, even emphasised on extension to include that there will be no political interference in the work of the Government. This ‘plan for prosperity’ will never be realised if the Government says one thing and does something else. The living example that I am talking about is what happened within four weeks of Government taking Office.

This People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government has done to Dr. Vincent Adams, Head of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) what should not have been done. Though he is an Executive Member of the Alliance For Change, Dr. Adams was not a political appointee. He was wholly a professional, the best in the field of petroleum and environment. That is what he did as a senior officer for years in the United States of America Government under Mr. Barack Obama and also the Clinton Administration. He was sent on leave whilst the Payara Agreement was being negotiated. It is political interference to the helm when one is going to call in an exceptional batsman like this off the environmental field, whilst one is in the arena of negotiation.

This artifice contrived to send him on leave will undoubtably prevent Guyana getting the best environmental deal out of ExxonMobil Corporation. This must also not be the manner in which one treats patriots and professionals from the diaspora. Someone mentioned about the diaspora engagement over there, but that is not how one does it. This is what page 60 of the Budget states:

“The LCDS will be broadened to include wider environmental services...”

It goes on to state:

“It will see the strengthening of the Environmental Protection Agency...”

This example of what you are doing to the Environmental Protection Agency, obviously *stinks to high heavens*. You sent off an A-grade environmentalist from the USA and Guyana and then you accept as head of some team, a Canadian, Ms. Allison Redford, who, from all appearances, had to resign as Alberta’s Governor on grounds of questionable spending. This I understand from Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) news. This reminds me of an earlier decision, in a similarly high-levelled matter, but in the area of security. The PPP/C Government wanted a certain Chief of Police from New York to advise the Guyana Police Force on police reform.

5.27 p.m.

This exclusion of the brilliant and patriotic batting for Guyana, for the questionable and not so certain about the batting, seems as if it is a feature of those in charge over there.

The continued flaring of gas, the continued injection of water from the wells into our ocean by ExxonMobil Corporation or any other oil company must be halted. It must be enforced; only a powerful player like that, at the EPA, could do it. Up to now, there are flimsy excuses for not managing to repair compressors and that must not be accepted. There is a consequential obligation that we have to meet under the Paris Agreement. Do you remember this? The Hon. Member, Mr. Jagdeo, would know it. The United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNCCC) was signed in 2016. It seeks to legally bind Guyana to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to pump polluted water into the Atlantic, and to flare so much gas is to contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions. We must not allow, by this violation of a good governance principle and, certainly,

political interference of a statutory body’s operations, ExxonMobil Corporation to take advantage of our prestigious ranking as a net carbon sink. We are inheritors of it because we are blessed with pristine forests and low levels of emissions.

On this score, I want to add that it is an unhappy and ludicrous situation to dismantle another ‘green’ policy of the APNU/AFC, by allowing the importation of more than eight-year old cars and half cut vehicles. Could one imagine that – half cut vehicles and used tyres? At page 76 of the Budget document, the Government argues that it will make vehicle ownership more affordable and accessible. This change of policy is ring hollow and it is hypocritical in view of the Vice-President’s love for low carbon strategies. Congested as they are, what is so low carbon about having more than eight-year old cars and half cut vehicles, which are going to welded as a whole here and made operable in our streets? The science has proven that used tyres are inferior to new tyres and they are also dangerous on our roads, especially when they are on packed minibuses. This is a policy that is nothing, but it will open the gate for certain friends of the PPP/C to profiteer. It is payback time. I know them, you know them and all of us know them.

My second point has to do with the sugar industry and the dismantling of the rightsizing of the Guyana Sugar Corporation. At page 61 of the Budget document, the Government indicated that it would reopen Enmore, Rose Hall, Skeldon Estates. The sum of \$5 billion has been allocated to be spent on this for the next four months. This is all about rewarding the PPP/C’s political base with moneys, which GuySuCo will have to borrow. Of course, it will be *via* more borrowings or it will have to get subsidies from the Government. As Ms. Hughes mentioned, it will become a black hole. This is certainly not a ‘plan for prosperity’; it is a road to perdition. King Sugar’s days are over, and the rightsizing that the APNU/AFC Administration did was very much in order and it was deliberated on long and hard. The sugar industry, at the time when we made that decision, had proven to be in need of billions of dollars in bailouts. That is the black hole that we are talking about.

The last Administration was the occasion for the rightsizing. The cause was long before 2015. We must be honest about the circumstances of sugar’s collapse. In 2004, the European Union told this Government – I was a part of it – that the preferential prices on sugar will go. In and around 2009–2010, the Union started to help them. What we know was that our former President, who is now the Vice-President, Hon.

Mr. Jagdeo, was indicating that we have to modernise. He built what is now called the Skeldon Sugar Factory. Roughly, US\$125 million was borrowed to build the Skeldon Sugar Factory; \$29 million was borrowed from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB); \$40 million was borrowed from the Export–Import Bank (EXIM) of China; and we had \$56 million in combination with the World Bank and Government of Guyana reserves, totalling \$125 million. At that time, the overall modernisation of sugar totalled US\$200 million. This is money that was badly spent.

By the way, as far as I understand, and I was in the Government for a five-year period, not a penny of this money has GuySuCo sought to repay to the Government. None! We were left with these very big debts. What is worse is that when they were talking about the modernisation ...

*Mr. Jagdeo left the Dome.*

**Mr. Ramjattan:** *Yuh gone?* They told the Skeldon cane farmers to start preparing their lands. Then, 829 cane farmers took ‘big’ loans from all the banks around the place at that time. They started land preparation. Today, we have, for all of the loans that they took as a result of the sugar estate and factory not doing anything, massive losses. Over 700 of those loans are now in a non-performing status.

I want to also make this point about sugar. Long before 2015, GuySuCo, in 2006, requested €1.623 million for the sugar industry. In 2007, it asked for €13.213 million and got €6 million; in 2008, it asked for €12 million and the EU agreed to give it €7.5 million. The EU gave it less because it was not meeting the projected targets. The GuySuCo was not meeting certain managerial skillsets, qualifications in the industry and best governance practices. Only €6.24 million was disbursed. In 2010, it asked the EU, again, for €9.3 million and was only given €3.25 million because GuySuCo was performing so badly. In 2012, the EU was asked, again, for €18.56 million and it got €18.56 million. In 2013, it asked for €16.1 million and got €12 million. All of these totalled €81.35 million that was spent on the GuySuCo or disbursed to the GuySuCo. The sum of €30 million was not given because GuySuCo could not meet its targets. With all of what was spent, as of now, GuySuCo cannot make a profit.

The GuySuCo brought in a man from New York and paid him US\$30,000 per month. Do you know Mr. Rajendra Singh? I noticed that GuySuCo has now brought in Mr. Sasenarine Singh. The GuySuCo believes in the Singhs. I wanted to tell the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo – I notice that he has gone missing – that I remember the new

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was at the National Milling Company of Guyana (NAMILCO) and, after his tenure there, even Mr. Jagdeo indicated to me that his nickname is ‘thunderbolt’. I hope that, under this stewardship, we do not name him ‘Demerara sugar’ or ‘sugar bolt’.

This sector is important, especially for the country as a whole. The GuySuCo could be a drain on our reserves; it will be a drain on the moneys that will come from oil and it will not make a profit, as we have said. The State Paper on the Future of the Sugar Industry that we dealt with here a couple of years ago, which was brought by Mr. Noel Holder, had indicated that the world market prices were half of our production costs. We had to rightsize because our markets would have only been local, Caribbean and a portion for the American special market. It would be about 150,000 tonnes of sugar. To go now and spend \$5 billion on some surveys with this new Board, and whosoever else ...*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, can I have some order. I can hardly hear the Hon. Member. There is too much of background noise. You may continue, Hon. Member.

**Mr. Ramjattan:** I am indicating that it will not be profitable. The experts that advised us and also this Administration that is making the call, did indicate that this is the true picture. To now go in an emergency scenario, without any studies being done and to put \$5 billion to reopen it, is obviously something that is misconceived. I remember because I was the Chairman of the committee who was asked to talk to the Opposition, the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers’ Union (GAWU) and all of the others. They were asking for specialised studies and we gave them the commission’s report; we gave them the financial statements from 2015 to 2017; and we asked the Hon. Member, Dr. Irfaan Ali, now His Excellency, to give us his studies that state that we should not close the estates and he did not. I think it was only GAWU that gave a study. That was only because of the fact that it had a special interest, which was to collect union dues.

When one has to rightsize one has to terminate. We terminated and paid the people their severance benefits but, of course, that meant a shortfall in union dues. For the 5,000 workers, if one is to multiply that annually by the union dues that would be collected, it is a lot of money. The GAWU had an interest.

*5.42 p.m.*

If we are not aware of what this is, it means that it could have serious impacts on the economics of Guyana. Once we start

to give GuySuco \$5 billion today, when 2021 comes, we will have to give it \$50 billion and then another \$50 billion. That is money that has to be distributed to all of Guyana and not only a specialised section.

I want to also make a point. There are special groups that are talking about molasses being profitable. We must not subsidise the distillers with certain quality of molasses at a special cheap rate. We have to have innovations that are going to make the marketplace free and fair and that is important. Again, do not allow just special interest to make that attractive argument, which is that we must go and spend millions and millions on the sugar industry.

There are lots of other plans. If the Government has the money now, because the oil and the oil moneys will start to come in this year, it can start doing what the other plans have indicated. That came from our Ministry when we were in Government too. It was the four Ps; I understand them to be: plantain, pumpkin, pineapple and peppers. They can be far more profitable for the Caribbean and overseas markets. This is important because, if we create a black hole and start to put money inside just to reward the base of the PPP/C, it could have implications against integration. It will create a lot of problems.

I want to say a couple of other things on sugar, but I think I have said enough on it. It is not a good idea to do that which is going to be sectionary or sectional in economics.

It is very important, then, that we become cautious. I noticed even the *Stabroek News*’ editorial mentioned this sugar sector. You must walk with caution, Hon. Member, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha. By the way, happy birthday to you. [**Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] No. I forgot, but watching you again, I remembered. We must not programme a sector for Guyana’s oligarchy for some industrialists and powerful families whose inefficient businesses previously shielded out of this competition. We must now compete, innovate and make the right decisions about a sector that is as big as sugar.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to talk a little about another issue which deals with the dismantling of another policy that we had. Do you know that there is a parallel that I see? It is just as in the American politics where Mr. Donald Trump wanted to drag everything down that Mr. Barack Obama did. It is from this perspective that I read this Budget: bringing in old cars again and the reopening of the three factories that were rightsized. They are now talking about an increase in land rents and other charges to farmers in the

Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary–Agricultural Development Authority scheme.

This country has to learn disciplined economics. When I was a part of the Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO), Dr. Jagan talked about disciplined ways of spending moneys, because when one spends money on something, he/she must get back. One does not spend like that. What we have seen by the dismantling of that regime, which brought the increase in land rental charges and water rates at MMA/ADA, was for the simple reason to ensure that the MMA/ADA scheme breakeven and become unprofitable. This is so that we could go on to do phases two and three, which could open more than 60,000 other acres of land. [**Mr. Nandlall:** *Inaudible*]... profitable.] It is very profitable now. Do not bother with it. Why is rice planted? It is because it is profitable. From the legislation that we have, it empowers us to ensure that we can meet that breakeven point. That breakeven point was three bags of paddy per acre per annum and that is about three thousand... three acres or whatever it comes down to, but it was three and half bags of paddy. One would get two crops per acre because of the land, the water, the sluices, *et cetera*.

