



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*

78TH Sitting

Wednesday, 31ST January, 2024

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

Assembly convened at 10.23 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Welcome to the Covent Garden Secondary School Teachers and Students

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Members. Let us welcome the teachers and students of the Covent Garden Secondary School on the East Bank Demerara. Hon. Prime Minister (PM), it is our neighbouring village. Just to let the students know, the process you all will witness today is the examination of the Budget numbers, item by item and ministry by ministry. We go through a process of having Members of Parliament (MPs) ask the ministers questions with respect to what he or she is spending the money on.

Expression of Gratitude towards the Members of Parliament

Mr. Speaker: As we mentioned the Budget, it would be remiss of me not to mention that many persons see us in this dome and they think that is the work of you, the Members of Parliament, but there is a lot of other work happening to ensure we get in here. For this year with regard to our Committee of Supply and these Estimates, I really want to express my appreciation to the two Chief Whips and the leadership provided by the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul and the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Singh, for their work in getting these Estimates here. We have been off to a very good start to these days, perhaps the best start since I have been presiding over these sessions. I look forward to similar constructive comments as we have had yesterday.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31ST DECEMBER, 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. /////Check motion/////

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

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve itself into Committee to continue consideration of the Estimates.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: Our first Ministry for today is the Ministry of Agriculture. As we invite the Hon. Minister and his team to take their seats in the well, I will be updating you on the summary as of the end of yesterday. We have 60 minutes in savings carried over to today and we are starting today at 10.29 a.m. Hon. Members, I turn your attention to pages 138 and 139. If anyone is getting problems with turning these pages because our fingers are getting dry, let me know. We will provide you with sponges.

10.29 a.m.

Agency 21: Ministry of Agriculture

Current Estimates

Programme: 211 – Ministry Administration – \$1,248,836,000

Mr. Jordan: Cde. Chairman, good morning. Through you, Sir, permit me to extend to the family, friends and loved ones of Mr. Aaron Leitch, a District Crop Extension Officer of Region 10, our deepest condolences from the Opposition. Line items 6111 to 6117: Could the Hon. Minister state whether any employee, or how many employees would have resigned under these line items, from 2023 to date?

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the Hon. Member. Before I answer, I also want to join in extending our sincere condolences to this worker's family, Mr. Aaron Leitch who worked very hard for the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI). On my many visits to Region 10 and also in the Tacama area, he would normally be on the team. We will miss him. Last night a delegation from the Ministry of Agriculture went to the home. We will continue to keep them in our prayers and also see their needs presently. On behalf, once again, I want to extend our sincere condolences to the family. We will miss him dearly.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. On behalf of everyone here, too, we extend condolences to the family. Yours truly, actually, Mr. Minister, used to be the Chairman of NAREI at one time.

Mr. Mustapha: Okay. The Hon. Member asked about a number of line items, so I have to go in by individual line items because he asked for the entire line items 6111 to 6117.

For line item 6111, Administration, there is a decrease here of a Personnel Officer, who resigned in October, 2023. Line item 6112, Senior Technical, there is a decrease with the resignation of one Civil Engineer. Line item 6114, there is a decrease in line item due to the following: resignation of five officers; one person went on retirement; three Accounts Clerks, two Office Assistants and the Registry Supervisor have retired. Line item 6115, Semi-Skilled, there is a Handyman who has resigned, and line item 6116, there are a number of scholars whose contracts came to end from the Ministry's Administration but have now been placed in the individual agencies, such as NAREI, the Guyana Livestock Development Agency (GLDA) and so on. In line item 6117, there are

Temporary Employees who have moved to different heads in the various ministries. That is the overall numbers that the Member asked about. The total is 11.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan.

Mr. Jordan: I have no other question.

Mr. Chairman: You do not have any other question.

Programme: 211 – Ministry Administration – \$1,248,836,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 212 – Agriculture Development and Support Services – \$25,760,739,000

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, line item 6321, specifically to GLDA, I see in 2023 the Hon. Member asked for \$627 million, that is for Wages And Salaries. Now, there is a decline taking it to \$550 million. Could the Hon. Minister say what has occasioned that decline, and whether staff have resigned also for that agency, and how many?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, if I am right, I am looking here and I am not seeing a decrease. I am seeing an increase of \$62 million at the GLDA, the line item that the Hon. Member had... That increase came about because of eight additional Livestock Assistants that we have employed at the GLDA. I have not seen any decrease at that line item.

Mr. Jordan: I am at page 673.

Mr. Mustapha: Page 673?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mustapha: I am looking at the line item that you are talking about, Employment Cost. In 2023, we had \$722 million that was budgeted for Employment Cost. In 2024, I am seeing here \$785 million that has been budgeted. Below that, you are talking about Material, Equipment and Supplies. If you talk about Overhead Expenditure, or if you are talking about Wages and Salaries by itself, you will see a \$76 million that has been increased under Wages and Salaries. Are you talking about GLDA? Yes, Mr. Chairman, we are talking here.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, probably we have different books, but I am seeing, and permit me, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Jordan: Wages and Salaries in 2023 Revised is \$627,197,000. In 2024, it is \$550,206,000. Could you confirm that you are seeing the same, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: We are at the Guyana Livestock Development Agency. Which page are you on?

Mr. Jordan: I am on page 673.

Mr. Chairman: I am on page 673.

Mr. Jordan: Appendix T.

Mr. Chairman: Employment Cost.

Mr. Mustapha: When you look at this here and you look at the line item that the Hon. Member is looking at, you have to look at two, Overhead Expenditure and Wages and Salaries. The Wages and Salaries was showing a decrease but the Overhead Expenses, that has been reclassified with those employees, have increased to \$235 million. That is why in my records here it is showing two different figures. Employment Cost gone up by \$62 million and then the Wages and Salaries will show \$76 million increase. The total increase for the two areas, Wages and Salaries and Overhead Expenditure, declined by \$550,206,000, but the Overhead Expenditure increased to \$235 million.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would still like to know from the Minister, how many employees have resigned, if any rather, during the year 2023, from the GLDA?

Mr. Mustapha: Four employees have resigned.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, same line item, 6321, National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA). I see a sum there of \$17 billion. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell this honourable House the salary and benefits of the Chairman of the NDIA Board, please?

Mr. Mustapha: The Chairman does not receive a salary from the NDIA's Board. The Chairman and the Directors receive a stipend. They do not receive wages and salaries.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, forgive me, would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell us what that stipend is?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I think I can lay that information over.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell us the salary and benefits of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the NDIA, please? [**Mr. Hamilton:** *(Inaudible)*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, Mr. Hamilton, parliamentary words. If you want to make a contribution like that, you could come to the microphone.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, the salary for the CEO is \$1.3 million, on a contract gratuity.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I did not hear that. Would the Hon. Minister repeat, please?

Mr. Mustapha: It is \$1,303,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: Is that the salary and benefits or the salary and there is a separate benefit? Would the Minister clarify, please?

Mr. Mustapha: That is not included in the gratuity. The gratuity is one side. The other [*inaudible*]

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Hon. Sir.

Programme: 212 – Agriculture Development and Support Services – \$25,760,739,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 213 – Fisheries – \$532,506,000

Programme: 213 – Fisheries – \$532,506,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 214 – Hydrometeorological Services – \$704,979,000

Programme: 214 – Hydrometeorological Services – \$704,979,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Estimates

Programme: 211 – Ministry Administration – \$1,535,500,000

Mr. Jordan: I would just like to ask the Hon. Minister if he can lay over the breakdown for the buildings that are going to be maintained or repaired under this line item. Thank you.

Mr. Mustapha: It is just one building at the Ministry's head office, we will be repairing the entire northern side of that building.

Mr. Mahipaul: I heard the Hon. Member say that he will be repairing the existing building. This is a Capital project. Would it not have been a recurrent project under Maintenance of Buildings?

Mr. Mustapha: No. The wording, we will rehabilitate the entire building, not repair it.

Programme: 211 – Ministry Administration – \$1,535,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

10.44 a.m.

Programme: 212 – Agriculture Development and Support Services – \$21,760,500,000

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, over the last year the Minister mentioned and started works on a number of pump stations across the country, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister to give us a breakdown of the completion by percentage, and give us a definite date as to when these projects will be completed.

Mr. Chairman: We are speaking to project code 1301600, is that right? Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, we have not met that programme as yet. The Member is moving; pump station does not fall under that programme. If you want I can give the answer; I have the answer, but I am just saying, procedurally, we are not at that area. We are at flood risk.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, we are at Programme 212, Agricultural Development and Support Services.

