



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PARLIAMENT OF
THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC
OF GUYANA

OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2024) 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

74TH Sitting

Wednesday, 24TH January, 2024

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.16 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

Prime Minister (1)

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

[Absent – on leave]

Vice-President (1)

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

[Absent – on leave]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (16)

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

+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
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[Absent]

+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
and the Public Service,
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+ 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,
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Georgetown.

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

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

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
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+ 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,
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Georgetown.

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
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+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
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+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini),
Minister of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
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* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P.,
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Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
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Kingston,
Georgetown.

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
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Kingston,
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Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

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No. 66 Village,

Corentyne,

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South Cummingsburg,

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Hon. Mr. Aubrey Norton, M.P.,

Leader of the Opposition

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Cove & John,
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Rupununi.
(Culvert City Lethem)*

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East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.,
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Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
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(ii) A New and United Guyana, Liberty and Justice Party and The New Movement (ANUG, LJP & TNM) (1)

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Officers (2)

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Clerk of the National Assembly,
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Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

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

Hansard Division Officers (16)

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Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor

Ms. Carol Bess,
Editor

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Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter

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Reporter (a.g.)

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Reporter (a.g.)

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Reporter (a.g.)

Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician

Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician

Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Welcome to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Rural Development, Saint Lucia

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, firstly, let us welcome in our gallery and sitting to my right, opposite the Clerk, the Hon. Mr. Alfred Prospere, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Rural Development of Saint Lucia. Let us give him a warm *sakapfet gason*. I will translate that, unlike the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry. *Sakapfet gason* is basically the Patois greeting for, 'how you doing, man?' As one Member just said, it is good behaviour. We are not in a church but there are certain rules of behaviour which we have to observe. We have been correcting them as we go along.

Reference to His Excellency the President

I want to remind everyone about reference to His Excellency the President. What you have noticed is that the moment someone raises this, I would say, not here, withdraw. I will continue to do that. So, we start.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTIONS

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2024

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2024 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 15, 2024, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

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

Constitutional Agency's annual budget as a part of the process of the determination of the national budget;

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

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2024 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2024, of a total sum of one trillion, eighty billion, five hundred and eight million, and six hundred and thirty-seven thousand, two hundred and nine dollars (\$1,080,508,637,209), excluding sixty five billion, three hundred and fifty-four million, one hundred and twenty-seven thousand and sixty-five dollars (\$65,354,127,065) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2024 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of thirteen billion, three hundred and sixty-eight million, five hundred and seventy-five thousand and eighty-three dollars (\$13,368,575,083) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2024.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$240,059,490,286 equivalent to US\$1,154,250,087 to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2024 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

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

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Our first speaker for today is the Hon. Mr. Jordan. Hon. Member, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, permit me to welcome the Hon. Mr. Prospere, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Rural Development, out of Saint Lucia, to our National Assembly. I trust that his day will be rewarding and fulfilling.

I rise to make my contribution to the budget which was presented by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service on 15th January, 2024, under the theme, *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity for All*. Sir, let me, from the outset, say that this budget lacks the capacity to improve the lives of ordinary Guyanese, that is to say, this \$1.146 trillion budget will not meet the needs of our housewives, pensioners, teachers, nurses, farmers, and the general workforce of working people. This biggest budget ever has completely neglected the poor and the lower-class workers, while it continues to focus on enriching the friends, cronies, and associates of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), even those incompetent ones in the form of 'a critic'. When they can give our modern-day pensioners \$3000, who must foot huge cost of living and medical bills for themselves, it is an outright embarrassment to our senior citizens. I sat and listened to the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service who, in his preamble to his budget presentation, gloriously praised the PPP/C for its work and numbers at the last Local Government Elections (LGEs). He stopped short of saying that it was the same PPP/C that was involved in electoral malpractices.

What the Minister did not say to Guyanese was that no less of a person other than the Hon. Vice President, Bharrat Jagdeo, had to apologise to the family of a deceased woman whose name and signature appeared on the list of nominators long after she was buried. I challenge the Hon. Minister to tell the entire story. Old people would have said, Hon. Ms. Parag and Hon. Mr. Jaffarally...they will know the rest. I

will end the story, however. Electoral fraud, malpractice, vote buying, gerrymandering, and the falsifying of signatures are the record of this PPP/C Administration, moreso, in the recently held Local Government Elections. That is the record of the PPP/C. What is true from the results, however, is the fact that the APNU/AFC made inroads in Bush Lot village where, in some cases, we never had votes. This time around, we picked up votes in double digits. Also, in the Blairmont/Gelderland Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) where the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) had two and three seats, those were all increased to four seats.

I want to ask this Government, where is the relief that was supposed to reach the ordinary man in 2023? Where is the relief and support for agriculture and small farmers? Where was it when pumpkin was \$1500 per slice? Where was it when sugar was \$360 per kilogramme (kg)? Where was it when bora was \$200 per bundle of 10? Where was the support when plantain was \$260 per pound? Where was it when beef was \$800 and \$1000 per pound? Where was it when celery was recently \$2500 per pound? Where was it when tomatoes and peppers were \$500 per pound and four in a plastic bag for \$1000? The price of these local cash crops is a clear indication of the failure of this Government's agriculture programme. That is the harsh reality on the ground in every region, in every town, and every village. All Guyanese face the burden of the high cost of living. To add insult to injury, the Government has delivered a paltry or a meagre 6.5% increase in salaries for our public servants. I understand that the Ministers of Government would not know what I am talking about. They cannot feel the pressures that are brought to bear because they do not go to the markets. They do not have to face the shops. Aunty Betty in Port Mourant knows what it feels like. Uncle John from New Amsterdam, cousin Waveney from Linden, and brother John Apple from Kamarang all know what it feels like. The ordinary man knows what it truly feels like under this PPP/C Administration.

It was the very International Decade for People of African Descent Assembly-Guyana (IDPADA-G) whose annual subvention of \$100 million was taken away by this heartless PPP/C Administration, thus removing valuable support from many in the Afro-Guyanese community. It has deprived many of valuable assistance in agriculture and community development. I, therefore, call on the PPP/C Government to immediately restore funding to the IDPADA-G and fully compensate that organisation for the years lost.

Mr. Speaker, please permit me, also, to put on record that we in APNU/AFC Coalition call on the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to carefully consider the extension of the International Decade for People of African Descent by granting another decade. I also point out that it was as a result of the response to the International Decade for People of African Descent we saw under the APNU/AFC Government that the Rural Agricultural Infrastructural Development programme, commonly called RAID, was introduced for the first time, with funding from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) to the tune of \$318 million, in the communities of Ithaca, Mocha Arcadia, Beterverwaging (BV), Triumph, and Buxton. That is what a caring government does for its people. Permit me to dissect the Hon. Minister's speech on agriculture and food security. Sir, in paragraph 4.47 on page 34, the Minister echoed:

“...over 200 shade houses were procured; hydroponics projects benefitting over 300 youths from Regions 2, 5 and 10 were launched...”

This Government, which spent almost \$1 trillion dollars last year, came to this National Assembly to boast of a project benefitting over 300 youths from across three regions in our country, when, in fact, Guyana's youth population stands well over 135,000, according to the 2021 estimated population of the Guyana National Bureau of Statistics (GNBS). This is a mere 0.2%. These youths are not only located in the traditional agricultural regions but in all 10 Administrative Regions. It is highly unacceptable for this PPP/C Government and its Ministers to come to this House to tell us about financing agricultural projects to benefit only 0.22% of our youth population, after spending over \$900 billion of our wealth.

10.29 a.m.

The Ministers with responsibility for finance and agriculture should pack their bags and leave. Sir, we say pack their bags and leave. If they do not leave, the very youths who have been deprived of the much-needed opportunities will soon send them packing at the next general and regional elections. Mark my words. It is the vision and plan of the next APNU/AFC Coalition Government to ensure that agriculture is extended to every region in Guyana. The youths of Port Kaituma, Matarkai, and Matthews Ridge in Region 1 will experience the opportunity to become young agriculturalists and entrepreneurs. The farmers in Lethem, the deep South Rupununi and those in Bartica, and Itabali in Region 7 will receive benefits from the next Coalition Government to go to

the ground and the waters as they explore the true agricultural opportunities of Region 7.

Like the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Aubrey Compton Norton, I share the views and vision that the people of Regions 1,2,7,8,9 and 10 must be given the opportunity to develop their potential in agriculture to feed those regions and play an integral role in placing Guyana not only as the bread basket of the Caribbean, but also as the South American nation that will feed the nations of the world. It is against this backdrop that our government will put funding, very early, into the establishment of a new and modernly designed campus of the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA) in strategic geographical areas to service agriculture in those regions. We do not want this good-for-nothing Government of the PPP/C coming to tell us about giving 300 youths out of 135,000 youths an agricultural opportunity, moreso now in a trillion-dollar budget economy.

What we want is for them to tell us and tell us now what are the immediate plans, programmes, and policies to develop agriculture in every region so that every Guyanese can benefit. We want them to tell the nation what the ordinary farmers will receive to aid in the growth and sustainability of their crops and livestock. We want them to tell us what assistance is there for farmers of Hackney and Kabakaburi villages in the Pomeroon River and not to pass them in your usual discriminatory way and starve them of services and resources. We want the Government to tell Guyanese why they took the excavators, bulldozers, and other equipment from the Ithaca Land Co-operative Society, which cultivates thousands of acres of land annually. We need them to return those machines now – Hon. Minister of Agriculture – to the people so that they can thrive and do well in agriculture; not for them to come here and play some Holy Mother of Mary, when in fact they skilfully choose which community they will give support and which they will not. I want this very Minister of Agriculture to tell us why he neglected the communities of Buxton, Mocha, Ithaca, and BV/Triumph and the programme of the Coalition under the Rural Agricultural Infrastructural Development programme in these areas.

Then, they have the Prime Minister who sails into communities with his water boy at that Ministry running to give people cutlasses and forks when, in fact, the Coalition had already chartered a course to see the complete advancement of these communities under the RAID Project. Who do they think they will continue to fool? *Long time done; short time left.* The people will remember them for

taking away their bread and trying to hoodwink them with crumbs in their cheap, narrow, *One Guyana* politics. All of these projects not only had a plan for agriculture by the Coalition Government but, also, the development of its own infrastructure and co-operatives. I guess perhaps the billions now being funnelled into the infrastructural development of our agricultural sector are truly for the family, friends, favourites, and flatterers, in my Khemraj Ramjattan's voice. Many are they who know that out of the \$72.3 billion targeted for drainage and irrigation (D&I), over 20% of that will go directly to the contractors. Perhaps, it is because some people's sons and brothers must benefit and so it is set that way. Or perhaps, it is probably someone else's opportunity or turn to buy the newest model Rolls-Royce, Sir, I am not sure, but you might know better than I do.

It is important to note that while this Government boasts about \$97.6 billion being pumped into agriculture this year, I want Guyanese to really understand the true outlay of this allocation. The Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB), which deals with the support of production, varieties, and yields within the rice industry, only received a meagre \$1.3 billion. Yet, this Government speaks about expanding the rice cultivation industry. It begs the questions, where is the study? Where are the plans? How did you arrive at this figure? Other crops, corn and soya bean, coconut, agro-processing, citrus and spices, livestock, fisheries, and aquaculture all received just over \$6.6 billion. That is just a fraction of the sector's entire budget. Fisheries and aquaculture received \$1.2 billion; livestock received \$1.5 billion; other crops received \$2.6 billion; corn and soyabean received \$967.8 million; agro-processing received \$527 million; citrus and spices received \$100 million; and coconuts received \$78 million. These are the sectors that we must develop to expand agriculture in Guyana. In this regard, rice cultivation and production are critical, and livestock farming plays a pivotal role in our agricultural development. This budget has no studies, no policies and no plans for the development of our meat and dairy production. There are no plans for the enhancement of feed production and marketing.

A pasture here and a pasture there will not expand agriculture. A bull here and a bull there will not improve breeding. Sir, a barren Black Belly sheep with no lambs cannot expand agriculture. The Minister of Agriculture must tell the nation, when he comes to speak, what is the total increase from the Black Belly sheep project. Had studies been done on the appropriateness of Black Belly sheep to Guyana, they would have been much more cautious in bringing them and boasting about the project. What we need

is a comprehensive agriculture plan and programme, taking into consideration every region and their geographical differences, while recognising the need for a carefully balanced allocation that will see a new and developing agricultural sector, paving the way for Guyana to become the nation that will feed the nations of the world, with a structured and sustainable agricultural sector. One that is first and foremost focused on the development of all our people and not just a few. I daresay that this Government lacks any concrete plan and vision for the true expansion of the agricultural sector. In fact, what they are interested in are the many infrastructural projects slated to come on stream soon, where they can get their hands on the deals with the contracts and control the agencies to grant the same in their favour. Lest I forget, are you aware that this Government granted a contract valued over \$800 million to a close friend called 'critic'? I know that you are usually so caught up in....

Mr. Speaker: I will ask you to withdraw that because we all know...

Mr. Jordan: I am so guided, Sir. I know you are usually caught up in the effective, efficient, and unbiased operations of this National Assembly that you might have missed it, just as how many Guyanese missed and quickly forgot about Su and the Vice President handling all the arrangements. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, upon advice from the Ministry of Agriculture, came to this House and carefully coined his speech and chose his words to tell the nation:

"In 2023, we commenced the design of three new Hope-like structures."

He went on to say:

"We will also be investing heavily in our pump stations. In 2024, Government will continue works on pump stations..."

X y, and z. What he did not say to Guyanese is that this Government has already spent billions of dollars on these pump stations and almost one year later, not one is completed. So much to say that Guyanese do not know if any is past 50% completion as yet. **[Hon Member:**

(Inaudible)] Yes, we heard about the roll over. It is the same way you threw a gun in a bag at the station. This Government plans to invest billions of dollars into new infrastructural programmes. This Government seems unable to deliver a contract to the most responsive and competent

bidder in a fair and transparent process. This Government also lacks the capacity to supervise and ensure that a contract is properly executed from start-up to completion. Every Guyanese must note that after one year, not one single person stands to benefit from any of the pump stations that the Hon. Minister mentioned.

The people of Black Bush Polder will be able to tell us better – God forbids if an extensive rainy season steps in right now – or perhaps, the people of Cottage/Mahaicony, who are likely to experience more flooding from these delayed and poor structures. This PPP/C Government likes to shout at the top of their voices that the Coalition does not like the sugar workers but let me set the record straight. We have no problem with sugar workers. We were rightsizing the industry in the interest of the very workers and our country. However, we question the waste and mismanagement of the spending of billions of dollars on Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) because we care about the industry and its sustainability. We will continue to question the poor management and gross incompetence of this Government when it comes to GuySuCo after knowing for a fact what the Vice President, Mr. Jagdeo, did at Skeldon with that failure of a project. We cannot run from it. GuySuCo is failing miserably under the PPP/C. It failed and was almost completely destroyed prior to 2015. Yet, again, GuySuCo is on its dying bed in 2024.

Here the facts: in 2019 under the APNU/AFC Coalition, which was the last full year in office, GuySuCo received and produced the following: - \$4 billion... [Ms. Parag: *Inaudible*] You need understanding, Hon. Member, Ms. Parag. The GuySuCo made 92,246 metric tonnes of sugar. When compared to that of the PPP/C in 2023, GuySuCo received \$6 billion, which was spent, and we saw a major decrease with GuySuCo only making 600,000 metric tons of sugar. Yet, again in 2024, GuySuCo will receive \$6 billion. We do not have a problem with the PPP/C's obsession with those projects that are failing because they themselves are failures altogether. In short, GuySuCo received approximately \$4 billion annually in support from the APNU/AFC Government as a plan to ensure it returned to optimal production and sustainability and then moved to viability. It produced, at an average, 100 metric tonnes of sugar annually under the APNU/AFC, while under the PPP/C, GuySuCo received over \$30 billion.

10.44 a.m.

All public servants and all Guyanese must know that it was over \$30 billion in just under three years. Now, it is

producing an average of about 50,000 metric tonnes of sugar annually. This is 50% less than what we produced under the APNU/AFC Government. That represents the failure of this PPP/C Administration. The bottom line is that the APNU/AFC Coalition Government prudently managed GuySuCo and the industry was better off and aimed to be valuable and self-sustainable. That is what the PPP/C must tell Guyanese. I challenge the Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, when he comes, to admit that GuySuCo was better off under the APNU/AFC, and not to speak about that failure at Rose Hall where he pumped billions of dollars only to produce 1,030 tonnes of sugar.

Instead, the Hon. Minister in the Office of the President with the Responsibility for Finance came to this House and said that sugar expanded by some 28 %, when, in fact, sugar production took a drastic decline from the last complete year of the Coalition when in 2019, like I said, we produced over 92,000 tonnes of sugar. In 2022 and 2023, GuySuCo produced 47,000 metric tonnes and scraped 53,000 metric tonnes. Now, it is producing 60 metric tonnes of sugar. What the Minister did not tell the nation is that the sugar production target was reduced twice and, most laughable, a third time just to meet what the Minister of Agriculture would call achieving one's target. The Minister of Agriculture should pack his bag and go home and stop spending and wasting taxpayers' money on GuySuCo. As a matter of fact, the entire board and management of GuySuCo should pack their bags and leave and allow that Corporation to grow and prosper. What a travesty it is for the Minister to be talking about an increase in sugar production.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to turn to Region 5, the land of my birth. One would want to ask again whether this Government really cares about ordinary Guyanese. Healthcare services are at their all-time low. One would have wanted to believe that from last year to now, when I came to this august House and spoke about a non-functioning x-ray machine at the Fort Wellington Hospital, the Government would have quickly fixed it. Instead, matters got worse. To date, the machine is still not functional and even causes electrical shock to the patients and staff of that hospital. That is a matter for the Hon. Jaffarally, to make representation for the people. Instead, he and his party are busy disenfranchising the poor, the sick and the vulnerable of Bath Settlement, depriving them of the \$200,000 cash grant that the Government is offering to its friends, families, favourites, election day workers and its candidates. Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Minister, Ms. Sonia, Parag will be able to clearly point that out to you. With all these talks about modern healthcare facilities by this Government, the assurance of even having a bare minimum

treatment of cold, cough and flu in Region 5 is becoming a nightmare.

Apart from the exceptional services one will receive from some of our very much professional and caring doctors and nurses, of course, who they do not pay well, it is most times difficult for a patient to receive the most needed prescribed drugs, thus causing them to resort to private hospitals and pharmacies. This is an added burden on the pockets of our already struggling and working-class population. I reiterate the call for a river ambulance for our Indigenous brothers and sisters of Moraikobai where... You do not buy a Land Rover for the people in the hinterland, Hon. Sonia Parag. There is no hospital in Moraikobai. What you need to do is to get a river ambulance, like the Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, did for the people of Baracara so that when they fall sick and when they have an emergency, they can quickly move from Moraikobai and go to the Mahaicony District Hospital so that they can be treated. I understand that you do not know what that is; you do not know where Moraikobai is; you do not know what the needs of the people are; and so you cannot meet the needs of the ordinary people. You bought a Land Rover for where there is hospital, but just a mere health post. How will the people get to the health facility that is much needed?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I want to help you to get to the end and so you will need an extension.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. 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, Opposition Chief Whip. Hon. Member, let us go to the end. Thank you. Five minutes.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Speaker, permit me to wrap up on public health in Region 5. This Government spoke about building a modern hospital in Bath Settlement. Like I usually do, I went searching in Bath Settlement at every street and every corner for this modern hospital where they turned the sod, of course, where His Excellency was. To my surprise, I had to drive three villages or almost four villages away from Bath Settlement to find the actual site of the hospital, and that is at Naarstigheid, located in the Union-Naarstigheid Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC). This Government went as low as naming projects based on their political stronghold, just to win the support. Mr. Speaker, that is disgraceful. It is not acceptable. The hospital is not in Bath Settlement, but rather, it is in a place commonly called

Fort Wellington. I want to ask the Hon. Frank Anthony to speak to those in Region 5 and tell them get that signboard down and properly name that hospital before they cause confusion in this region.

Moving on to education, I heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Priya Manickchand, talk about how many new schools will be built or, rather, which she is building. Last year, when I reported to this august House that the Augsburg Primary School needed urgent repairs and that the teachers' living quarters were covered in bush, it was refuted by the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development. I want to report that, at present, the children are housed – and the Hon. Mr. Anand Persaud would know – in the boardroom of the MARDS Rice Milling Complex Limited. That is how they care about our children. That is how the Hon. Priya Manickchand cares about our children. Just a few months ago, the parents and residents of Burma, Mahaicony community protested the move by the Department of Education about what was told to them, that the school would be closed down since it is not structurally sound. No wonder that Hon. Member had to run from this House. It was because of what he always spoke – untruths. Sir, you would not want me to say dishonesty. The untruths in this House caused him to leave and vacate this House. I want to put the Minister of Education and the Minister of Local Government and the Regional Development on notice that we demand a brand-new school for the children of Burma, Mahaicony Housing Scheme. It must not only be mentioned in the 2024 Budget, but it must also become a reality by the end of this year. Also, while the Minister of Education continues to build more schools, I renew the call for a separate building to house the No. 8 Nursery School and remove the children who are cramped in the lower flat of the No. 8 Primary School.

Several roads are in a deplorable state in Region 5. Yet, in this oil-rich, trillion-dollar budget economy, not much is being done to remedy this unfair situation. I want to commend the Hon. Jaffarally and the Regional Chairman of Region 5 for running their little apartheid scheme last year, where they rebuilt or rehabilitated out of 150 roads, almost all in PPP stronghold areas. Many know that 23 were done in Bush Lot, 30 were done in Bath settlement, and the list goes on. Now that they have finished all of those, the residents await to see how many will be fixed – Hon. Sonia Parag – in Hopetown, how many will be fixed in Belladrum, how many will be fixed in Lovely Lass. Tell us how many will be fixed in Trafalgar. Hon. Jaffarally, tell us about Kingelly, tell us about Central Mahaicony, tell us about Calcutta, tell us about Perth, tell us about Burma, and tell us about Ithaca, the very

villages that you deprived and starved of much-needed resources for the last three years.

In conclusion, like many of the people in Bath Settlement shouted that the Hon. Jaffarally must go, I want to say, too, that he must go and go now. Proverbs 29:1-2 states:

“He that being often reprov'd and hardened at his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy”.

Take warning, Hon. Jaffarally.

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: But when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.”

I send warning to this PPP/C Government that the scripture must be fulfilled. I repeat this every year for this Government to take heed and know that they are not lords unto themselves but are subjected to the authority of a supreme God. *Budget 2024* is a colossal failure, one nothing short of a thriving disaster and a planned scheme to keep the Guyanese people in poverty while just a few get rich. Sir, I call on all right-thinking Guyanese to outrightly reject this budget and the PPP/C Government and vote them out of office. I thank you, sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Now for the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Member, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let me join with you in welcoming my brother and counterpart from St. Lucia. He has been here in Guyana for the last three days looking at models that we have been doing in the agriculture sector so that he can replicate those in St. Lucia. My brother is very impressed. He told me this morning that he is very impressed with the development that is taking place in the agriculture sector. Do know something? We listen attentively when somebody has a speech and reads it. I was planning to take a different line this morning, but I have to change this. Do you know why? We just heard a lot of misinformation, a lot of untruths, and things that do not make any sense.

We heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, say that they are making inroads in the PPP/C areas. Well, I have in my hand the results of the last three Local Government Elections. I have in my hand the results of the Local Government Elections for 2016, 2018, and 2023. In 2016, the PPP/C controlled 52 Local Authority Areas (LAAs) out of 70. The APNU/AFC – 21. In 2018, the PPP/C controlled 57 out of

71. In 2023, the APNU/AFC was slaughtered by the PPP/C because we took 67 out of 80. When you come to this Assembly, you must come with fact. Do not come here with propaganda. We took away from them Mahdia, we took Bartica, we made inroads in New Amsterdam, we made inroads in Georgetown and we slaughtered them so much that they cannot catch themselves up to today and they want to get into Government. They want to be the next Government.

10.59 a.m.

If they are so loved by the people of our country. After three years in Government, the next local government election we will take all 80 local authority areas (LAA) in this country. When you come here, come with facts. Do not come and say you make inroads in Bush Lot; Bush Lot is a small community. Make inroads in Georgetown, in Bartica, in Mahdia and in New Amsterdam. Those are the areas that we talk about. The other thing is we just heard the Hon. Member ask what is in the Budget for the poor and the farmers. I will tell him just now. At this point, let me take the opportunity to compliment my brother here and his team for bringing a budget to this National Assembly that is comprehensive and a budget that has benefits for every single Guyanese. This Budget will see the continuation of the unprecedented, rapid development that we started three years ago in August, 2020. In as much as the Opposition continues to shut their eyes to the ongoing positive transformation all across the country, this progressive development would not be a surprise to anyone, given the PPP/C's proven track record of development and bringing good things to the people of our country.

We heard the Hon. Member talk about agriculture just now. Who is interested in agriculture? I want to tell the Hon. Member what the investments in agriculture were. In 2014, the last year of the PPP/C Government, before we came out of Office in 2015, the budgetary allocation in the agriculture sector was \$15.4 billion. In 2019, the last full year for the APNU/AFC Government, instead of increasing the allocation as they so loved agriculture and they wanted agriculture to be the backbone of Guyana's economy, what they did was reduce the budgetary allocation to \$13.1 billion. From 2020 to 2023, we have budgeted and expended \$122 billion as against the APNU/AFC's \$93 billion for five years. For this year alone, the agriculture budget of \$97.6 billion will be more than the five years that the APNU/AFC spent in agriculture in their term in office. [**Mr. Duncan:** What do you have to show? What are you producing?]

I will tell you just now what we will show. Let me tell you

what we can show. In 2023 compared with 2019, sugar grew by 28%; in 2019, sugar declined by 11.8%; rice expanded in 2023 by 7%; in 2019, rice barely increased by 1%; other crops expanded by 4.1% in 2023; in 2019, other crops barely increased by 0.3%; livestock grew by 12.7% in 2023; in 2019, livestock declined by 3.5%; the fishing industry grew by 37.8% and 75% in the aquaculture sector. Do you know what they had? They had a decline in minus 0.39%. That is the development we are talking about. That is what we have to show. That is there to show.