In 2017, we had to give a subsidy of \$387 million to the MMA/ADA. One does not just give companies subsidies and bailouts like that. The GuySuCo was given \$1 billion every month for the first 36 months of our Government. That is \$36 billion. Now, you are giving \$387 million to the MMA/ADA. What sort of economics is that? That is why this paper was brought to this National Assembly in the last Parliament. It was because we needed the increases. Let me tell you, a lot of the farmers agreed because they realised, too, that more than 1,000 miles of waterways, drainage and irrigation, and canals needs to be dug up constantly and maintained. What are you going to do? Is that the sort of economics that you are going to talk about here from the chief economist of them all? Oh, just put in some money. Where would you get the \$387 million from? Would you get it from borrowings? Would you get it from the taxation that you would collect?

By the way, in 2017, when we started to give land leases to people, we asked for the requirement of a Tax Identification Number (TIN) and not one person could have brought in his/her TIN. Taxation was absolutely not from them. I must tell you that rice farmers are like that. From being in Government for a number of years, we learnt that from the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). It is the same reason Mr. Statia came to ensure that a lot of people paid their taxes. A person would want water free, land at next to nothing value, and all of the kokers to be built. What is that person going to

do? Well, please pay a rental, which is called the basic sum of money per acre, for an entire year.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, if you want to continue, you will have to seek an extension.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you may conclude.

**Mr. Ramjattan:** It sums to approximately \$900 per month for drainage and irrigation charges and approximately \$6,000 for land rental charges. What is it? A lot of farmers in that area are overseas and are collecting rents from other people who are tilling the land. That is why we started to ensure that the tillers of the land get their leases. They are willing to pay, but we now have the Government saying we should dismantle the land charges and rentals, and let us go back to what it was in 2014. Again, it is about a reward for a section of our society. When a person *lifts the veil* and sees the face and purpose behind it, one could have problems there. It is not integrative; it is to segregate. Mr. Speaker, you had better watch that aspect of the matter. It is important then that we appreciate what was done under the last Administration.

In my concluding remarks, it is foolhardy for any new government to come in and say that nothing was done. I sit here and I get agonised and irritated over that. Who are you trying to fool? I know that you are masters of disinformation and fake news. *Gosh*, you went into Ministries and have seen the progress that were made. I was reading a book the other day called *Enlightenment Now* by one philosopher of today called Steven Pinker. He indicated that no matter what we say, society is on evolutionary path that is progressive, and it is getting better. One would feel that Pinker’s Theory had collapsed in the last five years did because of the disinformation or fake news. We have done a wonderful job.

I am urging, for the sake of this country, that the dismantling of the policies of the APNU/AFC, which sought to integrate and to make social cohesion, be discontinued. It will be absolutely wrong and a very high price to be paid, if our country is to be separated or pulled apart. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me join with my Colleagues in this National Assembly, in commending the Minister of Finance or my Colleague Bishop Juan Edghill and our Vice-President. I

want to recognise the contributions he has made to Guyana. It will take the Hon. Member four lifetimes before he can do anything near to what our Vice-President did, which is to bring an emergency Budget, an emergency which was caused by the APNU/AFC.

With all the challenges of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the unnecessarily imposed five-month electoral impasse by the APNU/AFC regime, that fought desperately to subvert our democratic process, the Guyanese people, today, are longing for relief. *Budget 2020* has many reliefs for the Guyanese people. I want to agree with the Hon. Member that the APNU/AFC has done a lot for Guyana. It took away the water and electricity subsidies for pensioners; it took away the cash grants for schoolchildren; it has increased land rentals by 600%; it has dismissed over 7,500 sugar workers; and it gave the Hon. Member joy to put suffering on the Guyanese people by taking away jobs and destroying families. That is what the Hon. Member was just saying.

As I said, this is a Budget that is focused on building and to ensure that we ease the suffering and the poverty on the Guyanese people that was imposed by the APNU/AFC over the last five years.

*5.57 p.m.*

I want to respond to some of the points that were made by the Hon. Member. He spoke about sugar. I thought that the Hon. Member and his Colleagues missed a golden opportunity when they came to this honourable House – after what they had imposed on the Guyanese people following the elections on 2<sup>nd</sup> March – to apologise to the Guyanese people and accept that they had done wrong. Instead, they are coming to this honourable and noble House, trying to tell the PPP/C what to do, which is to impose more suffering on the Guyanese people. We will not; our Party and our Government are rooting for the people of our country and every single Guyanese. Every single Guyanese, be it in the Rupununi, North West District, Crabwood Creek or Linden will benefit under our PPP/C Government.

*Budget 2020* re-emphasises the PPP/C Government’s commitment to the revitalisation of agriculture in Guyana. Agriculture is one of the pillars that sustains the Guyanese population and provide economic stability. Agriculture, over the years, has contributed to more than 20% of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture brings in approximately \$70 billion in revenue in our country. Over the last five years, as the Hon. Member just mentioned, with the measures imposed on the agriculture sector, we have seen a

decline in agriculture. This came about because of the maladministration and mismanagement of this sector by the previous Government. I want to tell you that agriculture was like a rudderless ship moving in the water without any captain. Imagine, when I took over this sector, all the officers within this sector were doing what they thought was right. There was no one there to give them any guidance. There was no one there to lead them. They were doing what they felt was right and without any policy. That is the way agriculture was under the APNU/AFC.

I want to tell you that we will ensure that agriculture takes its rightful place in our country’s development. In the next five years, starting with *Budget 2020*, we will implement measures to promote a diversified agriculture-based economy. We will create more jobs. Many of our speakers, on this side of the House, have alluded that, before the next five years, we will be creating over 50,000 jobs for Guyanese in our country.

We will increase the income of our farmers and workers. This will be achieved by modernising and upgrading infrastructure, strengthening support services, robust marketing systems at local and international levels and increase Guyana’s market share by tapping into the \$5 billion food import bill of our CARICOM region.

I want to state what is in the Budget for our farmers and the country for the year 2020, or for the next four months. A fundamental of any government is its duty to care. And let me be clear, the APNU/AFC was an uncaring Government. We just heard the Hon. Member speak about the GuySuCo. It was stated that we are pumping money into GuySuCo and that we have a political interest in that Corporation. The GuySuCo workers are not only PPP/C supporters and because of your policy towards the GuySuCo workers, they voted you out and that is the reason you are over there, today.

This is a document which I think the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, would have seen. This is not a PPP/C Commission of Inquiry (COI). This COI was commissioned by the previous Government and cost the Guyanese taxpayers over \$100 million. I would like to quote two lines from the COI:

“**ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

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

Optimal use has to be made of the limited resources especially where poverty is no stranger to the society.”

That was one of the recommendations.

The other recommendation states that the COI does not recommend the closure of any estates at this time. This is the COI document. The Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond, was the secretary of the COI.

Financial support in the short-term will be needed and this should be provided by the Government on a timely basis. What recommended this? It was the COI.

Today, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, said that we are pumping money into a black hole. It states here that dismissed sugar workers anxiously await the reopening of estates, the same sugar workers who cried to the Hon. Mr. Ramjattan and his Party over the last three years. Once again, the PPP/C is reopening opportunities for those dismissed workers.

I also want to quote from the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper, dated 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2020:

“Overjoyed”.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, and his Colleagues were enjoying the ‘Good Life’ while they destroyed families and decimated communities. People had to traverse the length and breadth of our country to find work. This is the way that the APNU/AFC wanted to run this country.

Before I go into the measures, I would like to state what I met when I went into the Ministry of Agriculture. As I said, we have seen the closure of the estates and the effects it had on our country. This closure created an unprecedented economic situation, deprived the economy of billions of dollars, reduced sugar production by 60% and lost nearly the same amount in foreign exchange. The Hon. Member said that they were rightsizing the sugar industry. If one remembers, at the headquarters, they closed four sugar estates and said that they were rightsizing. When there were seven sugar estates there were 393 employees [*inaudible*]. When four sugar estates were closed, with only three remaining open, the number of employees increased to 532. That was the rightsizing the Hon. Member was talking about; to increase the number to 532 employees. Who were the persons placed there? They were their friends; Party members and cronies were placed into GuySuCo. Before coming out of Government, the contracts were recently renewed ensuring that these people

will remain there. But rest assured that the new management of GuySuCo will rightsize the head office and ensure that our factories are once again operational.

When one looked at the rice sector, it was in crisis. The Hon. Member just spoke about the MMA/ADA rice scheme. Let me tell you something: we intend to put moneys in people’s pockets, especially the ordinary people of our country. With the reduction or reversal of drainage and irrigation charges in that scheme alone – the Abary area, which is 30,800 acres – each farmer will pay \$5,500 per acre; resulting in \$169.4 million back into the farmers’ pockets. Those were the moneys that the APNU/AFC was taking out from the scheme.

In the Mahaica/Mahaicony block, 30,000 acres – the farmers there will be saving \$5,500 a total of \$165 million. This was the amount being taken out from the farmers’ pockets.

How will production increase? How will our farmers produce? That is why we have this kind of poverty in our country. The farmers will be saving a total of \$616.4 million from the drainage and irrigation charges. For the cattle pasture, which is 35,000 acres, the cattle farmers will be saving \$70.455 million. These sums were taken away from the farmers by the then Government without any development in the scheme.

These were the pressures placed on the farmers by the previous Government. When one looked at the infrastructure in the MMA/ADA, it was dilapidated – 620 miles of drains and canals neglected. Do you know why? It was because the previous Government did not have the interest of the farmers at heart. Although the drainage and irrigation charges and fees were increased, the farmers were neglected. When we got into Government, we had to do an emergency budget for \$92 million. Today, farmers are having their canals cleaned by the PPP/C Government and the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA).

The rice farmers and other cash crop farmers in the Hope Estate were not spared of these draconian fees. Land rent skyrocketed by 500% in the Hope Estate. Farmers who were paying \$3,000 per acre, were asked to pay \$15,000 per acre. Those farmers took the then Government to court and won. Our own Attorney General (AG), the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, worked *pro bono* and was able to get the farmers to court and they won the matter against the then Government. The Government had to stop the increase.

6.12 p.m.

Faced with the high cost of production, land rental and drainage and irrigation charges, the situation was compounded by adding 14% value-added tax on agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, agrochemicals, pesticides, fishing gears and other necessary farming instruments. The high cost of production reduced the farmers’ competitiveness in the domestic and international markets. The Ministry’s Agriculture Sector Development Unit (ASDU) had multiple projects being delayed because it was awaiting signatures from the former Minister of Finance.

Further, those projects were so poorly planned and implemented that, within the first few years of execution, they were in a reallocation process of the loans with development partners. Both the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA) and the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), our premier institutions for livestock sector and fruits and vegetables, were woefully understaffed and needed resources.

The Acoushi ants are always a major problem, especially in the hinterland. Last Saturday, I was in Region 2, where I met several farmers from the Pomeroon area who complained bitterly that, over the last five years, they did not receive any help from the Government to eradicate the Acoushi ants. Every year, the APNU/AFC normally budgeted about \$10 million for the Acoushi ants treatment and still they were no help to the farmers. The Head of NAREI was there with me in Region 2. Today, I am proud to say that NAREI is now making its own bait and sending it to interior locations. Our farmers will once again get help from the PPP/C Government.

The seed distribution to rural and hinterland communities significantly affected rural and agricultural development; this was stopped. Why was it stopped? We will immediately recommence that programme, so that our farmers in the rural areas can have these facilities.

No new markets were found for other crops. Those markets were already there. We will revamp the new Guyana Marketing Corporation’s (GMC) capacity and build bilateral partnerships for new markets. We have already started. Only recently, I had a meeting with the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA), and they are on board with us to help develop our markets. As a result of that, we have included them on the Board of Directors of the new GMC, so that they could help us plan and find markets for our farmers’ produce.