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, 212. I will lay that over to the Hon. Member. **[Hon. Members:**
(Inaudible)]

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

We have pump stations going on and I will lay over all the information that he needs, the starting date and the final completion dates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, because it is in the description there at the NDIA. Hon. Member, Minister will lay that over. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I heard clearly that the Minister said he is willing to lay over the start date and completion date. May I add to that request whilst laying over, Sir, for the Hon. Minister to lay over the location of these pump stations, the name of the contractor for these pump stations, the contracted sum for these pump stations, the revised completion date from the date that was originally there for completion of these pump stations, the previous year expenditure for these pump stations, the current balance for these pump stations and the remarks...

Mr. Chairman: I may have to ask you to lay over that request.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, what I am looking at here, if I may, is the September, 2023, Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) report that gives a detailed breakdown of not only these pump stations but the entire capital programme of the NDIA, where we are seeing a number of projects still to be completed. Unfortunately, Sir, the October PSIP report to the NDIA Board was not submitted to the Board, the November PSIP report was not submitted to the board, the December one which was submitted was altered, not reflecting what it was in September and, as I looked at the minutes of that NDIA Board meeting, it was mentioned that they will not be providing this detailed breakdown as they did in September. So I am asking the Hon. Minister, in view of transparency and accountability, which I am sure he champions, if he can please lay over the PSIP report of the Capital Expenditure, similar to what I have for September, 2023, which I am willing to show him, if he can lay over that document as of 31st January, 2024, and if he can also request of the NDIA's CEO and Chairman to continue to give the PSIP report in the aim of transparency and accountability to the Board of Directors at NDIA?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, first of all, I want to clarify some misleading information to this National Assembly. I have here the Chairman and he told me that the board has received the report.

Mr. Chairman: I do not think the Hon. Member...

Mr. Mustapha: I do not know if the Hon. Member is a director of the board.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I was just cautioning you with the word misleading which would impute...

Mr. Mustapha: Misinformation, coming here. First of all, the Chairman told me just now that he and the Board have received reports. I do not know if the Hon. Mr. Mahipaul is a member of the Board of Directors, and he does not receive one. Secondly, we have been submitting these reports; these are public reports. All that the Member mentioned, because of our submission that is why he is getting those reports and all those details, and we are not afraid to lay the report. There were reasons. I went out and ensured that when the Hon. Member mentioned a number of issues, I answered them and said why these pump stations were delayed. The Hon. Member said that they were delinquent contractors and when we took steps to remove those contractors he went back and said blame the Government, the Government should not stop the contract. That is the hot and cold the Hon. Member blowing.

We had a pump station in Black Bush Polder for which we terminated the contract. The Hon. Member went and said how much money we lost and a whole set of issues. We responded to it. Likewise, those areas that we have pump stations now, I will be gladly laying over the report. I can read out the report, I have it in my hands, but it will take a lot of time. I will lay it over to them. I will give him all the details that he asked for. We do not have anything to hide from this side of the House. We are champions, yes, of accountability and transparency. We do not extort people; we do not go to contractors and say we are extorting you; you have to pay up or else we will report you. I have the evidence and I will take it out at the appropriate time... [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Certain people, I am not saying who, but certain people, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, as I rightly said to you, the last detailed PSIP report...

Mr. Chairman: Is it a question?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes. ...was of September, 2023, and that is what I am referencing here. October, November and December were not as detailed as this. The A Partnership for National Unity/

Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) has representation on the Board and that is how we acquire our information.

Sir, specifically to the pump station at Black Bush Polder, the Hon. Minister was kind enough to say that that pump station was terminated after failure to comply with numerous requests to do the work correctly. The design and supervision for the irrigation pump station at Black Bush Polder front land, Lot 4, was awarded to Innovative Engineering Consultancy Services to the tune of \$21,712,000. In the previous year, which was 2022, the sum of \$7,738,000 was paid to this consultancy firm and, in the year 2023, a sum of \$13,832,000 was paid to this consultancy firm. So the only amount of money, based on this PSIP report, as of September, 2023, that is owed to this consultancy firm is \$142,000, indicating that 99% of the budgeted expenditure was paid to the consultancy firm to supervise and design the pump station at Black Bush Polder. If the pump station was just 10% completed, why did the ministry go ahead and pay the supervision cost in full, basically, for this project?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, first of all, I want to say again, the NDIA Board is receiving the report; the Chairman here assured me that he has been receiving the report from the Board. The other issue that the Hon. Member mentioned, talking about the design and supervision by the consultant, indeed the job of the consultant is to look at the design, review the design, and ensure that the design is good for us to start the implementation of the project. The implementation was started and, during the course of the work, we found what the consultant informed us, that the contractor was not abiding with the rules in terms of getting the specifications done properly, and because of a number of failures that were highlighted by the consultant and our engineer, we terminated the contract. Now the contractor has received two payments. The first payment was contract mobilisation, and the other payment was part of a value for part of the work that he was doing, so I do not know what the Hon. Member is saying. Before we pay these payments, we have a bond that secures government funds, so we will not lose a cent from when we pay out those moneys. We have that bond for that contract, Hon. Member, and we will utilise it if there are overpayments from that work, but the contract has been terminated because the consultant cited a number of failures, and when we did the tests, the tests showed that, yes, there were failures.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, in my investigations surrounding these pump stations across the country, Sir, I have found out... **[Hon. Members: (Inaudible)]**

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Hon. Mr. Mahipaul, go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I was saying, in my investigation surrounding these pump stations, I have unearthed that these consultants, when they are finished doing their design, they would normally go to the engineering department of NDIA for ratification and basically to agree that this is exactly what has to be done before it is being accepted. My question to the Hon. Minister, would it not have been prudent financial management and better for the NDIA's engineering department to be enhanced and provided with the necessary resources, monetary and otherwise, for the engineers at NDIA to be the ones to do the design and supervision of these pump stations, which will not cost our country millions of dollars that go towards the consultant as opposed to our engineers that are in the system?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I do not know if the Member can comprehend what I am saying. What I am saying, listen attentively, we have a project design that is being reviewed by the consultant. After that review if the consultant has any issue with it, they come to the NDIA and they look at it and they agree, what has to be changed and what has to be added to that. When that is completed then we have a proper design for the project. That is a standard operating procedure when you do projects, that you do this design, yes, you do our design, but you have to have a person or a consultant. We normally have them to look and review it and they come back within the time to ensure that we have a proper design with both sides agreeing that the NDIA's engineering department and the consultant have a design that we can work with.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Before you take the floor Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, since we have been doing Estimates I have been referring to our Standing Orders, which allow prosecution, as the Hon. Attorney General will say, in a certain direction, and I draw... because I hear people shouting in my right ear about the debate is over, so judge if I am wrong in allowing the line of questioning.

“75. Procedure in Committee of Supply

- (2) On the consideration of the Estimates the Chairperson shall call the title of each Head of Expenditure in turn, and shall propose the question “That the sum of \$... stand part of the Estimates” ... unless an amendment is proposed under the provisions of the next Standing Order, a debate may take place on that question.

Any such debate shall be confined to the policy of the service for which the money is to be provided and shall not deal with the details of any item or Sub-Head but may refer to the details of revenues”

Which we have cautioned people about.

“...or funds for which that service is responsible.”

I stopped people asking questions on the revenue side yesterday when we dealt with the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA). I have had the debate confined to the appropriated amounts sought in the Estimates. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, I hope this puts the issue to rest.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much for that clarity, Cde. Chairman. The two pump stations at Region 3 that are currently under construction at A-Line Canal and Canal No. 1, they are way behind schedule as the Hon. Minister will agree with me on that. Sir, but in the process of building these two pump stations serious harm and deterioration were brought to the access road, both at Bagotville and Goed Fortuin.

10.59 a.m.

The one at Bagotville is causing our nursery schoolchildren to not have proper access to that nursery school. The one at Goed Fortuin is causing residents to not have access to their homes. Unfortunately, a senior citizen passed away two days ago. I was there. He had no proper access and so on. Outside of that, when they keep hammering these piles down to strengthen the area, the base of the pump station, they are destroying the homes of that families there. There is evidence of cracks in the walls and so on. Would the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) compensate that family for the destruction that was brought to their home and, secondly, would the NDIA add moneys to these contracts to rectify both access roads that are damaged so that they can come back to normalcy?

Mr. Chairman: There is another issue here; how people frame questions. The other issue is going to be whether there are provisions in this sum. Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mustapha: First of all, the roads that the Hon. Member mentioned, it is in the contract, the contractor will have to repair back the roads. In these contracts, there is something called Public

Liability Insurance. I do not know if the Hon. Member do not know about that. Any home destroyed or any person's assets destroyed would have to be replaced at the end of the contract. That is the way we will ensure we target and deal with that issue.