The young people of our country today are not being told to go and do plantain chip, cook-up-rice, dog food and pepper sauce. Young people today are involved in agriculture. One project that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service talked about is the hydroponic project that will start in Region 2, Region 5 and Region 10, where over 300 young people from each project will be involved. We are not telling them... We have a policy to ensure that Guyana becomes food secure. We have a policy to ensure that.

This brings me to sugar. Probably the young man did not read this report. His Government, the APNU/AFC Government, set up this Commission of Inquiry into the sugar industry.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

He is talking... [Mr. Jordan (*Inaudible*)] I have to bring it and tell you the outcome. He talked about right sizing. I do not know what the Hon. Member is referring to about right sizing. This is what this Commission of Inquiry states:

“THE WAY FORWARD

6.0 The Sugar Industry remains vital and important to the country of Guyana and its people, many of whom have their lives touched by the Sugar Industry.

6.1 The Sugar Industry must be given an opportunity not just to survive, but to be revitalised and to become a vibrant, efficient and profitable business where employees have a sense of security and optimal use can be made of resources...”

This is the Commission of Inquiry. They talked about the decline of the sugar industry. I want to go through this figure and tell them where the decline and when the decline started. In 2014... [Hon. Members: (*Inaudible*)] *Y'all can't take it. It is hurting.*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have an obligation to listen to the presenter. The Standing Orders are quite clear.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Mr. Speaker, permit me...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the Leader of the Opposition, are you raising on a Point of Order?

Mr. Norton: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the truth is we have committed to not heckling but it has to be reciprocated...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I do not see your Point of Order. I said we have an obligation to listen to the speaker. I never said...

Mr. Norton: On both sides.

Mr. Speaker: Any side.

Mr. Norton: On both sides. It cannot be done [*inaudible*].

Mr. Speaker: I did not pull any string. All I said was, we have an obligation. That is simple English, and I can say it in *patois* if you want to hear *patois*.

Mr. Norton: You are obligated to do it for both sides.

Mr. Speaker: It is very simple. Hon. Leader of the Opposition...

Mr. Mustapha: You cannot put me in the Opposition. I do not support them.

Mr. Speaker: I would like to ask you, please, if you want to stand on a Point of Order, the Standing Order states that you stand and say Point of Order and you cite the Standing Order, not just to stand. Hon. Members, please, we had this meeting yesterday with the Chief Whips and we started very, very well. Hon. Minister of Agriculture, you may proceed.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Speaker, I was saying that the decline of the sugar industry did not start under the PPP/C Government. I will give the facts. Listen to the facts, Mr. Speaker. In 2014, the last full year for us when we were in Office, sugar grew by 16%. We made a target of 216,357 tonnes. In 2015, for half of the year when they took over Government in March, the sugar industry started to decline. It went to 7% increase in the sugar industry at that point, but from 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, the sugar industry declined by 21%, 25%, 24% and 12%. You could see who caused the sugar industry to decline because they were against sugar. If you listen to the tone that they are coming with to this honourable House and talking about sugar workers, they

seem to have a problem with sugar workers. We have not heard them talk anything about the subsidies we put in the budget for places like Linden and Kwakwani – almost \$5 billion in subsidies. We, as a Government, are ensuring that every single group in our country receives resources fairly. We are not saying that it is one group. That is why people are embracing this Party, the People's Progressive Party/Civic, because they see the ideology. They are coming in droves and by the next election, in 2025, they will be wiped out from the map of Guyana, and you will have only the PPP/C to prevail.

They closed down the four estates. They caused 7,000 sugar workers to be placed on the breadline. They caused about 28,000 sugar workers with their families... Families were broken up and people had to travel to different areas to seek employment. That was the APNU/AFC's action. What is happening to the sugar industry today, in just three years? If you follow this Commission of Inquiry's report on the way forward, what we have been doing, today the sugar industry is once again becoming vibrant. We are seeing growth in the sugar industry. Last year we saw a 28% growth in the sugar industry. This year it will go further to another 66% to ensure that we make 100,000 tonnes of sugar. That is the turnover we are talking about. That is the progress. So, when you come here and you come to rabble-rouse and talk about this and that without a speech, you cannot make a speech without facts; you have a prepared speech, bury your head in it and read it. You cannot come and debate facts. The sugar industry, as I said, we will continue to revitalise and recapitalise. When we took over in 2020 and when we went at these estates, we inherited damaged punts, factories were damaged, and fields were abandoned. We had to make resources available to ensure that we get these factories back in operation. We are standing to our promises that we have made. We have started the reopening of the closed sugar estates, and Rose Hall is an example where thousands of workers are once again employed.

The rice industry: The Hon. Member, whomever prepared his speech, did not tell him that the former leader said that the rice industry is a private business. *Y'all* remember that? *Y'all* remember *y'all leff* the farmers in the *gool* and the Panama payment is still outstanding – US\$7 million. You left the farmers in debt. That is the legacy of the APNU/AFC. But I want to tell you that the PPP/C Government will recoup that money for the farmers in our country. *Y'all* remember the pressure you put on the rice farmers, especially in Region 5, with regard to the drainage and irrigation (D&I) and land rental charges from \$3,500 to \$15,000? When we took a motion to the Parliament *y'all* use

your one seat majority to defeat the motion, and we said that when we returned to Government we will reverse that, and we did reverse that.

11.14 a.m.

Because of that reversal, the farmers today are putting back in their pockets almost \$1.3 billion. That is the kind of work we are doing. We are not coming here and saying a parcel of bora is \$100.00. That is bora mentality. That man wanting to be the Minister of Agriculture is coming here and saying that bora, celery, *baigan* and squash... That is the man; that is the Hon Member. He is a squash mentality minister, a bora mentality minister. Like the Leader of the Opposition talked about bora too, and celery, the other day. The whole Party is bora mentality. That is the mentality of the Party, like pepper sauce, bora and everything. As I am speaking here, the rice industry is moving apace. We have seen increase in production. For last year, we were able to increase production by 41,000 tonnes and this year again, we set a target of 710,000, to increase production from 653,000 tonnes to 710,000 tonnes. That is the progress I am talking about. We brought out a new variety called the zinc-enriched rice, the bio-fortified rice. Today, those varieties are given to farmers. That variety will attract preferential prices around the world. That is the kind of thing we are doing.

We are doing research. We are bringing development to the farmers. Do not tell me about bora. All the projects they had, they talked about Ithaca, they talked about Buxton, they talked about Beterverwagting (BV) and all the projects failed. If you go into those communities today, the people are embracing us. In Buxton, I did all the sucker drains for Buxton/Friendship. You can go to Ithaca now. I can call people there. I went to Ithaca and I met with the farmers. We are clearing lands. We are doing D&I works. We are getting the farmers to return to the land, right in there where they call their stronghold, places like Belladrum, Foulis, Paradise. We are clearing lands for farmers because the President visited those areas and made commitments to the farmers. We are executing those commitments. They said that a place like Baracara is their strong hold. What is happening to Baracara today? The People's Progressive Party/Civic is the most welcomed Party in Baracara. The Baracara community now, what we are doing, we are putting them into economic activities. We have started the production of red beans in Baracara. We gave them tractors, we gave them pumps, we gave them fertilisers, we gave them solar panels. What did they do for the people of Baracara? Nothing; and they come here and rabble-rouse.

We heard about contracts. We heard about pump contracts. The Ministry of Agriculture or the PPP/C Government does not give contracts. We have a National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB). It is public procurement, and the contracts are being awarded there. They have agencies where they can go and question. They have the Public Procurement Commission (PPC). Let them write and get the information; but they are coming here and raising issues which they cannot substantiate. They come into the House and raise issues and they cannot substantiate them. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] We still have the 12 fire engine pumps that you bought, the 12 fire engine pumps that were bought under the APNU/AFC, the small-sized pumps which they procured from India. We are still suffering from those pumps. As I am speaking, yes, we had pump stations that were awarded last year. It was a roll over project. The Member probably does know about the budget cycle. It is a roll over project. The completion dates for these projects are March, April and throughout the year. We are monitoring these projects. These projects have consultants. We are meeting to ensure that these projects are on track. I do not know what the Hon. Member is referring to. They just come in here with fluff, a lot of fluff. We heard the Hon. Member talk about mega projects. This year, for his information, an expression of interest is out already for the Hope-like Canal in Region 5 and Region 6. The expression of interest is out and very shortly, within months, those projects will be commenced.

Mr. Speaker, you can remember, what we are doing is ensuring that we modernise the infrastructure of this country. My brother will tell you when he came here and then he went across, he was so impressed that he said when he goes back he will tell his Prime Minister that the projects that the Guyana Government are doing, that we are on track to achieve 25 by 2025. I am speaking in front of him. That is the fact. Those are the facts. We then heard about Regions 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10. The Leader of the Opposition who is always sleeping, or probably somewhere in some alley, does not understand what is happening in the country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, keep it good. You cannot impute.

Mr. Mustapha: All right, as you say. In a recent interview by *News Room*, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition said, and I want to quote Mr. Norton's recent interview with *News Room*: 'we have to stop being dependent on Regions 2, 3, part of 4, 5 and 6 for agriculture. It has to be expanded and linked to agro-processing.' Probably the Leader of the Opposition is sleeping. He does not know what is happening

in this country. In Region 1, we turned that region into the spice region in our country. We have turmeric, we have ginger, we have nutmeg, and those crops are being expanded. As I am speaking today, we have 300 acres of ginger that will be harvested shortly; we will have almost 2 million pounds of ginger coming out of Region 1. We have 100 acres of turmeric being grown right now in Region 1. We have \$28 million planting materials that we have distributed in Region 1. As I said, at Hosororo, Coomacka, all those areas, we have expanded and we have put in agro-processing facilities. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] That was a white elephant. They built a cassava factory without the equipment. When I went there the people said, 'Minister, there is no equipment.' This is the APNU/AFC's typical behaviour, no equipment in there. They put in some equipment at Parika. They turned it wrong sided, so when they push in the cassava, it comes out from the wrong side without grinding. That is the way they did it.

In Region 7, we have a solar dryer in Kamarang. We have a \$45 million investment for cold storage in Bartica. That is in progress right now. We did shade houses for the young people in Bartica. We gave tools. We did \$128 million work to expand the D&I system. All those works were done in Bartica in 2023.

In Region 8, we are empowering agriculture growth. We gave support to over 900 farmers, in terms of agriculture input and equipment. There was \$5 million for the hot-meals kitchen in Region 8. We gave them tractor with implement for Kato and Monkey Mountain. We have the seedling resuscitation, enhanced accessibility initiative, all those programmes in Region 8.

Region 9 has been a success story for us. In Region 9 today, almost nine villages are growing their own rice. I have provided a small rice harvester for the people in Region 9, and they are now producing their own rice. That is an achievement for us. We are supporting the women's group. We have, in Region 9, five agro-processing facilities in places like St. Ignatius, places like North Deep South. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] I challenge the Hon. Member to take him to Region 9 and show him all the agro-processing facilities that we have done in Region 9. Like them, they always doubt.

In Region 10, for the first time in the history of this country, we are constructing a conservancy. For the first time in the history of this country, we are making input in Region 10. We have pasture establishment of \$164 million. We did an agro-processing facility at Watooka. I, myself,

commissioned that. We have the hydroponics project that the President launched at the recent Agriculture Investment Forum & Expo, from which hundreds of young people from Linden will benefit.

Mr. Speaker, they are worried. Do you know why they are worried? It is because we have a plan for the young people in our country. Today, droves, hundreds, thousands of young people are getting themselves involved in agriculture. They are talking about development in agriculture. When we look at the growth, the oil and gas sector growth, taking out the forestry and the construction sector growth, 7% is a monumental achievement for us in the agriculture sector. Many countries around the world are contracting. Today, only the agriculture sector is growing by 7%. This year we will see it grow by almost 10.4%. That is way we do it and you are talking about agriculture. Today, Guyana is leading the charge in agriculture. My good brother over there can testify to the fact that the Minister of Barbados came here with his team, the Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines came here with his team, the Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Trinidad) came here with the team, the Minister of St. Lucia and his team are here. What are they coming to Guyana for? To look at what we are doing and to replicate it in their country. That is what they are coming here for, to see what we are doing. The Opposition that does not have a plan, does not have a vision, does not know anything about agriculture, is coming here and talking about agriculture.

If you look at the entire agriculture sector, you will see a renewed interest in the sector. This sector is moving and is moving rapidly. When you look at the new crops in the coconut industry, we have expanded coconut cultivation by almost 6,500 acres. [An Hon. Member: Tell us about catfish.] Do you want to hear about catfish? Let me tell you about catfish. In 2017, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) wrote the government then, the APNU/AFC Government, and told them to get their house in order or they will put a ban on catfish. They ignored it and we had a ban on catfish. That is the catfish girl. Now, we are trying to get that ban lifted again and we are very close to getting that lifted, so that our farmers and fisherfolks can export back to the United States. We said we will go into new crops. We have young people today who are involved in high value crops. We are making young people shareholders of companies. We have the Agriculture Innovation Entrepreneurship Programme (AIEP) that was launched by His Excellency the President. To date we have over \$25 million in that company. Young people will receive dividends from that company as shareholders. We are

empowering young people. We have an objective in the Ministry of Agriculture where 35% of young people and women have to be involved in all the projects in this Ministry.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. You have actually consumed your 100% of your first presentation. We need an extension.

11.29 a.m.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Speaker, quickly, what we will be doing, very shortly we will start prawns production. Annually we will see almost \$150 million coming out from this project for young people and women. We have started the cut rose project where single mothers are benefitting from the cut rose project. Today we are producing 55% of the roses needed in Guyana and very shortly we will produce all the roses for the needs of our country.

Mr. Speaker, as I am speaking here, we have modern infrastructure going up. Right now, there is an abattoir for \$598 million being constructed at Onverwagt. We have the 10 prawn ponds at Onverwagt. Probably the Hon. Member never went there. I went to No. 5 Village, we have over 900 rods of canals being done at Number 5 Village. We have canals being done at Ithaca.

In the livestock industry, what we are doing in the livestock industry, we are improving the breeds of animals that we have. Last year we brought in 63 breeding bulls which we shared to farmers. We have increased our artificial insemination programme. We started a new programme called the embryo transplant, where last year we had 50 successful pregnancies in our farm at Ebini, and this year we will do another 250 from a company from Brazil that is doing embryo transplants in the cattle of Guyana. All those things are enhancing the agriculture sector. We have a US\$20 million investment by Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL) in a dairy farm at Moblissa. Those are the things that we are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, this year, for honey production, we are bringing in three specialists from Cuba by the end of this month to start work with young people and women to increase our apiary in this country so that we can increase honey production. All those developments are plans for the agriculture sector, and I need about two hours to go through the plan so that they can hear what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, in the fishery, aquaculture sector, we have seen a tremendous improvement – 75% growth in the aquaculture sector; we have seen new species of shrimp and fish. So those are our plans that we have.

Mr. Speaker, you know, this APNU/AFC Opposition, they cannot ever see the seat of power in this country again because of their inept performance from 2015 to 2020. They are coming here with false narratives, feeling that the people will buy those narratives. They are wrong, Mr. Speaker. Do you know what they did? They tried to deceive the entire world and squat five months in the government just to derail the process, the democratic process of this country. Do you feel anyone will trust them once again? Never, never in the history. *Budget 2024* is yet another example of visionary leadership and dedication to improve the lives of all Guyanese in all ten regions of this country. Mr. Speaker, \$97.6 billion will support initiatives with cutting-edge technology, promote diversification and pave the way for resilience. During their tenure, their lack of initiative for agricultural development underlined a distinct link of lack of vision, leading to notable stagnation of progress within the economy. We are not moving around like shadows. We, through prudent leadership, are constantly in touch with the people across this country, listening to them, hearing their issues, and what they want, for they have a big say in what we do. We know what they want because we listen to what they want. We heard their cries and saw their tears when the burden was placed on their backs by the Opposition. Many of those cries were related to the agriculture sector, which was mismanaged and derailed under the said Opposition when they were in government. They sidelined agriculture and demoralised the farmer. Their mismanagement led to our country losing its leadership in agriculture within the region, a shocking reality but not surprising given the dismal track record of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, today, Guyana is leading in agriculture within the region again, not by magic but by responsible leadership. Only recently I accompanied His Excellency the President to Costa Rica, where he was awarded the first award by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) for his proactive leadership in the Caribbean

Community (CARICOM). The records of this Government stand for itself, and we will continue, we will continue to run this country prudently. We will continue to bring development to the people of our country, and we will regale them to Opposition for the rest of their lives and the PPP/C will prevail. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. I join with my colleagues on this side of the House to support *Budget 2024*. This Budget comes after the emergency budget of 2020, and, the 2021 and 2022 Budgets to rebalance Guyana and set the foundation for its transformation, steadfastly and carefully, step by step, for the sustainable transformation of our nation. And, of course, the 2023 Budget of *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. The 2024 Budget, *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity for All*, is visionary and speaks to a future that brings hope, pride, and dignity, for all of us Guyanese, even the Opposition Members who have not recognised it as yet.

Mr. Speaker, I have been through a lot of the budgets in this House. I think I have reached 34 so far, 34 budgets. And since 2012, the APNU/AFC Opposition has become more and more irresponsible and reckless and lacking in substance during these debates. There was no difference, even when they were in government unfortunately.

Mr. Speaker, we dare say that the listening public has been subjected to the vitriol of the APNU/AFC Members of Parliament (MPs) who appear to be living and nurtured in a bubble of intellectual opportunism and naysay, and may I say, and in some cases, sheer intellectual bankruptcy. I say intellectual opportunism, Mr. Speaker, as repeatedly they have misquoted and misinformed about the contents of official regional and international reports and government documents over these last few days, as they have done in previous budgets, to prove a limited and jaundiced view of the progress Guyana is undergoing under the leadership of the PPP/C. We have heard the young MP speak earlier about the 2020 Elections and may I just ask the Hon. Member a question. Because, certainly, we know that a number of the election petitions that were laid in the courts have been dismissed and we also know that the observer missions – the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Nations (Commonwealth), the European Union (EU) and the CARICOM – all observed and stood in solidarity with the Guyanese people during the recount for the installation of the legitimate and duly elected government of this country. Is the Hon. Member, the young man, saying that these people...? Is he attacking the integrity of these international

organisations which stated very clearly what had happened in Guyana?

Mr. Speaker, before I get them all antsy, since they are quick to get antsy. They are blind to the physical changes taking place in every single community across Guyana, and in denial that the rapid and escalating transformation taking place all around them actually exists. They cannot understand how the PPP/C Government is able to do all this in three short years. Instead, they repeat *ad nauseam* the mantra copied from the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, there is nothing in the budget, the budget will not put resources into the hands of the people, the budget is putting wealth in the hands of the PPP/C elites, family, friends and favourites. *Ah*, can you not come up with something more imaginative than that? Seriously? One MP went so far in this honourable House yesterday as to calculate that the largest wealth transfer will be 20 families. What was the basis for such a genius analysis? None, just throwing sound bites across to catch the media.

Mr. Speaker, I use the phrase intellectual bankruptcy because how does one explain when those on the opposite side cannot imagine a Guyana that is on the move and transforming to a modern, model nation: with a low carbon diversified economy; with transportation links across this nation; a new city; deep water harbour; and, of course, a new Demerara Harbour Bridge – which I will return to later in my speech – the Corentyne bridge; where our people can live in new housing schemes and peri-urban and urban centres with schools, health centres, hospitals, police and fire stations; where we can produce food so everyone can have a healthy diet; where our children and grandchildren can achieve their dreams; and where no one is left behind and we care for the elderly and disabled under One Guyana. Why do they have a problem imagining this? I have wondered why. Why the People's National Congress (PNC), APNU/AFC, or whatever they call themselves, could not imagine our Guyana reaching such heights and instead adamantly refusing to be part of this vision and transformation process and why, instead, they would try to undermine its progress? Short-sightedly they do not want Guyana to be transformed into a modern, developed nation under the PPP/C Government. Unfortunately, they would rather sacrifice Guyanese and Guyana to undermine the progress as it was stated at a recent Opposition rally of a few hundred people, and may I say, mostly older folks like me, and no diversity reflecting the diversity of our country that the PPP/C... In fact, the Hon. Member, who is in this House, stated that the PPP/C Government must be stopped even before the 2025 elections.

Mr. Speaker, threats and intimidation. Regrettably, and I say it regrettably, in all conscience, I have seen young MPs on the PNC side get mauled and distracted and their political careers harmed by this PNC/APNU/AFC Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) that must be threats and intimidation and not about progress. Surely, they must be envious because in their period of government they hopelessly had no vision, no road map to move Guyana. One must remember that they were not starved for funds. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*]

Yes, Mr. Hon. Member, it is no problem. I know it is hard to take. One must remember that they were not starved for funds as the PPP/C Governments from 1992 to now, with a debt burden inherited from the PNC days in government. Despite this the PPP/C left \$10 billion in cash, about \$450 million. We left about \$18 billion in gold reserves; in 2020 when we came into office, it had fallen to approximately \$600 million. The current account deficit in 2014 was about \$400 million, in 2020 when we took over it was \$1.8 billion. This is the height of incompetence and reckless and irresponsible leadership. From 2014 to 2019, export earners from the productive sector, my honourable colleague Minister Mustapha has given the breakdown on what happened to the agriculture sector. In fact, if we had taken the gold out of the equation of the export earnings between 2015 to 2019, we were down 15%; we had gone down 15%.

They gave salary increases to the public service and took it back with 200 taxes. Took out \$200,000 out of the pockets of each family of this country in each year that they were in Office. They scrapped the cash care programme. I remember in 2012 when the programme was introduced in Guyana that the Hon. Member, who is present here, said that the \$10,000 was miserly and we should give more. Unfortunately, when the same person was part of the government of APNU/AFC the programme was totally abandoned, and all the children received zero. In five years, more than \$10 billion was taken away from the ordinary working-class families of our country, assuming that the amount had remained at \$10,000 per child throughout the five years.

11.44 a.m.

The fact is that over \$10 billion over the period of Government was taken from Guyana's children. Had the programme continued in fact, and escalated in the cost as we are doing, they would have distributed up to \$30 billion between 2015 and 2020. They spent over \$1.4 trillion between 2015 and 2020. There is nothing substantial to show for it. My conclusions are APNU/AFC and their mother party, the People's National Congress (PNC), have never gone through any catharsis justifying its ideological and

programmational vision for Guyana. They have fed their supporters on a diet for over 50 years of victimology, racial division, fear, fiction and untruths which they cannot extricate themselves from and change course. If they repeat a lie enough, they begin to believe their own lies. They cannot extricate themselves, refresh their minds and create a new PNC because they are so steeped in this Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of violence, racial division, fear, fiction and untruths.

In fact, they have descended to such depths that the more the Guyanese people want progress and the more the people respond to the Government's programmes: housing, the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL), the Get Ready for Opportunities to Work (GROW), the Women's Investment and Innovation Network (WIN), part time jobs, small business grants, black belly sheep and rosters, they are going into a tailspin not knowing what to do, except to pull out the one card left in the pack – division; innuendo about race and now the new sound bites of 2024, “contractor capitalist class and PPP/C's friends, families, favourites and flatterers”. They ignore the fact that they are becoming more and more isolated, out of tune with the people and where the people want to see what Guyana will become. If they continue on this path and are convinced that they are right, they will end up in the dustbin of political parties. People want to move forward; they do not want to be dragged into the unpalatable cauldron of venom and toxicity. They want to get on with their lives; to have a house with some land and a car; their children being able to get a good education; and access jobs in creating businesses or farms, fish or some gainful economic activity that the women and young people are not left out. Over 60% of the GOAL scholarships are women and 44% of the household recipients are females. It is the same with small business.

One of the challenges we have had over the years is the fact that we had low participation of women in the economic sphere in Guyana; always, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports and all the reports. We are now reaching a point where women are becoming the dominating factor in micro, small businesses and activities. Of course, in the public sector, we already dominate; as judges, we already dominate; and as magistrates, we already dominate. [An

Hon. Member (Opposition): Burnham start that.] Yes, Mr. Burnham, yeah right, that is why he rigged the elections so he could stay in power. The APNU/AFC does not understand this forward and progressive moving of our people. In fact, they cannot comprehend them. It is unfathomable to them, while at the same time each of their Members of Parliament (MPs) also benefits from the

measures the PPP/C's Government have introduced as they should. The people like the Budget measures. They understand what these will bring to their lives. They want more and they will get more as the country transforms. They know that things are better and far better than under the APNU/AFC. The Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have come forward and supported the Budget and, the typical APNU/AFC's side, any organisation who comes out and is supportive of the Government, they denigrate. This is their usual tactic. These are all cronies and people controlled by the PPP/C. The Zadok Ministers Fellowship is a Christian organisation that represents the majority of Christian churches in Guyana – Evangelical, and they have come out with strong support for the Budget. There is also the private sector and the Rupununi Chamber, which I do not have the time to quote from them. I suggest you go and read those statements because they are indicative of what are the desires of the people of this country.

This is my conclusion. The root of the problem though is that the PPP/C and the PNC – APNU/AFC parties have fundamental philosophical differences. This is why they have such problems understanding the budget, the transformational agenda and vision of our country. The PPP/C have chosen a path of national development of pro-growth and pro-poor based on transforming the physical infrastructure of Guyana to open up the country to modernity, new areas of production and economic activities thus creating new skill sets and jobs, new entrepreneurs and more farmers on a principle of “no one left behind”. Hence, the parallel investment in GOAL, GROW, WIIN, the Board of Industrial Training (BIT), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), University of Guyana (UG), the new training centre, new social welfare programmes, the enhancement and expansion of the present social welfare for the poor and vulnerable, health, education, and housing and water sectors. We have seen amazing changes and opportunities created.