Added to all of this, no agriculture census was done in the last five years. This inhibited the farmers’ ability to understand the demand of the market. Since then, I had a meeting with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and that organisation agreed to help us conduct this census. Next year, 2021, the Ministry of Agriculture, in partnership with the FAO, will conduct an agriculture census which will help the farmers know what is in the country. For example, the number of farmers in the country, *et cetera*.

It was not only NAREI. Let us examine what was done at the GLDA. The duckling hatchery programme has been reduced significantly and has affected small poultry business development. We will work to resuscitate the livestock industry by improving the genetic stock and the breeding and hatchery programme.

There are several other problems plaguing the agriculture sector. I could go on and on to tell you what those problems are. For example, in excess of 50,000 canals and drains, predominantly in coastal regions, were left abandoned and neglected, which has had a negative impact on farming. We will work on a phased approach to restore these canals to provide efficient service to the farmers.

The previous Administration took away funding from the Water Users’ Association (WUA). The WUA was neglected by the removal of its funding. I want to assure this honourable House and the people of our country that, as soon as this Budget is passed, the Water Users’ Association will once again get its funding.

There was no dam maintenance programme and no programme to construct farm-to-market roads. We will immediately resuscitate these programmes.

As I said, the Hope Coconut Industries Limited (HCIL) is in crisis. When we looked at the financial position of the estate, there was less than \$120,000 in its bank account.

The Fisheries Department was found to have a liability of \$40 million. Additionally, there was no proper system for the provision of security, tracking system or any other measures for the fishermen to mitigate piracy. As I said, there are several problems that are plaguing the agriculture sector, but I want to go into some of the measures in *Budget 2020*.

Our Government will make GuySuCo profitable again. The PPP/C will raise the livelihood of sugar workers. Only recently, we injected \$600 million to pay wages and salaries to the sugar workers. There is a joint assessment going on

because the factories were neglected and closed. The machinery was sold to friends and families of the then Government at peppercorn prices. We will have to deal with that when it comes. The joint assessment, which we have put on the ground, will come up with recommendations. Some people will have to face the law as a result of what they have done to GuySuCo. As I said, in *Budget 2020*, we have an allocation of \$3 billion for recapitalisation and an additional \$2 billion as required.

In 2017, the APNU/AFC said that the closure of the three estates at Albion, Blairmont and Uitvlugt, was to concentrate on the output, to produce 147,000 tonnes of sugar annually – this was the production.

In 2015, when the PPP/C came out of Government, GuySuCo was on the path to recovery. I will use figures. I could vividly remember during the Budget debate of 2015, when the other Members over there were in Government, they took the credit for the increase in production. They said that they had turned around GuySuCo. Do you know what they did? They reaped the benefits of the PPP/C when they were in Government. They like to take credit for other people’s work.

In 2014, GuySuCo produced 216,000 tonnes; in 2015, 231,000 tonnes; in 2016, 183,000 tonnes; in 2017, 137,000 tonnes; in 2018, 104,000 tonnes; and in 2019, the lowest in production of 92,000 tonnes. To date, sugar production stands at 50,211 tonnes and, again, GuySuCo will not be able to make its target. You can ask the General Secretary of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers’ Union about that. A statement was just issued by GAWU, stating that GuySuCo’s production for this year will be the worst in the history of this country. This is thanks to the APNU/AFC Government.

The Hon. Member talked about pumping money into a black hole and bailing out an industry. The GuySuCo was the largest single employer of people in our country. The Government has to create jobs for its people. The Government has to take care of its people.

I want to quote what the Hon. Member was quoting previously about the United States of America’s President, Mr. Donald Trump, wanting to take all the gains made under President Obama. Well, I want to say that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) expended about US\$22 billion, in 2019, and will be spending another US\$37 billion, in 2020, in subsidies to farm businesses. What is wrong with bailing out an industry?



The GuySuCo is not just about sugar; it is beyond the balance sheet. The GuySuCo plays an important role in our country. When looking at the social aspect that GuySuCo played, there were 16,000 workers and their families who were directly dependent on GuySuCo. There were another 80,000 persons with indirect involvement. When looking at all improvements under GuySuCo such as drainage and irrigation, health, *et cetera*... and, the recreational facilities where we had famous cricketers like Rohan Kanhai and Basil Butcher coming out of Guyana. That was the role GuySuCo played; it was an all-rounded role.

When someone is narrow-minded and wants to take revenge by using politics to discriminate and punish people, look at the APNU/AFC... to punish the sugar workers of our country.

They have destroyed the Wales Sugar Estate, and because of their destruction, we cannot bring back the Wales Sugar Estate to how it was. What can be done? We will be creating a Wales Development authority. The authority will work with former sugar workers and others from the Wales catchment area to set up an agriculture value chain, which will utilise agriculture production. The Wales Development authority will create over 3,000 jobs for the people on the West Bank of Demerara and catchment areas over there.

As I said, providing jobs for Guyanese must not be deemed political. A government must provide jobs so that workers can provide for their families in an effort to reduce poverty and to allow growth of the local and national economies.

The rice industry is one of the most important industries in our country. It contributes 20% of agriculture GDP. We will continue to support the rice industry, through expenditure, drainage and irrigation, research and development, extension services, marketing and financial support. As I said and as the Hon. Member said in his budget presentation, rice is not a private business; it is a Guyanese business. We will continue to spend on rice, so that rice will create jobs for Guyanese.

**Mr. Speaker:** I would like to continue to hear you. Could you ask someone to move an extension?

**Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]:** Mr. Speaker, could I kindly ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to complete his presentation?

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister of Agriculture, you may continue.

**Mr. Mustapha:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I said, we will see a reversal of all the increases: land rental, drainage and irrigation charges, and other fees that were harsh measures which were imposed by the APNU/AFC on this sector.

Once again, I want to say that we will engage the farmers’ representatives which is the Guyana Rice Producers Association (GRPA), so that we can work together to improve.

*6.27 p.m.*

The GRPA was starved of funding by the previous Government. That Government tried to destroy the GRPA, but the GRPA is resolute, and will continue to work with the Government to ensure that our farmers’ interests are taken onboard.

For this year, \$112.9 million has been allocated for the maintenance of dams, drainage and irrigation for the farmers in the MMA area.

*Budget 2020* will see the extension of the Onverwagt access road, worth \$25 million. Twenty-nine million dollars has been budgeted to do dams and emergency works, so that the farmers could bring out their produce. Plans are in place to increase the value of export with new markets. We will ensure that the farmers’ interests are put first and foremost when dealing with buyers. We do not want another Panama crisis. The Hon. Member will probably tell you that Panama owes our millers and farmers \$1.9 billion, and they have done nothing to recoup that money. I am happy to report that, in our first week in Government, we contacted the Panamanian authority and they have agreed to pay the money with interest. They have also stated that the rice deal will continue. That is the way a Government works.

We will see development in all facets of the agriculture sector. The agriculture sector will be improved, along with other crops and fisheries. We have budgeted large sums of money to ensure that we take this sector out of the crisis that it had found itself in. We will ensure that our farmers’ interests are taken first and foremost because they were neglected.

The last Government was waiting for oil money. It was closing all sugar estates and saying wait because the oil money will be coming on stream. The whole intention was to get the oil money, so that corruption and squandermania could continue.

In *Budget 2020*, we will inject \$60 million in the Hope Coconut Industries Limited, which is an 88% increase. Remember, I just reported that there is only \$120,000 in its bank account. After this Budget, the HCIL will have \$60 million.

Furthermore, special incentives will be available for the planting of corn and soya beans. When these items are imported in the country, it takes a lot of foreign exchange. We usually spend US\$24 million to import these items. We hope to reduce this in the next five years and give incentives to our farmers to go into this type of production.

We will give tax concessions and investments to agro-processing facilities, full storage and packaging facilities. That has been reported in the Budget.

For 2020, \$236 million has been allocated to the GMC to offer support in institutional market arrangements, to strengthen value chain, to work with farmers to be in compliance with quality standard and food safety systems and to expand new market value processes for Guyana.

The GLDA will be given \$750.5 million to ensure that its systems are improved. This is not a bailout; this is taking care of the needs of the people of the country. [**Ms. Flue-Bess:** Bailout.] This is not a bailout. The Government’s focus must be to ensure that companies are on the right track, so that they can create wealth. What were you doing with the money? Were you spending it on a shell that is at Liliendaal – Ocean View International Hotel – for which you paid \$1.7 billion? You did not waste the money there, but it is being wasted to give to the sugar workers, farmers and the other workers. That is the mentality of the APNU/AFC. That is why you are over there, and you will not again, God forbid, not again, come back into Government for a very long time. [**Ms. Fernandes:** (*Inaudible*) democracy.] Do not talk about democracy because you were trying to steal the democracy from the Guyanese people. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, and his Colleagues, were trying their utmost to steal.

In conclusion, I want to say that, unlike the APNU/AFC, the Ministry of Agriculture will be more proactive than reactive. We will ensure that we take care of the needs of the farmers. We will ensure that we take care of the needs of the workers. And, once again, we will create wealth. We will ensure that every citizen of our country enjoys the wealth and benefits of this country and not because one is living in Linden or Port Mourant he or she will be treated differently; everyone will be treated equally. The philosophy of the PPP/C is to treat

every citizen equally and we will continue to do that. We will continue to ensure that we pay well, so that we can take our people out of the poverty and misery that was imposed by the APNU/AFC.

*Budget 2020* is the first step in the right direction to change the course of the development of Guyana, so that we can ensure our people’s interests are taken onboard. With this, I commend this Budget to the honourable House.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister of Agriculture. I now call the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson.

**Mr. Patterson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Let me start by offering you my congratulations on your election to your office and I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome all new Members of Parliament (MPs), on both sides of the House. I would like to congratulate all the new MPs for their presentations, particularly the new MPs over on this side. I think you have risen, so far.

Also, let me make an apology to the new MPs for some of the behaviour you would have seen in this House from some of the older Members. Sometimes, you can help them to behave in a manner befitting Members of Parliament in this august Assembly.

Firstly, I must say, I never thought that I would have to say this, but I am pleased that the US Secretary of State, Mr. Pompeo, is not here because it has deprived this House of certain Members, particularly, the Hon. Member, Mr. Kwame McCoy and others. Obviously, I will be able to make my presentation uninterrupted, with as little noise as possible. Unfortunately, Minister Nigel Dharamlall was not chosen. However, I will make do with small mercies.

It was Abraham Lincoln who quoted from the *Bible* and said:

“A house divided against itself, cannot stand.”

Today, I stand here to borrow those sentiments and pronounce that a country divided against itself cannot prosper.

Guyana and its citizens cannot continue to be pawns in this mindless game of disregarding everything studied, analysed, planned and even implemented by a previous Government, only to start over in the name of politics. This is like *throwing the baby out with the bath water*. This is one step forward and

two steps backward. It is time for change, and we must do things differently.

For this Parliament to drive progress in Guyana, we must first acknowledge where we are and then define where we are going. In the last five years, there were several areas in which this country made progress, and, like any good foundation, this needs to be built upon. Clichés and buzzwords are everywhere, but we need a clear vision to be articulated, so that, as a Parliament, we can judge what to do and how best to do it with inclusivity.

I was a bit surprised and taken aback when the Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony, made his speech and went on about the state in which he found the COVID-19 hospital. I was saying to myself, what short memories we have. Just over the road, if one looks out, one will see the pool at the National Aquatic Centre. It was under the tenure of the Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony, that the pool had to be rebuilt four times. I see my Hon. Colleague, Dr. Jennifer Westford, ducking her head right away.