Mr. Mahipaul: Would the Hon. Minister please guide this Committee as to the reason there is that significant delay in the completion of the two pump stations at Canal Number One and A-Line?

Mr. Mustapha: The completion dates for those two contracts are 29th March and 30th April, respectively, this year. The delay came about because there were a number of other issues. For example, at the A-Line Pump Station there were a number of fisher folks there who had structures. We took about six months to get those people off that area. Then, there was a community centre at the other place there. We had to negotiate with the community. We had to build a new community centre and it took almost nine months before we got going. There were a number of issues. We are working with the community. The Hon. Member is aware if he visited and knows. He lives in the area.

Mr. Mahipaul: There are four other pump stations that were awarded last year. These pump stations are: one at Meten-Meer-Zorg, Belle Vue, Pouderoyen and Jimbo/Grove. The start date on the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) that I made reference is September, 2023. It states the start date for the one at Meten-Meer-Zorg which is 4th September, 2023; the one at Belle Vue is 27th June, 2023; the one at Pouderoyen is 27th June, 2023; and the one at Jimbo/Grove is around the same date, 4th September, 2023. Could the Hon. Minister say what is the reason for there not being any physical work actually at these sites? I did pay a visit to Belle Vue and Pouderoyen at the same time I was at Canal Number One and A-Line and no work is done there currently.

Mr. Mustapha: Here again, the document that the Hon. Member has there is probably not correct.

Mr. Mahipaul: Give me the right one; the updated one.

Mr. Mustapha: Listen to me; I have listened to you.

Mr. Chairman: You asked your question, now give the Hon. Minister a chance.

Mr. Mustapha: Now, we have had a review of those dates, after which we have had the design and consultation with the NDIA. Those projects are 18 months in duration. They will run up to 2025. The dates are August and July of next year. The new start dates will be 5th February and 30th January that we have in the contracts. As we are speaking now, there are test piles that have already been driven at Jimbo. We have the contractors procuring their steel sheet piles. These are important components that have to start with these pump stations, so works are going apace. We will ensure that we work and monitor these projects very closely.

Mr. Mahipaul: I look forward to the updated PSIP report because as the Minister rightly said, I have an outdated one. Sir, may I ask the Hon. Minister if, in this sum of \$10 billion, there is consideration for more pump stations, and if so, where are they going to be located?

Mr. Mustapha: Yes. There is another pump station at Chesney on the Corentyne that we will build this year. Very shortly, after this Budget is approved, we will put out the advertisement and move the process forward.

Mr. Mahipaul: Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to provide us with an update on the pump station at Cottage, West Coast Berbice, which was awarded to the tune of \$903,371,020 on 1st December, 2021, which is the start date that I have here? Based on September, 2023, PSIP report, it was just 44% completed.

Mr. Mustapha: This pump station is about 80% completed. The new completion date is 30th March.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister provide us with the update on the pump station at Andrews, Essequibo Coast, that was awarded in the sum of \$528,050,550 with a start date of 27th September, 2021?

Mr. Mustapha: That should be completed by the end of February. The pump is being installed presently as we are speaking here. The pump is onsite.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to provide us with an update on the construction of the pump station at Charity, Essequibo Coast, Region 2, which was awarded in the sum of \$544,890,203 with a start date of 8th July, 2022?

Mr. Mustapha: That is another project that we had a lot of challenges in removing squatters from the sea dam there. The project is about 25% completed. The contractor is continuing to drive piles there.

Mr. Mahipaul: Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to provide us with information pertaining to the construction of a pump station at Letter Kenny, Bloomfield Outfall channel, Corentyne Berbice, Region 6, which was awarded to the tune of \$759,379,100 with a start date of 20th July, 2023?

Mr. Mustapha: Works are in progress and the contractor is in the process of procuring steel sheet piles and the pumps.

Mr. Chairman: You would know every ounce of dirt in that area too.

Mr. Mustapha: Definitely. I will ensure that happens because that is my home community. Just one correction, Mr. Chairman. Probably, when the Hon. Senior Minister will be responding he will tell you about that area. That is an area where one of the structures of the Hope-like Canal will be built. The entire catchment area from Black Bush Polder to Port Mourant will drain through that area also. It is a large project that will go on there later on in this year.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much.

Mr. Mahipaul: With reference to the dredging of the Pomeroon River mouth, I know that this contract was awarded to the tune of \$569,300,000 and, of course, that was in keeping with the bill of quality and the scope of work which required specific type of equipment to go to the Pomeroon River to do that dredging. I am aware that because of the depth, draft and a whole host of other technical issues, it was not – the special equipment, I think it was a hopper dredger, that was supposed to go there – able to go for various reasons. Could the Hon. Minister indicate to this Committee if there was a change in the sum of money that was awarded because the scope of work had changed since the equipment that was supposed to go there was not able to go?

Mr. Mustapha: That is a good project. As a matter of fact, that project will bring a lot of relief to the farmers in the Pomeroon River. It will complement what we are doing there. For a total of 537 farmers, we are now lifting their beds by one metre. When we had the draft in the Pomeroon River as the Hon. Member mentioned, we went and saw the project. The contract sum remained the same

although we changed the scope of work because the place was so shallow that we had to create a channel for the cutterhead dredge to work. As we are speaking now, the cutterhead dredge is working but there are a lot of coconut husks coming out because people seem to dump the husks in the river. What we are doing now also is purchasing from the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) and the Hope Coconut Estate machines that we are using to help farmers in the Pomeroun River to do the mulching process and the value-added with these husks. We are now avoiding the husks being dumped into the Pomeroun River. The project cost or the contract cost has remained the same but the scope of work has changed because we have to do other designs.

Mr. Chairman: Excellent.

Mr. Mahipaul: I welcome the project to clear the river mouth at the Pomeroun. Indeed, it will bring relief to farmers once done correctly. Thank you very much and I look forward to the Hon. Minister to update my PSIP report with the correct status of these projects among others. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: He gave a speech at the end and not a question. Do you want to respond?

Mr. Mustapha: As I said, we do not have anything to hide. As you know for a fact, we always make information available. We are always accountable and transparent.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the questioning is finished. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, please, you have a good habit of giving additional speech when the persons are responding to the questions.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: I am trying to catch the microphone. Hon. Member Mr. Jordan, you have the floor.

Mr. Jordan: Sir, the project at Dantzig/Fairfield and Content foreshores, we see here another \$275 million provided for that project. Could the Hon. Minister say what is the correct percentage of work completed and when the work is expected to be completed?

Mr. Mustapha: That project was a rollover project. The completion date for the first phase of the project will be 31st March, 2024. We have an outstanding balance of \$21,278,000. The other breakdown was the 400 metres geotextile tube grind at Paradise Gib which will be completed on 28th February, 2024. We have an outstanding balance of \$13,415,000. Then, the \$240,360,000 disaggregates as follows: construction of 200 metres timber breakwater at Dantzig. If one remembers, in that area we had a serious failure, a saltwater intrusion. It was because of the saltwater intrusion many farmers are unable to plant there up to today's date. Under this Government, we have the farmers going back to the lands there because we have built the structure there. We will continue to build it. This year, we have 200 metres timber breakwater at Dantzig/Content for \$81 million.

11.14 a.m.

Then, we have a procurement of 6,000 tonnes of rock armour to do at Aberdeen, Columbia, at \$64 million. There is another small project construction of 200 metre rubber mount grind at Columbia and Essequibo, and a number of other areas that we have. Then, we have the mangrove monitoring. As you know, for a fact, since we started this programme, we are seeing now in the entire coastal area the resuscitation of the mangrove. We have built a mangrove centre at the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute's compound, where we are bringing students across the country now to train them there. We are having the community buy into this programme where we are restoring back our mangrove and that is helping our Low Carbon and Development Strategy (LCDS) in moving the process forward.

Mr. Jordan: Provision for drainage, irrigation structures and seat facility at Mahaica Mahaicony Abary - Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA), I see \$250 million. Could the Hon. Minister state whether vehicles and equipment are included in this sum for the MMA/ADA?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, if I can give you a disaggregation of this figure also. There are no vehicles and equipment in this but we have a number of capital works that we will execute this year to enhance the MMA/ADA scheme. I know for a fact that I am looking here to improve and increase acreage in that area. We have new areas and places such as Rampur - the Hon. Member might know about those areas - Herstelling and Karawab. Those areas we are trying now to increase acreage so that we can have cattle, rice and cash crop farmers taking up land there.