The PNC, unfortunately, has no such vision. Let me quote from no less than the Leader of the Opposition from his speech last year. Before I get to that, when one reads the speech of last year which was on the last day presented a 22-point plan for the development of Guyana. This is one that is reactive and needs urgent reaction. It seems that certain two media houses unnamed set the tone and the subject areas. The Opposition, within hours, picks up the issue and runs with it. It seems unable to even generate issues they should champion. When we look at the speech of the 2023 Budget and the 22 proposals for advancing Guyana, we are looking at a proposal that sees development from a recurrent budget

point of view; spend money and give out handouts. However, the economy has to be driven by an engine of growth; by physical infrastructure; by investments; by expansion of the economy; by diversification of the economy and not by just saying, well, let us increase the salary of that and let us give out this and that. [Mr.

Mahipaul: That is what all of you are doing.] No. What we are doing is quite different, Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul. We are doing two things. We are on two tracks: pro-growth and pro-poor. We are not the rabid capitalism that some of you were talking about in the House yesterday – no; no; no. This is where we are investing in the physical infrastructure and investing in the people of this county.

I went through the proposals diligently of the Hon. Member. There is not one proposal in this that relates to the economy. It is a proposal that came last minute. Your own people did not even know what was coming because they never heard of it before you presented it in the House. They did not speak to these issues, if this was your party's plan. Not one of them dealt with the importance and deal with the two overarching issues we have not had in Guyana for a long time and that impedes the speed at which we can go into development; one, was energy and electricity which my Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramon, young Ramson eloquently spoke about yesterday. If we do not solve the energy problem in terms of manufacturing, the growth of the economy and bringing down the price of electricity... It is important because that is what has held back the manufacturing sector. It has held back many of the sectors in Guyana including the farmers, the rice farmers and so on. This states nothing about infrastructure as a driving growth of how it will create jobs and manufacturing. For every road we are doing, there is more sand and gravel that we need. We are using asphaltic concrete; that has to be produced. This is producing more. There are ripple effects in the economy, but I have heard in this House, for the whole last three days, why are you building this – physical infrastructure, why are you spending so much on this? It is looking at things in an unanalytical mind, in a silo mind and not understanding the big picture; you do not get the big picture – you just do not. The proposals here are myopic and small minded because they cannot see the breadth and scope of how one drives a nation into national development; and how a nation is transformed. It runs on several tracks simultaneously. There is uneven development; there will be uneven development, but one has to take the bullet and do it that way. This is myopic as I said.

Why has not the PNC/APNU/AFC published its national development agenda? [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*] Lord, do not tell me that it is in the 2015 Manifesto. That

document is a hodgepodge of things thrown together and none of which together or on their own can transform Guyana as they did not when they were in Government. As I said, most of them were not even implemented. In actual fact, there is one, as I said, that looks at a recurrent budget and monetary handouts, which cannot bring sustainable development. The PNC has lost their lodestar. Do you know what a lodestar is? You have lost it – *Google* it. You have lost it a long time ago. They are rudderless with no compass. They are just jumping from one issue to another without having a comprehensive picture. The people of this country judge a government by its track record. The electorates do it all the time and that is a challenge for the governing party and the opposition parties. It shows in 2020 that the people of Guyana chose to not vote for the APNU/AFC and put them back in government. They have had enough of the 200 taxations which took money out of people's hands. Even the draycart man had to pay an increase in license fees. It was a period that we never want to return to again. The people of this country never want to go through that again.

The Opposition talked about the cost of living and all these things. A total of 30,000 people lost their jobs when you were in Government. What did you do for them and what assistance did you give them? Not a thing! The ILO report studies that have been done on the social economic impact of the closure of the sugar estates was published in 2021 which gives one a picture of how devastating this one act by the government was, not only for the sugar workers but entire communities. The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), at that time, was paying and supporting all the drainage and irrigation in a country that is flood prone. Highly irresponsible, even though it was warned in its own Commission of Inquiry (CoI) that the closure of estates would have a catastrophic impact. They did not listen because they did not know everything. A lot of accusations have been made in this House – unsubstantiated, of course. The Opposition speaks of democracy but calculatedly omitted to tell the House that their Government have had the highest level of executive lawlessness in the history of our nation, with consistent violations of the Constitution over their term in Office, which escalated after the no confidence motion and 2020 elections, where the head of the Organisation of American States (OAS) election observer team, the former Prime Minister, Mr. Bruce Golding reported to the OAS Permanent Council that he never “witnessed such a transparent effort to steal an election”.

The Opposition came to us about poverty. Unfortunately, some of them have not read the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report on Indigenous

women and children in the period 2017 which was published by UNCEF in 2018. In fact, it was circulated in the House. This shows the terrible poverty that existed in the interior areas for women and children because of the lack of drugs, lack of textbooks, lack of water, *et cetera*. We are righting the wrongs and injustices that were done to our Indigenous people. We have been consistent from 1992 building the communities even when we did not have money and even with the debt crisis. We were in public debt, thanks to the PNC, up to here. Mr. Speaker, go visit the Amerindian communities now; each has a health centre and a school. In Amerindian communities, there are All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) and solar panels.

11.59 a.m.

To go back to the energy issue, the solar panel project which started in 2012 gave out approximately – if my figures are right – 13,000 household solar panels which are still standing up to 2020. What was the view of it? The objective of that was to bring electricity to communities so the children could study. How could a child be studying, have no electricity and have a juk-juk lamp. This is what we innovated in 2012 and in 2015, of course, it was abandoned. The solar panels were taken and put on the Office of the President and State House. Let me just give you an example of Region Seven. It has 21 villages where 4,639 panels were designated and allotted of which 2,760 have already been distributed and given to the communities and accounted for. Everybody is signing for Lower Mazaruni, Upper Mazaruni, Kamarang, Kako and Waramadung so far. Region Seven is the most expensive region to do the distribution of solar panels because almost everything is by boat or plane.

We have references by other speakers that deal with audits, procurement and other words that the Speaker is not allowing in this House. The Audit Reports for 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 are filled with case after case of breaches of the Procurement Act and financial regulations. The Public Procurement Commission (PPC) report, a public document, on the new Demerara Bridge in 2018, exposed the collusion of a Minister and a Cabinet to cancel a tender with over 20 foreign local companies and it gave the contract to a company who never bid and continued for a year after the PPC report to pay that company over \$100 million clandestinely through the Demerara Harbour Bridge. This new second-hand mantra, which is a second-hand mantra of the Opposition of friends, families attacking contractors *et cetera*. Their financiers and mentors have spoken of a racial discrimination. How does one know if a bidder is of one ethnic group or not? They ignore the thousands of small

contracts at the Local Government level, regional ministerial tender boards, contracts given to all ethnic groups who have a right to bid and be considered and, if responsive, they get the contract.

The increase of the income tax threshold to 100,000 per month would bring relief to an additional 13,000 people from paying any income tax and it would benefit thousands of people, which include teachers, nurses and public servants. As the Government approach to contain the imported price increases, provide relief to the most vulnerable and promote expansion of productive activity in job creation; people who get above that amount will now be able to increase their deductions by \$100,000 when paying income tax, which would give them more liquid cash and increase their purchasing power by \$4.8 billion an increase in disposable income and provide \$70 billion to businesses and individuals. We make promises as a Party; we have kept our promises. We will continue to keep our promises because they are the honour and the responsibility of our Party to serve the people of this country, not to hold on to power and rig elections as have been the tract record of the Opposition. The Budget is a tangible expression of hope and optimism for the future. Development costs and sustainable development costs more in the initial phases.

Infrastructural transformation is one of the fastest ways to expand, bring development to the economy and bring rapid benefits to the people. This is what we have done in 2021 to 2023, which is to invest heavily in people, especially the poor and vulnerable. How does one resolve the two of overarching issues: reliable energy and also communications? It is not only information and communications technology (ICT) but roads, bridges and aviation. We have to expend huge amounts of money on both as reflected in this Budget. The revenues from the oil sector have given us the means to use these now; it is not when oil runs out to transform the infrastructure of this country. The legislative framework is being reformed and modernised. We brought 84 Bills including the Single Window Platform Bill that will make doing business more efficient and less exposed to unsavoury practices because I cannot call the other word in this House.

Guyanese are ambitious and innovative. They are jumping on the transformation bandwagon of Guyana. I have heard about the accusations. Over 600 companies have registered with the local content in 2023. One thousand small contractors have been encouraged and assisted to get registered and bid for small contracts across the country. Each of these hire five people minimally, by that group alone

in providing jobs for over 5,000 people. By the way, a number of these small contractors are female.

The Amerindian Village Councils have been given contracts to build roads and infrastructure in their communities. Roads and bridges are being built; houses are being built; water is coming to communities that never had; streetlights are going up; and demand for skilled workers in masonry, steel bending, electricians, engineers, heavy-duty drivers and plumbers are, in high demand. The country is getting more connected so that more services will be available online. We have a shortage of skilled workers in many sectors and hence the investment in the Board of Industrial Training, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Women's Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN), Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL), the University of Guyana (UG)... By the way, dealing with WIIN, UG and GOAL, this argument that is a fictitious argument that has been created by the Peoples National Congress, if UG graduates 5,000 grandaunts every year, which I do not think they do, the GOAL, in three years has reached 21,000 people in three years who are doing certificate, diploma, degrees, masters and PhD. The University of Guyana is doing 5,000 per year, on average that is 15,000. If one adds 15,000 to 21,000 it is equal to 36,000 people in this country who have had access to higher education and post-secondary school education. Is that not something we should be proud about? Is that not an intervention to reduce poverty, to give people a chance who could not afford to come to town to go to the University? One of the problems of the University is access and, therefore, the online feature is a modern innovation to bring people into the modern era and to be able to educate themselves. Again, we point out and repeat that a majority of takers in these programmes, particularly GOAL are females.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, for this programme, you will need an extension.

Attorney General (AG) and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: [*Inaudible*]

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. AG. Hon. Minister, you may have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are playing catch up after all these years and we shall not slow down until we transform this economy and the people of this country to live at a high standard of living. This is the golden era of Guyana. After 68 years of independence, we are

finally showing our people and the world what Guyana is and what Guyana can become. The people know you on the other side better than you know yourself. They know you; they have you on their radar; they know you. Hot air promises, sound bites and irresponsible behaviour. As I said, I have always trusted the wisdom of the Guyanese people and I will continue to do that until the day I die. This is a visible and accessible Government to all Guyanese. My Colleagues who spoke before me talked about the community meetings where people put up their requests, put up what they need to get themselves better in life; whether it is equipment, whether it is support for families or the very poor in the communities. The programmes are there to empower people, empower youth, women and men in our societies and to be able to take their rightful place and dignified place in our country. As you know there are two philosophies that say – as I said we have philosophical differences the one view is to give a man a bowl of rice if he is poor and the other one is give a man a fishing rod and let him fish. The PPP/C is on the second track. Give the people the power to choose and to improve.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Article 4 report – it is publicly available, and you could look at it, as its mid-year review that we have produced in this Parliament which gives you facts, go back to the facts and, not calculations of some people in their imaginations - over the last three years has complimented and produced reports that support the position of this Government in what it is doing and its programme of activities, including physical infrastructure. In terms of commenting on the young Member who was before me, the Hon. Member made a comment about Belladrum, about youth and discrimination. Why - I asked the Hon. Member a question - when the Government went to develop a youth programme in Belladrum the Hon. Member locked the Belladrum Community Centre? It has remained locked since then. Why? If you are so hot on youth, why would you prevent a youth programme from coming to Belladrum? I know Belladrum, you do not. The centre is still locked up and the youths and the community are being denied use for any other purpose.

There have been accusations here about discrimination in distribution of the programmes we have for the poor and vulnerable. I call on the opposition; if there is anybody who has been left out from the COVID-19 allowances, the one-off pensions for the pensioners or for all the other programmes we did, bring the names so that we can fix it. You do not want to fix nothing; you want to have this mantra that you can call discrimination. You are not interested in fixing nothing. You are not interested in representing the

people who you say were discriminated against and who did not receive these things. The programmes of this country are the initiatives of the President. The Men on Mission and President's Youth Advisory Council are efforts and initiatives to involve people in addressing social issues. We are on a good footing.

You cannot, on the Opposition, mouth inclusivity but say inclusivity on your terms only, that is what it is. You want to be part of the border issue, but it is on your terms. You were invited to Argyle Declaration at the meeting, you refused. You have meetings... [Mr. Duncan: (*Inaudible*)]

You do not know, Mr. Duncan; be quiet. You have no idea what goes on. The Opposition must come good, come with an open hand. The fact that they are told not to shake the hands with the Ministers is a level of... I do not want to say stupidity but maybe it is. If you do not want to shake the President's and the Prime Minister's hands, this is the level of asininity and I do not know if asininity is an unparliamentary word. Opposition, it is time to stop playing games and attempting to blackmail the Government to do what you want and ignore the rest of the stakeholders. The stakeholders of this country, private sector, labourers, religious, Amerindian, women, youth all have a role to play. If you are not representing, we are doing it all the time.

I wish to support the Budget, to support my Government and my President in bringing this Budget which will expedite the speed of the process which is already going fast on transforming our nation and improving the quality of life of all Guyanese. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance. Hon. Members, before we break for lunch, first we have the students from Morgan's Academy visiting this morning. To the Committee of Selection, as soon as we break here, let us meet to fill vacancies in other Committees. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take a break until 1.20 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 12.13 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.53 p.m.

Thank you, Hon. Members, please be seated. Hon. Members, they say, true things sometimes pass in joke. I say, the Opposition Chief Whip might find it more or less stressful as the Sergeant at Arms. Hon. Members, we resume with the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira who would start at 1.55 p.m.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I delve into the substance of my presentation, permit

me to say to all our Hon. Women in this House, be assured that you will always have my respect. I believe as honourable men, we have the responsibility to not only protect and love our women but, most importantly, to show them respect. The hurdling of insults and personal attacks at each other and involving Members' families in this House have become untenable in the last two days. The sanity of the Parliament needs to be preserved. Like this Budget, Parliament needs a reset. Today, I rise fearlessly to give my views on *Budget 2024*, but also to be constructive in my contribution. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the contributions of the Hon. Minister and his staff at the Ministry of Finance, all other programme heads, and public servants who contributed to the formulation of *Budget 2024*, Guyana's first trillion-dollar budget.

Further, Mr. Speaker, permit me to join my Colleagues on both sides of the House in extending a happy New Year to all Guyanese – home and abroad – while remaining optimistic that the prudent and informed arguments that we, on this side of the House, continue to put forward, will cause the Government to adjust the sequence of its, 'Staying the Course' posture, to ensure that the task of empowering citizens for inter-generational prosperity is indeed afforded literally to all Guyanese. *Budget 2024*, with all its grandeur and flowery diction that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance and the Public Service never fails to bring, has been unsuccessful in achieving national contentment – national contentment. Instead, it is doing well in drumming up national disquiet among the majority of the citizens. Not 'Staying the Course', but instead adjusting the course in *Budget 2024* is indeed what is necessary.

Why would the fastest growing economy, not in the Caribbean, not in the Western Hemisphere but the world over, continue to lose so many experienced nurses and teachers to countries with single-digit and, or negative economic growths? Why is the turnover rate so high in the military among junior ranks since the first oil? The truth is, these professionals have recognised that even if the Government paved streets or built four-lane roads and some fancy roundabouts where they live, the wages, salaries, and ill-conceived policies of this Government, are imprisoning them to the ranks of the working poor. The course of *Budget 2024* has to be adjusted to fix this dreadful reality. *Budget 2024* has in it the ability and the power of the zeros to address the multiplicity of issues that plague our learning institutions, health, agriculture, housing, legal and other sectors. It has the means to elevate the poor out of poverty. A budget that is over \$1 trillion must be put into context for

a greater appreciation of why we say that the course of Government must be changed so that our people can benefit more.

One trillion dollars with a capital T is the equivalent of \$1,000 billion. We have what it takes in this Budget to emancipate our citizens from the hamper distribution policy that was the hallmark of the last three Budgets. It has what is needed to address the high cost of living by ensuring food security for all and to address the issues of youth unemployment in a population of less than 800,000 people. I am persuaded that all of us in this House, long to see our beloved country grow and blossom to its true developmental apex, where the benefits of what this country have to offer goes beyond the Government's friends, families, and those in privileged circles. We all want a Guyana where lived experiences make us proud to say, *Guyana is we own*, because of what our unwavering sacrifices have given to her and what she is giving back to us in return. We need *Budget 2024* to give us improved infrastructure and all the fardangle that will glitter to outsiders. At the same time, we need it to give us increased compassion and care for our seniors; more quality in education; more equity in employment and the awarding of contracts; in the selection and distribution of small grants; and yes, more compassion in the liveable wages and salaries for just services rendered across every sector.

In *Budget 2024*, I see the state as a facilitator to the private sector, driving growth with all of its generous measures and expecting there will be a trickle-down of benefits to the people. This approach seldom works anywhere. The people of Guyana have had past benefits from the PPP/C's policy. Hence, they demand a different approach from this important sector in our economy because the primary desire of the stakeholders involved is to make big profits by all means. Hence, we need to know how many citizens are living on the poverty line and below the poverty line in 2024. This will give us a guide as to how we may adjust *Budget 2024* for a more meaningful impact. The adjustments must be deliberate and significant. The balance we strike must be definitive and unambiguous. We cannot be prioritising roads and bridges at the expense of citizens' social and economic needs. That widening gap between the need for infrastructural development and people's development must be realigned. It will be a stinking abomination for us to be spending hundreds of billions on fat cat projects, while mummies cannot afford cabbage at \$500 per pound and sweet potato at \$300 per pound.

I have not seen a favourable comment in any of the press for this Budget on the cost of living. It therefore begs the question – is this Government tone-deaf to the cost-of-living realities the people face? Yesterday, my good Friend, the Hon. Member Mr. Bharrat, boasted about 1,000 vehicles registered at the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) as a reflection of progress. Here is the reality: 75% of all car owners took a loan to buy their cars under this \$1 trillion Budget and they still must pay taxes on the vehicles. This Budget can easily erase the tax duties on vehicles 1500 to 2000 cubic capacity (CC) for citizens whose salary after tax is less than \$300,000 per month. This is so unfair given our present levels of economic growth. The trickle-down economics aspirations of this Budget have already been rejected by the people because it failed to connect with the masses of them.

2.04 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, staying on the right course to build prosperity for all requires adjusting some aspects of *Budget 2024*, to a more people-centred approach in how our resources are allocated for holistic development. This phase of our country's development must be pursued in ways that allow all citizens to feel and reap the benefits of our collective growth in a tangible way. Mr. Speaker, the same promptness in which drugs and other health materials are delivered to hospitals and facilities in other parts of the country, is the same alacrity the Region 10 Regional Hospital must experience. As we speak, in Region 10, diabetes drugs have to be procured privately by patients for that common chronic disease. It is not the same elsewhere. *Budget 2024* has the resources to award the judgment of the High Court for nurses who were unjustly penalised in Linden, and the Government should do the honourable thing and pay them their dues. The agents of Government should abort the unjustified and heartless challenge towards our health care practitioners and do so now.

The Agriculture Sector in Region 10 needs beyond lip-service. A piecemeal intervention to a paltry increase of \$7 million will not do much for our agricultural desire in the region. Given the availability of arable lands and the general potential of the sector, purpose driven policies for agriculture in Region 10 can derive real solutions for the damning effects of the high costs of living, by simply empowering residents to grow more food, while simultaneously addressing the challenges of unemployment of our youths. The Government must incentivise farmers to put landowners to work and to attract youths to the land as an attractive mainstream livelihood.

We, in Region 10, are certain that we can make a significant contribution to the Government's idea of food security nationally and help to achieve the regional 25% reduction of imports by 2025, a goal being led by the President. Sir, there are dozens of Lindeners with leases to acres of land and no resources to develop them sustainably. The people we have, have the will but not the wherewithal. *Budget 2024* can do much more than provide subsidised fertilisers to farmers and a few dozen chickens to People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Party supporters in the region. We need our farmers and leaseholders in West Watooka, Millies Hideout, Wisroc, Rockstone, Ituni and Kwakwani, to have not only access roads to their lands and markets, but access to machinery to clear those land, access to water, drainage and irrigation, organic seeds, pesticides and grants. Yes, sizable grants and low interest special facility loans, thus, empowering the region to make a meaningful contribution to this sector. Mr. Speaker, the Government must give the same support given to farmers in Parika, Regions 1, 3, 5, 6 and 9. Additionally, and most importantly, the noteworthy representation the Government made in 2023 for rice farmers to get special interest rates and facilities with several commercial banks, should be extended to other farmers involved in fruits and vegetable cultivation, livestock farming and agri-tourism. The Government simply needs to move away from the piecemeal discriminatory interventions for sections of our population, and focus on holistic, all-inclusive policies, to include all facets and all the people in the sectors to benefit holistically.

Affordable housing is a constitutional right in Guyana and should be embraced as a basic human right. I commend the Government for the successful allocation of house lots to the citizens in our region and the President for acting on his promise to Lindeners for the construction of 1,000 homes. I must digress, however, to remind the Government that, while numbers in house lots allocation is a good thing politically, and while we know that home ownership is a catalyst to social stability, those who built their homes long ago to survive must also be looked upon kindly with ownership of lands on which their homes exist. They too have a right of expectancy. It is in this regard that *Budget 2024* can provide real tangible help to thousands of residents in Linden, Region 10 who live in communities birthed out of squatting. The regularisation of Andyville, Prosville, Rasville, Bur Jag, Covid City, West Watooka Hill Top, Blueberry Hill Backroad, Parts of Amelia's Ward, Coomacka, Ituni and Kwakwani should be done under *Budget 2024*. I have written the President on this matter, and he publicly

committed to getting it done. The people will hold him accountable to his words.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, Hon. Member. Your communication with the President and subsequent comments, you need to withdraw. Please, I am being very strict with respect to the issue of reference to the President. It is in Standing Order 41 (7) and (8).

Mr. Figueira: Noted and so guided, Mr. Speaker. Getting this done must be accompanied by care and the empowerment package, with those people paying 60% less for those lands, for it is them who carved out the living spaces with primitive tools and human strength. We believe that is a very fair position, Mr. Speaker. Getting it done should come with the building of roads within those communities and providing all of the infrastructure and facilities needed to make those communities conducive for the mental health and wellbeing of all those residents, including their children and the elderly. Regularisation must also come with heightened employment creation in the region. We in the region welcome the expansion of the Wismar-Mackenzie Bridge, a brainchild of the Coalition Government. Our present experience on a daily basis is testament to this need. Further, the building of the Linden to Lethem highway is equally important to our people in Region 10 for the enormous potential it can harness for growth and development. However, our people must benefit from owning lands along the corridor for the establishment of businesses.

By its geography, Region 10 is best suited to become a commercial and heavy cargo transshipment hub. We will no longer accept just being a gateway to the interior and to Brazil, where people and businesses pass through to other destinations. We want to be that destination for commerce, trade, tourism and entertainment. No other region in this country is more connected to Guyana than Region 10, the heartland region where all three of our main rivers flow. The heartland in which we can access eight of our 10 administrative regions. *Budget 2024* can help us to be a transshipment commercial hub. On the corridor to Brazil, we need an industrial duty-free zone to be established, container terminals, assembling plants, warehouses, cottage industries, small, medium, and large-scale manufacturing industries, hotels and so much more should be the establishment and more so, get the support of Government for sustained jobs to be established so that our people could be readily and permanently employed. It is in this regard that we invite the business community to come on board and invest in our town and region.

Region 10 needs deliberate investments. We need to see the Linden airstrip, which is considered the third best in the country, developed now and come under the control of the municipality as a revenue earner for the township. It needs a hanger, a control tower, and other facilities to contribute to air travel to the interior and other Caribbean destinations. Budget 2024...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what is needed now is an extension for you to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Budget 2024* can make all of this possible, but its course needs adjusting. The Linden Enterprise Network (LEN), intended to support local entrepreneurship, is failing in this regard. The paltry injection of \$50 million in 2022, 2023, and, again, in 2024 means nothing to the people of Linden if our people cannot access the funds. If we are serious about helping people develop businesses and create employment opportunities as a means of diversifying the local economy, away from its bauxite dependency, then the funds to LEN should not only be made available quickly but should also be increased to \$1 billion. This will allow the people of Region 10 to make use of the opportunities that corridor to the south offers to us for our permanent and futuristic development.

The good in *Budget 2024* can be better. The good in *Budget 2024* can be better for all of our people with shifting the course and incorporating the inputs of the Opposition in these debates, for our collective benefit as Guyanese. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Datadin: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, permit me, firstly, to place on record my support for *Budget 2024*. Whilst doing that, permit me also to congratulate Minister Dr. Ashni Singh and his hardworking team in presenting the largest budget in the history of our country. It is important to note that this, our largest budget, which is a truly remarkable [inaudible] has been presented and is being funded with no new taxes.

We have heard much about the budget, and we have heard much discussions about what sensible and responsible expenditures would be. We must bear in mind that a sensible and a responsible person who has to manage a budget must make decisions. There are decisions of what you can afford,

there are decisions of what you need to do first and there are decisions about what you can do to ease the situation. This is simply a budget being managed on a very large scale for our nation. The fundamentals of the budget are simple. We build out infrastructure, badly needed infrastructure, the infrastructure in turn provides housing and provides economic activities, both of which require more skills and services. We provide for the skills by educating more people as fast as we can. If you are going to educate people, quickly, then, you have to employ every possible way by which you can educate them. You can educate them in person, as we say, at the University of Guyana (UoG) or you can educate them online or virtually, which may be faster and may reach persons who would otherwise be unable to attend.

2.19 p.m.