Firstly, it was built in the wrong direction – twice. Who builds an Olympic-sized pool in the wrong direction twice? Then, more piles were placed at the bottom of that pool than there is at the Guyana Marriott Hotel Georgetown. When the pool was casted, it still cracked. After all of that, a consultant from Germany was brought in to fix it. Dr. Anthony then made mention of when His Excellency opened the hospital which was formerly the Ocean View International Hotel and how it was unfinished. When the Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony, opened the Olympic pool at the National Aquatic Centre, he said that they should have an Air Race event there. The person said that the pool was not finished and that there was need for a warm-up pool. And so, a warm-up pool was built. I am amazed at what short memories we have – what short memories my Colleagues, over there, have. Have they forgotten the state in which we found Kato Secondary School, in Region 8? Have they forgotten about that? They come here and regale us about what is ready, about what is right and about what is not there - short, short memories. *People in glass houses, should not be throwing stones.*

I crave your indulgence so that I can make the following comments about the oil and gas sector, which will propel our economic recovery post the COVID-19 pandemic.

Already, a lot has been said about oil and gas. Much of it can simply be classified as pure political rhetoric, designed to present a falsehood about the sector of which only a few possess expert knowledge. There has been much talk,

internally and externally, about the value of the contract signed between the Government of Guyana and ExxonMobil Corporation. I suspect that some of these baseless assertions will continue. In fact, it was our belief at the time, that the 2016 agreement was a vastly improved contract from the 1999 agreement signed by the PPP/C, an agreement that will bring tremendous benefit to the people Guyana. The PPP/C has said throughout its campaign that it will re-examine the contracts in the petroleum sector. It is well within its right, as a sitting Government, to do as promised. They have been chirping for more than three years that there is a better deal to be had. Well, if there is, go get it.

6.42 p.m.

We are not going to stand in the way of any process that would bring additional value and benefit to our people. If there is a better deal, it is your time to go and get it.

I note that the Ministry of Natural Resources is about to setup an oil and gas working group, aimed at utilising our natural gas. I am pleased to inform this House that my Government, along with several international partners have done a lot of work in this regard. To this end, we have completed a study on costs, economics, impacts and key considerations for transporting and utilising gas from offshore Guyana for the generation of electricity for local consumption. That study was funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). We did a study on the system expansion generation systems, on how best to transition Guyana to clean and renewable energy, and that was done by the IDB as well. We did a study on transporting and utilising natural gas in Guyana. There is a gas to power feasibility analysis funded by the IDB as well – an oil and gas masterplan. We even had a site selection study, where 10 possible locations were identified and ranked accordingly, based on land size, site development costs, accessibility to utilities, infrastructure and port access, distance and accessibility from the Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) unit and socio-economic and environmental impact. We even had a site analysis on a deep-water port funded by the IDB. We even have in place a financial proposal for the funding of the gas pipeline and generators at extremely competitive terms.

The only outstanding issue, when this project was transferred from the then Ministry of Public Infrastructure to the newly-established Department of Energy, which is now under the Ministry of Natural Resources, from 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2018, was the final approval for a recommended location for land business. All of these reports reside in the Department of

Energy. I am putting these on record so that the entire country could know what was done and what we left there.

For full disclosure, before commencing this speech, I uploaded all of these documents and studies to the media, not only for the natural gas sector but for other areas, which I will reference during my budget speech. Just as the Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, said that no one should be taking credit for other persons. We, Sir, have done a lot.

The Minister in the Ministry of Public Works, the mini me, made headlines when he reported to this House that the Government owed the Guyana Power & Light Inc. \$16 billion. Sir, that is correct. What he failed to inform this House was which section of the Government owed 85% of that debt. It is the Guyana Water Incorporated. This entity is similar to the GuySuCo; it is very loss-making.

At the current rate, coupled with the leakage in the system, this company is indebted to GPL on an average of \$1 billion per year. I also sent to the media the audited accounts of GPL in 2015, which showed that the Government of Guyana and GWI owed GPL \$10 billion in 2015, before we got into power. This issue predates us coming into power. Water is life, so the GWI was never disconnected. Now that the Hon. Minister has discovered that the Government owes GPL, he is free to pass the instruction to cut the power to GWI any time he wishes. I will also be keenly examining the exhibits next week to see, since he now knows that the Government owes GWI, how much money the Government has put in to pay GPL, to offset that debt. We will see, Sir.

The Minister in the Ministry of Public Works also listed various reasons, since the PPP assumed Office, blackouts have increased. He talked about this and that – blackout. His proposed solution, as is written and contained in the Budget speech, is expressions of interest for 30 megawatts of power. He boasted that he received responses from 30 persons and agencies to sell power to the GPL. If this is the Government’s short-term plan to end blackouts, this country will be in for a dark Christmas and an even darker first half of 2021. I do hope that, in the measures that the Minister announced, he took VAT off candles because we will need them. This is an unsustainable plan. First and foremost, there is no private company in the country that has that amount of excess power to sell to GPL. Secondly, GPL, as the Hon. Members feel, is not like *Lego* land. One cannot just plug in bits and pieces into GPL and make it work. One could ask the owner of the Giftland Mall, who is right next door. For over a year, he has

had a licence and, yet, he cannot connect to GPL because of the technical difficulties involved.

On behalf of the people and citizens of Guyana, I would like to offer the Government a simple short-term solution. Sit with the team, find out which are the unreliable sets and find out what are the maintenance issues. Let them buy the parts today and get the Power Producers and Distributors Inc. (PPDI), which is the company that maintains the equipment, and let them service the equipment right now. In that way, maybe, we would be able to have power for Christmas and the first half of next year. The previous Government did it. There was almost a year and a half of uninterrupted power until the PPP/C came in. We are begging, and I am pleading on behalf of the citizens of Guyana, do something. The only solution to our problems is the generators which the APNU/AFC Government procured earlier this year. The Minister in the Ministry of Public Works makes statements in a jovial way of where the generators are and when they are going to be finished. That is the only solution. I can guarantee you that, when the generators come into commission, these generators, in the first quarter of next year... The PPP/C will be saying that it was its solution to blackouts, taking credit for all the vision and hard work done by the APNU/AFC Government.

I want to go on quickly because I have quite a lot. The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project: Mention was made in this Budget about the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. However, no funds were allocated. This is a very good thing because the Project, as conceived by the PPP/C, is nothing more than a Ponzi scheme. The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was supposed to be a retirement fund for certain politicians and because the APNU/AFC Government won Office, those certain politicians could not retire. They are still here with us and, maybe, they were trying to bring it to fruition.

Let me clarify our position on the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. As a hydro site, it is a workable Project. However, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, as developed by the PPP/C, is not. To best describe this Project, permit me to quote and paraphrase from the real Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Da Costa Jordan, in his 2015 Budget speech:

“This Government...

Meaning the APNU/AFC Government.

“...is well aware of the importance of clean, reliable and affordable energy for the development and improved welfare of our people. The problem is that,

as currently configured, it will not only be irresponsible, but a downright criminal act of deception were we to proceed with the Amaila Falls. Our investigation has revealed that, at the current cost of almost US \$1 billion, the Guyana Power and Light Company Inc. (GPL) will be required to make annual payments amounting to US\$130 million to the operators of the hydro facility, which will total US\$2.6 billion over the 20-year commitment period for the power purchase agreement. This does not include Guyana’s contribution for at least US\$160 million, comprising of roughly US\$45 million to do the road, US\$80 million in equity through the Norway Fund and US\$35 million in loans that we had taken from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Further, Sir, there is the question of the garnishing of US\$65 million of our foreign reserves.”

As I said, I have uploaded all these documents to the media. The only reason I did not upload the financial details of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project to the media was because I am unsure if it still remains proprietary information. If any of the lawyers watching this telecast can inform me that it is not proprietary information, then I will upload it to the media, so that everyone could see that it was a Ponzi scheme.

Even further, why this Project is not viable, the PPP/C was depending on US\$80 million from the Norway Fund or the Norwegians. The Norwegians visited Guyana last year and when our Government explained to them our Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) and our proposed energy diversification programme, they were so impressed, Sir. So impressed that they immediately endorsed our plans and approved the transfer of the funds from the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project to build three 10-megawatts solar farms for GPL.

I have the letter in my hand, and I have uploaded it, of course, to the media already. This is a letter from the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment. It is addressed to Minister David Patterson. I would just quote a part of the letter:

“I would like to welcome the utility scale solar PV Project referred to in your letter, prepared by your Government agencies, in cooperation with the IDB. I confirm that we would like to pursue the development of this project under our partnership and support the vision stated in the Green State Development Strategy.”

6.57 p.m.

What were these renewable projects that so impressed our Norwegian partners? To highlight a few: Four hydro projects at Moco Moco, Kumu, Ikurbisi and Kato; 10 solar projects in areas, including Bartica, Mahdia, Lethem, Bethany, Monkey Mountain and Achiwuib. All of these projects have been included in the 2020 Budget which, in other words, means that the PPP/C has endorsed our plan and has continued with it.

I move quickly on to the Linden-Lethem Road. When the Hon. Member, Mr. Devin Sears, at the back, made mention of the Linden-Lethem Road, the Minister of Public Works stated that it was a PPP/C project. Untrue. The Hon. Minister, Robeson Benn, is speaking after me, so he could comment. The funding for this project was given to the APNU/AFC Government by the United Kingdom Caribbean Infrastructure Partnership Fund (UKCIF) in September, 2015. I have included a document in the media folder as to what I am talking about, so that no one could say that I have not.

What is even worse is that, when the then Opposition met with the UKCIF last year, they informed them that if the PPP/C wins the elections, they would cancel the project, to which the UKCIF responded that if they cancelled the project, they would cancel the grant fund. The PPP/C did not even want this road project. It is only included in the Budget because if they pull it, they will lose the money. Members of Parliament, Mr. Devin Sears and Mr. Figueira, I would like both of you to go back to the people in Region 10 and tell them not to let the PPP/C come to say to them that the road is going ahead because they would like to see development in Region 10. No, they did not want the project. You should also tell them that, when we met with the UKCIF and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), they put an option to the Government. The option was a fair-weather road or an asphaltic concrete road. The Government of Guyana’s, the APNU/AFC, non-negotiable position was the asphaltic concrete. We have to ensure that the PPP do not reverse and give you a substandard road.

Quickly, the East Coast-East Bank Bypass Road – the traffic on the East Coast and East Bank has reached a critical stage. To this end, the APNU/AFC has designed a modern highway, which not only caters for better traffic management in all areas along this corridor, but it also allows for additional lands in all communities to be opened. What is included in this Budget is a road that goes straight from Ogle to Eccles, a bypass road in the truest sense. It bypasses Sophia, North and

South Ruimveldt, Houston, Agricola, McDoom, Bagotstown and those other areas. The APNU/AFC’s design was a four-lane road with a sufficient medium for future expansion, linking all of these communities. All of these communities need traffic relief.

One must ask, who will this new road benefit? How will it reduce traffic congestion along the East Bank corridor? Whose land will this road benefit? I have uploaded all of these to the media folder. Maybe, this plan should give you a better idea. This is the road. This is what is called the Houston Estate.

[*The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, displayed an image of a plan.*]

We know who owns that Estate. This is another private developer, and this is under the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited/Guyana Sugar Corporation (NICIL/GuySuCo). They are the only persons who will benefit from it.

It is not lost on us, on this side of the House, which villages will be bypassed by this new design. The money is a loan. All Guyanese have to repay this loan; hence, all Guyanese should benefit from it.

The new Demerara River crossing: I will say this very quickly. I am glad that the Government has announced that it will be seeking expressions of interest. I will be so bold to say that, despite whatever they propose, any bridge that they build will be in exactly the same location the APNU/AFC proposed – Houston and wherever else. The only viable place is New Hope on the East Bank, Demerara.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you will have to bridge your presentation with a five-minute extension.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you may continue with that bridging.