I will come later on to it. Remember, we are building now and we are building a food hub in Guyana. We have to ensure that Guyana be the food hub. We produce food in a large quantity because for us to be successful, by 2025, Guyana has to be successful and the entire Caribbean is looking to us now to ensure that we do that production. We now opened up new lands in MMA/ADA. We opened up new lands on the Corentyne. We opened up new lands in the Essequibo Coast. We are now getting farmers more land so that they can produce.

If the Hon. Member, for example, construction of secondary canal tail MMA/ADDA – \$15 million, improvement at Abary Conservancy – \$15 million and I have the details there, rehabilitation secondary channel embankment 500 acres, cattle pasture development at Bandetta \$70 million, and rehabilitation of the sea facility \$150 million. As you know Region Five now, in that entire scheme, this year we have almost 85 or close to 90,000 acres for this crop under rice cultivation. Most of the seeds are being produced right at MMA/ADA. With this improvement that we are having, we can be able to produce all the seed paddy needs for Region Five MMA/ADA scheme for 100,000 acres of rice. Those are the disaggregation for the \$250 million that the Hon. Member asked. I will give him a copy of this.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, moving to the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA), could the Hon. Minister state under the provision for livestock development, who are the suppliers of the shade houses to be built and those that have started?

Mr. Mustapha: Are you sure the GLDA has a shade house? I do not think the shade house...

Mr. Jordan: Sorry, Sir. That will be for NAREI so I will just jump over to NAREI.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, these are public tenders. I cannot determine who will have the shade house. We have a number of suppliers in this country. There is a public process and these things are being awarded by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB). There will be an advertisement and, based on the most responsive bidder, the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board will agree.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, last year we gave to the Ministry of Agriculture \$100 million to start this project. the programme started and the Minister mentioned that over 300 youths would be

benefiting from such. Could the Hon. Minister state who was the supplier then and what procurement process was used?

Mr. Mustapha: There were a number of suppliers, if I can remember well. Mr. Chair, I can supply that information and lay that information over to the Hon. Member. As the Hon. Member rightly said, it is not only the 300 young people but a number of schools. We are resuscitating the agriculture sector in a number of schools, including schools in the city and around the country. There are almost 154 shade houses that we have built in schools across the country. This year that process will continue.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister say what is the total number of black belly sheep in the country for the Black Belly Sheep Project that is under GLDA?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, we have 707 of those sheep and then the other trans will come, according to the Minister from Barbados with what he told me, before the first half of this year, right?

Mr. Jordan: According to the Minister in his answer last year, he said by now it is public knowledge that the President launched this project in Region Five. He said that the project was started in Region Five. He mentioned that we already received 438 black belly sheep from Barbados. We are hoping that before the first quarter of this year that we will receive the remaining to make it one thousand. This project, as it was launched in Region Five, will start in Region Five and then it will go into different parts of the country. Probably, Region Two will come into being after. Mr. Chair, we are almost a year passed this time that the Minister mentioned. I want to ask the Minister, what is delaying the entry of the rest of the black belly sheep? Also, how many ewes and rams are among this batch of 707?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, you know something, that is beyond the Minister's control. We are working with Barbados jointly on this programme. Barbados has to secure these sheep before they give us. The Minister of Barbados told me, last year, that we will receive the sheep at some point in time, we have not received them. The Minister, again, told me that we will receive the 293 sheep remaining before the first half, and when one looks at the Budget, one will see that we have catered for that tranche to come in Guyana before the first half of this year. It is beyond my control. I can say tomorrow and when I go over to the Minister, he says next year. Do you understand? We are

waiting on Barbados. It is a programme that we have and indeed the programme has been launched in Region Five. We will roll out the programme in different parts of the country. We are only catering for one region but, as I said, we are waiting on the other tranche to come here to move the process forward.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, this programme seems to be a very problematic one. Sir, my reason for saying that, the Opposition in Barbados also questioned the Black Belly Sheep Programme which is between Guyana and Barbados. Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, when will the distribution start and if he is going to stick to Region Five as the first region?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, that Opposition seems to be like this Opposition – destructive. Let me be frank, leaving out joke. We already have 45, if I can remember, Dr. Walrond, or around that of applicants from Region Five alone. As I said, the programme will roll out in Region Five. We have earmarked Region Five to roll out this programme and very shortly we will roll it out. As I said, since the first set came, we already have addition to that. The Hon. Member mentioned ewe and ram, we can give the Hon. Member that count later on by laying that over.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, be careful on how you are citing opposition. I think the last time Prime Minister (PM) Mottley won all the seats. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may have the floor.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, with due respect, there is parliamentary opposition and opposition. The Hon. Member never said parliamentary opposition. He said opposition.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, are you lecturing the Speaker?

Mr. Norton: Yes. I am because the Speaker is trying to suggest there is no opposition.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, just cautioning you. I could have invoked that you have to stand on a Point of Order first. I do not need to have... There is no debate on this – no debate. We deal in here; we deal in a house; and we talk about one opposition parliamentary. Hon. Member Mr. Jordan, you may have the floor.

Mr. Jordan: Yes, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I would still like the Hon. Minister to say to this Committee when - since the Minister already has a number of sheep here - when will the

distribution start in Region Five? Also, while the Minister is telling us when the distribution will start in Region Number Five, could he probably lay over the list of persons with the criteria that is being used for the distribution of the first tranche?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, first of all, I got here, what Dr. Walrond who is the Head of the GLDA just gave me. The total number of sheep here, we have 707,544 females and 163 males, ram and ewe. The Hon. Member has that figure. This programme, as I said, we already have 42 applicants. This programme will roll out very shortly. I cannot give the Member an exact date but within months this programme will roll out. We are now scrutinising and working out an arrangement because this arrangement we have with the farmers is that they have to provide. For example, if we give them two ewes and a ram, they have to provide back to GLDA, for a period of time, three breeding cycles, provide back the animal to us so that we can replicate this. If you are talking about building a Caribbean brand to replace the New Zealand lamb that are coming over to this part of the world.

Mr. Jordan: The Hon. Minister still did not say when because he mentioned that he has a number of those sheep in the country. Please, tell us, when you are going to do this distribution, the first tranche?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, I am just saying the Hon. Member is trying to hold me to a date. I am saying within months the programme will start.

Mr. Jordan: I am correct to say within a month from today's date the project will start. Mr. Chair. Under the Sustainable Agricultural Development Project, in last year's examination of the estimates the Hon. Minister stated that the Abattoir that is under construction at Onverwagt would have been completed by the end of last year. Could the Hon. Minister state what is the completion percentage at this time? When is the project really expected to be completed?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, this project is 75% completed. As a matter of fact, the Hon. Member is saying... Now I invite him personally to go to the project because I visited the projects a number of times. I told him to go and take a look at the project too because this project is in Onverwagt. This should be a state-of-the-art abattoir and that is why there were some changes of design and the new completion date would be the second quarter of 2024.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister tell us what were the changes in design that caused the delay?

Mr. Mustapha: I can lay that over, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, under the Hope Estate – \$50 million, could the Hon. Minister please lay over the works that are supposed to be done for the provision of the bridge and upgrading of the drainage and irrigation system?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, if the Hon. Member want it, I can lay it over but it is a few bridges only. There are in the estate to enhance the estate, to ensure that farmers have better access and better infrastructure in the estate so that they can produce.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, the new Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) provision for buildings and equipment, I am happy to know that the Government budgeted a sum of \$110 million for buildings and equipment. I would like to find out from the Minister, how many suppliers are there at the new GMC that supplies chicken from overseas?

11.29 a.m.

Mr. Mustapha: No supplier supplies chicken to the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC), Mr. Chairman. No local supplier supplies chicken to the GMC.

Mr. Jordan: Again, to the Hon. Minister – he can correct me – during last year, there was an incident with a truck transporting chicken somewhere within the Lethem area.

Mr. Chairman: What project code is it?

Mr. Jordan: It is under the New GMC, Sir. It is project code 3300800.

Mr. Chairman: Was it a GMC truck?

Mr. Jordan: Yes, Sir. That is why I said that the Hon. Minister can correct me. It is the question in that form. There was an accident and the chicken took a few days before it reached to Georgetown. Could the Hon. Minister state if it was a GMC truck and if the truck had cold storage?

Mr. Mustapha: I do not know what this Hon. Member is speaking of. We have secure vehicles with proper cold storage whenever we transport these items. We try to ensure that the food safety standards are upheld when we do these things. I do not know what the Hon. Member is talking about.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Standing Order with respect to questions states we should not ask any Minister a question for which he has no responsibility.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, with regard to the New GMC, what is the role of the Ministry of Health in the inspection and certification of the quality of imported chickens and eggs at that facility? Could the Hon. Minister state?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, the GMC does not import eggs. I do not know what the Hon. Member is asking. I do not know what the project code is. What is he trying to get at?