Secondly, you need to improve, as best you can, the payment of moneys to people and the citizens. You also have to make their disposable income better. You do that by easing economic hardships. Hardships such as the cost of fuel; hardships such as Value-Added Tax (VAT) on various items. You could reduce that. The cost of shipping is reduced. Now, [Mr. Holder: (inaudible)] We will get to you shortly, Mr. Holder. Now, the budget does these things in spades. The infrastructure being built, the Harbour bridge, the highways, the roads. Better access. Those roads, which Hon. Ministers Croal and Rodrigues are using, allow for the development of communities so that people can access new housing. They have increased salaries. They have increased pensions. They have alleviated the cost of living by holding the cost of fuel constant. Increasing the Because We Care cash grant and the removal of some taxes.

Mr. Speaker, in a world where everyone wants to be a light, a beacon – light is recognised as a positive guiding force – my Colleagues in the Opposition are fighting to be shadows, the total antithesis of light. The Members of the Opposition speak to this nation as if nothing they have ever done happened. The Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, speaks as if the 2020 Elections never happened. He speaks as if the nation did not witness daylight robbery being attempted. As the saying goes, Hon. Member Mahipaul, you cannot jump over your own shadow. The disregard for facts, basic simple facts, is astonishing. The Opposition and their membership, the Hon. Members, seem to have a history of that. When the facts do not suit them, they make them up. When the math does not suit them, they make that up, too. The people of Guyana know this, and, once again, you cannot jump over your own shadow.

We heard references by the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul. He went on about the Public Accounts Committee (PAC); he went on about what and how many meetings were had. He made a comparison that in the previous edition of the Parliament, there were not as many meetings. There were not as many meetings because, in 2018, the Government fell. They refused to give up power. They then went to an election, they were voted out and, again, they refused, for five months, to give up power. Here is where the members of the Opposition come and stand at the podium and profess their love for transparency, accountability, democracy, all these lofty ideals which, when they were in Office, they ignored. They ignored the will of the people. They ignored the will of their own membership in Parliament, and they still come to this House and say, those are the ideals which bind them. Now, the Hon. Members in the Opposition, they come up one after the other and I suppose it is fair to assume that they will continue to do so, speaking of things that are not factually accurate. They use these fantasy facts to make their case, to make their argument. They have the audacity to say, on the basis of these fantasy facts, that they will win the next election. They forget that the Guyanese people know them.

The Hon. Member, Minister Indar, reminded them that the Guyanese people's minds are not short like goldfish. The factual matrix could not be ignored. This is the party, when it did not suit them, argued vociferously, across this land and across the Caribbean, that 33 was not a majority of 65. The Hon. Member, Amanza Walton-Desir, said in her presentation that, Mr. Speaker, there were two choices. The choices were between the Opposition and the Government. The actual fact would be, yes, there are two choices. There are choices between democracy and no democracy. The choices are between feasibility studies that yield three-lane bridges or the other side, this side of the House, building those bridges. We will hear them talk about how many of the things we are doing were their idea and they were going to do them or, they are faced with the consequence on this side of the House where we are doing it. You will hear the promises of what they will do and how they will spend the money when they get back in power. This side of the House is actually doing, actually spending the money for the betterment of the Guyanese people, and we are in power.

Now, we have choices. Under the previous Administration, there were commission of inquiries (COIs) for everything. I recall there was a commission of inquiry for a phone call. Everything, there was a commission of inquiry. Then we had the spectacle of rigging elections. Then we had fantasy mathematics. Then we had bangles, beds and bed sheets.

[**An Hon. Member (Government):** Broaches.] Mr. Speaker... Broaches. Thank you, Hon. Member. Mr. Speaker, Ms. Walton-Desir was right. There are two choices, we can go back to the choices that involved feasibility studies and rigged elections or we can actually participate in the development in Guyana. Now, the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, and others, have repeatedly said they cannot support the budget. Exactly what in the budget do you not want to support? The Hon. Minister of Sport, Mr. Charles Ramson, was very clear. Which... [**Mr. Ramson:** Culture, Youth and Sport.] Culture, Youth and Sport. I stand corrected. Which part do you not want? Which road do you want us not to build? Which school do you want us not to build? Which housing area do you want us to cancel? What is it exactly that you want to stop? The Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, who, as usual, is not here, went on to speak about guarantees, about what was in the best interest of Guyana and why it is that a parent company guarantee could not be issued. Mr. Speaker, permit me through you to offer him some kind words of advice. A – do not speak of things you do not know. B – do not interpret law if you cannot read. A necessary qualification to understand and interpret law requires reading.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker

Mr. Datadin: It is only kind advice. I do not impute.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Chief Whip of the Opposition

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker Standing Order 41(4). The Hon. Member, has insulted the Hon. Member of this house, which is... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member you are standing on a Point of Order. I do not see that. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Datadin: Thank you, Sir. Now, it would help... [*Interruption*] It would be, and it has been... My suspicion, Mr. Speaker, is that, at the very beginning, the Hon. Member got the judge wrong. It was Justice Kissoon. He said Justice Persaud. Entirely different. The letters I have compared in the two names, remarkably, they are none in common. Now, do not speak if you do not know. Then, the second part is, if you are going to refer to the Order, at least know what the Order said. It would help if he was accurate about that. To then go to say further that a parent company guarantee should be seen or known. Your Honor, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is a statutory body which is governed by a statute, what they can disclose, that is presented to them, is explicitly and specifically provided for. They are required, for those documents, to keep a register, a

ledger, of all those documents submitted and it is available for anyone, including the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, to go to their office between the hours of normal business hours, and he will be allowed to see them. [Mr. Nandalall: He could see it, not read it.] Well, he will see it. I was careful. Now, much is made, and a lot is made by the Hon. Member of the vast need for the guarantee and the dire consequences which will follow. But again, if he would get assistance from someone to read the Environmental Protection Act, he would see that there is a principle enshrined and embedded in it known as the 'Polluter Pays' principle. It is, in fact, for its time, when the Act came about in 1996, a very forward-thinking principle. It means, simply, without more, without any agreements, whoever caused the pollution, whether from oil, gas, chicken, duck, or cow, whoever causes the pollution, is legally obliged to pay for the repair of that pollution.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member. I am legally obliged to ask someone to ask for an extension.

Mr. Nandalall: Sir, can the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation?

Motion put and agreed to.

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

2.34 p.m.

Mr. Datadin: Mr. Speaker, if I may just quickly move to two issues. One is, in the budget, as is provided, when we look at what our gas resources are – because much conversation is had about the non-petroleum sector – and if we look simply at local content, for example, the local content since January, 2022 to present, contractors, sub-contractors and licensees reported to the Secretariat 3,938 local hires. Seven hundred and eighty-five of those were within the first six months of 2023. Of that total, 824 Guyanese were employed as plant and machinery operators; 1,203 were professionals; and another 485 were technicians. The total number of persons employed now exceeds 6,000. I say that to make the point that, when we are saying that we are not taking steps to improve the lives of the average citizen, we are. The Local Content Act, by itself, has provided the opportunity for locals to be employed. The education system is providing the education they need to be able to be employed. Comments that are made about generations, future generations and the use of the Natural Resource Fund (NRF), it is important to note that there is a withdrawal rule from the fund that guarantees that some of

the money will remain, while others will be used for the benefit of the present population. That is always a challenge. Do you save everything for the generations to come or do you also improve the lives of the present generation, in addition to providing a safety net for the generations to come?

Mr. Speaker, just to tell you, the production – the floating production, storage and offloading (FPSOs) vessels in the Stabroek Block are projected to realise production of crude oil over 550,000 barrels per day in 2024. This is expected to be ramped up to over 600,000 later in the year. The sector will expand by 44.7% and it is projected that there will be 202 lifts of crude oil at that time. Again, the resources of the country are going to be taken from that production, placed into the fund, and before anything happens, this Parliament will have a say on what happens. It is a very simple mechanism. If I may finally say, the Hon. Member, Juretha Fernandes, had the vision of taking \$2 trillion, which is what she said we had, and dividing it by the population, which gave everyone \$9.3 million per household. I make no comment on the math or the figures, they are always suspicious. The proposition was simply, give the money to the people to buy house and cars. What about the roads for those cars? What about the house lots for those houses? What about the water and electricity for the development? What about critical and civil service?

The preposterous proposition was made that, despite all of the oil, we have squatters, and they are poor people in the country. That is a *non sequitur*. Poor people and squatters and the production of oil are different things, they can be used to alleviate. We must reconcile, we are a poor country moving forward, and forward we will, under the leadership of President, Dr. Irfaan Ali, and his Cabinet. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you...

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Speaker, if I may?

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

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Speaker, I did not want to interrupt the Hon. Member when he was making his presentation. However...

Mr. Speaker: What gives you the thinking that you could interrupt now?

Ms. Fernandes: I am seeking your attention, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You have to stand on a Point of Order.

Ms. Fernandes: I stand on a Point of...

Mr. Speaker: When he was speaking, but I will listen to you.

Ms. Fernandes: You can guide me.

Mr. Speaker: I will guide you.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you. The Member said that I proposed certain things. Sir, I am asking that the *Hansard* check my speech because I never said that and the Hon. Member may take his own advice when it comes to reading. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. In fact, well observed. We will ask that the *Hansard* be provided and we will check. If he was quoting you wrongly, we will have it expunged from his presentation. As we are on that, I am setting the records right. I know the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development promised to provide some documentation during her speech. We are expecting those. Also, the Hon. Member, Ms. Maureen Philadelphia, is to provide a list of teachers who were supposed to have graduated without completing these, so I am looking forward to that list. Also, we are going to have to get those lists, if not we will expunge all of that. Thank you. Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, at 2.42 p.m.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2024*, I wish to extend my best wishes to you and the staff of the Parliament of Guyana, to the staff of the various ministries, members of the media houses and my fellow Parliamentarians. I trust that this year can see us working together in unity for the betterment and a common cause for the development of our beautiful country, Guyana.

With that said, I wish to begin by rebutting some of the statements made by my Colleagues on the other side of the House. One – Mr. Lee Williams, the Hon. Member of this House, stood up last year and repeated this year that the PPP small c continues to give contracts to their families and friends and that is why the husband of one Parliamentarian continues to get contracts in the region. What he failed to mention was the total number of contracts he was given for 2021, 2022, and 2023, and the total sum of those contracts. Mr. Williams is a born Guyanese. He is entitled, like any other contractor, who, when bids are advertised, tenders and is qualified to do such a job, he should be awarded the contract, and based on the competence, should continue to be awarded. Mr. Williams, along with other contractors in the region, like Mr. Grant, Mr. Jones and Mr. Ward, just to name

a few, are looking out for contracts to be awarded to them out of this \$1.146 trillion budget. I also heard that the Hon. Member made mention of \$200 million being allocated for sports grounds this year and made mention of my home village several times. Kako village, my beautiful village, a clean Indigenous community to which, Mr. Speaker, I extend an invitation to you, your staff and the Members of this House to visit.

What is saddening and disappointing, that the Hon. Member failed to mention, is that, in the year 2022, when the PPP/C was the Government of the day, it was Kako Village's turn to host the district tournament. It has been a culture over the years that the hosting village, in preparation for the hosting of the games, had to ensure that the ground was safe and suitable to host the football, volleyball and the other track and field events and matches during the day and night. Hence, the Government of the day is always asked to assist in making this a reality for the young people. Sadly, the 11 clubs from the various villages in the Upper Mazaruni were totally disappointed when they could not play some of the matches during the evening or the night as how the matches would have been played in other communities in Upper Mazaruni or like the grounds in Georgetown that play football matches under the flood lights. His Excellency himself was asked to donate a generator to light up the flood lights which were...

Mr. Speaker: You need to stop at that one.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Okay. Sorry. The Government of the day was asked to donate a generator to light up the flood lights which were already procured and bought by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), in 2020. *Lo and behold...* [An. Hon. Member: (Government): *(Inaudible)*] You will never know. *Lo and behold*, the day before the commencement of the game, there was no generator in sight on the ground. The Government's team from Georgetown was expected to arrive for the opening of the games the next day, which was a Sunday. The generator arrived as if it was an advance security during the night before the arrival of the team. By then, it was too late for it to be installed and to get the lights. To add injury to insult, it was announced publicly that the generator was rented and would have to be returned to Georgetown. Imagine chartering a flight to fly in the generator to Kamarang, then hire a boat to take it up to Kako, plus the rent that had to be paid for the days it spent on the ground without being used and then the return cost to take it back to Kamarang and then fly it out back to Georgetown.

Mr. Speaker, unto this date, at this time, the sports ground in my village of Kako has never been lighted up with the flood lights. The flood lights are there on the post. I guess that was one of the occurrences of 'Because We Care'. This is the picture of the rented generator that was returned.

[The Hon. Member displayed a picture.]

2.49 p.m.

Since Mr. Hamilton, the Hon. Member of this House, chose to speak a lot about the past, that happened under the governance of the APNU/AFC, I wish to remind this honourable House of the good things that happened. Under the APNU/AFC, like I said, floodlights were distributed to every community which was hosting the district games. Here is a picture of the former Minister, Ms. Henry, handing over floodlights to the Kamarang Sports Club. One of the good things, which is of importance to mention, is that our policies, programmes and plans were people-centred, with a clear vision of the role and importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) towards the modernisation of Guyana's economy. The Government then continued to work vigorously to stimulate growth of the ICT sector, resulting in expansion and emergence of major ICT and e-government projects. To name a few, video conferencing equipment for use in the telemedicine applications were installed in four health facilities, namely Baracara, Orealla, New Amsterdam and Bartica. The Centre for Excellence in ICT was launched in June, 2019.

Mr. Speaker, we did not starve our hinterland residents of access to information and knowledge of current and foreign affairs. We set the pace and the foundation in establishing radio stations throughout this country. There were ICT hubs. Whether you win or you lose, the people remember what you did for them. The hubs were built, and some buildings were identified for connection and instalment of ICT, and e-services for hinterland, poor and remote communities project was operationalised in 2019. I have spoken to teachers, nurses and other workers in the hinterland who have applied to do online courses but have not been able to do so successfully due to the lack of connectivity. The few who manage to commence are making sacrifices to buy megabytes from private satellite internet services in the communities. Many have lamented that they may not be able to continue or ever dream of completing due to the high costs. I can also recall approaching the Minister of Education, Ms. Manickchand, Hon. Member, whom I have great respect for, about the teachers who were enrolled to do online courses, but were unable to do so in my region,

specifically the Upper Mazaruni. I am much appreciative that she came up with something and that was to bring them out to Georgetown to attend classes at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) and most of them graduated at the end of last year. This is commendable, Hon. Manickchand.

On 18th July, 2019, Ms. Hastings-Williams, then Minister of State, led the national delegation, which presented the first Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations High Level Political Forum, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council. Why do I make mention of this? The VNR entailed the review of all SDGs. Notable progress had been made in food security, climate change mitigation and natural resource management. His Excellency then, President David Granger, had highlighted Goal 4, quality education, as the mother of all goals. A review of Guyana's human rights will soon be laid at the United Nations (UN). I trust that the issue or the matter at hand with the Chinese Landing will be dealt with, and a report will be given at that UN sitting. I trust and the Indigenous people are looking forward for same.

Budget 2024, themed, *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity for All*, was laid in this House on 15th January, 2024. Sophisticated as it may have sounded, a hard rock budget, as some have described it to be, there are so many questions left to be answered. Has the budget catered for persons in all walks of life in this country or is there a gap ... [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible) morning.] Thank you for waking up. Or is there a gap between the aspirations of this budget and the unvarnished reality? Are there provisions in this budget for the total well-being and happiness of every citizen or the majority?

I can recall quoting from a certain book entitled, *Reflections on Happiness and Positivity*. I will repeat it again, where the author, in his own style, explained what happiness is. He said that there are two types of happiness, personal happiness which is its own science and the happiness of society as a whole which is what we seek to achieve through our public services. It is about feeling safe and secure in your surroundings and the society in which you live. He went on to say that happiness does not fall under programmes that are separate from government's daily work. Happiness is the main focus of government work, and the entire budget must be considered as dedicated to achieving the happiness of our people. My question to this honourable House is, does this hard-rock budget do just that for the people of Guyana or will it ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I want to do just this for you. You will need an extension.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Chief Whip.

Motion put and agree to.

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

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish now to quote from an Indian Guru who said:

“There is a big difference between growth, progress and success”.

If the budget is increased year after year, from millions to billions and from billions to trillions, that, undoubtedly, is growth. However, growth must be aided by ethics, that is, honesty, discipline and norms, norms such as transparency, accountability and integrity. All of these contribute to what is called progress. Progress plus humanity, morality and spirituality is called success. The budgets getting bigger and bigger, year after year, do not necessarily mean you are successful in pursuant of the happiness of your citizens. I say all of this to say that this \$1.146 trillion budget will mean nothing to the majority of the Guyanese population, the working class, the poor and the vulnerable, the old-aged pensioner who are struggling to meet ends in this oil rich country, especially when there is no desire to find a common ground for a good cause that will have an impact on the lives of our citizens. We have heard many recommendations from the previous speakers on this side of the House. My hope is that these recommendations be considered in the interest of the people of Guyana and not be ignored at the end of the debate and consideration of this budget.

Let me now turn my attention to the region from which I hail, the famous Cuyuni/Mazaruni Region, which was touted by none other than Minister Teixeira as the most expensive region. Yes, a good thing is always expensive. Region 7 has most of the gold mines, the diamond mines, the beautiful waterfalls, the pristine forest, the rivers, the timber, flora and fauna and beautiful people, too. Is it because it is the most expensive region that they will continue to be neglected? I remember when I came into Government in 2015, I was told that the region is too expensive, and we may not be able to do the hinterland housing programme. I made representation. I said let us try it out and we built 20 three-bedroom houses

in Upper Mazaruni, which was halted in 2020. Onto this day, there has not been another house built for the residents there.

I call on this Government to make Region 7 a special case. Do a special study and let this budget find ways and means to cater for the people of Region 7. They are Guyanese too and they are in the Essequibo. Please. Essequibo is our own and we need to cater for the needs of the children, the parents and the students. Under the APNU/AFC, we built six new primary schools within three years – Imbaimadai, Kamarang, Kako, Paruima, the village from which Mr. Lee hails, and Eteringbang. I do not like to compare because comparison kills creativity, but I must say that for the past three years, there has not been any new school built in my region. Waramadong Primary was dismantled sometime, and, to this date, the children are attending classes in various buildings. I ask Minister Manickchand to please let the school be completed this year so that the children of Waramadong Primary School can go back to normal classroom settings. The lone school – the Desrey Fox Secondary School – continues to be plagued with many challenges. There is no adequate water supply. In this 21st century, the children still have to fetch water in buckets from the creek and the rivers to bathe and to wash their clothes, which is very sad. It is a sad situation. I ask us to look into this matter. The Guyana Water Inc. (GWI) or whomever needs to do something with that well for it to provide adequate water to the dormitories and to the community as a whole.

Water supply: I know wells were installed in Five Miles, Kamarang, Jawalla. Please note, Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, that the water in Jawalla and Kamarang is inadequate. Half of the community to the right side of the airstrip does not receive. That includes the hospital, the police station and the Amerindian Hostel. They do not receive water supply on a daily basis. When the pump that pumps the water from the river to the hospital breaks down, the staff have to fetch water in buckets. It is sad that in this 21st century we still have to do that. I trust and I hope that this budget will rectify these anomalies that happen in our hospitals and schools. With that said, Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Applause*]

3.04 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, and now for the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs, the Hon. Ms. Campbell-Sukhai.

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, let me congratulate the

Hon. Minister of Finance and his technical team for contributing to the preparation of the 2024 Budget, one of the largest budgets to date. This budget addresses the current needs of our nation and its people. The budget positions Guyana for transition into a modern country. It offers support, benefits and opportunities for all. The theme, *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity for All*, aligns with the philosophy for a 'One Guyana' where no one is left behind.

Leadership is another key to success. In similar fashion as we refer to education as the key to success, leadership is also a factor. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration is demonstrating the kind of leadership that represents the furtherance of the PPP/C's manifesto promises and commitments to the people of our country. It allocates investments for sectors that will sustain our current and future generations in reality. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration is building out our economy and our country beyond 2030. The budget measures provide for people with disabilities, pensioners, vulnerable groups, students, youths, women, farmers, public servants, other professionals and the private sector, inclusive of Amerindian population. This is evidence that no one indeed is left behind.

The Guyanese people can be assured that this Government honours the manifesto promises on which it campaigned to get into government. As such, the budget campaigned on reestablishing the 'Because We Care' grant to our schoolchildren, which had been denied them for approximately five years. The cash grant today has been increased to \$40,000. Added to that, we have retained and continue to deliver school uniform assistance to students all across this country, in both private and public schools. That means that each school child is getting a monetary financial assistance, which is managed by their parents, to ensure that there is no problem with further support for ensuring the children stay in school. It is not only about financial support, but it is also about the students having a hot meal. [An. Hon. Member: Casinos.] It is not only about casinos, but it is also about strip clubs. When we are finished this budget debate, I will find some time to meet him at his popular strip club and we will have a discourse.

The Guyanese people can be assured, also, that pensioners will continue to enjoy the rebate on water and electricity and an increase in their pension this year from \$33,000 to \$36,000. Persons receiving support under the public assistance programme would also now receive an increase from \$16,000 to \$19,000. The public servants continue to

enjoy increases under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, and the threshold has been increased. It means that people today, including workers, parents and families, have more disposable income. So, this talk about small increases, it was small in your time, and you made it even smaller when you took away the pensioners' rebate and support for water and electricity. Guyanese families do not have to fear the removal of cash grants from their children any longer. The pensioners do not have to fear that they will be unable to pay their water or electricity bill any longer. That is assured under the People's Progressive Party/ Civic Government.

Vulnerable groups' benefits and support from the People's Progressive Party/ Civic Government was seen as excessive when they came into Office, and that is why they trimmed the vulnerable group benefit and support during the last five years when they were in Office from 2015 to 2020. They diverted those moneys to add to their enhanced *wannabe* bougie lifestyle. That is what they did with the money. Guyanese are wise. They have always been wise. No amount of love verbally expressed in this House by the APNU/AFC Parliamentarians will ever get under the skin of the Guyanese population and the electorate, and that is why you will remain where you are in opposition for a very long time.

As I turn my attention to Amerindian development, this year if you take a glance at the budget – and it is available publicly – you will see that \$800 million is allocated for land titling. Mr. Speaker, \$100 million will also be allocated for the hosting of the National Toshaos' Council (NTC) meetings. I will get to the details as I go along. There is \$3.4 million for the continuation of the Presidential Grant to villages. There is \$1.2 billion for youth under the Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme (YEAP) or the popularly known Community Support Officers (CSO) programme. There is \$147 million to promote Amerindian culture, heritage, traditions and contribution to this nation. There is \$100 million to support our scholarship students, and this is another way in which our Government continues to support families and households. It is not only about the salary you collect at the end of the month, but it is about all the other benefits and support that we have put together and packaged to assist the people of our country, including the Amerindians. Unlike the APNU/AFC who abandoned its manifesto promises to the people and to the nation, the People's Progressive Party/Civic has stayed the course with respect to fulfilling the manifesto promises on which we campaigned, and the results are there to see.

Land titling. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is committed to protecting Indigenous land rights and has demonstrated so by designing and implementing the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) project. It was our Government that established that project. This year, as I mentioned before, \$800 million will be used. I want to draw attention to what is going to happen and what has happened already. Immediately upon resumption of Office by our Government, the land titling programme was reactivated, and I am proud of that. Within two years, that unit in the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs conducted 20 investigations for villages that applied for areas which they would have liked to have titled to them. Within less than two years, seven villages were granted extension of land. Within two years, eight demarcations were completed. Those that were granted extension were – and I will give you the names – Mashabo, Mainstay, Hobodeia, Hotoquai, Red Hill, Akawini and Moco Moco. Those that have been demarcated are Kangaruma, Tassarene, Mashabo, Capoey, St. Monica, Mainstay, Yupukari and Arau.

The success story of land titling under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government for 2021 to 2023 exceeds, over and beyond, the APNU/AFC's period in office. Let the facts be told. We must never forget the struggles of the NTC in 2017 when they were fighting to reverse plans by the APNU/AFC Government when they established the Commission of Inquiry surrounding land claims of Amerindian land titling and others. It also caused me, as the Opposition Member of Parliament at that time, to lay in this House a motion calling for the revocation so that we have secured land tenure security for Indigenous people. The APNU/AFC had no intention of advancing land titling for Amerindians. As reported in the media, no title was approved for Indigenous communities under their tenure. My colleague, Hon. Member, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks, made it quite clear that when they boasted about Yupukari being titled under them and the extension, it was work done. When they unceremoniously removed the ALT at that time from their offices, they took over and that is one only that they have done. They spent all five years sitting doing what only the walls of the offices know.

Amerindians can be assured that it was under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government that the percentage of land owned privately by Amerindians increased from 6% to 16%. The ALT project will go down in the history of this House and in the records that the majority of lands titled to Indigenous people were all done under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. It took the APNU/AFC 26 years to honour the precondition of independence to issue

and secure land for Indigenous people. It was only in 1976 that a few were titled, and when, in 1990, it was heading to election, the then leader of the party decided that he would also title others, hoping that the Indigenous people would have voted for them.

3.19 p.m.

Another matter which I believe I want to address is the carbon credit revenue. Following the return of the PPP/C Government to Office in August, 2020, and after an extensive national consultation, the PPP/C Administration expanded the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) initiative of 2009 to 2030. Guyana finalised its first commercial sale contract with HESS Corporation for the sale of carbon credit. This is a first for a small, developing country. The multiyear agreement is for \$37.5 million, Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD+) jurisdictional carbon credits consisting of 2.5 million credits per year for each year from 2016 to 2030 with payments for these credits starting in December, 2022 and ending in 2032. The agreement covers about a third of Guyana's current anticipated credit issuance. Guyana is now, once again, able to advance and move to phase two of our strategic plans. After several months of consultation on the LCDS 2030, it was agreed that 15% of all revenues received from the sale of carbon credits would be paid directly to Indigenous and local communities. For the year 2023, this total amounted to US\$22.5 million or \$4.7 billion. The full endorsement for this was registered at the February, 2023 meeting of Amerindian leaders following two years of consultation prior.