**Mr. Patterson:** Sir, time has run out. I want to say something about the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), but I think I will issue a statement. My speech is already with the media.

I just want to say this on the CJIA for the records. In the Ministry of Public Works, there are three bonds: a

performance bond for \$13.8 million, a retention bond for \$6.9 million and, I think, an Advance Bond for \$5 million. In total it, is \$25.7 million. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Sir, that is alright; you do not believe many things. Those bonds are redeemable without question. If anything is not to the acceptance of the Government over there, they could redeem the bonds. The \$25.7 million could buy 52 air bridges. They keep talking about four and eight air bridges; it can buy them 52 air bridges. If a toilet roll holder is not acceptable to them, they could redeem the bonds. They cannot come back here to say that we accepted bad work; it is on you now, Sir.

I must say this: they had asked why we did not redeem the bonds. Sir, we did. In November, I wrote to the Hon. Minister of Finance to say that we should redeem these bonds. He wrote back, and I have uploaded that to the media as well, that we should do this expeditiously. Unfortunately, the Chinese New Year and COVID-19 have delayed it. We wrote to have it done.

I will make a statement and I will tell you about the ferry. I see in the Budget that the Government came to ‘unlocking bilateral processes for the ferry’. That is illegal. We had a public tender and an award was awarded by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) and a decision was made. No one can have a bilateral process that overcomes the procurement laws of our country. If anyone attempts that, legal actions shall follow. We have only two options: It is either the contract is awarded, as NPTAB had done, or annul the process and go back to the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board.

Quickly, *Budget 2021*: I see that I have two and a half or three minutes remaining. I would like to end my contribution by providing an insight into *Budget 2021*. We are finished with *Budget 2020*. Unlike five years ago, when I went into the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, there were no implementable projects in my budget. In the Ministry of Public Works, ask we speak, there is a slew of interesting transformational projects, all studied and completed and will be included in the PPP/C’s budget 2021. We should name that budget ‘*Don’t stop the projects*’.

Here are the project which will be under the PPP/C. I am stating them now, so that we will know when the Government brings them next year: the Parika Waterfront Development Project – that is ready; Lethem Regional International Airport; Georgetown Waterfront Development Project; Alternative entrance and exit roads to the Diamond Housing – remember that they sold the reserves, we have already started

an alternative exit, they will come with that; upgrade of the road link between Sophia and the University of Guyana (UG) road – that road right here; upgrade Lamaha Street, between Vlissengen Road and Kitty; the Wismar Bridge; upgrade of Linden/ Soesdyke Highway; Wakenaam Solar Farm; Solar Farm in Annai, Solar Farms in Port Kaituma, Matthew’s Ridge and Kwakwani; extension of the East Coast Highway road; extension of the bypass road from Diamond – it is all there – the road from Siparuta to Orealla – this has already commenced and is going back to Kwakwani; and new generators in Anna Regina and Canefield. All of these projects are ready, financed and are on the desk to be put into the budget.

The Hon. Ministers visited the new Asphalt Plant and they were blown away. They said it was transformational. Of course, it was transformational, that is the vision of the APNU/AFC Government. I can say this: the 2021 Budget in the Ministry of Public, whatever they want to call it, will be all projects done by the APNU/AFC. We had the vision, we put everything in place, and they are now reaping it.

I would like to end with a quote, not from the Good Book; I am not a religious person. I would like to end with a quote from a movie:

“We will be back.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]:** First off, I would like to congratulate you on your ascension to the Chair of Speaker of the National Assembly.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you.

**Mr. Benn:** Also, I would like to congratulate Mr. Lenox Shuman for arriving at the position of Deputy Speaker to the Assembly. I would also like to congratulate, particularly, all the new and young Members, the new entrants to our debates or participation at the National Assembly.

I have to immediately refute some of the grossly erroneous assertions just made by the former Minister of Public Infrastructure, Mr, David Patterson. Mr. David Patterson just said here that, when the APNU/AFC came into Office, there were no implementable projects.

7.12 p.m.

There were projects which were on the way: The West Coast Demerara Road, which they luckily completed; there was the

East Coast Demerara Road, which they have not, to this day, completed; there was the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, which had difficulties – they change the scope of works, reduced the size of the building, it has not been completed to this day; there was the Sheriff Street Mandela Road Project, which we started, for them to continue the implementation, it has not been completed to this day. Five years have gone.

Imagine the temerity of this Hon. Gentleman, to come here in this honourable House in the full face of the evidence and the facts on the ground, to say those things he just said. Shameless. Could the Hon. Gentleman, tell us, how many megawatts of power the APNU/AFC put into the system since they came into Office?

**Mr. Patterson:** Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Elucidation, he would like to [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Could I have some order, please? Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, the only way I can allow your Point of Elucidation is if the current speaking Member decides to give way to you. If he does not, then you would have to take your seat. Hon. Member Mr. Benn, would you concede to Mr. Patterson?

**Mr. Benn:** I will not.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, please take your seat. Hon. Member Mr. Benn, continue.

**Mr. Benn:** The Hon. Gentleman spoke about the working group on oil and gas and about having expert knowledge in oil and gas. Where were these Gentlemen, who are rounding their mouths and talking about oil and gas, when the exploration was being done? I went out there on the ships doing the seismic exploration. Where were these people who suddenly have overnight expert knowledge in oil and gas, who come here to speak in the manner that they speak, on this matter without wanting to engage with those who worked on the projects and those who created the discovery? When we found the oil, they said that it was an elections gimmick. Now, they are the most convinced persons on the face of this earth on questions of oil and gas, something which they are now just learning about. This another shameless thing and I cannot deal with all of them without impairing the presentation I want to make.

The Hon. Gentleman should read the Norconsult Report on the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. The Hon. Gentleman said, essentially, that the Norwegians agreed with Guyana, the APNU/AFC Government, to ignore 165 megawatts of

renewable power in the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project for 310 megawatts solar erection in various parts of the country. In a country which is energy poor, the most significant term in our development of equations is the lack of energy. They refused to put the money into the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. I say to you, Sir, the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project is a viable project. Thousands of megawatts of renewable energy go over our waterfalls as we speak even now. That power is renewable, could be brought to use starting with the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, as identified by Norconsult, and will also allow us to move on to the next power projects – the Tipuru Ikuribisi Projects – which would allow for thousands of megawatts of export power to Brazil. In which case, we do not have to use gas or oil. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** You should retire.] Sir, I would never retire. You could go if you want. You are already in the pre-retirement stage.

This Hon. Gentleman stood in his place and he said that the Linden to Lethem Road to the Mabura Road was a project which they initiated. **[Mr. Patterson:** I never said that.] You inferred, Sir, that you initiated the project and got the money, when we knew that we designed and did the feasibility studies with Mott MacDonald, in association with Cenco.

The studies we did with Norconsult and the financing which we initiated, the management and the negotiations with the Department for International Development (DFID) for US\$1 million, related to making the first phase of an asphaltic road to Mabura and the building of a bridge across the Essequibo River at Kurupukari. That is a fact. It is in the studies which were done by Mott MacDonald. Another effort by this Gentleman, honourable as he is supposedly, is to confuse persons in respect of what the projects were. I would also remind the Hon. Gentleman that, along with the persons on that side, for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, the Hon. Member, Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon and the former Hon. Member, Dr. Rupert Roopnarine, were flown into the interior, landed on the road at several different places, agreed with us that it was a good project, after having read the reports we had given them, and they came back to Georgetown and praised the project. It was reported in the press. Later, perhaps, when they got together in their cabal or whatever they do, they decided to abandon the project and leave US\$19 million lying in the bush, wasting money so far. *[Interruption]*

I want to continue, having tried to deal with those untruths which the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, presented here on this floor of this honourable House. I want to move on with

respect to the Ministry Home Affairs, for which I now have *[Interruption]*

*[Members of the Opposition pounded the desks and shouted, ‘Justice for the Henry boys!’]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Please allow the Hon. Minister to make his contribution. I recognise that the previous contributor had a relatively quiet Dome.

**Mr. Benn:** Mr. Speaker, I would want to reclaim the time which resulted from interruptions from the other side. We have re-established the Ministry of Home Affairs, now, as an unpretentious and a more down-to-earth institution to deal with the issues of crime and public safety in Guyana.

The experience of the last 40 or so days signifies, perhaps, a baptism of fire for the new Ministry, given the deplorable state of affairs with which we found it in. The fact of the issues related to the investigations and court proceedings on electoral fraud; riots; fires; blockages; arsons and the despicable murders and mutilation of youths on the West Coast Berbice, to which we could add, just recently, the discovery of drug smuggling aircraft; prison unrest; and the overarching problem of the struggle against the Coronavirus pandemic... it is important that you should know and that we should identify with the situations that we have in Guyana. When there are violent eruptions, particularly related to electoral issues, there is a link between politics and pride, particularly at elections time. I have to say, clearly, that the racially inspired unrest on West Coast Berbice, identifies, again, the link between politics and violent crimes and ethnic related crimes in Guyana. The eruptions, which we just witnessed, add another sordid chapter to this issue.

The loss of the vote of confidence in the National Assembly in December, 2018, apparently set in train a number of events, which, while there are parallels in our earlier history, are noteworthy for the transparent relentless; criminal attempts in the full glare of national; international and regional observers; stakeholders; media and diplomats.

7.27 *p.m.*

The brazen attempts to thwart the will of the Guyanese people were expressed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020, elections – where there was indeed an attempt, relentlessly, several times undertaken, to steal the country – despite the advance placement of military and political agents in key administrative positions; the penetration and corruption of the GECOM; the access to public funds unrestrictedly; and the



use of public assets for political purposes. All of those weapons which were formed against the will of the Guyanese people did not prosper.

For this, we have to thank our supporters of the PPP/C, the national and international communities, stakeholders, the European Union, the United States of America and others, particularly, Guyanese. Guyanese, despite different political views and preferences, took the position in the end – despite machinations and calls to disorder by the APNU/AFC – to stand in solidarity around Guyana’s democracy and peace. They decided that they would not be sucked into a situation which would have led to a breakdown in law and order and which would have allowed for a continuation of undemocratic governance in the country.

The experiences of the people, from 2015 to 2020, allowed for the taking of a position around democracy in Guyana. Particularly with respect to the General and Regional Elections, the people said not this time; our elections will not be stolen again, and electoral fraud will not be allowed to raise its ugly head in our country. It has been a close call.

Recent events identified that the efforts of the *sanctimonious gangsters* are not yet at an end. Former President, Mr. Granger, and the Hon. Member, Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon, alighted on the communities of Belladrum, Cotton Tree and others on the West Coast of Berbice. In the aftermath of their engagement on the issue of the vile murders of the Henry boys, the narrative that took precedence was that the murders were racially inspired, that certain communities should put in place self-defence measures and that no justice, no peace would be the order of the day. The result was that the streets and roads were enflamed with roadblocks.

**Leader of the Opposition [Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon]:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a Point of Order, Standing Order 40(1), please.

**Mr. Benn:** Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** I am trying to hear what the Point of Order is. I just heard the section you are citing, Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I want to hear what the Point of Order is.

**Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon:** It is a Point of Clarification, please.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I can only allow a Point of Clarification, under this Standing Order, if the standing speaker decides to give way to you. Hon.

Minister Benn, would you give way to the Leader of the Opposition?

**Mr. Benn:** I will not.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you will have to take your seat. Hon. Mr. Benn, please continue.

**Mr. Benn:** [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, please. I can hardly hear Mr. Benn. Please have order. Let us respect the presenters.