Mr. Jordan: The GMC has one project code, Sir.

Mr. Mustapha: That does not fall under the project code, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Jordan, do you want to provide a clarification?

Mr. Jordan: Sir, it is one project code for the entire New GMC here. I am guided by that.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair for clarification's sake, there is \$110,500,000 million that is budgeted for the New GMC. I will now go and give a disaggregation of the \$110,500,000 million so that the Member have clarity.

Mr. Jordan: I never asked for that, Sir. I never did ask for that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, just one second. Hon. Member Mr. Jordan, you spoke to me and if I have given the floor to the Minister, you must respect that the Minister is on the floor. If you want to heckle him and I do not hear, that is a different story. When you put on your microphone and speak into it, then you are officially taking over his position on the floor and my position in the Chair.

Mr. Mahipaul: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I do not have a problem; you can take it over now if you want, Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, that question does not fall under any of these project codes. I can give a disaggregation of the \$110 million that has been budgeted for the New GMC for projects this year.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister but I think the particular item which he asked about was eggs and you said that it does not import eggs. Hon. Member Mr. Jordan, you have the floor.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) ...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, hold one second. The Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, wanted to stand on the point you were questioning. Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, you have the floor.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There is an allocation for the NAREI and we see a significant increase here, Hon. Minister. Could you state out of this allocation how much will be allocated for NAREI on the Soesdyke Linden Highway? This is specifically because the increase – for residents in Region 10 – in seedlings and all the other permanent crops that arm of NAREI caters for is in somewhat low amounts. So, if we are going to make agricultural interventions, I would like to know what are these interventions that are going to be made specifically for the arm of NAREI that caters predominantly for a large population of Region 10.

Mr. Mustapha: We are enhancing the Kairuni station that we have there. We are in the process now of working jointly with the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) to do a well so that area can have its own water supply. We are enhancing the nursery there. Very shortly, we will build a nursery for cocoa and coffee in that area. We are now working with Costa Rican Accreditation Entity (ECA) to have those planting materials come to Guyana – germ plasm. Recently, we built a coconut nursery in that area. The Region 10 area caters for a lot of development coming through the NAREI.

As I said in my budget presentation, when one talks about Region 10, especially Linden, people only link it to mining. We want to change that perception. A number of Lindeners and people from Region 10 are now involved in farming. We did large scale clearance of land in places such as Muritaro and Malali. We are now putting a lot of effort and investment in those areas. As I said, we built a number of infrastructures in that area.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, for bringing that clarification with regard to agriculture in Region 10. I agree that a lot of people are of the view that mining is and agriculture is not that big, even though there is the Ebini area with the corn and soyabean in Region 10. With regard to you making mention of a lot of clearing in the areas, specifically in Linden, would the farmers be given some form of intervention to help clear the lands so that they could get involved in a larger scale of agricultural undertaking? Moreso, would they access the additional seedlings that the Linden arm of NAREI would provide? We need assistance for those farmers to have access to machinery to clear those lands. Would this intervention be a part of that programme? If so, how could they access the assistance that they would need for the clearing of the land, as well as the seedings and such?

Mr. Mustapha: Over the years, we have been giving and sharing free planting materials to all the farmers who requested, not only in Linden but across the country. In Linden, a number of farmers received this service from us. For example, in Rockstone right now we have a bulldozer clearing 40 acres of land. For the second phase to clear the land at Muritaro and Malali, the advertisement will go in the media very shortly after this Budget is approved. It is an ongoing process.

When the Hon. Member encounters farmers who want help, we have our officers in Linden. We have our office there and we are providing the services and materials that they need. In areas such as those, things such as the Acushi Ant bait must also be provided because that is a serious problem there. We are giving that free. We are producing it and giving it free to the farmers. We are making available planting materials and things such as citrus, pineapple and suckers to farmers. There are coconut plants – three years and 18 months – that we are making available to farmers. That will be continued and it will be intensified over the years.

Mr. Figueira: Minister, I have a list of farmers who are requesting this assistance. I will make this available and follow up with you. Given the fact that you have committed publicly that you will make these equipment available for the clearing of those lands, once the lands are cleared, it therefore means that water now becomes an extended issue. If they are going to plant more, they are going to need access to water. I know you started some form of irrigation in the west Watooka area, in particular. When we extend those lands, the present upgrade that you did with regard to the drainage and irrigation, would that facilitate the extension of the clearing of the lands to incorporate more farming activities?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, as long as we clear lands and they become available to farmers, we are providing planting materials. At the same time, we are also looking at irrigation. As the demands increase, we normally look and find ways to have irrigation available for the farmers in various communities and that will continue.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you. I have one other final question. With regard to the coconut nursery that you mentioned at the arm on the Linden Highway, would this also include the nursery for the Brazilian special specie of coconut?

Mr. Mustapha: Yes. We can make some available for the farmers who need it in Linden.

Mr. Figueira: I will provide you with that list, thanks.

Mr. Jordan: Coming back to the GuySuCo, we have here another \$2 billion budgeted under capital contribution. Last year – 2023 – we budgeted and spent \$3.5 billion. Mr. Chair, at the beginning of the year during the consideration, we were talking about \$549 million for the Rose Hall factory and the Minister said it was for the completion of works in the factory; the rehabilitation of the main crane gantry component, crane carrier, boiler component, bagasse carrier, centrifugal baskets and crystallisers; and the rehabilitation of scales, vacuum pans, wharf and general factory equipment. He said, we will then spend another \$50 million on buildings, roads and around the area. Could I ask the Hon. Minister if all the boilers are operable at the Rose Hall Estate? At this time, are there any leaks on the centrifugal baskets? What is the total cost for the rehabilitative works that were done after the \$549 million was spent?

Mr. Mustapha: Like other factories, sugar estates and sugar factories that were left to the mercy of nature, we had a lot of money spent on them. When the estate was closed, things were neglected and lots of parts deteriorated. We said that we will reopen it and we did do so last year. Now, for those parts that the Hon. Member mentioned – things such as a boiler – you will repair it but during the course of grinding, you might find a leakage and you have to repair it. That will be a continuous process. Those baskets that he talked about have been repaired. The Rose Hall Estate is scheduled to commence grinding this year at the end of February. What he said there about all those arrangements, the repairs are in process and will be completed for the Rose Hall Estate to commence grinding this year, so that we can work on the target that we have set for the GuySuCo.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, to the Minister, am I to understand that there are still defects at the Rose Hall Estate's factory at present?

Mr. Mustapha: No, Mr. Chairman. I am not saying that there is defect. If the Hon. Member was good apprentice coming out of the GuySuCo Training Centre-Port Maurant (GTC-PM), he would know that when one does the grinding of canes, one may encounter difficulties. As it stands now, there are no problems. We are preparing to commence grinding by the end of February.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I do not know how better of an apprentice I need to be, but he can check the record. I graduated with double Distinctions and a Credit from the GuySuCo Training Centre. I would like for the Hon. Minister to say to the Committee, what was the total sum spent at the Rose Hall Estate to get it to the state that it is today? How much sugar was produced? What is the profit from those sugar? I know it is 1034 tonnes so I should not ask that; I am sorry.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, let me tell you something, if I was a Member of the Opposition, I would not ask that question to embarrass myself. It is they who caused it. They closed the estate. They caused it to rot. They caused the deterioration of the estate. They caused thousands of lives and families to be broken in this country. They have the audacity to come and ask that question. It is \$9 billion. They caused the people of this country. They cost taxpayers \$9 billion to be spent to rehabilitate and bring back the Rose Hall Estate into production.

11.44 a.m.

They caused it. We produced 1,031 tonnes of sugar late last year when we started it. I am very optimistic that, this year, the Rose Hall Estate will produce the target we set, that is, under this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I just want a clarification. Continuously you would say to us that we have to ask a question and we cannot make statements. It is also true that when you are asked a question, you are expected to answer, but you are not expected to make statements outside of the answer that you just had? I need your clarification.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, we would normally start at 10.00 a.m. For persons who are not physically able to be in the House at the time it starts, we have provided a special Zoom link for Members of Parliament (MPs). This matter was raised shortly after we started. I do

not want to be too repetitive, but I have said over and over again that, the programmes for which the moneys are identified are opened for people to make those statements and I have been referring to Standing Orders. I read out, in details, Standing Order 75 (2) which allows for a debate on the sums being appropriated. That is why the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, had a field day in making a lot of contributions. I cannot keep repeating this for every late comer in the House or a person who fails to log in. But rest assured that I have great guidance in our staff with respect to these rules, international conventions and the 800 years of parliamentary democracy that exists, West Minster style. Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, are you finished?