Village-led investments: to date, 232 village councils and Community Development Councils (CDCs) have withdrawn \$3.8 billion and have undertaken 811 projects in the following sectors: agriculture, including cultivation of crops, shade houses, fishing, cattle, and livestock rearing; business enterprises and services – internet, electricity from both solar and genset generated; transportation services by the acquisition of minibuses, boats, outboard engines, including All-terrain Vehicles (ATVs); tourism projects, including eco-lodge guest houses, fully furnished, and beautification of their villages; sports and youth investment – they invested in facilities and cultural groups development; and also investments are being made by village councils in infrastructure both social and productive – trails, farm-to-market roads, footpaths, benabs, meeting places, dining halls, multipurpose buildings, and the list goes on.

I am clearing the air on what the Hon. Shadow Minister, Mr. Vincent Henry, Member of this honourable House, said that there seems to be no transparency or accountability and that the Government was seeking to control this process. I want the House to know that the 15% was deposited directly into the bank books of the village councils, a special bank book. The villages elected oversight committees from within the villages to provide monitoring and scrutiny over the use of those funds by the village councils. Maybe, it would have been wise for the Hon. Member to share some information because a very close relative of his heads the scrutiny committee or the oversight committee in his village where he resides in Shulinab. There are mechanisms in place in which the villages themselves, approved by the villagers, are managing their funds and there is no need for the Government to seek to control it. Sometimes, we need to bring the facts to the House because the nation is watching us, the youths are watching us, the school children are watching us, and they will one day be able to do their own research when they grow up or when they enter university. Then, they will look back at you the Members on the Opposition benches and frown upon how you wasted your time here in this House.

Update on the Amerindian Act was also another matter which was raised in this House. The Government of Guyana is committed to reviewing existing primary legislation governing the rights of Amerindians. This exercise is being executed in collaboration with the NTC and is supported by the Auditor General's Chamber. The review process began with the training of 54 facilitators, 14 NTC executive members, 25 Community Development Officers (CDOs), five Management Development Officers (MDOs), and 15 Community Service Officers (CSOs) and 3,663 Amerindian leaders and residents in the location where these trainings were being conducted. Training was conducted in Regions 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9. If the Hon. Shadow would like to examine the APNU/AFC's track record on the promise to review the Amerindian Act under its five years, he can do so. In 2017, 2018, 2019, and early 2020, \$100 million was spent and there is not a single report on it. They could not produce a report because when they turned up to villages, there were like three persons sitting on a pavilion who had heard about their visit. I could give you the experience of the Kamarang consultation. My colleague, who comes from the Upper Mazaruni – Paruima village – was also a sitting member of his village council at that time. When the team that was paid \$100 million turned up at Kamarang, the Toshaos had gotten notice just prior to their arrival, and told them very blankly that they could not speak, they could not discuss, and they

would not consult because... [An. Hon. Member: She sounds like she is lying.] I am not lying; sorry; I am not misinforming this House. They could not discuss because it was not a consultation. People went with perceived ideas of what they would have like to do.

Youth development – Under the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, we pay particular attention to addressing the challenges of Indigenous youths. The matter of the CSO once more surfaced in this House and we had cause to circulate in this House a Compact Disc (CD). Maybe, we should not have done it, but to clear the air once and for all, the CSOs were employed, engaged by our Government and they were paid up to April. They were not dismissed. In fact, we paid them every three months, but because it was campaign time and May was elections, we could not have paid them for May to June. It was the obligation of the incoming government to do so. [An. Hon. Member: What did you all do with the cheque?] Let him produce the cheque. We were not in office to cancel any cheque. The CD is right here. Mr. Speaker, if you want, I could read it, but they have it and so I will not read it. I will tell you what. If you had any interest in the young people, in the young Indigenous youths across this country, particularly those in the hinterland, you could not have disengaged them. A total of 1,972 young people were sent home in June without pay. They were not paid for May or June. They were told not to come to work in the month of July. If you raise this matter again in this House next year, I will bring the other letter which disbanded them.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you how interested and caring we are to ensure that Indigenous youths benefit in this nation, are treated with respect, and are provided with opportunities. My colleagues before spoke about how they are benefiting in the various hinterland regions under the GOAL scholarship. Also, they have said how many secondary schools this Government continues to build to expand access to secondary education to growing school children. I will concentrate on what the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has invested over the last three years. We have invested thus far \$3,468,400,000 that went into the pockets of the young CSOs who are engaged under the project. This means that an additional \$3.4 billion circulated in the hinterland in the Amerindian villages.

3.34 p.m.

It means that the village shops are able to find business; it means that young people can provide additional items and services that they may need. It also provides them with an

opportunity to have the experience at governance, tourism, forestry, education, and also to ensure that they understand how important it is to be part of community development. Not only that, funds were also expended to train them in the community – and the Hon Member has left – but the majority of the training that is taking place for the Community Service Officer (CSO) is conducted at the Bina Hill Institute. This Government has made the Bina Hill Institute the primary location and venue for training CSOs. We have to thank ourselves because the Bina Hill Institute, for the information of this House, is fully funded by the Government. It may have a genesis in community initiative but the Government pays the administrative staff, it pays for the administration and operation of that institution, it pays for the meals of the students who go there, it pays for their projects when they have livestock or vegetable farms...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, it pays for us to look at the time. You need an extension to conclude.

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

Mr. Speaker: I thought the Hon. Member Mr. Sherod Duncan was going to move that motion.

Ms. Rodrigues: Mr. Speaker, may my colleague be given five minutes to conclude her presentation?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Minister, you had three persons raising for you for such an interesting presentation.

[Hon. Members: (Inaudible)]

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: We will meet up.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Speaker, we continue to support villages with the Presidential Grant. That has been a very useful source of funding for villages to address mini- and micro-projects that they would like to enhance their villages with. Every year... and I want to raise this matter here about unfair grant distribution. Whether it is a grant for schoolchildren, everyone gets; whether it is grant for support when there is a disaster like flooding, or long drought season, every household gets; when it comes to the Presidential Grant, every village gets; no one is left out. For the Presidential Grant, 233 villages annually implement projects using funding under the Presidential Grant.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the National Toshihaos Council (NTC). The NTC is the representative, the legitimate, elected, representative of the Indigenous peoples. And I want to tie this in with the Hon. shadow Mr. Vincent Henry's question and comment about how the Minister of Amerindian Affairs is upstaging the Amerindian Peoples Association (APA) meetings. I did not know I was that powerful. However, we have no intention of upstaging anyone's meeting. If they are advocates, they have a role to play, but they must be advocates in a factual way, and when they divert from the facts, this Minister will respond to them. The NTC is the highest governing body which comprises of all elected Toshihaos and our Government is a partner with them. Guyana is the only country worldwide that sits an entire week to discuss, to have conversations, to dialogue and to engage with the Indigenous leaders who engage the Government on behalf of their people. Our Government does not only meet the leaders in the city, but, leading from the front, His Excellency goes on outreaches where he meets directly and listens to the people from the various villages. Our Cabinet is a cabinet that conducts outreaches. So, we will continue to support the NTC, and we should pat ourselves on the back, but we do not *beat our own drums*. We had established a new, modern secretariat for the NTC that costs \$140 million and, this year, we have in our Budget \$7 million additional so that they can provide more expensive furnishing, air conditioning, *et cetera*, to make their operational headquarters more friendly.

Tell us what the APNU/AFC did. They did not issue land titles, they did not build a secretariat for the NTC, they did not conduct and manage the funds entrusted to them by this House. I come to the point where the Hon. shadow Mr. Vincent Henry questioned the accountability of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission's (GGMC's) transfer of funds to the Ministry. I want to read from the Auditor General's report that the sum of \$865.11 million was expended to pay Hinterland Employment Youth Service (HEYS) stipend. The Ministry did not present a progress report for these projects and payments and could not even determine whether the funds were utilised for the intended purposes; and this is only one. You go through 2017, 2018 and 2019, the Amerindian Development Fund under the APNU/AFC Government was not accounted for – huge amounts of millions. We continue to support, infrastructure wise, the hinterland, and I want to quickly make some points. Region One...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you would not be able to quickly make the points. You can quickly wrap up now.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Speaker, I would want to say that Guyana's economy and Guyana's people should expect from the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic a prosperous and modern country. This Budget is furthering the activities that is setting the pace for our country to be a shining star in or hemisphere. I would like to add support and to ask this House to support this Budget. It is a budget that has everything for everyone. *[Applause]*

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Sir, I am not sure what is my relation with casino. What I have to say is that I stand here resolute to represent the people. I rise to complete the responsibility that has been assigned to me. Last Monday we had the Senior Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh. He moved the motion for the approval of the estimates for the public sector and the budget for the financial year 2024, which obviously is inconsistent with Article 171 of our Constitution. Do not get very alarmed. *Budget 2024* is themed, *Staying the Course: Building the Prosperity for all* and like all of us, we are shocked that the Hon. Minister had the temerity to tell the nation that we are prepared to stay the course. Yes, Dr. Ashni Singh, we are... *[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]* Yes, yes, yes, Hon. Member for the course of this House we have had to say that yes, we are... and we all know why there is a pause. Whenever there is... The Hon. Minister... and I do not have to go through what my Hon. colleagues went through with the other *[inaudible]* but what I want to make sure is that... *[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]* Oh God, *shhhhhhh*. What I need to make sure is that there is *shhhhhhh* because you know what? There is going to be a time where the *shhhhhhh* is going to come into effect. Like I said, I, myself...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, do you want to come again?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I am hoping that my time is not going to be deducted from this.

Mr. Speaker: What I could do is take a short break and come back because...

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: No, Sir. No, Sir. I am ready. *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I need a short suspension and I will return.

Mr. Jones: Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 3.47 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. Please be seated. Hon. Members, we resume the contributions of Members on *Budget 2024*. Before I call on the next contributor, just an announcement on the air-conditioning. The management of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) is doing some work to make the air in here even healthier. They are changing out some filters and a few other things. I want to thank the Hon. Member Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo for raising this issue with me yesterday and corrective action is being taken. So we should have new filters and new purifiers in the next few minutes. If it goes on and off, we are doing some work. Our next speaker is the Hon. Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister, the Hon. Member Mr. Kwame McCoy. Hon. Minister, at 6.27 and 30 seconds, you have the floor.

6.27 p.m.

Minister in the office of the Prime Minister [Mr. McCoy]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, colleagues. Good evening, all. The people, over the last few days, who did little or nothing are the loudest in this House. I am happy they stood to identify themselves. They did nothing for people across this country. They are the loudest but they did little or nothing for the people of Guyana. If one listens to the contributions, over the last few days, by those on the Opposition side, one would believe that they did so much and enough to be able to be in the space of Government. It is indeed their lacklustre performance, their lack of vision and their lack of creativity that have them in the Opposition benches today. They have made my job so easier – very easy – by standing to identify themselves. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) had a fix for every single thing. They created every single plan in this country, but they failed to implement the plan that they created. Every project of the People's Progressive Party/Civic and everything that was brought on stream, they claim it was theirs. There are so many plans that never saw the light of day. Sudden love for people. "Suddenly people have new meaning to me. I had loved them all along. Never had the chance to perform. Wake up suddenly, I am in love".

Mr. Speaker: You have proven the point. You have a great voice for singing.

Mr. McCoy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am glad that you admire my singing voice. Wake up; people are suddenly in love with people and that is just because they are out of power. Again, it is a demonstration and a way of fooling people yet again. They did this before and they will continue to do it because it is just who they are and they cannot take the truth. They walk out because the truth is

more powerful than... They are walking out. They are walking out. They are walking out. They are walking out.

[*Members of the APNU/AFC left the Dome.*]

All of these things. It is because all of the tactics they used over the years, and, thankfully, we have the information age. These days allow instantaneous information to reach people across the world. It is a little difficult but, of course, it is not impossible for them to continue their webs of untruths and misinformation. They spew all across this country all sorts of information and they come here. At least one would believe that people who come here to debate the national budget would, at minimal, have the basic facts and would be accurate and truthful about what obtain in this country and what ought not. These are people who, today, a short few years ago, tried to hold on to power, grip power out of greed and, of course, they would have us believe that they were not there. It was not them. It was Shaggy; "it was not me". I want to tell you those Members on the Opposition, at the end of the day, the people across this country are sensible enough and enlightened enough to be able to detect all of your trickeries, your games and your shenanigans. I made it my duty, over the last few days, to speak specifically to people who have been following these debates, young people, mind you, and it is telling how brilliant and intelligent they are.

Mr. Speaker, before I go on further, first of all, allow me to wish you and your family, all the Members of this House and their families, and the staff of the National Assembly and their families a bright and prosperous New Year. We have started this year, 2024, on an extremely positive note. As my Colleague, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his awesome team have lifted us onto Pakaraima's peaks and Roraima's plains of hope for the future of our country and its peoples. *Budget 2024* has shattered every conceivable ceiling Guyana has ever been constrained by since her independence, with provisions for the exponential growth of every sector and measures that create an enabling environment for our young people to emerge from poverty and their various and other social strata and begin thriving. The Budget opens up vistas of opportunities for citizens in every corner of our country. To climb onto paths that are sure to lead to wealth, creation and ultimately to prosperity for all. As I am on this subject, we hear every single day a reference that has become so popular. Guyana is this oil-rich country; we have all the money we need; we have everything that we need; and it is used in a way and manner to suggest that we are not, as a government, doing enough with all of this money.

6.35 p.m.

The truth is, we are just not there yet. We are not yet rich. There is still a journey along that will get us to the point where our earnings from the oil resources would become much better than it is today. This thing that we have all of this money, and we could do everything is just again the way of the Opposition trying to spread mischief that the Guyana we are in today is Guyana, and the Government is able to afford everything. We need to be very careful. You could imagine or any one of us can imagine if this APNU/AFC – and God forbid if they were – were in government over the last three years, by now, we would be with our begging bowls all across the Caribbean and the world, as everything would have already been done or emptied. All they know is to squander, all they know is to splurge and become so occupied with the fanciful things without using sense and intelligence to manage in a prudent fashion.

I therefore wish to unequivocally commend Dr. Singh and his team; their Excellencies, the President and the Vice-President; the entire Cabinet; and, of course, the leadership of our Party for actualising the vision of the People's Progressive Party/Civic through the crafting of this groundbreaking and game changing national Budget. Since the reading of the Budget last week, Opposition politicians have been huddling in their various rabbit holes with their Kool-Aid handlers. I assure you; they were not trying to comprehend its magnitude and its features that aim to bring benefits to people and feeding Guyana's transformation pathway that is sure to create empowerment for every single Guyanese, including their constituencies. They were instead busy nourishing the disease of jaundice that has infected their eyes, casting visions of only doom and gloom since their fall from grace in 2020.

For the duration of this debate, they will jump high and low here in pretence claiming to be representing their constituencies. In fact, these same self-righteous masqueraders are the ones who placed a noose on more than 200 taxes around the people's necks, took away our children's grant, took away electricity subsidies from our pensioners, took away water subsidies from pensioners, and took away their promise to double the old age pensions. They took away people's opportunity to buy used cars, took away people's right to land and housing support and took away people's opportunity to benefit from cheaper electricity from the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. They mercilessly took away sugar workers' right to earn a living. The APNU/AFC Government took away the livelihoods of small miners, small loggers and small farmers, and in one of

the most unparallel and unpardonable acts of cruelty as they did to the sugar workers. The APNU/AFC took away jobs. Do you remember we were at a level where 30,000 jobs were lost during their reign? They took away development resources. They took away land and they took away the very dignity of our Amerindian brothers and sisters. Just when we thought the Coalition partners had lowered themselves to the pit floor of uncaring governance, they then brazenly attempted to take away our hard-earned democracy, following their deserving defeat at the 2020 National Elections.

In the first year of our return to government, and consistently until now, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration restored the dignity to our Amerindian citizens, restored the dignity of our sugar workers, restored the dignity of our senior citizens by putting back their water and electricity subsidies and increasing their pension by 75% – and this will reach our promise to 100% by 2025. We have restored our citizen's constitutional rights to housing with over 30,000 house lots distributed today to hundreds of houses and hundreds of houses built. We have restored the livelihoods of small farmers and loggers all across this country. We have provided economic empowerment and pathways for women folk and single mothers. We have restored our children's grant and, of course, we have worked to improve the lives of people right across this country. We are not saying that we have done it all. All of this is part of a process in which we started out in 2020 by picking up the pieces, correcting the mistakes, fixing things and working every single year to improve the lots, to improve our assets and to improve the lives of people. It is a process and it will not happen overnight. None of us, on this side, hold the view that everything is *hunky-dory*, and everything will happen all at once. The certainty of what we are saying is that we are making strides, we are making progress and we are working for the development of people. It is visible every single day across this country that our people's lives are getting better.

When Lindeners and people from all across this country begin enjoying paved surface of the intercontinental highway to Brazil and its four lane bridge from Wismar to Mackenzie, when commercial trading begins to intensify through that road and investors role to set up shops in Region 10 and elsewhere, and when the people will know that those are empowering benefits for this and other budgets, certainly the Opposition will say it amounts to nothing. When residents of Regions 2 and 3 and citizens from all across our country begin feeling the benefits of the new four lane fixed bridge across the Demerara River and the gas-to-energy power project with a 50% reduction in electricity cost, eventually,

and better believe it, they will know it is because of this and other budgets fulfilling the Manifesto promises of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. We will all enjoy first class healthcare services; better quality education facilities; standards and opportunities, including debt right off; free university access on campus and online; better community pathways; roads and interregional highways; farm-to-market roads; value-added infrastructure support; better recreational and sporting facilities; and better security domestically and across our sovereign territorial boundaries. The people can already see the experience of this transformation.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I have a few young people across there who have given permission to use their testimony and would like to testify of the work of this Government, the progress we are making as a society and their faith and belief in our governance model, our structure and our budget's formulation. I thank them for being here because I did not just want to use names without having the faces right before us. The young Dr. Vishal Joseph, a 30-year-old mixed race Guyanese seated over there in his sharp blue suit was coerced into supporting the Coalition Government in 2015. When he began criticising their cruel, anti-working-class policies, they quickly side-lined him. This is his written testimony:

“I have unshakeable confidence in President Ali and the PPP/C's astute leadership driving remarkable development for our country. As a young Guyanese blessed to benefit directly from the People's Progressive Party/Civics' expansive vision in business, health, education and social development, I can personally attest to the power of placing opportunity and equity at the heart of our collective ascend and the advancing national development. This Government's defining ethos of inclusive participatory governance has provided invaluable platforms for youth to directly apply our expanding expertise in service to fellow Guyanese. The Government's participatory policy making processes actively solicit and elevate insights from youth, women, indigenous groups and all people seeking a voice in national development. I experienced this firsthand through good faith, advocacy and engagements with ministers who demonstrate that grass root engagement is crucial to inclusive progress.”

Do you know what they will say if they were here? – perhaps even later when they listen to what I had to say –

that young Vishal Joseph was paid money to come here. It is so disparaging. I will bet you that is how. No one out of their own volition and freewill can give a testimony so glowing about the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. That is how they are. I also want to share the story of Mr. Courtney Benn Junior, another black young man, who is fully empowered under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government and who is actively contributing to national transformation. This is his testimony. It states:

"I have had a unique privilege of assessing both of the parties that have governed Guyana over the past 30 years and even before the People's Progressive Party/Civic returned to power in 2020. It has become crystal clear from most rational Guyanese that this is the party with a vastly superior approach to the socio-economic transformation of Guyana. This contention goes way beyond the hollow argument about the Government having access to oil revenues because even while we were sure of the coming oil money after 2015, the necessary transformative vision was non-existent. Guyana has in fact now been placed on a rapid path to its transformation which in a broader sense is the pre-2015 development strategy of the People's Progressive Party/Civic on steroids.

From my perspective, the macro-economic vision of the Government to underpin the transformation with unprecedented expansion of the traditional sector and the private sector, the buildout of targeted critical infrastructure and world class education and healthcare is a master stroke of immeasurable proportions. That to my mind will eradicate poverty in short order while creating opportunities every step of the way for Guyanese of every race, class and creed to empower themselves for intergenerational wealth creation."

6.50 p.m.

In the interest of time, the other two persons who shared similar views and have similar testimonies, which I will not go through at this time because I am very fearful that the time will go on me too quickly. I will save their testimonies but, definitely, rest assured that their testimonies are similar to the two that I read at this podium. Thousands of Guyanese every part of the country, believe that we are making progress. Do you know what is so funny or comical of the Opposition? They will come here and argue that nothing is being done has an impact on anyone. To me, that is the most

nonsensical type of argument to come from anyone. Not that okay you are doing 'x' in this particular community, but we believe that you can do five times more or change this priority and add it to something else or something that at least adds up to some sort of criticisms that you could even consider. Nothing, it is sheer emptiness and that is what is worrying. I spoke to a student yesterday. Do you know what the student said? The student said: at least in a debate and the references to all sorts of things about poverty levels and whatever levels and who are not getting this and that, you would imagine that an Opposition would at least cite some study, some survey or something as the basis for those arguments." The majority of the people are in poverty and nothing is working. What sort of people operate in this way and fashion? I do not necessarily want to give a particular name to the Opposition – putta-putta brains.

Now, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the truth is that we have in this country one of the best examples of a government. In the Caribbean, we are admired for the type of leadership that we use to develop our country. We are admired around the world. Never before have I ever felt so proud of being a Guyanese. It is the proudest moment. Wherever a person goes, right across the world, people who are following the happenings in Guyana are so complimentary about what is taking place. I do not expect the Opposition to come here and not criticise us so do not get me wrong. At least be constructive; at least say things that are sensible, say things that make sense that people can follow, believe at least and can act on. The People's National Congress (PNC) once teeming with intellectual prowess, that is, now depends on lowly economic advice from an interloper, a little want to be intern. That is the sort of deficit in substance that has characterised and continues to shape the low points in the lives of Cathys *et al*, of all the irrelevant parties desperately hungering for power again. The sweet fat salary lifestyles that they once had, supportive by multi-million travel and eating bills and conflict of interest contracts to their own businesses which they soaked up during the five long years, the orgies have raped our treasuries. They put this country through misery. [An Hon. Member: Ordeal or orgies?] Orgies.

Again, all over, this fast-growing economy of the world, all across the small and medium sized business community and the burgeoning private sector, Guyanese are saying 'never, never, never again to the intellectual bankruptcy across every home benefitting from the Because We Care grants. Once again, we are hearing the resounding cry never again to cruel mean-spirited and selfish-social policies, never again. Across the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL)

scholarship beneficiary community; never again is the resolute stands of the 30,000 house lot recipients; never again is the screams from our sugar workers; never again to more than 200 draconian taxes on the backs of poor people; never again to billions wasted on satisfying their egos of sanctimonious gangsters, leaders who cared only about themselves; never again to rigged elections; and, surely, never again to a Party in government bereft of ideas and cursed with the D'Urban Park sort of imagination. By the end of 2025, bruised from a bigger beating and convinced of their perpetual relegation to that side of the House, even the master of their fate and the captains of their souls will resign themselves to the never again vacuum. This Budget all across the country... I tabulated, last evening, the comments on social media, those appearing on television...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, my tabulation says you need an extension to conclude.

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Ms. Parag]: Mr. Speaker, may the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation, please?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Parag. Hon. Minister Mr. McCoy, five minutes to conclude.

Mr. McCoy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have so far come up with 736 Guyanese who are speaking positively. This is just a quick random sample. There are 736 Guyanese who speak positively about this Budget, this Government and the development trajectory on which we are on – 736 just by randomly checking.

Most Guyanese understand, by now, that the rise in the cost of living across the globe is not the making of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government and it is not unique to Guyana. The key difference here is what the Government is doing about it. Let me use as an example, the Republic of Suriname is now ranked as a high degree of hardship location for expatriates living there, much less the citizens. A recent analysis described our eastern neighbour as now plagued with the ever-rising cost of living posed by persistently high inflation, plunging more than 60% of the population under the poverty. It is not much different in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. In October, 2023, the Trinidad's *Daily Express* Report cited the rising cost of living as being the leading factor for the pay cheque to pay cheque dilemma facing households. The Report states:

“Some months families sacrificed groceries to meet other basic needs, prompting economists to assert that the middle class is gradually disappearing from the once oil rich nation”.

While one leading Psychologist there believes that the situation is directly impacting mental health. I take no pleasure in highlighting the perils being faced by our other Caribbean Community (CARICOM) territories and I mean no offence to their governments and our brothers and sisters there. Suffice to say, politicians here in Guyana must acknowledge these common cross-border realities plaguing the world with honest and realistic narratives to their support base. The Government of the People's Progressive Party/Civic does not hide behind any cloak of political expediency nor do we wear blinders in delivering on our mandate and when we are dealing with the bread-and-butter situations of Guyanese. We are constantly consulting with our stakeholders and people, right across this country and reviewing our policies and programmes to address all of the pressing issues including the issues of cost of living and, of course, to make sure that we have sustainable economic and social growth, while providing real time cushioning interventions to ease the cost-of-living burdens for every citizen.

I can quickly roll over to my portfolio. When we assumed Office, the information, public affairs in 2020, and the state media communication apparatus were fully clothed again in the Kabaka era. The pre-1992 Congress Place guards extensive reorientation was done with the staff. We continue to invest in training programmes to ensure that our people who are deployed in the state media are improving in their standards and are serving our national good by sharing information and communicating with the public. It is because of the time constraint; I wish I could say much more here. The bottom line is, this Budget is a budget for all the people of Guyana. If one goes through this Budget, every part of our country has something to his/her benefit, something to enhance his/her life, something workable for his/her family, something for the pensioners, something for the youth and something for everyone.

I therefore commend the 2024 national budget as a superstar budget. It is a budget for everyone and a budget that will make a huge difference in the lives of every Guyanese continually and consistently. Thank you and I commend this *Budget 2024* as the budget worthy of everyone's support. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Minister McCoy and now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Hemraj Rajkumar.