**Mr. Benn:** I want to assure the Members of this honourable House and all Guyanese that the justice which is required... [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, please, order.

**Mr. Benn:** ...and must be given in relation to the vile murders of the Henry boys and Haresh Singh, persons who were beaten and robbed and those who suffered property damages...there will be justice in relation to all of those things. There will be justice for all who were hurt with respect to the disturbances on the West Coast of Berbice.

However, the important thing that I want to point out is that politics of victimhood is irrational. The politics – I can only call it the carrion crow politics – which, when something happens, immediately presumes that it is has political motivation, racial inspiration and all those other things, I think, was the unfortunate aspect of certain engagements on the coast, which led to a great deterioration in the circumstances of safety and security on the West Coast of Berbice, and a great deal of problems.

I want to encourage my erstwhile Friend, the Hon. Member, Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon, not to follow the path of his former leader of becoming an ahistorical leader of the APNU/AFC.

In defence of the Budget and in support of it, I have to point out that it seeks to restore the economic fundamentals of our economy on a sustainable and growth-oriented path. The deprivations of the past five years, attacks on the enduring pillars of the Guyanese economy... the sugar industry where over 7,000 workers were fired without attention being paid to the inter-relatedness and the multiplying effects of that industry on the economy. There were attacks on the rice industry. There were attacks on the bauxite industry where they allowed the Berbice River to be blocked, which brought to an end the production of the Russian Aluminium (RUSAL) company and the loss of work, wages and sustenance to

families at Kwakwani, Kurubuka, Haruru, Mapletown, Linden and New Amsterdam. All those persons lost their jobs as a result of one action. One is left to wonder why the then Government allowed some miscreants to continue, for months, the blockage of a river to international and ordinary traffic.

The workers in five communities lost their jobs and their families lost income and sustenance. We now have a change from that which was a parasitic approach to the relationship between the Government and the economy, where taxation was oppressive and nothing real brought about development for people. There was pervasive job loss throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. For those who are making noises on the Opposition side, they should go and look into the eyes of the children of the sugar and bauxite workers on the Berbice River. They should go and look in the *pickneys'* eyes and tell them the things that they are saying here now.

Turning to the new Ministry of Home Affairs, I would say that the Ministry was delimbed. Minister Felix had a different Ministry which took disparate parts of the Ministry; it was disjointed and misused. The Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) became a political persecution agency for the then Government. It was abused. The Community Policing Group (CPG): the whole apparatus had collapsed. The diverse communities which these Community Policing Group represent do not rely, expect or have confidence any longer in these groups. The Community Policing Groups are 80% inactive at this moment.

The stewardship of the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, of the Ministry of Public Security is characterised by a degradation of the critical aspects of the Ministry and their effectiveness. We have to work hard to redevelop those.

The National Commission on Law and Order was established and Mr. Ramjattan, perhaps, knows this document. There was no meeting of the National Commission on Law and Order for five years, a Commission which enjoys bipartisan participation. There were no meetings held for five years. There was no expansion of the Station Management Committees (SMCs) to bring oversight to the police stations and policing. We need to overcome the lethargy and malaise in significant sections of the Ministry in order to bring about new energy and thinking and encouragement with rewards to the professions and workers; to inspire critical thinking and data-driven approaches to the issue of public safety and crime fighting; and to bring an end to the partisan engagement and spirit in the way we approach the issue of public safety and

security. The Guyana Police Force is mandated, now, to restore a professional culture and pride to its institution. There are reassignments of responsibilities on the way, which are not yet concluded. The regional-based system has now been put in place.

7.42 p.m.

We want the Guyana Police Force to be service-oriented and helpful, from the hostile, predatory compromising and disdainful posture that is present in too many places of the agency. Police corruption is a major problem. The lack of diversity in the police force and the other related agencies is a problem. The issues of complaints of wrongful dismissals and unfair advancement activities are still a problem. We have asked, throughout the force and other agencies, for the establishment of a 10-point iterative improvement programme and plans to be embarked upon.

Training and retraining and exchanges with regional and other police forces will be undertaken. By regional, I mean at the CARICOM level and even, by extension, further on.

There will be an improvement in public relations communications and, to some extent, a civilianisation of certain aspects of the force will be undertaken so as to free up trained police to put *boots on the ground* to do proper police work. Body cameras are being used. Vehicle cameras will be installed in the vehicles. Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking and certain citizen activity captured will be accepted. Random drug testing and programmed health checks will also be undertaken. The police have had the unfortunate experience, during elections time, of being dragooned, mustered and marched to vote. Policemen were used in deplorable ways, at the Ashmins Building, GECOM Headquarters and even here, in this building, in respect of electoral issues.

At the moment, the Guyana Police Force is basically at full strength, with an establishment of 4,956 ranks and an actual strength of 4,020.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I had given you back some of the time from the interruptions so you were at full strength then, but you would need an additional five minutes to conclude. Could someone so move?

**Ms. Manickchand:** I ask for five minutes more for the Hon. Member to conclude his speech.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Ms. Manickchand:** It might be appropriate for me to ask now, also, that we suspend the Standing Order and continue tonight until the other two speakers are finished.

**Suspension of Standing Order No. 11**

BE IT RESOLVED:

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

[*Minister of Education*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Standing Order suspended.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you can continue towards conclusion.

**Mr. Benn:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Guyana Prison Service (GPS) finds itself in extremely difficult conditions in its facilities. Fires at both the Georgetown and Lusignan Prisons – and we may remember that 17 persons lost their lives in the Georgetown Prison fire – have resulted in a degradation of the facilities, overcrowding and to very difficult conditions.

At the moment, at the Lusignan Prison, 572 prisoners lie in close proximity to each other with little protection from the weather. We are taking steps, even now, to build a new, temporary facility and the intention is to build a large new prison building at Lusignan.

A programme is on the way at Mazaruni, the Georgetown prison and, eventually, at New Amsterdam with respect to putting in new prisons. This, indeed, was a programme started by Mr. Ramjattan, the Hon. Member, after the fires. My only concern about it is that they are extremely expensive, and the projects are delayed by over two years and counting. We still believe in the rehabilitation of prisoners. We need to have a better understanding of the social economics relating to crime. We have to use Sociologists to have a better understanding of the issues relating to crime, particularly amongst young people. Again, I say that the number of persons in our prisons is 256 persons per 100,000 of the population, which is much higher than the global average, which is about 160 persons per 100,000 of the population.

We intend to procure more equipment for the Guyana Fire Service. There have been difficulties seen as a result of,

perhaps, of the lack of proper training, engagement and assertiveness which resulted in complete loss of buildings, particularly the issue on Sheriff Street recently. In relation to new fire stations being set up at Lethem and other places, we are examining the issue of putting in a system of volunteer firemen.

I want to quickly point out that there is a continuation of the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP), which is supposed to secure lives and livelihoods, particularly for youths, and to prevent the tendency to go towards criminal activities. This programme was started in 2014, under Minister Rohee, and I was glad, recently, to be able to partake in the graduation of a number of youths in relation to this programme. But I still think that the direction of the programme should be towards more sustainable, practical engagement in relation to the issue of sustainable livelihoods and that is something which we would want to see.

I spoke about the issue of the Community Policing Groups and about their complete practical ineffectiveness.

I paid some attention to some issues relating to the licensing of firearms. It appears as though 2020 was a banner year for the issuance of firearms, at the hand of the Minister, without the engagement of the Firearms Licensing Approval Board. Some 61% of all firearms issued in 2020, in the seven months so far, were issued at the hand of the Minister without engagement of the Firearms Licensing Approval Board. There are all kinds of talks about why this has occurred. Certainly, it was examined and spoken of as a strange issue. There are many complaints about it, but I want to assure this honourable House that this is not a practice that I will continue or undertake.

With that said, I want to fully support and commend this Budget to the House. I think our adversaries on the other side do not have a full appreciation of the nature of Guyana, the nature of its economy, the nature of its people and the fact that our people, indeed, do love and need each other. I have to say, particularly for myself, that what we want on this side of the House is the delivery, to the next Generation of Guyanese, a better life than we ourselves have had. That is our responsibility as leaders and as older persons. Those who represent the best of our society in this House are to hand over to the next generation a better life than we have had. The better life, as we see it and as encapsulated in this Budget, comes through the work of the PPP/C in Government with Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali as President and at the helm of our country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** Hon. Speaker, Colleagues, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Look around and you will see. It is a privilege and an honour for me to stand here in this honourable House. I stand here proudly to represent the APNU/AFC Coalition.

I join with my Colleagues in congratulating you, Mr. Speaker, on your appointment to this noble House. Based on your acceptance speech, I have every faith that you will be a just and fair Speaker.

Permit me to express my gratitude, first and foremost, to my Creator for all of his mercies and continued blessings; my ever supportive family; my two little angels, Simran and Sanjana; my earthly gods, my parents, Vidya and Rohan Chandan; my strong network of solid and genuine friends; and, proudly, the leadership and the membership of my party for affording me this opportunity to serve, especially the Leader of the Coalition, Brigadier David Granger; Leader of the Opposition, Lt. Col (Ret’d) Joseph Harmon; the General Secretary of the party that I proudly represent, Amna Ally; and Dr. Mark Kirton.

Permit me to offer my sincerest commiserations to the families of Joel and Isaiah Henry, Haresh Singh and Prettipaul Hargobin. I want to reiterate the loud calls for justice and for swift and impartial investigations. I hope that my Colleagues on the other side of the House understand the critical connection between public security... and they ensure that justice is delivered to those families and answers are given to the people of this great nation. Not only answers, but answers must be given in a timely, fair and unbiased manner. Anyone who thinks that the diabolical execution of Joel and Isaiah Henry and the murder of Haresh Singh can be swept under the proverbial carpet, does not have a basic clue about public security.

7.57 p.m.

If the pain, the anguish and the hurt of the citizenry are not settled or adequately addressed, it will forever linger, and it will be a constant threat to public security. I urge the other side of the House to use all the weight of the State to deliver justice to these families. I plead with you: do it with the same vigour with which you are hunting down your political opponents.

Before I make my contribution to the 2020 Budget debate, I wish to put on record my intention to fully represent the

people. As a legislator, I intend to serve the good people of our beloved Guyana without fear or favour.

*Budget 2020*, arguably, is a payback Budget. It is a Budget for the boys. Those who bankrolled PPP/C’s campaign have been heavily rewarded, while the ordinary man has been left empty handed. This Budget betrays Guyanese. *Budget 2020* is deformed, defective, deceptive, divisive and disingenuous. It is truly, as my Colleagues before me have laid out, a D grade Budget; it is not even a C minus; it is a D grade Budget.

This Budget not only lacks preparation and vision, it lacks strategy approach, foresight, and clarity. The dark and diverse interests that were organised to install this Government are smiling at the bounty that *Budget 2020* has brought them. But the policemen and policewomen, our soldiers, our nurses, our teachers, our doctors and our public servants have been cast away by the wayside. There is nothing but a little bit of sparse crumbs for them. Moneys are talked about, but the Budget is devoid of increases for our hardworking officers – nothing. Our security men have been kicked to the proverbial curb. These same hardworking security men and women are now being called to run up and down Georgetown, West Coast Berbice and elsewhere, to break into people’s homes, to stamp on people’s constitutional rights, and the list goes on.

This 2020 Budget is *thick on talk but short on plans*. It is a compendium of hastily put together measures. Where is the plan for our safety and the security of our people? This Budget is not only weak; it is woeful.

For the last five years, the Granger-led Administration provided the ‘Good Life’. What this PPP/C Administration is providing to the people is nothing but the good lie; lies, lies and more lies.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I think earlier today, at the beginning, I spoke about unparliamentary language.