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, permit me. It was prudent management that brought about the right sizing of the Guyana Sugar Estate Corporation (GuySuCo) under the Coalition Government. Hence, we see GuySuCo being able to sustain itself. Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister now state what is the production target for 2024 per factory? While he is doing that, I would like for the Hon. Minister to also state what is the expected grinding time for crop per factory.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I just want to make a clarification on an issue that the Hon. Member mentioned. When they got into Government, for the commission of inquiry (CoI), they said they had the best brains of Members. That was headed by Mr. Vibert Parvatan and a number of persons who knew about sugar.

Mr. Chairman: Stay away from the names.

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, all of us agree that those people knew a lot about sugar and they would have given us findings that we would have upheld and ensured that we implemented. Those Hon. Members of that Commission said that no sugar factory should be closed. There is nothing like ‘right size’ in the report of the Commission of Inquiry – nothing like that.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Mustapha: That is a clarification. I do not know where the Member got ‘right size’. That ‘right size’ is one Hon. Member’s word in this National Assembly.

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member asked a question.

Mr. Mustapha: The grinding period will be in this year. The first crop will start in February and will end almost at the end of May or close to the middle of May. The targets for the estate – we are now looking to revise some of the targets, and I can lay that over for the various factories.

Mr. Jordan: For clarity, could the Hon. Minister say the grinding period again? I want to make the note.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, earlier, I said that the Rose Hall Estate will start at the end of February, that is the beginning of the grinding period, and it will end between the middle to the end of May. It is based on the weather pattern, and we are looking at that. As I said, we are revising the targets for these sugar factories.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, based on the mechanisation and the works done in the fields, could the Hon. Minister state how much cane is available for grinding throughout this first crop at the Rose Hall Estate?

Mr. Mustapha: For this first crop, we have about 2,500 hectares of cane at the Rose Hall Estate. When we went to the Rose Hall Estate, there were many abandoned fields, there were forested areas and we had to clear that. Whilst we are doing that, which is a work in progress, we are mechanising, we are changing the Dutch beds to make broader beds so that we can have these machines cut the canes in some areas and also load – the cane loaders. Those hectares will increase over the next few months. We have until March to have canes that could be planted so that we can reap and get sugar this year.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, you have the floor. Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, you have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr, Chairman. Minister...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I do not know why you are overlooking me.

Mr. Figueira: With regards to... Ms. Ferguson, behave.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, Ms. Ferguson. Give him a chance and then I will come back to you.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: You did indicate to me that you wanted to come up next. Yes, you did, a long time ago.

Mr. Figueira: Minister, National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), in 2023, you had informed the House that you would have provided over 300 shade houses across the country. In 2024, we have seen a significant increase. Are you in a position to inform us as to how many shade houses will be made available in total for those who are interested in having access to a shade house for 2024?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, as I said, we are having requests, especially in the education sector – the schools. We are working very closely with the schools. We have the Agriculture Innovation and Entrepreneurs programmes that will now be extended to Regions 2, 5, and 10, where a number of those shade houses will be going. We will also have like what we have in Mon Repos, one of the largest hydroponic farms. We will also extend that programme to Regions 2, 5 and 10, where a minimum of at least 100 youths from these areas will get involved. As the Hon. Member mentioned, I cannot tell him exactly how many shade houses will be provided this year. We have in our budget approximately 200. I am being told that we will procure them and then we will work with the various organisations, groups and schools to see their needs.

Mr. Figueira: The Food Safety Authority – I see \$5 million there for the provision of equipment. Could you state what are the equipment that will be procured, and would any be catering towards the testing of the crops, the end product of these crops? What we have seen most recently is a lot of consumers saying that they are purchasing goods on the market which are spoiling very quickly, and they assume that it is because of the enhanced use of fertilisers. We want our citizens to buy good quality and more so, organic foods. Would this type of equipment cater for ensuring that the foods being sold on the markets are up to standard for safety? This is because we have seen an increase in cancer and such like and we are of the view that it is because of the foods they are consuming. In this regard, could you state specifically, what are the equipment that will be used? Moreso, has the Ministry given some thoughts toward the idea of investigating the crops/products that are being sold on the markets that are spoiling very quickly?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, this \$5 million is to buy some small equipment. The Sustainable Agricultural Development Programme (SADP) that we have, we are now constructing a food safety authority building with a lab. I am hoping, later on this year or early next year, that can be completed. This is a programme that we are working on to have the food safety authority in operation. When we have that, we have to bring in food and drugs and other bodies that are responsible. The Hon. Member would have mentioned that the vendors are complaining about the heavy use of fertilizers and things like that, all of those bodies or agencies will fall under the Food Safety Authority. I am now in discussion with the Attorney General to see how we will bring it. Also, we have to bring back the legislation to National Assembly because there are a lot of punitive clauses that we have to amend. We are working on that too, and we will have to bring that back.

What the Hon. Member is saying is, yes, we are working from our level, from the Ministry of Agriculture, through National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) and other agencies, to reduce the use of the traditional fertiliser. As you know, we had the Agriculture Investment Expo, where we had a number of specialists who came, and we are now looking at the Nano Fertilisers which are more friendly for food processing and things like that. It does not have the kind of chemical effect that these traditional fertilisers have. We are working on that, yes. Overtime, the food safety authority, with the labs and the equipment that would be in those buildings, will help us to analyse the food and get it better.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Mr. Figueira, I have the Hon. Member...

Mr. Figueira: This is my last question. Ms. Ferguson, may I crave your indulgence with the Chairman's permission? Thank you. Mr. Minister, NAREI, is there an educational programme with regards to teaching local farmers how to utilise the waste to make their own manure to cater for those farmers, small scale who cannot afford to buy fertilisers, be it the safe fertiliser or otherwise? This is so they can ensure that whatever crops they are growing, based on the knowledge that NAREI would have provided, it could help them use their cow manure, leaves, shavings or whatever they can to have a balance on how to fertilise the crops they are growing in a safe space with whatever is available in the environs? Thank you.

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, Mr. Chairman, we have started that, and that programme will continue. Not only with NAREI, but with the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA). There are

compost programmes that we have in various parts of the regions. I have been working with farmers' groups and we have continuous training. It is on our Facebook and social media pages. We have places in Region 9, 10 and all over the country. We have these extension officers who have been trained to ensure that they go to the farmers and ensure that they have those kinds of trainings. That will continue and we will aggressively pursue it again this year.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Minister. Now, for the Hon. patient, resilient Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, a pleasant good morning to you and to all the other Hon. Members of this esteem House. Mr. Chairman, if I can take our attention to project code 1301600, National Drainage and Irrigation Authority. I note there is a whopping \$10 billion for the construction of water pump houses and, also, for the payment of retention fees. While I was on my way to the National Assembly, I was tuned in and, based on some of the responses proffered to my Colleague with regard to the delay in many of these projects coming on stream, which were as a result of persons having to be relocated, persons had to be removed and all other reasons that you would have given, but, Hon. Member, could you say to this Committee of Supply whether feasibility studies were done? This is because the feasibility studies would have allowed you to know that squatters were encumbering the project area and what might be the setback for some of these projects being rolled out. Were feasibility studies conducted in the Charity area? Also, I think I heard somewhere in Belle Vue, in Region 3 and there is another area in Region 3 where houses were in close proximity of the project site. So, were feasibility studies done, Sir?

11.59 a.m.

Mr. Mustapha: The need for drainage and irrigation would have caused us to budget these projects or to put these projects in place. The Hon. Member talked about feasibility studies. These studies are not needed for these projects. What we have been doing is, we have been working with the farmers over time, we have been looking at the needs in the area and that is why these projects have come into concept for them to be built there. The point is, I mentioned just now the reason, and I gave those answers to the National Assembly already on what has caused the delays in some of these projects.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I will not accept the responses given by the Hon. Member. This is taxpayers' money, and we must ensure that if we are to spend taxpayers' money, we must be able to get value for money. The Hon. Minister, earlier, Sir, did make mention of the fact that designs were done. So, if designs were done, obviously, a feasibility or a pre-feasibility study should have been done prior to the design being done so that you would know exactly what would be the challenges that would face some of your projects in the execution stage.