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be given this opportunity to share my views on *Budget 2024*. *Budget 2024* was presented to this National Assembly by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh on 15th January, 2024. This Budget was presented to us under the theme: *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity for All*. The Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, in his Speech told us that we will see national prosperity translated into community prosperity and, ultimately, household prosperity. The sum of \$1.146 trillion is estimated to be spent this year to achieve this goal. This is the first time, in our country's history, that a budget has passed the trillion-dollar mark. The Hon. Minister boasted that this year's budget is financed by no new taxes. The Hon. member should have told us that this Budget would not have been financed by any taxes at all.

7.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are told, however, to meet this extremely large spendings, Government intends to take steps to increase the amount to be withdrawn from the National Resource Fund and, also, increase domestic and external borrowings, which will no doubt put a heavy financial burden on our current and future generation. We have to bear in mind that borrowing at a high rate of interest over a long period is costly and will put a heavy financial burden on our future generations. *Budget 2024* is like budgets 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023. It continues to display the Government's uncaring and unconscionable attitude towards the poor and vulnerable. There is no practical measure in this budget that will see the building of prosperity for the ordinary man. *Budget 2024* does not provide anything substantial for the poor, the aged and the public sector workers. With all the billions to be spent on infrastructural work, it definitely has provisions to continue to build prosperity for the privileged few. The appropriate theme for *Budget 2024* should have been: 'Nothing for the needy; building prosperity for a privileged few'. We all know that in 2023, the citizens of Guyana had to face challenges of the high rise of the cost of living, it was a struggle throughout the year to make ends meet.

In December 2023, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance, the Hon. Dr. Singh, announced an inadequate 6.5% across-the-board increase in salaries for public sector workers and Government pensioners, along with a cash grant of \$25,000 to cushion the pressure of the high cost of living. Mr.

Speaker, this is how the Government demonstrated its commitment to ensure that all categories of workers enjoy a continuously improving standard of living, improved opportunities and a brighter prospect for the future. In a country with the fastest growing economy, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 33% in 2023, surpassing the projected 25.1%, our Government could only provide our hard-working public servants with a 6.5% increase at the end of the year. Our workers waited 12 months before they could have enjoyed the increase in salary. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, a public servant earning \$1 million, would have received \$65,000 per month and would have received \$780,000 retroactive pay. A worker earning \$80,000 would have received a mere \$5,200 per month. The Government boasts about putting more money in the pockets of the workers. We know the ones who are earning \$1 million and above, please, your Honour. We do not have to get the torch light to see in the day whose pockets are being filled.

Mr. Speaker, our economy is expected to expand at an even faster rate this year. GDP growth is projected at 34.3%. We are told that *Budget 2024* has an allocation of \$121.4 billion for wages and salaries for central Government workers, including a salary increase that will be announced later this year. Why do we have to wait, Mr. Speaker? Give the hard-working public servants their increase now. One cannot doubt that the prices of basic food items and other basic necessities have increased. A 10 kilogrammes (kg) bag of parboiled rice now costs between \$2200 and \$2300, A 400 gramme (g) pack of Fernleaf milk powder is \$800; chicken – \$488 to \$500 per pound (lb); eggs – \$1600 per tray; plantains – \$250; eddoes – \$300; sweet potatoes –\$400. These were the prices at the Suddie Market last Sunday. Our citizens have to face these high prices every single day. The cost of living is expected to continue to rise in 2024. Mr. Speaker, the Government with a good conscience should have made the announcement now and pay the workers their increase in salary. In a country with the fastest growing economy, with an economy that surpassed its projected GDP last year, and an economy that is set to expand at a faster rate this year, there is no reason why your public servant should wait until the end of this year to receive any increase in salary the Government intends to provide. As I said earlier, let the workers have their increase now.

We have seen an alarming increase in vehicle accidents and road fatalities on the roads throughout our country. There have been over 170 fatalities in 2023 and we already have a number of deaths on our road for this year. Just a few hours ago, there was an accident at Vreed-en-Hoop. These accidents are claiming the lives of our citizens. Speeding and

the careless use of the road are claiming the lives of our young people. The Government seems not to have a plan to curb the carnage on our roads. We need to have increased police presence on our roadways. We have to get cameras to capture infringements and the use of those images to aid prosecution. We have to have a continuous road safety education and find ways to curb the indiscipline by road users. This Government needs to take a drastic action to make our roads safe again. However, *Budget 2024* seems not to address the challenges that are faced by our people.

We also have seen several buildings in our country destroyed by fire in 2023. We have fires already destroying homes this year. The Government has removed VAT and duty from fire extinguishers and smoke alarms. We do hope that this measure will reduce the fires in our country in the future. There is a need, also, for a comprehensive educational programme to sensitise the citizens of fire safety. There is an allocation in this year's budget for the construction of a fire station at Charity to complement the one at Anna Regina. We in Region 2 welcome this development. However, we need another facility to be built at the southern half of the region between Queenstown and Supenaam, where this will enable the fire service to respond to fires on the southern half of the coast in a timely manner.

University students and potential university students are disappointed. They are still waiting on the promise made to them by this Government to make education at the University of Guyana free. This is the fourth year of this Government in Office, and they have taken no steps, so far, to provide free university education, failing to fulfil its promise to this nation. Mr. Speaker, how long should our students wait to receive free university education? When will this Government fulfil its promise? With a \$1.146 trillion budget, this Government could have afforded free university education for our students this year. The University of Guyana graduates welcome the announcement by the Hon. Minister of Finance regarding the outstanding student loan write-off. Graduates are eagerly awaiting the announcement of the criteria and commencement of the debt write-off. I do agree that graduates should serve our country for a period of time to be entitled to the debt right off. Let the graduates know what the criteria are for their write-off and let us start the process. A large portion of the 1.164... sorry \$1.146 trillion will be spent on infrastructural development and a small percentage on social development. There must be a balance between infrastructure development and social development. We in the APNU/AFC Coalition believe that our citizens are the most important assets in our country and that government should invest more in improving the well-

being for our citizens and not just to provide the opportunity for the privileged few.

Today, in a country with the fastest growing economy and with the budget of \$1.146 trillion, the Government has increased old age pension and public assistant by \$3000 to help improve the standard of living of the old aged and the less fortunate. Mr. Speaker, \$36,000 is inadequate to maintain an elderly person in these times. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to learn that, out of the \$1.146 trillion budget, the Government will be paying an increase in the National Insurance Scheme minimum pension, survivors' benefit and invalidity pension and contributing \$550 million towards the payment of the one-off grant to the persons with 700 to 749 contributions.

Mr. Speaker, removing VAT and duty from firefighting equipment and reducing the cost of medical insurance will benefit the privileged few and not those who find it a challenge to put food on the table, find transportation to send their children to school and find their monthly rent. These measures are not intended to ease the pressure of the high cost of living on the ordinary Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker, Essequibo belongs to Guyana. We the citizens of Region 2 are steadfast and resolute that we are Guyanese and Essequibo will always remain the largest county of this beautiful country of ours. I wish to recognise that in this Twelfth Parliament and, if I am correct, this is the first time there are four Essequibians sitting in this National Assembly. We share the pride of being Essequibians and we are happy to represent the people of Region 2, even though we sit on the opposite side of this honourable House. The Hon. Ms. Coonjah told us of the modern Abram Zuil Secondary School, which was commissioned last year. I wish to remind this House that it was the APNU/AFC Coalition Government that had conceived, planned and budgeted for the building of the Abram Zuil Secondary School. If one examines the 2018 Estimates, one will find that the APNU/AFC had budgeted for the construction of the Abram Zuil Secondary School. We are not told of the shortage of nursing staff at the Suddie Hospital. We are not told that some of the nurses have to work a 12-hour shift, and that relatives have to clean and feed their sick.

We are not told of the inconvenience faced by our people because one of the engines of the MV Kanawan was out of commission for over four months. The two ferries, the MV Sabanto and MV Kanawan are providing an essential service for us. These boats make four trips in five days, and five trips in two days. We, the Essequibians, depend on the

service of these ferries and Government must ensure that they are properly maintained.

Our rice farmers continue to receive low prices for their paddy. They are complaining about the high cost of production and lack of Government assistance. Farmers were promised half-bag fertiliser per acre by the Government to assist them in their cultivation for this crop. The farmers are still waiting for the fertiliser to be delivered so that they can be able to apply it to their present crop. Farmers along the coast have complained that access dams leading to the backlands are in deplorable states. The drainage and irrigation trench need cleaning. Farmers are calling on the Government to repair the dams and have these trenches cleaned so that they can have easy access and proper drainage and irrigation to their fields. In 2022, the people of Region 2 were promised the establishment of an industrial estate at Onderneeming. In this year's budget, there is an allocation for the completion of the industrial estate at Essequibo. I have been trying to locate this facility without success. We would like to know exactly where this facility is and what percentage of this project has been completed so far. [An Hon. Member: Go check.] Them *aint* got nothing like *duh*. I checked.

The construction of the water treatment plant at Onderneeming has commenced. We are eagerly waiting to have treated water coming from our traps. Last year, another water treatment plant was budgeted to be constructed in the area between the area of Charity to Walton Hall. Nothing has been done as yet. Again, this year, there is an allocation set aside for the construction of the said water treatment plant in the area of Walton Hall to Charity. We hope this year...

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

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, Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you can continue.

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you, very much. Mr. Speaker, we hope that this year we will see the reality of this project. All of our people in the region are entitled to have clean water coming through their taps. So, I urge this Government to move fast and ensure that these facilities do not remain in the construction stage.

7.20 p.m.

Our most important asset of our country, in a land of such bounty... Sorry. Our citizens are the most important assets of our country. In a land of such bounty, Government ought to have employed more realistic measures to ensure that our people receive direct benefits from our increasing wealth. With a large budget of \$1.146 trillion, the Government ought to have done much more to improve the standard of living and wellbeing of every citizen in this country. Pensioners, the less fortunate, expect much more than the \$3,000 they were given. They are disappointed. The public sector workers expected much more than the increase in the income tax threshold. The public sector workers are left again to wonder what salary increase there will be and how long they have to wait to receive it. The 2024 Budget lacks the human touch, and it has no comprehensive plan for building prosperity for all. Under these circumstances, I am unable to support the passage of *Budget 2024*. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Jaffarally: I rise to support *Budget 2024* under the theme: *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity for All Guyana*. Allow me to congratulate the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance and the Public Service – perhaps, one of the best finance ministers in the Caribbean – and the staff of the Ministry of Finance. *Budget 2024*, that was presented to this National Assembly, caters for every single Guyanese, whether you are a market vendor, a teacher, a public servant, a taxi driver, our men and women in uniform, our students, or our pensioners. Every single Guyanese, whether you live in Region 10 or Region 1, every Guyanese will benefit significantly from *Budget 2024*. Before I continue my presentation, allow me to respond to the Hon. Vinceroy Jordan, who I recall describing in 2020 as deaf, dumb and blind. Over time, this Hon. Member has become unrepairable.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I did not hear what you just said.

Mr. Jaffarally: I said deaf, dumb and blind.

Mr. Speaker: You have to withdraw that. Come on, please. You cannot impute that on an Hon. Member. Let us keep it good.

Mr. Jaffarally: Let us get the facts straight. The Hon. Member said that the community of Moraikobai does not have a water nor a land ambulance. I got pictures to prove... [Mr. Jordan: (Inaudible)] That is what you said this morning. These are the pictures of the water and land ambulances.

[The Hon. Member displayed pictures.]

Look at this, Mr. Speaker. I will lay it over. **[An Hon. Member:** He has never been to Moraikobai.] As a matter of fact, you have never gone to Moraikobai. He spoke about the Augsburg school. What are the facts concerning this particular school? This school has a student population of nine students – nine students is the population, n.i.n.e. There were consultations with the teachers and parents of that community. There were consultations with the parents and teachers of that particular school. The teachers said to the parents, ‘we will provide transportation to take the children to the closest school’, which is Calcutta Primary School, which is less than 10 minutes away. It was the parents who decided that they preferred to use the march boardroom. It was the parents’ decision. We recognised that we need a new school. *Budget 2024* will cater for a brand-new school at the Burma Housing Scheme.

The Hon. Member spoke about discrimination – that this Administration, the PPP/C Administration, is discriminating. I wish to remind you, Hon. Member, that when you took Office in 2015, you took away the streetlights from the people of Blairmont, Bush Lot, Bath Settlement, and Cotton Tree and you are talking about discrimination. You spent five years in Government and in those five years, you spent every single cent on community development on the Hopetown and Paradise grounds – \$40 odd million, and not a cent was spent at Shieldstown; not a cent was spent at Belladrum and not a cent was spent at De Hoop. What is the record of the PPP/C? *[Interruption]* We are a mere three and half years in Government. We have rehabilitated many community grounds, such as the Itaca Community ground, Cotton Tree, Blairmont, Number 28 Village, Belladrum, De Hoop, and Fairfield. We have developed those community grounds because this Government of Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and my Colleagues around here, we believe that from the resources of this country, every community must benefit. Mr. Speaker, go to the Ithaca basketball court, go to Cotton Tree, we have repaired and built pavilions and installed streetlights. Go to Belladrum, we have made pathways, pavilions, and streetlights. Go to Fairfield and De Hoop. That is how we believe all Guyanese must benefit from the resources of our country. Mr. Speaker, you spoke about roads, and we discriminated...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, speak to the Speaker because I did not speak about any road yet.

Mr. Jaffarally: The Hon. Member spoke about how we are discriminating about community roads. In five years, the

APNU/AFC built 32 roads in Region 5 in selective communities. Last year, 2023, we built 169 roads in Region 5 and every Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) and community benefited. Let me give you one perfect example... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I cannot hear on the left side of my ear because of the shouting. So, I just want to bring that to the attention of the House. Go ahead.

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, let me give you one perfect example. In the Blairmont/Gelderland NDC, we built 11 roads, four in Ithaca, three in Blairmont and four in Shieldstown – equal distribution. That is how we operate. Every community benefited from roads in Region 5. Communities like Ithaca, Shieldstown, Cotton Tree, Number 4 Village and Number 5 Village. Do you remember when you went to Number 5 Village and vomited your racism, the Hon. ...

Mr. Speaker: Again, Hon. Member, I did not vomit anywhere. Come on, please.

Mr. Jaffarally: When you uttered your racism...

Mr. Speaker: I did not do that either.

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the Hon. Member that when he went to Region 5 with the Leader of the Opposition at a public meeting, when he was criticising the PPP/C... Do you know what happened at the Local Government Elections? In Number 5 Village, out of a voting population of 348 voters listed on the voters’ list, the PPP/C got 216 votes. The Hon. Member said that he will win Region 5. How on earth could you have won Region 5 when Region 5 has 75 constituencies, and you were unable to field candidates for 28 constituencies? How were you going to win Region 5, Hon. Member; how were you going to win that? I saw you at Bath Settlement with an old People’s National Congress (PNC) thug named Ka-Ka and you took a video of it...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not know if that person is in the House to represent himself. You have been doing good. If you speak to the Speaker, you will do better.

Mr. Jaffarally: I am guided, Mr. Speaker. When you come here, Hon. Member, come and present facts. You are a pastor of a church, and one expects better from you. *(Inaudible)* He is a pastor of a church. In addition to the water and land ambulances for Moraikobai, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government, led by Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali; led by our Prime Minister, the Hon. Mark

Phillips; and our Vice President believes that every community, whether on the coastland or in the riverine areas, must benefit equally.

In 2024, Moraikobai will receive a steel tug. The Hon. Senior Minister and Minister Parag were there recently. They benefited from 217 solar panels in 2023. With the help of the Minister of Agriculture, they are cultivating 10 acres on cassava plantation. All of that was done in 2023. What have you done in your five years? Not a single Minister of the APNU/AFC, in five years, ever visited Moraikobai. Do not forget what you did at election time. Do not forget when you objected to the people of Moraikobai being on the voters' list.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of Region 5, where more than 50% of its residents are occupied in agriculture, whether they are rice farmers, cattle farmers, cash crop farmers, poultry farmers or being involved in the fishing industry. On any given day, Mr. Speaker, take a walk by Bourda Market or Stabroek Market and you will see dozens of trucks, canters and other vehicles with produce coming from Region 5. Region 5 is indeed the breadbasket of Guyana.

7.35 p.m.

The Ministry of Agriculture, through its various programmes, has made significant strides in empowering our farmers, in promoting sustainable agricultural practices. We have implemented numerous measures to enhance irrigation and drainage systems. We provide farmers with improved varieties and offer training programmes to help them to adapt to modern techniques, to increase crop yields, while conserving the natural resources. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, there is massive infrastructure development. In 2020, when the Hon. Minister, Zulfikar Mustapha, took office, we went to the Mahaica Mahaicony Abary - Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) back lands. It was difficult to differentiate where the drains were and where the rice field was. The whole place was destroyed, no infrastructure and the farmers were deliberately punished because they were perceived to be the PPP/C supporters – like you did to the sugar workers. That is racism, my friend.

Over the last couple of years, we have improved the infrastructure development, our drains, our bridges, our culverts. The infrastructure has now improved significantly that, today, every square inch of agriculture land available is occupied. Farmers are returning to the land, unlike when you were in Office, the APNU/AFC, they were forced to abandon their lands because you never provided any services and then you increased the rates at MMA/ADA.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have occupied all the time allocated for the first 15 minutes, so you will need an extension to conclude. You will get through much more if you speak to the Chair.

Mr. Jaffarally: Mr. Speaker, so, we have improved...

Mr. Speaker: You have to get an extension.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, may the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation?

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Jaffarally: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Education Delivery, we recognised the importance of education in the growth and development of our economy... [An Hon. Member (Opposition): (*Inaudible*)] You cannot tell me *fuh* hold on. We recognise the importance and we have modernised the education system to create an environment that is both conducive to teaching and learning. What is important to recognise is, today some of our top students, whether at National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) or at the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), are coming from the regions also. Our two Grade-A secondary schools, the Bygeval and Rosignol Secondary Schools, have provided outstanding students at the level of CXC and the primary schools are equally doing so. We are improving in our education delivery across our country.

In the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship programme, Region 5 has seen 1,420 students involved in the GOAL scholarship programme at various levels. The GOAL Scholarships are catching on to more and more young people and they are coming from various communities and various backgrounds. We should be happy that this Government has given another opportunity to our young people to ensure that they develop their education.

In housing and water – the three housing schemes at Balchyoek, Blairmont, Shieldstown and Burma are about 90% complete. In a matter of time, hundreds of Guyanese will be given their house lots. In fact, they have started identifying their house lots. Very shortly, another housing scheme at the back of Bath Settlement will be constructed.

In the health sector... [An. Hon. Member: Not the burial ground one (*Inaudible*)] Not the burial ground. The burial ground lady is not here. In the health sector, we continue to upgrade our health sector. The brand-new hospital – just imagine the Hon. Member, Mr. Vincero

Jordan, is concerned about a name for the hospital. What? Does he want the hospital to be named Mr. Vinceroy Jordan Hospital? That is so ridiculous.

Our rice industry – in 2023, we have seen the increase in rice production to 264.073 metric tons, which is an increase of 21,000 metric tons over 2022. A drying floor was constructed at Cotton Tree. A total of 635 farmers in Region 5 benefitted from 6,709 bags of seed paddy, valued at \$33 million. The Rice Research Station (Burma) produced 22,000 bags of seed paddy through the farmers of Region 5. Our cattle farmers also benefitted from the Ministry of Agriculture, 13 breeding bulls were distributed to the cattle farmers in Region 5. A total of 10,000 Black Giant chickens were distributed to 242 small farmers.

His Excellency launched that programme, and the first batch of black belly sheep has arrived in this country. This year, the other batch will arrive and then we will start distribution. The Hon. Member, Ganesh Mahipaul, seems to have a dislike for our Ministers Ms. Sonia Parag and the Hon. Anand Persaud and the Hon. Nigel Dharamlall, but let me remind you, the Hon. Nigel Dharamlall will return. The 2024 Budget will see the lives of our Guyanese people enhanced. Therefore, I want to urge my Colleagues on the other side of this House to join with us in working together so that we build one beautiful Guyana. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Mr. Speaker, may I have the floor?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister Manickchand, go ahead.

Ms. Manickchand: I know we are watched a lot and I know that this year we have a provision in our budget for the building of a primary school at Augsburg and I am very happy to let parents who are watching as well...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, are you raising on a Point of Order?

Ms. Manickchand: No, I am just helping...

Mr. Speaker: I cannot give you floor to elucidate on anything else. I thought you were going to rise to move the suspension of the Standing Orders so that we can continue beyond eight o'clock and complete the business. Suspension of the Standing Orders to go beyond...

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]

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, I ask respectfully that the Standing Orders be suspended so that we could proceed with the business of the House until we are finished tonight.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, before I call on the next speaker, I have to deal with a couple of matters that we have been tracking. First, we had an objection by the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, that she did not make a particular claim in which she said that the Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, credited to her. I just want to read both of the statements and put that to rest because the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, was in perfect order. From the transcript of the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, she said:

“For the sum of \$2 trillion dollars, if one breakdown per a Guyanese family it would bring him/her to \$9.5 million. It does not take anyone with a university degree to understand how life changing \$9.5 million would be to an ordinary man and woman, and more particularly, to the most vulnerable persons in society, some of whom have to live and suffer the indignity of being in poverty. The sum of \$9.5 million per family could give them a decent roof over their heads and a car to drive.”

The Hon. Member Mr. Datadin said:

“If I may finally say, the Hon. Member, Juretha Fernandes, had the vision of taking \$2 trillion, which is what she said we had, and dividing it by the population, which gave everyone \$9.3 million per household.”

I think what he did do in error there was, he did not quote 9.5, he quoted 9.3. That is the only thing I saw that he did wrong. We put that now to rest and remind those who promised to submit their documents to us, please do. Ms. Parag and the Hon. Member Ms. Philadelphia, we are keeping track of these ongoing matters. Now I call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Devin Sears, to make his contribution. Mr. Sears, the clock starts at 7.47 p.m.

Mr. Sears: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to give a quick update on my Colleague, the Hon. Member,

Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond. She is okay. She is currently being reviewed at the medical centre and she is surrounded by her loved ones and, of course, she is responding positively. As a Member of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, if you permit me. We would like to thank the Speaker, the staff and, also, the Members on the Government side for giving support in this time of aid. It shows how both sides can work together in the face of adversities. We would also like to say thanks to the emergency medical technicians (EMT) team for their quick response. Of course, we wish the Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond, well and a speedy recovery.

Mr. Speaker, allow me a minute of my allocated time to wish the Members of this honourable House and Guyanese locally and abroad, God's richest blessings and a prosperous New Year. Also, I say thanks to the staff that worked tirelessly in compiling this year's budget estimates, but I pause to flag the directive of the subject Minister and, by extension, ultimately the Government, as misguided and out of touch with the daily realities of an average Guyanese. The contributor before me made some claims with regards to lighting and rehabilitation of various fields. I want to say this here, we had the best Government that this country could ever dream of, the APNU/AFC. Under the directive of the then Director of Sport, Mr. Christopher Jones, currently our Chief Whip, we would have rehabilitated and lit Ithaca Community Centre Ground, Calcutta Community Centre, Lovley Lass Community at Central Mahaicony, Lichfield, Bath Settlement, Cotton Field, Trafalgar, C Field and much more.

Today, as I stand here to make my contribution to this round of budget, I stand as a proud Lindener, not the fake ones – 100% Lindener. The basis for me mentioning this is because we are a proud people, a resilient people and a united people. Linden in Region 10 is the heart of Guyana. The region that pumps life into this country, culturally, socially and economically. My region bridges the gap between the coastland and the interior. It is strategically placed which affords us the chance of reaching almost all the regions in Guyana.

7.50 p.m.

The three main rivers run through her; she is rich in minerals, timber, tourism products and arable land. It possesses a high educational pursuit and talent. Mr. Speaker, the Upper Demerara/Berbice is a paradise and someday, it will achieve city status. However, it is a fact that owed to political spitefulness and suppression, this dream, under the

PPP/C, will never come through. This is just because its residents rejected them in every major election. For 27 years, collectively, the PPP/C Government placed its feet on the necks of Region 10 residents and forced them into a time warp, currently gasping for air. Guess what? Under the APNU/AFC, things began to change. Might I remind this honourable House that under the APNU/AFC, we returned Local Government Elections in 2016; funded the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN) Incorporated to help young entrepreneurs; built the Central Immigration and Passport Office; completed the feasibility studies; and found the sources of fundings for the Soesdyke/Linden Highway as well as the Wismar/Makenzie Bridge and the Linden to Mabura highway.

I want to just stitch this in. The Government prides itself on four lanes. As residents of Region 10, we need a four-lane highway as well – the Soesdyke/Linden Highway. We provided proper maintenance for the Linden to Kwakwani road and the interior from time to time so as to ensure the safe travel for our residents and persons going to do business in those areas. Our party introduced the internet for the very first time in many Indigenous communities. We must not forget that. This Government fails to realise that even with the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme, there are Indigenous communities that cannot have access to it because the Government has not maintained internet connections in those communities. So, they are completely ignored. For instance, there is Kwakwani which needs internet access. Our party maintained the subsidies for electricity in Ituni and places such as Kwakwani.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

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

We began the construction of the Linden Technical Institutes' (LTI) dorm so that persons within the interior could have access to higher education. We began the rehabilitation of the call centre back then, an achievement that this Government currently claims and owns.

We also improved healthcare. In fact, I just got a call from some workers at the Linden Hospital Complex, and they said that there are significant drug shortages. So, greater emphasis needs to be placed on healthcare by this Government. Under the APNU/AFC Government, we cared about the people and residents of Region 10.