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** I am guided, Mr. Speaker.

From the very second this Government was installed, on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020, on this most regrettable day, the country’s security immediately reverted to the pre-2015 low. I wish to posit that there can be no guarantee of security when the people are doubtful of whether the Government installed is the Government for which they voted. That is why we must clear all doubts with an immediate hearing of the petition. Every citizen, in every village and every region, is entitled to the same protections and guarantees accorded under the laws of our country.

Might I remind you that the Guyana Police Force is charged with protecting our people – our citizens. They must protect our life, liberty and security. They cannot and must not be selective in protecting our people. Look at what has happened over the last couple of days in West Coast Berbice. You heard from my Colleague that senior officers were heard instructing the police to target a woman in a green dress. This woman was standing on her bridge, in a street. We will readily provide the evidence; this is not hearsay. The police must be called out. Where were they when buses were being stormed? Where were they when our citizens were attacked? What we have seen is the total disregard for citizens’ right, and a complete failure on the part of the police to maintain law and order. We are, therefore, witnessing a pattern of threats to public security, which is creating an environment of fear, discontent and a total loss of confidence in the security sector.

There are growing concerns about the indiscriminate use of the military to supplement the role of the police. We all know that, traditionally, dire emergency situations have to emerge, and the police must be seen as incapable of managing the situation before the military is activated. The military has a different type of training for internal security situations. We urge careful management of this type of operation. This means that appropriate training must be provided to the police so that they can be better equipped to de-escalate threats of social unrest.

There have been the recent, inconsistent processes relative to the detention of suspects by the police. We have noted, and we have noted clearly, that, in the cases of allegations made against the GECOM officials, those persons have been held beyond the 72 hours statutory limit; while in the cases of persons accused of gruesome, barbaric and horrific murders, the suspects were released within 72 hours or thereabout. We call on the police to respect due process and ensure consistency in their actions.

As we examine some of the events which have unfolded since 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020, these do not auger well for public security. There has been a complete breakdown and our citizens have not felt this insecure since the dark days of the PPP/C. Let us examine some of these various, sordid events. Public servants have been sent home with no explanation. Most of them are the sole breadwinners in their homes. Once joblessness increases, public security is at risk. If you sit here as a legislator and you do not understand this, then you belong in another business and not in this noble House.

My Colleagues on the other side of the House need to understand that when they begin to tinker with security services, seeks to get favoured persons in positions and disregards due process, they are de-professionalising an essential arm of the State. You are completely eroding public confidence in those who are responsible for public security. The rotten potatoes simply cannot be brought back. Bringing back the rotten potatoes is spoiling the entire bag. In over 40 days, the Government, which is tasked with enforcing public security, has done more damage to public security and has significantly damaged public confidence.

I wish to remind this most honourable House of our achievements, that is, the APNU/AFC’s achievements. Time will not permit me to touch on every single one of the achievements made by the David Granger Administration, but I hope that the other side of the House will continue on the path of progress, and that you will deliver the ‘Good Life’ to the people, which they deserve.

Firstly, I would like to touch on the fire service. Between 2015 to 2018, the Coalition Government built six new fire stations at Corriverton, Melanie, Lethem, Onverwagt, Mahdia and Mabaruma. We increased the human resource capacity of the fire service, which resulted in women taking their rightful place as professionals within this organisation. The fire service finally got the professional mobility it deserved under the Coalition Government.

This is the APNU/AFC’s report card: we acquired six brand new, high capacity fire tenders; four state-of-the-art ambulances; and two of the most modern water carriers. These are functional and operational, distinct from the famous non-working water cannons of the PPP/C. We commissioned the most modern firefighting and rescue boat to satisfy our maritime needs of the emerging oil and gas sector. Now that Guyana has the second longest runway in the Caribbean, we have equipped the CJIA with all of the latest firefighting resources, which are in compliance with international standards.

Most importantly, for the average citizen, we have reduced our response time in the events of fire and other emergencies by 50%. This is our legacy; it is a legacy of achievements. An A+ for the Coalition. These are facts; these are not fluff. We have delivered on the ‘Good Life’.

I now wish to turn to the prison service. The vague language used in the Budget to address the prison system signifies a lack of vision for this important sector. We see no effort in the Budget to establish a long-term plan to reduce

overcrowding or compliance with the human rights standards for the treatment of inmates. I am struck by the fact that this section of the Budget does not mention the words ‘COVID-19 pandemic’ or ‘public health crisis’, and we see what is happening at Lusignan right now.

8.12 p.m.

As is recognised all over the world, the prison population is ‘ground zero’ in the fight against this disease. I hope the affected prisoners, who have contracted the deadly COVID-19, are given proper treatment and that all efforts are made to protect the other prisoners. We have seen no evidence in the 2020 Budget, of any efforts, to provide adequate medical facilities or medical personnel so as to deal with the health risk, which presents itself in the prison environment.

This, again, is the APNU/AFC’s report. We rehabilitated and maintained all facilities; we have procured, for the first time, steel cells to house maximum security prisoners; we commenced the upgrading of the Mazaruni Prison to enhance its facilities and upgrade its capacity; there was even the procurement of equipment to improve the safety of officers and inmates; we ensured that the prison service recruited over 100 prison staff, including the provision of training of new and existing staff; and we also established a taskforce, which has made recommendations on the relocation of our prison from urban centres. Again, an A+ for the Coalition. These are facts and not fluff. This is our legacy, a legacy of achievements.

I wish to turn now to the Guyana Police Force. Despite the current regrettable state of affairs, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic continues to treat public security as a national joke. The question begs, when will they get it if they ever do? You cannot throw around a few dollars at this critical issue and think we will all be able to sleep at nights. This Budget addresses public security in language only benefiting of a party manifesto. While it is good that moneys have been allocated to make our policemen and policewomen comfortable as they conduct and execute their duties, it falls short under urgencies and plans that are necessary to move this organisation forward. This is the deception in *Budget 2020*, and the deception which has become the hallmark of the PPP/C under its current leadership. You have inherited the Coalition Government’s commitment to rehabilitate police stations, which means that you should recognise the value of strategic planning. Interestingly enough, the carver of this *Budget 2020* states:

“Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment...”

Yet, I did not discern any grand plans and proposals for our law enforcement officers to be protected in the midst of this pandemic.

When the nation’s health is endangered, it is a matter of national security and, above all, if the men and women entrusted with providing that security are not protected, we are not secured by any stretch of the imagination. Policemen and policewomen are working under unsafe conditions. Where is the support from the Government? It is certainly not in this Budget. The PPP/C promised a one-month bonus on the campaign trail but are now providing two weeks ‘fine change’ during this pandemic, when the people need financial support more than ever. Again, this is a betrayal. I urge my Colleagues, on the other side of the House, to desist from this one-off ‘fine change’ that borders on a simple token when dealing with the salaries of our hardworking law enforcement officers. They deserve the ‘Good Life’. This is why we increased the salaries of public servants by 77% between 2015 and 2019, with retroactive tax-free salaries. I urge the men and women of the security sector not to be fooled by this three-card trick. You are receiving a one-off payment with this *freck*, which is being touted as a big pay out. It is not a bonus; it is what Guyanese call a *little stretch*.

You will recall that the Coalition Government did not engage in handouts; we increased the salaries. The public sector received 12 months of that increase and it remained permanently on their salaries. By the way, the question begs, who is the Minister of Finance? If there is one, is it Dr. Ali? Is it the Hon. Bishop Edghill? Is it someone else? It is unheard of, that a nation is without a Minister of Finance, which is a most critical portfolio.

While I am on the subject of appointments, I wish to submit that the very appointment of the most Hon. Member Benn, as Minister of Home Affairs, is a clear signal to the nation about what the PPP/C intends to do. The most Hon. Member Benn, in his previous ministerial appointment, was known to go around Georgetown with a hammer and demolition gowns. He picked up a certain name and, from his performance to date, it appears that he intends to continue in that vein in security sector. Lord, help us all. I urge the Hon. Member Benn not to dismantle any structures but to expand on our structures. To dismantle what was built, with all intents and purposes, will be a disservice to the security sector. I also plead with the Hon. Member to read the Security Sector

Reform report and continue the good work started by the Granger Administration.

On pages 54 and 55 of this ‘D’ grade Budget presentation, there was a hasty attempt to address public security. Despite the fact that we understand that this is an emergency Budget, the signs of what is to come for the security sector are not good. We have already seen the dangerous and unhelpful posturing of a serving Minister of Government, inserting himself, directly, in the process of police investigation, an action unheard of in the history of governmental processes. I take this opportunity to remind the members of the Guyana Police Force that their independence is guaranteed by Constitution. Our policemen and policewomen should not bow to the political directorate. I plead with you, do not reverse the professionalisation of the force, which was achieved by the leadership of President Granger.

I now turn to the drug trade. The move to dismantle the drug empire by the Coalition Government is well recognised locally, regionally and internationally. We ensured that drug lords did not find any refuge. They had no friends in the Coalition Government. We allowed the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) to function independently. A local office for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was established in Guyana and this has contributed significantly to the reduction in the drug trade, after years of resistance from the PPP/C Government. We cannot allow the dark days of the narco-empire to return to our beloved country.

If it pleases you, Mr. Speaker, I find it necessary to allude to a very sordid development, which has sent chills down the spines of the collective population. It appears that, after 40 days of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic back in Office, it seems that the ‘drug boys’ are back in town and back in business. They are encouraged that the Coalition no longer controls the State apparatus. The recent discovery of an aircraft with dead bodies and cocaine in the Issano area, sadly harks back to the pre-2015 narco-state, in which we lived in constant fear. Talk about legacy; that is the legacy of pre-2015.

Upon assuming Office, the Coalition read the riot act to the drug empire and, by our third year in Office, the drug lords retreated. The question begs, what has changed or what has occurred in the last couple of days, to give them the confidence that they can land planes with illicit drugs, boldly, in our communities? This is on everyone’s mind. The question begs, why are they so encouraged...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, to proceed with this same confidence, you will need an extension.

**Mr. Jones:** I do hereby move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** I hope that, for the sake of our people, this is not the beginning of the narco-empire, and I hope this is not the beginning of the return to gunshots disturbing our peace or the return of the lawlessness of pre-2015.

I am supremely aware that the other side of the House will reject the idea that the drug empire felt comfortable whenever the PPP/C was in Office. If this is an unfair assessment, I ask that they follow the governing methods of the Granger-led Administration on these matters and prove me wrong. Give the Guyanese people hope, not *gloom and doom*. I ask the other side of the House to read the Collins’ report. This was a presidential inquiry. The Collins’ report details the findings which were used to guide the policy.

The APNU/AFC set a gold standard for how a Government should signal to drug dealers that it is not in for games. We sent strong signals. You cannot be everywhere to guard the vast areas of this country, but you can demonstrate, by your actions, that there will be serious consequences for those who breach our airspace to engage in illegal activities. I dare the other side of the House to follow our standard. Let there be condign actions from the highest level. Convince us that you have changed and that you mean business. I urge this Government not to revert to past habits and to allow the drug enforcement agencies to continue to operate independently. Do not interfere with their work.

The facts are irrefutable that, from 2015 to 2019, crime was reduced significantly. Extrajudicial killings disappeared, piracy was eradicated, we activated the 911 emergency centres and there was the installation and operations of the new state-of-the-art 911 emergency system. In addition, citizens can send text messages to 911. We implemented the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme and we also established the Command Smart City Centre, which is operational and there for viewing.

8.27 *p.m.*

Rapists, drunk drivers and paedophiles are being monitored. Once again, an A+ for the APNU/AFC Coalition. We the Coalition Government worked tirelessly to address fresh

approaches to put the period of the troubles behind us. What we have witnessed in the last 40 days reminds us about the great national poet, Martin Carter, as he said in his poem:

“This is the dark time, my love.”