Mr. Mustapha: First of all, I want to debunk a statement that was made by the Hon. Member about whether we got value for our money. We have value for our money in this country. Now, the other issue is that the Hon. Member probably does not comprehend what I am trying to say. She does not know about the agriculture sector. For example, the needs assessment. The needs assessment in these areas were done. We need to build these projects. Yes, we had a design. The design was reviewed by the consultant and the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) Engineering Department, and they agreed that this would be the design. When we went to the project site, we encountered some difficulties and the cause, and I explained what the cause was.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, this would be my last point. While the Hon. Minister just mentioned that it seems as though I do not know anything about agriculture, it seems as though he does not know anything about project management. This is because if he knew the steps in project management some of the things that we are encountering in these projects would have been avoided. So, I am saying to you, when it comes to the expending of taxpayers' money, we have to ensure that we get value for money. This is because if you had known that houses were in close proximity and all manner things, these things would not have been delayed. Hon. Minister, you have to be very careful when you are trying to make personal comments to Members of this House here.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I want to maintain that. The Hon. Member is talking about project management. We have not overrun the cost of the project, number one. We had some illegal structures. The Hon. Member was a Minister in the previous Government that bought 12 undersize pumps and up to now the taxpayers of this country have to pay for those pumps – fire engine pumps. The Hon. Member has the audacity to come and talk about project management and about agriculture, when the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) killed agriculture in this country and caused Guyana to lose its place in the agriculture sector in Caribbean

Community (CARICOM), which was taken up by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. To know our agriculture sector is being led by His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfan Ali... This country is leading the Caribbean under the PPP/Civic Government – under this Government.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, my concern has absolutely nothing to do with design. My concern is about the feasibility study and the persons who would have been affected. But, let me say to the Hon. Minister, you are talking about 12 pumps, we still got to know about the ...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, we are prosecuting the estimates here. So, please let us stay with that. I think we have exhausted the questions.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, I have a follow-up first on the Hon. Minister's comment about Guyana being so engaged in food production – basically, on food security. I see here, when we look at Volume 2 of the Estimates, one of the Impacts that has been identified, number 3, there is, "Safe and reliable food supply and security". The House will recall that, it was in 2022 at the Agri-Investment Forum and Expo that Vision 25 by 2025 was announced. My question to the Hon. Minister is, what percentage of that 25 has been achieved at the end of December, 2023, given how far along we should be and, what has been Guyana's contribution, percentage-wise, to that reduction in the importation of food?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, as the Hon. Member rightly said, the last time we did a study, we had approximately 60% of those targets which we met. We are hoping that by the end of 2025, we can achieve 25% and Guyana would have contributed significantly towards that. I do not have the figure here to call a figure, but Guyana would have made the most contribution in CARICOM to that target of 60%.

Ms. Fernandes: I am happy to hear that there was a study. Could the Hon. Minister commit to laying over that study to the House so that we will all be in possession of the same data?

Mr. Mustapha: It was not a study for clarification. It was a target – a calculation of the target of 25%. We are at 60%. I am willing to show the contribution of the 15-Member States and the five associated states in CARICOM, the contribution they have made to that target. I am willing to lay that over. It will show in that target, Guyana's contribution, where Guyana has made the most

contribution to that target in all the areas and all the priority commodities that were identified by the Ministerial Task Force and approved by the Heads of Government in CARICOM.

Ms. Fernandes: Could you, Hon. Minister, say if we will be scaling up when it comes to our exports, the number of exports, or would we be scaling down in 2024?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I mentioned earlier that we are building a food hub. We are building a food hub to help CARICOM reduce the food import bill. We are looking to be self-sufficient for the production of livestock feed by the end of next year and, also, to be a net exporter. So, automatically and definitely we will be scaling up in that area. I do not have the figures for 2022, but in 2021 we imported \$2.6 billion in high-value crops. Now, we are contributing more than 40% and have reduced that target. We have scaled up in that area, with things like broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, lettuce, bell peppers, you know those things. The young people on that programme are supplying the hospitality industry right here in Guyana. We have a ready market.

In a number of areas, we are looking to improve. For example, the target set this year by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Agriculture, we have to increase rice production by 710,000 tonnes from 653,000 tonnes. We are looking to increase sugar production. We are looking to increase or start the production of Vannamei Prawns at Onverwagt, which will commence in a matter of months. Guyana will be an exporter of that species of shrimp. We are looking to increase the production of brackish water shrimp. As a matter of fact, we have increased it from 10,000 kilogrammes, when we started the project, to approximately 90,000 kilogrammes now. So, yes, Guyana will be scaling up in production and, also, in the export of these crops.

Mr. Fernandes: Thank you. Excellent to hear those numbers. Could the Hon. Minister please say what is the percentage of the integration of small and medium-scale farmers into that scaling-up process?

Mr. Mustapha: That have been tremendous for us, in terms of around the country. A lot of small-scale farmers have been involved in these productions, in terms of producing these crops. What we are doing also, we are looking at our food security plan for the country and we are not looking at farmers on the coastal area. We have a comprehensive plan for the interior location where we are trying to make them self-sufficient. We are building nurseries in various interior locations so that they can help contribute. For example, in the Deep South, we recently commissioned an agro-

processing facility, and we are working with the farmers there so that the community can produce all the peanuts and process it right there so that they could send it out to our coastal area.

We are working with places like Orealla and Siparuta. We have developed 30 acres of a pineapple farm there so that they will produce their pineapples. We are also building up an agro-processing facilities in Orealla and Siparuta right in the hometown of the Hon. Member, in Bartica, which is considered like Linden, a mining area. We are trying to change that perception. We are building a cold storage facility there and we are working with farmers to start the process there. So, a lot of small-scale farmers are now moving into a different category – medium scale, moving up. What we are doing is, we are concentrating on doing specific types of production. We are saying yes, you can do all crops on a small scale, but if we are talking about the need for peppers, broccoli or a special crop, we are working with farmers and integrating them into the system so that they can help produce those things.

Ms. Fernandes: I would like to draw the Hon. Minister's attention to Indicator 9 which says, the “Number of farms certified to produce wholesome food and agricultural commodities for export”. In 2023, it was reported that the number of farms that were certified to produce such was 301. However, the revised target for 2024 is 200. I find it a bit difficult to understand, if we are looking to scale up, why is it that the Ministry's target is 100 less than the actuality for 2023? If the Minister could kindly guide me.

Mr. Mustapha: This is farm certification, Mr. Chairman, and it is in addition to what were certified in 2023. Another 200 or more of those farmers will be certified to produce those types of food.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, I am not sure if Hon. Minister have the information with him, but could he commit to laying over a breakdown of those farmers who were certified?

Mr. Mustapha: Sure, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. As we continue to speak to food security, could I draw the Hon. Minister's attention to project code 2803000, which speaks to the Hinterland Environmentally Sustainable Agricultural Development Project. I am looking at the project document there in Volume 3, and it also speaks to enhancing food security and nutrition. My question to the Hon.

Minister is, since there is a lot of work being done, as you said, on integrating small and medium scaled farmers into the overarching goal of food security that Guyana is directly in, what percentage of Indigenous communities have contributed towards the food security structure and is there any direct policy measure or indicators that we are looking at when we are talking about food security in Indigenous communities?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I can lay that information over. For example, in Region 9, we have approximately 58 villages that we are working with directly. In this programme, we are working with each village in the various interior locations. What we are doing is enhancing their capability, ensuring that we have more production. But I will lay that information over to the Hon. Member for the entire 242 Amerindian communities across the country.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. This is my final question, could the Hon. Minister say, in addition to the Hinterland Environmentally Sustainable Agricultural Development Project and the funds being allocated therein for Indigenous communities, when it comes to agricultural development, is there any other mechanism that is utilised by the Ministry of Agriculture when it speaks to equitable distribution of resources to aid in the development of agriculture? I know that you did speak, Sir, about having cleared lands and so forth in other areas. Has the Ministry of Agriculture engaged any Indigenous communities when it comes to those initiatives like land clearing and so forth and, if yes, could the Minister say which communities were engaged? Further, what is the overall goal when it comes to food security for Guyana?

12.14 p.m.