We also increased the subvention of the municipality so that it could function effectively. We were hoping that we would have seen an improvement in subvention in this year's

budget. The entire budgetary allocation for the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) was accepted under the APNU/AFC. There were no cuts or deductions during our tenure. The facts do not lie. No matter how much the Hon. Members on the other side of this House come with their legendary tales, promised fortunes, flowery speeches, and movie references, the Guyanese people will not be bamboozled. *The devil is in the details*. After deciphering this massive trillion-dollar budget, the *modus operandi* of the PPP/C remains the same – defund the Opposition-majority Regional Democratic Councils so that Central Government can swoop in, look good, and use this as a political ploy. The facts do not lie, and I have them right here.

For over three years, Region 10's capital budgetary allocation was the lowest in terms of increase. When we look at Region 2, which supposedly is their stronghold, it increased by 42.9% but Region 10 only received an increase of 25.4% over the last three years. You say that you want Region 10. Region 10 rejects the PPP/C. They must speak the truth. In this year's budget, through the allocation provided by the RDC, there will be no roads in Kwakwani, Ituni, Coomacka Lands, Speightland, Block 22 and much more through our elected officials.

There is no transformative project in the 11 Indigenous villages that we have. I am sorry the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs is not here. There is no mention of any significant investment in places such as Number 58, Great Falls, Malali, Muritaro, Number 47, Hururu, Wiruni, Kimbia, Sand Hills, Rockstone and Riversview. Minister of Amerindian Affairs, your people are crying out that they need assistance. I will go even further. For some reason, the PPP/C Government does not like boards of directors. They do not like the opinions of people who come together to make a product or a service work. We have had the absence of the Linden Enterprise Network's board for a very long time and even the Linden Hospital Complex's board. The people of Region 10 are asking for those boards to be in place. We are tired of unilateral decisions being made on behalf of our people.

With regard to the new bridge that the PPP/C is claiming, this is a project of the APNU/AFC. Let me say this. Despite that fact, we support this project, and we are happy that the PPP/C is pushing ahead with it. I must say to you that I am putting the PPP/C on warning, at this point in time, that the bridge in Linden must not end up like the Berbice River Bridge. It must never end up like the Berbice River Bridge whereby large exorbitant funds are being charged to commuters. That will never happen in Linden.

I am moving to the municipalities, Mr. Speaker. In this year's budgetary allocation, as I said, there is no increase in subvention. Let me say this here: it is my view, my opinion, and my strong standing that the administrative and policy arm of the council must be respected, as guided by the Municipal and District Council Act, Chapter 28:01. Any activist who is politically appointed to fill such a role must ensure that the council is well guided, and that the will of the people is executed. I go further to say that when the APNU/AFC got into the municipality in 2016 by majority vote, it found that there was a tall bill that was inherited by the appointed Interim Management Committee (IMC) of the PPP/C. Currently, this debt is still being repaid. The municipality needs a bailout. Let me tell you why. Currently, Linden is indebted by \$288,601,000. That is the reality. We owe the Linden Utility Services Co-op Society Limited (LUSCSL) over \$86 million; the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), \$157 million; the Guyana Labour Union (GLU), \$3.8 million; the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), 29 million; and pension and gratuity over \$10 million.

As I represent the people of Linden here, we are not just asking for a bailout alone. We are asking for more support so that the council can function effectively. The solution is simple. Start by increasing the subvention so that more projects can be executed through the municipality. There can be the acquisition of new sanitation equipment. We also say that Linden needs a new municipal mall. The PPP/C has built one in Mon Repos. Linden needs a municipal mall now more than ever. We also need the construction of a multi-state department building at Bamia which will house police, immigration, the toll booth, and even an emergency response unit. That is what the people of Linden need. We also need the revaluation of residential and commercial properties so that we can increase our earnings as a town. Also, we need the expansion of the land boundaries.

My recommendations are simple when it comes to *Budget 2024*. I speak on behalf of the people I represent in Upper Demerara/Berbice. Consideration of a bridge for Kwakwani is needed now more than ever. We need to bridge Jeep Landing to the other side of Kwakwani. I know the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat, who frequents there, will make representation for this. We also would like this Government to explore, develop and even exploit tourism opportunities in all the Indigenous villages and communities within Region 10. Of course, this year, you have to begin the construction of the industrial estate. We need to work with stakeholders to create a regional investment portfolio. Now, I know I am making all these points, and they are taking notes to put in their manifesto. Let it be known here that the APNU/AFC

claims these projects. We must focus heavily on empowering the Guyanese labour force. I know that we have seen in the media constantly that we need 500 nurses, and they are going to be coming from Cuba. We need to empower our own first. We need to create better working conditions for our work force here in Guyana. Guyana must come first. Also, we need to review the minimum wage of our public servants. It is disheartening to note that, recently, an article was published by the News Source which stated:

“Guyanese now sending money to families overseas”

This is with reference to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson’s, comment. I do not know if the PPP/C’s Government is out of touch or maybe it is getting its wealth from somewhere. I know the reality in this country is that the long lines at Money Gram, Western Union, and even Laparkan Group of Companies are endless. I am not sure if the Hon. Member on that side of the House meant to say that maybe Guyanese are sending barrels of oil overseas. The harsh reality is that the remittance rate in this country is extremely high, which is a sign of growing poverty. It is clear that this Government does not have a plan for the working people – the poor people in this country. Persons cannot even afford to use toilet tissue lavishly anymore because things are so hard; one ply at a time, they say.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to share with you that this PPP/C sings a song constantly. Like the Hon. Member, Mr. Kwame wee McCoy, who sang just now, the PPP/C Government sings the Frank Sinatra song all the time:

“... I did it my way...”

[The Hon. Member gave a rendition of a verse of the song, *My Way*.]

Presiding Member: Hon. Member, before you break into another rendition, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Presiding Member: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Sears: They are out of touch with the harsh realities of this country. Just the other day, we had someone making reference to walking through some valley with their fist up high and all those things. When you walk through Victory Valley and knock on people’s doors, they complain and bring their problems to you – pot turned down for three days,

and their mouth corners are white. The PPP/C Members over there are oblivious to that fact. Listen, people in this country are suffering. You would not know about that, Hon. Mr. Nandlall, because you are doing well for yourself.

I have to close here but let me say this. In order for this country that we call the Cooperative Republic of Guyana to grow, the PPP/C must go. Let me make this clear. When the APNU/AFC gets back into Government in the next General and Regional Elections, we will find spaces for all of you because we believe in inclusivity. We believe in a bottom-up approach, rather than a Central Government and top-down approach. We believe in uniting Guyanese. We will bring more investments to Guyana. We will raise our minimum wage. We will treat our elderly better than how they are being catered for. We will improve our education, healthcare and even the forestry sector and other minerals sector.

I also want to close by saying this. If the two sides, the Opposition and Government, cannot come together and work as one, this country cannot progress. We must exercise political maturity. It is sad to say that every year we come into this House and constantly debate the increase in budgetary allocations and so forth and there is not one recommendation that the PPP/C has taken from the Opposition, which I believe represents the majority of all Guyanese. I rest my case by saying this: in *Budget 2024*’s current form, I cannot under any circumstances – because it does not cater to the poor – support it. God bless Guyana. [Applause]

Presiding Member: Thank you. Hon. Member. Our next speaker is the Hon. Mr. Charlie.

8.05 p.m.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This evening, I rise to join my esteemed colleagues on this side of the House to add my contribution to *Budget 2024*. The theme for *Budget 2024*, *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity for All*, underscores the PPP/C Government’s dedication to continuity, sustainable growth, economic stability, responsible fiscal policies, and strategic investments for inclusive societal well-being. It emphasises prudent financial management to foster innovation and ensure equitable prosperity, serving as a guiding principle for a robust future in Guyana.

Speakers before me on the Opposition side criticised the 2024 Budget, particularly the assistance given to the old age pensioners. Lest the Opposition Members forget, it was in relation to their own budget of 2018, the *Guyana Times*,

dated 29th November, 2017, published an article captioned, *Betraying our pensioners again*. I quote:

“The Budget is entitled “Continuing the Journey to the Good Life... The Old Age Pension increase of \$500 per month is simply disgraceful. It is particularly disgraceful in the context that APNU/AFC had promised that were it given a chance to govern, it would immediately double the Old Age Pension.”

The Opposition Members have the gall and audacity to stand and criticise what the PPP/C Government is giving to our old age pensioners. They deserve more, and they will be getting more, not like your \$500. I do not know where you should bury your heads. The APNU/AFC did little to no Amerindian land titling. From 2020 to 2023, the People's Progressive Party/Civic delivered and issued eight absolute grants and eight demarcations, totalling 16.48% that Amerindians now own in Guyana. That is the landmass. Mr. Speaker, US\$10.7 million was left by the People's Progressive Party/Civic in 2015 for the continuation of the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) project. Guess what the APNU/AFC did? They closed the Amerindian Land Titling Unit and squandered the US\$10.7 million to their own use. Now, they come here pretending to love the Indigenous people of Guyana. I do not know where you should bury your heads. On May 30th, 2018, the News Room published an article captioned, “*I have not been able to title any village*”- Min. Allicock. Mr. Speaker, this would substantiate this:

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

[An. Hon. Member: What is wrong with that?] Something is definitely wrong with that because you promised, and you did not deliver. The Coalition did not deliver on its promise. They failed in their 100 days. That is the problem. In this august Assembly, a Coalition Member called out the Amerindians for being avaricious or greedy – how much more lands do they need? To this day, no apology was given from the Coalition to the Amerindian people, and we will not forget that.

The APNU/AFC discontinued the ‘Because We Care’ cash grant that gave parents, especially those in the Amerindian areas, a financial boost. You took that away from the children of Guyana. The People's Progressive Party/Civic

has restored that, respecting every child in Guyana by paying the cash grant for 2024 in the sum of \$45,00.

The APNU/AFC parked the solar systems electrification project. Six thousand solar panel units were left. What did you do with the 6000 solar panel units? You did not serve the Amerindian people. You parked it and used what belonged to the Amerindian people. Today, 280 plus Amerindian villages, inclusive of riverine communities, have received their solar panels. The People's Progressive Party/Civic is a testament to the people of Guyana and the Amerindians that we are in Government to serve and deliver. The APNU/AFC disposed of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) programme, which was aimed at supporting hinterland communities and replaced it with the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) that brought absolutely no benefit to the Amerindian people. In 2023, \$4.7 billion was allotted to Amerindian communities across Guyana. Some 243 Amerindian communities benefitted and will continue to benefit under the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

Under the APNU/AFC, there was no secondary school in the hinterland communities to further universal access to education. In five years, you did not build even one secondary school. Yet, now you have come to love the school children. What happened before in Region 9? There was only one school, and it was a community high school. The PPP/C built that school, and it is now an A-Grade school St. Ignatius. The PPP/C constructed other secondary schools across Region 9 – Aishalton Secondary School and Sand Creek Secondary School. Coming on stream is Karasabai which will open this year. We have a secondary school in North Rupununi. It is not only secondary schools, but it is with dormitories for our children.

The APNU/AFC did nothing, absolutely nothing, to amend the Amerindian Act for the further benefit of the Amerindian people, despite allocations being made available to undertake this, budget after budget from 2015. The APNU/AFC did absolutely nothing in this regard. However, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has taken it up and we will fix it on behalf of our people. The APNU/AFC neglected health infrastructure across the hinterland, and it is the fact. Under their tenure in Government, when we visited the health centres, we could not have been afforded a Panadol, but we saw pharmaceutical being purchased by the suitcase. The APNU/AFC imposed hardship taxes on the Amerindian communities, and it is a fact. Some 240 plus taxes were imposed by the APNU/AFC. I can go on and hash

everything, but I will have to say it another time. The APNU/AFC dismally failed the people of Guyana during its tenure.

I will now turn my attention to the geographic region that I represent, Region 9. Road infrastructure in Region 9: across all five sub-districts, roads, ingress, and main access were upgraded in 2023 to a tune of \$1 billion.

Under education, our children benefitted from the 'Because We Care' cash grant. In 2023, \$424 million was disbursed. In 2024, \$486,630 million will be disbursed.

Under the Technical Vocational Educational and Training (TVET) programme, I can highlight the development that has taken place. Mr. Speaker, I will give you a synopsis of this achievement under TVET. In Region 1, 187 persons benefitted; in Region 8, 113; in Region 9, 190; in Region 7, 265. That is a total of 755 to a tune of \$91 million. Is that not progress, Mr. Speaker?

Hinterland water: under the 2023 programme, a total of 36 wells were drilled in the hinterland. A total of \$1.4 billion was invested. Seven wells were drilled in Region 1. One was drilled in Region 2 and that was at Capoey.

8.20 p.m.

There was one in Region 4 and that is at Silver Hill. There were two in Region 7 at Kaikan and Westerbeck. There were five in Region 8, including Kamana, Paramakatoi, and Mahdia. There were 20 in Region 9, including Sand Creek, Rupanau, Kaicumbay, Yakarinta, Shriiri, Katoka, Rukumuta, Aishalton, Awarewaunau, Rewa, Potarinou, Baitoon, Katoonarib and Quatata. For 2024, a minimum of 40 wells are planned to be completed with a budget of \$1.5 billion. The plans for each region include the following: 20 wells to be completed in Region 1 in the villages of Santa Cruz, Warapoka, Kokerite, Barima, Koriabo and Hotoquai. Some 15 wells in Regions 2 and 3 in villages including Mashabo, St. Denys, Tapakuma Village, St. Monica and Friendship.

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

Ms. Rodrigues: Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleague be given five minutes to complete his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hinterland coverage grew from 20 with around 45% of the population

in the hinterland with access to water to 75% at the end of 2022 and 83% at the end of 2023. It is targeted to achieve a maximum of 93% by the end of 2024 and 100% by the end of 2025.

Budget 2024 serves as a roadmap for a prosperous future for all Guyanese. Under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government's vision and leadership, strategic plans have been implemented to attract private investment, enhance infrastructure and social services, and create ample opportunities for all Guyanese. The focus on job creation and personal growth has contributed to a comfortable and improved quality of life for citizens across the nation. The People's Progressive Party/Civic's fiscal priorities are clear, empowering Amerindian communities through targeted development programmes. Allocations are data-backed, aligning seamlessly with overarching economic strategies. This budget underscores our commitment to strengthening the Amerindian land tenure, promoting sustainable village economies and upgrading essential infrastructure in the Amerindian regions.

Mr. Speaker, as we present this vision for financial stability, it represents a collective effort towards building resilient communities. We affirm our commitment to fiscal responsibility, emphasising that this budget not only allocates funds but invests in the dreams and aspirations of Guyana's people, fostering a future of prosperity for all.

In conclusion, *Budget 2024* prioritises the needs and well-being of the people with a strong focus on improving citizens' lives, emphasising welfare and aiming for inclusive growth. It adopts a people-centric approach. Tailored to address concerns and aspirations, the budget aligns the citizens' needs, putting them first, centred around individuals. It enhances overall societal welfare through social initiatives, reflecting a people-driven agenda and fostering inclusive development. With this, Mr. Speaker, I commend *Budget 2024* for passage. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Presiding Member: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Beverly Alert, to address us.

Ms. Alert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Coming this late on hump day is not the easiest thing.

Presiding Member: I notice that you still look alert.

Ms. Alert: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, I do. Before I get into my presentation, allow me to join my colleague, Mr. Devin Sears, in expressing full appreciation for the concern of Hon. Speaker, Mr. Manzoor Nadir, over the welfare and

well-being of our colleague, Hon. Geeta Chandan-Edmond and also to colleagues on the other side of the House who came over and expressed concern. At a time when our women are coming under such vile attack, their genuine concern was most refreshing and most welcome. We thank you. All is not lost.

Mr. Speaker, as I join my colleagues in debate of the national budget for 2024, I wish to place on record appreciation for the hard work which was done by staff of all the Ministries and agencies to bring this budget to this House. Special appreciation for the work of the staff of the Ministry of Finance. *Budget 2024*, presented under the theme, *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity for All*, provides for expenditure of over a trillion dollars, the largest amount to be appropriated by any of our governments. But so too was the \$782 plus billion last year. Every year, it keeps growing, more and more money is being spent. With the supplemental papers, the real 2023 expenditure was also in the trillion dollars line.

As we listened to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Singh, in his longest ever presentation to this Assembly, of the largest ever budget for this country, it was billions here, billions there, a couple of hundreds of millions here and a few hundreds of millions there. Just hundreds of millions and billions everywhere. Just spend, spend, spend. What about value for money? When the stardust and moon glow of *Budget 2024* have settled and the Copperfield effect has disappeared, then what is left is heavy and grey. Like thousands of other Guyanese, I was disappointed that more was not provided for public servants and pensioners to ease the burden of the cost of living. When we examine *Budget 2024*, it must be in the context of present economic circumstances. Quoting from *Guyana Chronicle* of December 12, 2023:

“Guyana’s economy has tripled in size since the start of oil extraction (end of 2019).”

This is from one of the lowest per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Latin America and the Caribbean in the early 90s.

“It is estimated that Guyana’s economy should record a 38.4 per cent real GDP growth rate this year...”

That was in 2023.

“...while growth rate should continue with an expansion of unexpected 26.6 per cent in 2024.”

The *Guyana Chronicle* was quoting an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report. In 2019, the pre-oil year, Guyana’s GDP per capita was US\$6,473. In 2021, the first year after oil production started, the World Bank data showed that Guyana had already entered the top 100 per capita economies of the world. Colleagues before me have spoken about economic growth, and so too has Members of the Government side of the House, and rightly so. In 2023, per capita GDP was over \$20,000, from \$6,473 in 2019 to \$20,539 in 2023, a 300% increase. And that, Mr. Speaker, is the context in which this budget has to be examined. For when the economy grows, it is the natural expectation of the masses that they will get more. For if we produce more, then it follows that our people should get and deserve more. I am not saying equal percentage increase in earnings. What I am saying is that the increase in GDP and per capita earnings should be reflected in what our citizens, especially our disadvantaged citizens, are getting. So, when the Government comes to this House and announces a \$3,000 increase for our senior citizens, and a few thousand dollars more for the differently abled in society, then, as we would say, *the maths ain’t mathsing*.

My colleague, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, provided undisputable statistics to show the widening of the divide between the elite and the poor in this country and the humongous salaries of Ministers of Government. Then, my colleague, the Hon. Christopher Jones, brought to our attention the paltry salaries of ordinary public servants and the next-to-nothing increase for those on the lower end of the salary scale. *Chalk to cheese* does not begin to describe it. There is always the ridiculously positive rebuttal of what the Coalition did and failed to do. Let this House be reminded that under the Coalition Government, our petroleum industry came on stream, from discovery to production, in one of the fastest ramp-up the global oil industry has ever seen. It is, today, the industry that is driving massive growth across all sectors.

Mr. Speaker, the PPP/C of today would want Guyanese to believe that they are pro-poor and the Government for the working class, but I say that philosophy died with Dr. Cheddi Jagan.

As I said, let us examine *Budget 2024* in context of economic circumstances. Many would recall that when the PPP came to office in 1992, just within a few months, Dr. Jagan increased minimum wage by 46%. It was Dr. Jagan who also instructed that a bipartisan committee be established to look at the ways and means of increasing public servants’ wages and salaries. The committee found

that wages could be increased between 25% for the lowest band to 15% for the highest band, and that was at a time when Guyana was categorised as a heavily indebted poor country (HIPC). Today, Guyana is the fastest growing economy globally, when GDP per capita is up some 300% in the past three years. But this Government can only provide a measly, miserly, paltry, skimpy 6.5% salary increase to public servants, an insult to the memory of the founder of the PPP. To compound the misery of the poor, working class, the 6.5% increase is across the board. So, what the elite class in Guyana gets as an increase on their already massive salary could be the full salary for many ordinary citizens. So, how better off are people today as compared to 2019 – the pre-oil era? There should be no screw face, no anger, no resentment and no vexation. All Guyanese should be walking around comfortable with their pockets. Instead, it is one set of people smiling. The elite who gorges themselves at the trough of super salaries, inflated contracts, and backroom deals, they are smiling all the way to the bank, while the masses, the public servants, in the one to three or five salary scale, look on from the outside as the rich get richer and they regress into abject poverty.

As I said, what about value for money? As I listened to the Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service presenting *Budget 2024*, the words of Morgan Heritage kept ringing in my ears, and it seems like we have a lot of people in here who like music and movies.

8.35 p.m.

The words ‘do you see anything to smile about’ – billions being spent but at the Belle West Health Centre, Region 3, there are elderly persons who cannot get their blood sugar tested. A simple, basic, but lifesaving thing as a blood sugar test, very often, cannot be done because the Health Centre is out of strips. Mr. Speaker, do you see anything to smile about? In April last year, *Stabroek News* reported that at the West Demerara Regional Hospital, a 16-year-old was admitted on a Friday. Up until the Sunday when he died, he was not attended to by a doctor. Mr. Speaker, do you see anything to smile about? When a pregnant woman dies because she cannot get oxygen at the hospital, do you see anything to smile about? People living at the squatting area, at the seaside of Anna Catherina or Vreed-en-Hoop jetty or Parika mud flat, many of them do not even have latrines, Mr. Speaker, do you see anything to smile about? Only yesterday at the newly commissioned school at De Willem, Region 3, the children had to be sent home. There was no school because the washrooms were flooded, the sewage was

backed up. The school was commissioned on 17th January this year, and by the 23rd January, just two days of it being occupied, it had to be closed because the sewage was backing up. I guess that is what you get when friends, family and favourites turn a contractor. I am not even going to touch Bamia School because there is nothing there to smile about.

While the Government boast of how much they spent building schools in Region 3, the results at the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) and Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC), apart from the few top performers, is again nothing to smile about. No one on this side of the Assembly is disputing the need for more schools to ensure all of our children can find a place into schools, but to pluck out a few high performances is nothing but the Copperfield effect. Shine the spotlight on where you want the audience to focus, but dare you look in the shadows, yes, the shadows, for there you will learn that at the primary level, some 75% of the students who write the National Grade Six Assessment, do not, I repeat, do not achieve 75% of the total marks to be earned. The *Guyana Times* of 8th July, out of over 15,000 students who wrote the assessment, more than 11,000 did not get 75% of the marks. This is at the primary level, the bedrock of education. I hope no one would dispute the importance of primary education. No one is denying the importance of classrooms, books, and trained teachers, but there is a disconnect between the inputs into the education system and the outcomes. As a nation we must not rest until those figures are turned around, where, at the very minimum, 75% of our children achieve at least 75% of the marks at the NGSA. This is not about scoring political points and political mileage. This is about the future of our country whether we have thugs and beggars in the streets or technicians and other professionals in the yard, that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service said we need.

What is recommended – because often they say that we come and we do not recommendations – is a taskforce comprising the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, the security sector, the private sector, women agencies such as the Mother’s Union, that would examine existing circumstances in each school so as to allow an environment where teachers can transfer knowledge in a safe environment. Let us find out what the problem is and fix it because it is fast becoming a situation where school is not a safe place. The school term just started a few weeks ago and yesterday there was a report at Zeeburg. A parent had their child hit another child in the

presence of a teacher, and the teacher was so afraid, too intimidated to do anything about it. Every day there is bullying; teachers are threatened with bodily harm and too often those threats are carried out. At Vreed-en-Hoop Secondary School gangs of young men terrorise students and teachers. How will the billions end this scourge?

I will continue to look at what is taking place in Region 3 under the PPP/C Government and the failure to address the needs of the ordinary people. More than a year ago, at a PPP/C public meeting on the West Bank Demerara, I personally asked that the playground at La Retraite be rehabilitated. The Hon. Vice President was there, the Hon. Minister Indar was there – and I am sorry that he is not in the House right now – and I spoke with him directly. To date, nothing has been done. The ground remains overgrown and the fence is in disrepair. The young men from La Retraite and Stanleytown who want to play *ah lil* scrubby football on the weekends, try to keep a portion clear but lack the resources to clear the entire ground. This ground is next door to a school. Still on the West Bank Demerara, at Bagotville, the same thing...

Presiding Member: Hon. Member, before you continue to tell us about the West Bank Demerara, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. Alert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is the same thing at Bagotville. My grandfather came from the Pomeroun, so the proud Carib blood flows in my veins. For centuries, our nation's first peoples have preserved the forest. Their sacrifice today allows for those forests to earn money in the form of carbon credits, yet, like subjects of a colony, they do not control how those funds are spent. A paltry 15% is given to them. Last year, I said they should get no less than 50% and I make that call again. The first peoples of this nation must be allowed to chart their own course, to define the agenda of their conference, to set their own budget for it, and they should be allowed to take the money for the carbon credits to fund their conference. Our Amerindian peoples are free and must benefit from the sacrifice of generations of their fore parents.

[*Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair.*]

Last year, Guyanese and the world watched in disbelief as 20 beautiful souls suffered an avoidable fiery death – avoidable. We learnt from the survivors how the fire quickly spread across the polyvinyl chloride (PVC) ceiling fuelling the flames. It will shock Guyanese and it will shock the world to know that portions of the newly commissioned school dorms at Leonora have PVC. Do we not learn? Do we not learn?

One of the largest allocations of *Budget 2024* for a single project is for the gas to shore project that is said would provide 300 megawatts of energy. One, last year power consumption peaked at 182 megawatts. How really is this Government catering for an expanded manufacturing sector? Two, the peoples' money is being spent on this project, but to date we do not have the final figure for this project. And three, ExxonMobil has not made a final investment decision on this project. The Government keeps siphoning off money out of the national coffers for this project, but what the people do not know of this project, far out knows what is known. As I said, *Budget 2024* has the Copperfield effect, that illusion of doing great, wonderful and seemingly impossible in achievements. Unlike Copperfield where it is just an illusion and the building remains in place, at the end of 2024, the PPP/C would make more than a trillion dollars disappear from the national coffers. Like my colleagues and the poor hardworking public servants, the pensioners, and the impoverished in the fastest growing economy, I cannot support *Budget 2024*. It needs to go back to the drawing board.

Budget 2024, Staying the Course is more like a curse, the curse to the memory and legacy of Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the curse to our old age pensioners, the curse to our hardworking public servants, the curse to the poor people of Guyana, and a curse to the yet unborn Guyanese child who on entering the world will be burdened by debt. Come 2025... [An.

Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*) Yes, because I was in the media, and I covered many assignments with him. Come 2025, the good people of this land will do the comparison. What they got before oil under the Coalition Government and what they are getting now that the economy has grown by 300%, they will take the red jersey, they will take the money, they will take the barbecue, attend the free concerts and they will change course. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to join in the debate and in the discussion. First of all, let me join with our colleagues from over the other aisle, the other side, in expressing our concern for the health and wellbeing of our fallen Comrade or rather should I say the patient

who... I want to tell you that she is having the best care we can afford. She was seen almost immediately as she entered the Accident and Emergency (A&E). As I understand it, she underwent a computed tomography (CT) scan and the medical personnel, the entire team with the necessary skills, are already reviewing that. Let us keep our fingers crossed. We do understand your concern and we will try to work together.

Having said that, the Budget this year is a special budget but, yet, it still reveals characteristics of previous budgets over the past three years. This is an early budget. It is a good tradition that the Ministry of Finance, including the entire team headed by Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh have been able to re-establish. This year, it is early, in January, and I think it was about the same time last year. That is why I want to thank Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his team specifically, not only on my own behalf, but on behalf of the Regional Executive Officers (REOs) and others in the regions who will be the managers to implement this Budget. Why am I emphasising this point? In the past we might have passed a budget three months in any particular year. These apparatchiks – the REOs, the Deputy Regional Executive Officers (DREOs), the Regional Health Officers (RHOs) and the heads of the department in the regions – would be expected, in that shortened time of say nine months, to be able to deliver on a 12-month budget. This change is very much welcomed.

You would recall that in the past years, towards the end of the year, the leadership in the different regions would be scrambling to get projects done and that was unfair to them. I want to thank the powers that be in the Ministry of Finance, especially Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his hardworking team, for getting us back on track – two or three consecutive years, and that is it. These things might not be appreciated by many parliamentarians here and more so by the public. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh did his work early in the previous years which started from about the first quarter, and that is why we have an early budget. What I do understand – and this might be a state secret – is that he is attempting to have it done this year, in December. So, for the next year we would already be hitting the ground running from 1st January. [Mr. Mahipaul: ‘Behri,’ you are releasing state secrets.] I got your attention. You are showing me that is so.

This early budget does many things. It builds on the achievements we have already had from the previous budget. You can see it in the narrative if you looked at the various books or volumes coming out from the Ministry of Finance. Every detail is there if you pay attention and if you put a

little effort into it. This Budget is based on the achievements and will continue, in some cases, the projects from multi-year. I want to congratulate the team for doing that and pointing it out to us, especially in the speech by Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, when he introduced the Budget. I would like to call on our colleagues across that way to probably put a little bit more energy, a little bit more time into doing that, that is, comparing what we have now. It is all there in volumes one, two and three. And some of you might even want to change parties because by now you should realise, Mr. Speaker, that they are wasting time over there. Some of them are quite bright, from their performances we saw, but they seem to be trapped over there. We are liberating you. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I am told that the PPP/C is extending their civic component. You might find a place there. I am told that he who laughs the loudest sometimes will be the first one. Now, I know the Minister will go into great depth.

8.50 p.m.

I know when Dr. Anthony comes to the fore he will do a good job of putting on more information, so I will restrict myself to certain things. Thank you from myself for the early budget but more so the apparatchiks in the regions are very thankful and happy. The next thing they want to announce publicly is the way the Ministry of Finance engaged them for months – and that is worth applauding – when some time last year or the second half of the year when we might have been thinking about an early Christmas, going home early and so on, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his team were travelling the country, and in some cases having meetings virtually, to get the details that they wanted. As a matter of fact, I am told that this year they will start working as early as March to July, to prepare next year’s budget. I congratulate them for that, not only from myself and the team over here, but the team... [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] I am hearing a voice in the wilderness. Mr. Speaker, could you protect me?

What does it mean to have an early budget? It means giving more time to those persons whom we sometimes look angrily on, in the regions, when they do not perform by December. In some cases, they are hustling to get rid of the moneys by doing *knicks knacks* in the regions and asking for waivers. That will not be happening this year. If it does, it means that they will be putting their professional reputation at stake or on the chopping block.

Health: The difference in the sums allocated for this year and last year are significant. In other words, as one observer

pointed out, the PPP/C does things to scale. We do not do anything too small. The increases are, for example, from \$90.2 billion last year, now it is \$129.8 billion – a quantum leap. Why is that so? It is because we are changing the visible architecture in the sector. Six new hospitals are going to be built. As a matter of fact, in many cases, the foundations are far gone in preparations. It would be good if, probably, as a part of solidarity, the Parliament can decide, not only one committee in the Parliament, to go visit, to give support, give solidarity, to these workers on the site there – six new hospitals, including a maternal and paediatric hospital. Maternal, meaning the woman who gave birth or those who have given birth recently, up to the first two months of the post delivery time and their infants. That would be one of the six brand new hospitals. We are not rushing it; the plans are there. The foundation has started to be laid in many cases. What we started to do is – and it is reflected in this year's Budget – train. Of course, some wise aleck over there made a very good observation that we are building hospitals but we do not have people. That is so; we do not have enough now. The hospital will be supplied by nurses who will be coming out an expanded nursing school financing the nursing training. It is all there in this Budget.

Again I want to point out the team that helped to craft the budget – the Office of the President and the office of Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, the Ministry of Finance – did a great job with coordination. What is more, they not only coordinated among themselves at the top level – the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the President – they actually had numerous meetings in the regions. [Interruption] So he is awake; the guy is awake. I am happy I am catching your attention. It was a grassroot effort in the regions, especially on the coastal areas, but also in the hinterland. There are many other things for the hinterland that are specific to them. For example, bringing up Lethem, there will be certain installation, certain new equipment. Why? Although we might not have the complete team to exploit fully those equipment, there would be visiting teams but you have to have the equipment there. The next thing is – in the Budget it is pointed out too – once you have expensive equipment, you have to be able to spend to keep them up to date, keep them maintained. That sometimes is a bother in terms of the expensive costs that it incurs, and in some cases such equipment is so specialised and expensive that you have to import the manufacturer's person, even beyond the warranty period, to repair them, to maintain them.

A next thing you will notice in this Budget is training. Training under health is very much expanded this year in terms of the volume of money that has been allocated. I

suspect that you would already recognise that part of that money will go to training local persons to do exactly the repairs. Remember, there is a guarantee period for these expensive equipment. If you are supposed to titivate or so with them, you would have lost the opportunity to bring in the specialist who are obliged by contract, for the first year or the first six months, to come and repair and maintain them. Training under the Ministry of Health will include training of specialists, Biomedical Technicians or Biomedical Engineers, a very expensive and a very specialist area. In some cases, some bits and pieces of machines are repaired by only specific people, and in some cases by the manufacturer or by people they have trained in the country where it was bought, like Guyana for example. So we are on the right track. We are back on track. We would not be backing up this time. It is straight forward. We will be going forward, forward, but in an informed manner, and the method we have done to make sure that we inform is visitation. I can tell you this: When we were in the Opposition for that short and unfortunate period and we walked around in the regions we never saw the leaders of that Party – the PNC/APNU/AFC – doing such information gathering, because the basic information gathering has to be done not by telephone, you have to be there.

I want to thank, again, the Regional Health Officers who devoted lots of their time, sometimes at short notice, for us to visit, revisited and revisited again, certain areas until we decided that we had the right information to go into the budget. What I am saying is, this is not an exercise only by Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his team but we need to value that support from those at the grassroots. Practical experience shows that sometimes we would have been missing certain things if we had not gone down. This is not only for this year's budget but in the past. You have to go there. Many politicians – I can exclude myself from that – boast that they run down to the grassroot. We do that but we do not boast about it but that is where we get the information. For example, we recently completed something called the... [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible) grassroot.] I am firmly seated, bedded in the grassroot. That is what I am saying. That is why I could compare when you were in Office; we did not see you at the grassroot. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] No, that is going a bit young.

We have the fusion of efforts at the central level, that is the Ministry of Health. Of course, the Ministry of Health, as you noticed in the Budget, has seven different programmes. One is dedicated to standards and that is the programme which sends out the operators to check that the machines are being maintained properly and so on. What is more? There is a

next difficulty we are trying to overcome. Sometimes we have, in the sector, very expensive equipment but there is no standardisation. Even if we are to train – and I see the Minister of Public Service is empathising with me – for one machine to be repaired, that team of maintenance people will not be able to operate in another region on another piece of equipment. We are trying to standardise the purchase, the trademarks and. Ordinary people like me and you will understand that if we have a car and someone else has a similar car, it is easier to come together and put heads together and repair the car, instead of having two different models, and so on. I think you got the message. We are putting (*inaudible*) too by this, having the right people in the right place at the right time, not only in the clinical aspect of it but in the maintenance of it, so that we do not... [An

Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*) Incidentally, that young lady, or colleague, has just, I think, undergone her CT scan at the Georgetown Public Hospital Georgetown (GPHC) and they are reviewing it. Yes, I am happy for that prompt. We are pushing up for that level, and it will have to be across a period of years. So by 2025 we should be having all the basic equipment. [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)

I aint hard ears, *yuh* know. Any hard ears people *yuh* looking *fuh*, just check across there. I want to be kind this time, so I would not rub them too much. I am told that the most hard ears one is the one *wuh* does *mek de* most noise. [An

Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*) You said it; I did not.

We are trying to standardise all of our expensive equipment and there are to be lots of that, not only in this Budget for this year but if you look at the prospective budget and the figures for next year, you will see that there is massive investment. The five years that we lost to the fluke PNC victory... [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)

Yes, really lick us up. The first few years of the PPP/C Government, we did up to 10 new hospitals at Diamond, Leonora, Suddie, Mahaicony, Port Mourant, and extensive increases in the investment in Moruca that was in the past. Our idea was, and this was very much supported and even guided by Dr. Jagdeo, that we were preparing basic infrastructure at that period so that in the near future, which should have been now – we had the misfortune of losing the controversial elections – we would have been going the higher level of infrastructure. Now, we have done that after being out of power for five years and we will be having the six new hospitals that I referred to, practically on all the coastal regions and Lethem. That is something that we should be applauding the Government for – six new hospitals by 2025. To do that, stone, concrete and glass are not enough. Therefore, massive training has started.

I heard some ill-informed comments that we should not be bringing in nurses. The mere fact is, this Government is not lying to you, we are telling you the truth... [An Hon.

Member: (*Inaudible*) Yes, you said that. Why are we importing skilled...? Why are we doing that? It is because, in the meantime, upscaling of our training of our nurses. For example, do you remember we had put in night training? Do you remember I had put in night training for nurses? Do you remember, Opposition? I had found the building in Kingston; a nice building. I seized it; I needed it. I got good support from the then Ministry of Finance. We had to do little repairs. When we started... [An Hon. Member:

(*Inaudible*) That is the only way you will get enough nurses. I hear a voice across there agreeing with me, not only this side, but I think... [An Hon. Member:

(*Inaudible*.) Who did not agree? [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] I will enlighten you during the coffee break.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, that chit chat has used up your first allocation of 15 minutes.

Dr. Ramsaran: I think I have caught their attention, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*.)] No, I am waiting for the five minutes.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, may the Hon. Member have five minutes to conclude his presentation?

Dr. Ramsaran: This is going to be the key five minutes. We are going to elucidate something.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Parag. Hon. Member, Dr. Ramsaran.

Dr. Ramsaran: You see the general trend is moving in several directions at the same time, while at the same time understanding two things – building theatres themselves, operating theatres themselves, even the most modern, would be a burden and quite useless if we do not have what? The people, what managers like to refer to now as the human resources (HR); and that is the next big component that you see in this Budget, medical training. And one part of it, which is funded by this Budget – and we are a small country, we have a small medical fraternity – in many cases when we do not have the skills to train or to upgrade people who have already been trained, we will be importing those, building relationships with all the key universities and university hospitals across the world, until we get there. So we will be importing the skills to initially train and at the same time create here our pedagogues; our people will teach our people

here, teach our youngsters here. This is not only for the doctors, this is for nursing. In this Budget you will notice that nursing will have a big explosion, a positive explosion. As a matter of fact – and some people over there did mention it – we are losing our nurses. Why do you think so? It is because they are good. We have already broken that discussion. Should we not train for countries that want our nurses, especially North America and Canada and the small islands. Can we not say come and let us train your nurses for you? We are working on that. Under my term as the Minister of Health, we had active discussions with leadership in the small islands, the leadership of the health sector and the public service to do exactly that. We did start, not with nurses or doctors but with the other health workers, lesser qualified health workers.

I remember in one case coming back from the international conference where I met some people and I invited them to take advantage of our training, not as nurses and doctors only but as laboratory technicians. Before I could turn my back, a delegation was already there. The Mama, the older lady, brought in nine Caribbean students to join our programmes and we were happy. What I did? I said, ‘we will not take a cent from you. We invited you and we will help you find housing, but we cannot pay it.’ They said, okay, that Guyana is so good. That particular delegation started to refer to Guyana as ‘Big Brother’. We extended our hands there and we gave them the training, free. Initially, we gave them transportation from where they were living to the training centres, free. Then they, what? They were to pay. We even located houses they could rent. What does that mean? The warriors, the wellness warriors. It means that the health sector can bring in money into the country, not only by offering services of a particular nature but by actually teaching. That is why I think, even the Opposition should make known to themselves, this nice little booklet ‘opportunities given by the Ministry of Health.’ If you have friends overseas, and they want to come for training, we cannot bring them in but we can give them, in some aspects, free training, like we did with the small islands. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] Yes, some of them said they want other fancy things in it, so we are looking at it. That is the next point I heard.

9.05 p.m.

I want to tell you, before I take my seat, about the links with very excellent international hospitals and centres of learning; Mount Sinai was mentioned. There are so many others, but we will bring it up later on across the year as we speak. Centres of excellence, as a matter of fact, have started to

come here; they are fighting, tumbling over each other to get here, we welcome that. We will not give up our sovereignty.

Medical tourism, another aspect of it. I see we have some bright fellows over that side too. So, yes, medical tourism from this aspect. If you look back into history, dentistry, Guyanese sometimes come back home to do what? Go to their favourite dentist. We are going to be encouraging that, not only for dentistry and dental interventions but...

[Mr. Bharrat: (Inaudible)] Exactly. The Port Mourant Hospital (inaudible) was meant to be that, but remember how Mr. Moses Nagamootoo opposed it. Khemraj Ramjattan opposed it, stood up and voted it down, and I never got the money to complete it. We are going to be doing that now.

[Mr. Mahipaul: Hon. Khemraj.] Hon. Khemraj. Where is he?

[Mr. Ramson: He gone and drink.] I hope that is Adam's ale. Coming back to the... in conclusion, we have it...

[Mr. Mahipaul: You cannot come back, your time done.]

Again, I am hearing that nagging voice, that annoying voice – lots of noise and no sense. Anyhow, we have a good mix, a good mix of creating the HR needed while at the same time you see buildings going up.

What I would suspect we can do – I have to speak to Hon. Ms. Teixeira who is my boss in this regard – we can probably organise joint visits to these sites, not only as parliamentarians in a particular health committee but the general Parliament, and you will be impressed. As a matter of fact, I think if we do that, we will definitely have to expand the civic. I am told that by the end of some trips, by the end of some visits to certain hospitals, some of them were already concluding, ‘we *gah* join them otherwise we *getten leff* out.’ I am doing that especially for you, you can pass it on through the Chair to your colleagues, but you have to start behaving properly. *Yuh gattah* be fit and *prappa*. Some of the lawlessness we have seen would not be tolerated in the health sector, especially when we are expecting many Guyanese, based overseas, to come back to do not only traditional dental work but any other thing.

We are right now actively equipping or giving information to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation so that they can pass it through our embassies, that Guyanese who might have skills and want to come back home to Guyana can contribute. Incidentally, we have already had such offers, and we are looking into them. How do you accredit people who you know have the skills, but you have to go through the paperwork? Guyanese, who have retired, who have gained good reputation in centres of excellence in North America and Canada and even in Britain, they want to come back now and give something.

We have not only the schools in terms of physical infrastructure, but we are already looking for the faculty. Of course, over there, if you have any persons you know who migrated from Guyana and you are in contact with them, we will welcome your information to tell us how to get to them. Incidentally, while we are speaking about...

Mr. Speaker: Incidentally, Hon. Member, you need to wrap up.

Dr. Ramsaran: What I am saying is this: incidentally, some of the things we failed to do because we lost power are still in our Manifesto and we are strictly keeping to that and I would advise the Guyanese public, and even the Opposition, to look at our Manifesto. Some of you might lose consciousness when you realise how powerful it is, but those of you who do survive that activity come tell us, yes, Dr. Ramsaran, yes. Yes, to the other doctors and so on; you have done well. The PPP/C has been working quietly in and out of government to realise what? Its manifesto.

With that, I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will be available at the coffee break to elucidate and enlighten the Opposition Members. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] And I was just starting. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member Dr. Ramsaran. And from one medical doctor to another, we welcome the Hon. Member Dr. Jennifer Westford.

Dr. Westford: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I would also like to join my colleagues on this side of the House to commend this 2024 Budget which was so eloquently presented by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Special recognition is also given to the dedicated staff of the Ministry of Finance who participated in the preparation of this Budget.

Mr. Speaker, this future-securing Budget is replete with measures that are designed to further increase the benefits derived by all citizens and residents of this dear land of ours over the last three years. This 2024 Budget is staying the course along which the building of prosperity for all is optimum. The Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan posited that this Budget has nothing for the poor, especially when they have to feed themselves. If the Hon. Member had taken the time to read this Budget, he would have seen that every citizen will be benefitting from the transformation earmarked in this Budget through the increased allocations to the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, our citizens are already benefiting from investments made last year in facilitating the cultivation and the production of corn and soya, an investment, Mr. Speaker, that was frowned upon by Members of the opposition. Owing to the bountiful harvest of the aforementioned, the cost of livestock feed was diminished significantly earlier this month, thus resulting in the reduction in the price of eggs, chicken, mutton, and pork. This was as a result of the reduction in livestock feed; and this was a welcomed investment. The very persons who the Hon. Member spoke about, the poor, and as he said, the working poor, they are the ones who have benefited and will continue to benefit, because I can assure you that in the next few months, as I was informed by one of the major producers of the corn and soya, that we can expect even more reductions in the price of stock feed.

Mr. Speaker, as he did last year, once again, the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, was critical of this year's unparalleled investment in infrastructure development. The truth is, though, that the words 'infrastructure investment' causes shivers down the spine of the Hon. Members of the opposite side. The Hon. Member also alleged that these investments only benefited large contractors who he said made 20% profits on each contract. Firstly, it is scientifically proven that investments in infrastructure not only boost the economy in the short term but also set the foundation for long-term economic growth. It also facilitates the creation of jobs in various sectors, principally in construction and the engineering industries. Access to reliable transportation, clean water and electricity are essential for a healthy and functioning society. By investing in infrastructure, this Government is ensuring that our citizens have access to these basic necessities, leading to a better quality of life for all.

Secondly, the majority of the thousands of roads, drains, and bridges, that are built and will continue to be built in small communities, such as villages on the East Coast, the East Bank, in Kitty, Campbellville, Albouystown, and also community structures in Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. Significantly, these structures were and will continue to be built by small contractors whose workers predominantly hail from the very catchment areas and not by large contractors as intimated by the Hon. Member.

The Hon. Member Ms. Alert, when she spoke a short while ago, mentioned the case of a patient who was admitted to the West Demerara Hospital, and I repeat, admitted to the West Demerara Hospital on Friday and was not seen by a doctor, or by Sunday, and that patient died on Sunday. Firstly, I would like to advise the Hon. Member, and not only that

Hon. Member, I would like to advise all Hon. Members of this House, to please verify facts when they are reporting it here. The word admitted that I repeated a short while ago means that for a patient to be admitted to a hospital, they must have seen a doctor. So it is very unusual for her to say that the patient was not seen by a doctor. No other person, neither a nurse, a porter, no one, can admit a patient to a ward without... only a doctor can do that. Let me say that the health sector – and we have just heard Hon. Dr. Ramsaran telling us all about how many hospitals were built, health centres and all the rest of it – has been one of the major sectors that this Government has been investing heavily into, and one of the sectors that has seen enormous growth and improvement over the years, under the tutelage and administration of the PPP/C Government.

I must say that, once again this year, we heard another Member of the Opposition this time, last year it was from another member, who reported that there is this mysterious United Nations report that they are reporting a 4% malnutrition rate among children in Guyana. I tried to explain last year, probably I was not that clear.

9.20 p.m.

I would like to urge the persons who are reading or seeing that article and reporting of four per cent malnutrition – maybe let me say again, for the benefit of those Members, and probably, others who are listening to me – malnutrition does not mean the lack of food alone. Malnutrition means either lack of or too much of. I dare say that this problem we are having - I think they should not only look at the heading of that article, but they should read the article – is an issue of obesity or overnutrition in our children in Guyana. For that reason, the Ministry of Health has been employing additional staff who are categorised as nutritionists because it is a health issue. We feel that when we have nice fat babies everything is well, but it is a form of malnutrition. It is not the type of malnutrition that the Hon. Member, Mr. Vincent Henry, was trying to portray to us. Before saying that he said that there is a lack of food in the interior, in the Amerindian communities, when he mentioned the four per cent malnutrition. This means that the Hon. Member was trying to say that because they do not have food they are malnourished. Dr. Ramsaran and Dr. Anthony might remember the days when, in this country, the malnutrition was so severe that a ward actually existed for children called 'the malnutrition ward'. What we saw in the videos is what we are seeing here – malnutrition. It actually went further than our children. We had something called beriberi which was prevalent in mostly the prisons and that was a form of

malnutrition too. Thanks to the involvement and investment from the PPP/C Government when it took over in 1992. We saw it diminishing and then it was abolished. The malnutrition ward was abolished, and we then opened the paediatric surgery and medical wards.

To this day, I do not want to say that there is no case of real undernourishment and malnutrition because there are some other conditions that may cause children to look like that. I would want to put my head on a block that the Hon. Member, Mr. Vincent Henry, misinterpreted that article or was trying to mislead us in this House and the public. **[Dr. Anthony: (Inaudible)]**

Exactly. We started programmes and gave something – I do not know but all of you might have heard about it – called the sprinkles which were multivitamins and other minerals. We started those programmes. We started another programme where we actually give mothers at the clinics milk and porridge stuff for their babies and for themselves too. We did not only give nourishment to children, we also gave to the mothers too because we were encouraging them to breastfeed the babies. We have invested heavily in the health sector. The Hon. Minister, Dr. Frank Anthony, will tell you about all of what is in the Budget when the Hon. Member speaks because we still have lots of those programmes, we have improved such programmes in our Budget as it is now.

While on health, our immunisation programme is second to none in this hemisphere – second to none. Sometime back, ever so often, when one opens the newspaper, the person would always see and could put his/her head on a block that maternal deaths, one, two and three. That is something that would never be abolished. In no part of the world would it be abolished but it has significantly improved because our conditions have improved and our level of training... I do not want to misquote anyone, but I cannot recall which of the Hon. Members on the other side spoke about training persons; why do we train people when we cannot keep them; and we do not give them enough salary? Training persons is not only for the Government's use. We train persons and we will continue to train persons. We have had over 200 scholarships offered under the management of the former Minister of the Public Service. We have had lots of training programmes. We will continue with those training programmes. Our aim is to make our people marketable. Our aim is to make our people qualified enough to work in any part of this world not only in Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, my aim is to get you to conclude, and you have to do that in five minutes which the Hon. Member, Ms. Parag, will move.

Ms. Parag: May the Hon. Member please have five minutes to conclude, Mr. Speaker?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Thank you, Minister Parag. Hon. Dr. Westford, you may continue to conclude.

Dr. Westford: Thank you. This Government has stayed the course. We are not going to be deterred by persons saying, yes, you are spending moneys, but we need to see value for the money. We are getting our value for the moneys that we are spending. We are assured that our people are benefiting.

Mr. Speaker, if you go out there on the street and you stop the average person, he/she will tell you that he/she has been benefiting. Everyone will have his/her own expectations. Some people will say they want a donkey cart, some will say they want a car and others will say they want a helicopter. We all have different expectations but, basically, all of our citizens are benefiting. Our aim is to ensure that every Guyanese; man, child, woman and I dare say all citizens as well as residents once one is living in Guyana, he/she will benefit from the goodies and the good developmental issues that we are offering in this country. We will stay the course. We will continue our advancement. I want to urge my friends and Colleagues on the opposite side of this House. We know that you are in the Opposition, and we know that it is going to be difficult for you to say, oh this is a good Budget. You may not like everything in the Budget but, please, do not *bury your head in the sand* and even if you do not want to say it here, please acknowledge to yourself. You know that there are good things in this Budget. Yourself, friends, families and more so your constituents are benefiting and will continue to benefit from the policies and the investments of this PPP/C Government. We urge you to work with us. Those of you who would like to join us, you are welcome. Please, help us to sell this Budget and show the people out there that there are lots of good things that this Government is doing. We know it is politics but do not *bury your head in the sand* because it may be left there, and you do not want it to be left there. [An Hon. Member: Do not be an ostrich.] My Friend behind is saying do not be an ostrich because you might be caught, plucked and cooked.

In saying so, I would like to join with my other Colleagues and recommend this Budget to the House for passage. To all of us, I am the last speaker, let us have a safe journey home and come fresh tomorrow, renewed for more and better contributions from our friends on the opposite side. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Dr. Jennifer Westford.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to Thursday 25th January, 2024 at 10.00 a.m.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this brings us to the end of our business for today. Hon. Member, Ms. Sonia Parag, you have the floor.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, I seek the adjournment to tomorrow at 10.00 a.m. to continue the budget debates.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House now stands adjourn to 10.00 a.m. tomorrow. Thank you. Have a good night.

Sitting adjourned at 9.32 p.m.