Before I take my seat, I would like to say to the Guyanese people, do not fear, do not lose faith, the light will return. As my Colleague said, we will be back! And, we will be back. I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Ms. Browne:**

“Warriors are not what you think of as warriors. The warrior is not someone who fights, because one has the right to take another life. The warrior for us, is the one who sacrifices himself for the good of others.

His task is to take care of the elderly, the defenseless, those who cannot provide for themselves, and above all, the children, the future of humanity.”

Today, I rise to deliver my maiden presentation to this honourable House, beginning with a native quote. As a nation, we are celebrating Amerindian Heritage Month. As a proud Lokona, my presence here today is an accomplishment, not only for myself, but for every young Amerindian and every young Guyanese in our country. I know that my family, friends and villagers, to whom I also owe this accomplishment, are following this presentation live.

Mr. Speaker, before I go any further, I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of the National Assembly, and my fellow Lokona warrior, Hon. Lenox Shuman, on his appointment as Deputy Speaker of this noble House.

Today, I am humbled to stand and speak on behalf of an inclusive Government, to fully endorse *Budget 2020* under the theme: *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Growth and Job Creation; Enhancing Welfare.*

Our only regret is that *Budget 2020* could not have been delivered since April. By now, we would have been well on our way to implementing our ‘Plan for Prosperity’.

The Coalition came to our villages, in 2015, and attempted to sell us the promise of a ‘Good Life’. A few of us bought into their *nancy story*, but the majority knew that many of their promises were just that – promises. They told us that it was

time to respect Amerindians and that it was time to respect young people. We all know the outcome of that story, which ended tragically on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020. The APNU/AFC should now be ashamed to use the word ‘democracy’ after blatantly attempting to hijack our elections.

The APNU/AFC respected us by firing close to 2000 young people, like myself, under the Community Support Officers (CSO) programme. The APNU/AFC respected us by taking away our solar panels, some of which were intended for the very pensioners to receive their electricity, the same Amerindians who the Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, is now so concerned about. The APNU/AFC respected us by stifling our land titling programme and by referring to us as greedy. We, in turn, have shown them the necessary respect by sending them packing into the Opposition.

This disrespect was anticipated, since, prior to assuming Office in 2015, the onslaught began when the then combined Opposition mercilessly slashed moneys allocated to us in the national budget under the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF).

This disrespect is still evident today on the opposing side of the House, referencing the presentation made by the honourable geographical Member of Parliament of Region 1, Mr. Ronald Cox, when he said that the people of Mabaruma were drunk on the Kumaka Waterfront after receiving their \$10,000 cash grants.

I would like to ask the Hon. Member, is this how we wish to portray the people of our hometown to the world? We as Amerindians are not only known and capable of being drunkards; we as Amerindians can manage any income coming into our pockets. My Brother, we are much more than that; let us not say something like that to the world. The \$15,000 cash grant will go a far way, a long way in ensuring that many more of us continue to blaze new trails and write our names in history in every sector and in every high office in this country. This *Budget 2020* will correct and address many of this disrespect.

On another note, allow me to invite the Hon. Members of the Opposition to the hinterland, to a place I call home for the past 28 years of my existence, including former Ministers of Government sitting here today, who, for the past five years, did not step foot in many villages in my region and, as such, are unfamiliar with our concerns and our plights.



Across the region, the cries of neglect are the same. The Government failed to stimulate local village economies; failed to lend support to community sports groups; and failed to lend support to scholarships to youths in the hinterland, as alluded by the Hon. Minister Parag, with given statistics. Again, these wrongs meted out to us will be made right in *Budget 2020*.

I know the Hon Members on the other side attempted to differ on the development of the Barima- Waini region. The Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, spoke passionately about a strip of concrete road between Mabaruma to Port Kaituma, a concrete bridge in Moruka and the smoothest road also, which is the Barabina access road. The Hon. Member presented a lovely picture of the Barabina swamp road, which I would like to suggest was photoshopped. I was in Barabina two weeks ago, accompanying the Hon. Minister, Mr. Collin Croal, and this is the reality of the Barabina swamp road.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a picture of the area.*]

Since I am also on evidence, this is what the concrete bridge in Moruka looks like now.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a picture of the bridge.*]

Recently, the approach has already detached itself. Were there any studies conducted on the project site? What is this, if not corruption?

While many mentions were made, it is not surprising that no mention was made of the coffee project in Santa Rosa, which can be considered a 95% failure, with only a few coffee plants left standing. The Member did not make mention of the processing facility in Smith Creek, which is incomplete and for which the funding has been exhausted. No mention was made of the Kwabanna Cassava Processing Factory, which is yet to *see the light of day* X-Ray Department. While we await word on what is the next move for these projects, since millions were already expended, we also await word on what happened to our uniform allowance since 2018, for which sums were approved in consecutive national budgets.

We will have to show them how it is done. It is indeed sad that neither of the two former Ministers of Amerindian Affairs are sitting here with us in this Twelfth Parliament to see, firsthand, what is truly a budget. Imagine, two Ministers could not deliver to the Amerindians what one Minister, singlehandedly, achieved under the PPP/C, since the Ministry was established in 1992.

I wish to turn my attention now to the regional health sector which, like the rest of the country, has suffered severely under the previous Government – from a severe shortage of drugs and medical supplies, as reflected in various consecutive audit reports. There was a time when the biggest hospital in the region did not even have x-ray films to aid in simple diagnosis. For every pain, the prescription was Panadol, until that, too, ran out. This shortfall will be addressed in *Budget 2020*.

Surgical outreach was done every three months under the PPP/C Government. That too became a thing of the past, and our people had to be sent to Georgetown for routine surgeries that were otherwise done in Mabaruma, thereby, putting a further strain on the already heavily taxed Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation.

The previous Government boasted of having procured a state-of-the-art water ambulance for the people of Moruka to benefit, which was publicised with much show on social media. However, I stand here, almost two years later, and I can say, without fear of being contradicted, that we the people of Moruka have not seen the propeller much less the water ambulance.

The health sector is a mess and I honestly feel sorry for the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony because the road ahead would not be easy. I have every belief and full confidence that he will bring back the health sector to what it was under the PPP/C.

The Regional Democratic Council (RDC), of which I am a former Vice-Chairman, proposed and constructed two spanking new doctors’ quarters, one in Manawarin Village, where we noticed that maternal deaths were one too many, and one in Kwabanna, which is the closest point to villages in the entire Barima.

We were promised, three years ago, that we would receive resident doctors to work in these communities. This never became a reality. Now, we will have to fix this. While the APNU/AFC was running back and forth to the courts to frustrate this country and delay the inevitable, we lost two of our children to scorpion stings. Many thanks to the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony, the staff at the Kumaka District Hospital and the Guyana Defence Force, the third victim, who is eight years old was medevacked, almost immediately in the dead of night, and is alive and well. Without a doubt, I know he will grow and become someone influential.

When we speak on issues, we do not *speak with water in our mouths*, because we have visited every single village, unlike

the Hon Members on the other side, and no one can challenge that fact. When the geographical Hon. Member spoke about the need for a health hut for my friends in Imbotero, I am left to wonder whether or not he had any voice in the past Government to lobby on behalf of his hometown. We will look at the people of Imbotero, which is only 10 minutes away from Morawhanna where there is a resident health worker.

The previous Government did not construct any new health huts in Mabaruma. Instead, it took them five years to almost complete the Port Kaituma Hospital Complex, which the Hon. Member spoke about and which was left by our Government at more than 50% completed. It was hurriedly commissioned just before elections for political mileage and is still not completed. It is a mere skeleton, as there is currently no theatre, no x-ray department, no nurses’ quarters and the doctors’ quarters, for which \$17 million was expended, is still incomplete.

8.42 p.m.

Here we are, five years later, the PPP/C will have to complete its vision for the residents of Port Kaituma. Five Star and Big Creek, which are critical areas with no access to communication, were not even considered by the past Government. This will also have to be looked at in the indicative years.

The X-Ray Department at Kumaka District Hospital, which was ‘left’ in *Budget 2015*, is still incomplete and patients are still transported to Suddie Public Hospital for a simple x-ray. Is this the ‘Good Life’? A maternal waiting home, which was budgeted for under the Regional Democratic Council in 2019, to benefit the people of Moruka district and to aid in the process of monitoring our high-risks mothers from 36 weeks, did not become a reality. The moneys were left sitting there for reasons being nothing more than incompetence.

Regional Democratic Councils, such as that in Region 1, which were controlled by the PPP/C, were frustrated and our attempts to serve the people were stifled. While Central Government spoke about inclusion and decentralisation, we were not given support to aid in the process of visiting our constituencies. The order of the day was regional flags. Could we guess the colour of those flags? The RDCs were stifled to the extent that Chairpersons and their deputies were not allowed to execute their mandates as elected officials as enshrined in the laws of Guyana.

As a former Vice-Chairman, I speak from experience and can completely relate since I was meted with the highest form of disrespect, not only as a young Indigenous leader but also as a woman, when I was refused an office space in the Moruka sub-region’s Office and when the house that was assigned to me, in my official portfolio, was entered into by regional officials, while I was away in Georgetown awaiting the birth of my first child. I am attentively...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I want to respect your right to complete your presentation. Could you please seek someone to move the motion?

**Ms. Manickchand:** Yes, please, your Honour. I, respectfully, ask for five minutes for the Hon. Member to conclude her maiden presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Ms. Browne:** Now, I am listening attentively for the Members on the other side *to cry foul*. Is that inclusion? Is that decentralisation of governance? Is that the collaboration that Hon. Member Mahipaul spoke about? Little did they know that, in frustrating the RDC and trying to stifle the work of the Council, they did not hurt us; instead, they hurt the people who were supposed to benefit from the services offered by the elected officials. I am proud to say that we have maintained our 10 out of 15 seat majority on the RDC because the people have confidence in our leadership.

What can I say? I am a warrior and not a fighter. Today, I am proud to be in an inclusive and accommodating Government. I am proud that every child in my region will receive the \$15,000 cash grant. I am proud that every family will receive the \$25,000 COVID-19 relief. I am proud that presidential grants will be increased. I am proud of the support for farmers back home in my region, with the Acoushi ants poison and also the aid in terms of transportation, since the Minister of ‘boats and bicycles’ did not extend the services to our people. I am proud of the reintroduction of community projects. I am also extremely proud and happy for my friends across the country who will now benefit from the reintroduction of the CSOs programme, once again.

Further, I am also extremely proud that the solar panels will be sent to homes where there is still none and for the completion and furnishing of information and communications technology hubs across the country. I am extremely proud that the Hon. Minister and my Brother, the Hon. Collin Croal, will improve, significantly, the water supply, starting with this emergency Budget. Most of all, I am

happy, humbled and proud of the representation of my people in this House and in the Government.

My Friends and Hon. Members on the other side, let your conscience be clean; let not the cries of the thousands be on your conscience, especially when, as a country, we too are battling COVID-19 and the effects of this dreaded virus. Let us support *Budget 2020*. We have a lot of fixing to do and *Budget 2020* is a step in the right direction. You are all welcome on board. Guyana belongs to all of us. Thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member.

Hon. Members, let me thank you for your patience today with our internet connectivity and with some of the other technical challenges which we have had. This concludes our business for today. I now invite the Hon. Minister of Education to move the adjournment motion.

**ADJOURNMENT**

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.”

*[Minister of Education]*

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Ms. Manickchand:** I now move that the House stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m., Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Assembly now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m., Friday, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

*Adjourned accordingly at 8.50 p.m.*