Mr. Mustapha: Last year, we had the National Toshias Council Conference (NTC) right here. We had a number of requests and we have been working. Since I became Minister of Agriculture I have been working with the villages across the country. The President himself visited a number of interior locations. Based on those requests, we have been working with various communities across the hinterland. We have been, as I said, giving these Black Giant birds. As a matter of fact, as I am speaking, 152,000 of those birds were distributed in the interior locations. We have \$709 million under the integrated programme this year that will go for hinterland development. I can give that disaggregation. I have here in my hand the work we would have done.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

I have the disaggregation for the \$709 million. Then we have a number of works that we completed. We have this list here where areas in the hinterland communities are now producing most of the food things, like crops for the entire Region 9. We produced a lot of cassava sticks for those areas. We produced livestock – animals. We gave breeding animal. For Region 1 and Region 9, we gave them specialised equipment, large tractors with grass planter and harrow ploughs so that they could build their own nurseries. We are working with them in various communities to build nurseries so that they can have their own planting materials. We are continuously building capacity in those areas. This year we will also put down another 50 cages in the hinterland community so that will help to contribute, like what we are doing in Mashabo and Mainstay, those areas and other hinterland locations. We are working very closely with the hinterland community to build their capacity so that they could produce food, not only one type of food, but in various areas we are working with them.

Programme: 212 – Agriculture Development and Support Services – \$21,760,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 213 – Fisheries – \$78,338,000

Programme: 213 – Fisheries – \$78,338,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Programme: 214 – Hydrometeorological Services – \$65,000,000

Programme: 214 – Hydrometeorological Services – \$65,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I could be guided here. The next head is the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce. Should we take the lunch break now or invite the Ministry? Hon. Members, it is a good time to take the suspension for lunch. Let me thank the Hon. Minister and all of his staff for taking us through that agency.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting suspended at 12.20 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.32 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

We are in Committee. I invite the Hon. Member, Minister Oneidge Walrond, the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce and her team. Just to keep track of the timings, the clock is not rolling as yet, Minister. To the Chief Whips, at the end of the Ministry of Agriculture, we only had 10 minutes in savings. We are now time saving on the allocations. We are starting now at 1.33 p.m.

Agency: 23 Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Current Expenditure

Programme: 231 – Policy Development and Administration - \$420,258,000

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, line item 6114, Clerical and Office Support, I observed that there is a slight decrease in the budgetary allocation for 2020. When one looks down at the staff complement, there is a decrease... My apologies, it is 2024. There is an obvious decrease from 20 to 18 staff members. I just want some clarity with regard to that, if the Hon. Minister would.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you for your question, Hon. Member. The decrease is due to two staff having resigned, one Office Assistant and one Accounts Clerk.

Mr. Sears: Going down to the line item, that is, under maintenance and infrastructure, line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads. There is an allocation this year for \$7 million. I would just like to ask which roads will this be and which communities will benefit?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, as you know, with regard to the Guyana Trade and Investment Exposition (GuyExpo) and other events, last year, we have been able to reintroduce them to much success and have them returned after four years. It was about five or six years. The roads that we are referring to are the roads at the National Exhibition Centre, to continue to be able to accommodate patrons who come into GuyExpo and other events.

Mr. Sears: That would be all for now.

Ms. Hughes: Hon. Minister, line item 6281 – Security Services, we see a fairly large increase. Could you explain the increase and the security company or companies contracted under this?

Ms. Walrond: The increase was a result of the actual rates of the security services being increased. We budgeted in 2023 using market prices and for 2024 it is the actual rates that are being used.

Ms. Hughes: Which are the security company or companies providing the service?

Ms. Walrond: It is Nel Global Security Company Incorporated.

Ms. Hughes: Hon. Minister, line item 6302 – Training (Including Scholarships), we see a 100% increase in support training, but I am just curious if you could explain the areas of training and who are the recipients?

Ms. Walrond: The strategic direction under this line item caters for 60 persons to be trained for the Digital in Motion programme. This is a programme that helps our small and micro enterprises to train them to use the digital methods to support their businesses and to enhance productivity and capacity, as well as to help them with connectivity in the market.

Ms. Hughes: I am just curious, is that strictly for staff or is this one of the training areas you provide to the private sector companies?

Ms. Walrond: This is strictly for community businesses that are in a community identified. This project is being run in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In collaboration with them, we identified communities to benefit from the Digital in Motion programme.

Ms. Hughes: Minister, could you just repeat the name of that security company? My apologies. I am going back to line item 6281 for clarity. Could you say maybe how long they have been around? I did not recognise the name.

Ms. Walrond: Neither do I. It is Nel Global Security Company Incorporated. They were secured by an open tender. We have no history. We do not have any other information about the security company. We would be willing to provide it, if that is necessary.

Ms. Hughes: If you could. Thank you. I want to go on to line item 6291 – National and Other Events, we have a very large increase there, close to 100%. I am wondering if you could explain if these are increased events or new events you are adding to your calendar or maybe other events you are expanding into other parts of the country?

Ms. Walrond: Hon. Member, this increase is based solely on the Japan Expo. As the Hon. Member would appreciate, being a former Minister of Tourism, every five years we have the International Expo. This increase caters for the expo that is going to be happening in Japan next year, that is, the \$30 million.

1.41 p.m.

Programme: 231 – Policy Development and Administration – \$420,258,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 232 – Business Development, Support and Promotion – \$1,134,862,000

Ms. Hughes: Line item 6133, Benefits and Allowances: We see an interesting activity. We budgeted \$1,405,000 in 2023. Of course, that was revised. This year, we have gone down to \$710,000, although we have not had a 50% decrease in your staff. I see your staff has moved from 18 to 13. I do not know if you could explain that. It is benefits and allowances. So, we are just wondering if any staff has lost out in that area.

Ms. Walrond: The decrease, I am advised, is due to the Director of Industrial Development retiring and the Director of Commerce no longer being there.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you. Security Services. Under this heading, line item 6281, there is a very similar kind of situation. It has moved from \$39,032,000 to \$67,792,000. Is it a similar situation? Again, what is the name (s) of the security company or companies?

Ms. Walrond: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you know, we have now added four new call centres under our portfolio. This is the reason for the increase in security services for these call centres. The Security Service is RK Guyana Security Services. It was publicly tendered. They were all publicly tendered.

Mr. Sears: Line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: We have seen an increase of just about \$71 million, if my Mathematics is correct. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister who are the beneficiaries in terms of local organisations to whom this line item is attached.

Ms. Walrond: This is contributions to the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS) and the Small Business Bureau (SBB).

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: A quick follow-up on that particular line item in relation to the Guyana Small Business Council and Bureau. Is a report normally given on what happens in that particular organisation? In Appendix T, I see what is happening there for the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS), but there is nothing for Small Business Council and Bureau. Is there a report that is laid or which the Hon. Minister gets as to what has transpired with that agency throughout the year?

Ms. Walrond: Yes, there is a report that is provided by the board of the Small Business Bureau.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Is it possible for you to lay over that report?

Ms. Walrond: This is a report on the distribution of grants.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: The distribution of grants, and the process that goes into the distribution of grants.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the process.

Ms. Walrond: Yes, we can provide that, please.

Mr. Chairman: She will. Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes. Sorry, I have Ms. Fernandes first.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. It is just a follow up on the same line item which deals with the subsidies and contributions to local organisations. I noticed that the Hon. Minister stated the Guyana National Bureau of Standards and the Guyana Small Business Council and Bureau. If we turn to page 471, we will see a long list of others under that very heading and not just those two. For example, Help and Shelter, the Guyana Legal Aid Clinic and so forth. Probably, my book is a

little off. I think my copy is a little bit distorted and that is why I am asking for that clarification.
Thank you, Sir.

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

Mr. Chairman: We have one process in the House. It is Member of Parliament (MP) to Speaker, the Speaker to Minister and the Minister to Speaker.

Ms. Fernandes: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead. Do not worry with the chit chat.

Ms. Fernandes: I think my copy is distorted. That is why I was asking for some clarity. I definitely need to change what I am looking at.

Mr. Chairman: Good. Take care. Please, I thank everyone for the assistance in answering some queries but let us keep it a bit formal.

Ms. Hughes: I am wondering if, on the policy side, we could get an update on the current status of the Lethem industrial area and the whole project that was going on there.

Ms. Walrond: The Lethem Industrial Estate has been completed. I believe you might be referring to.... In 2024, we are outfitting, further, the business incubator area. We are taking applications for the Industrial Estate proper and applications for the business incubator area as well. There is where we will be doing agro-processing and other kinds of businesses to help small businesses to be able to...Garment processing, food processing and purifying of water. These are the kinds of activities that we are inviting on the estate. A large portion of the business incubator is finished, but there is an additional portion that we will be completing in 2024. We are inviting applicants for the occupation of the estate.

Programme: 232 – Business Development, Support and Promotion – \$1,134,862,000

Programme: 233 – Consumer Protection – \$166,615,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Sir. One quick question on line item 6321. For the Guyana Consumers Association, in 2023, \$500,000 was budgeted, nothing was paid, and it is being

budgeted again. Could the Hon. Minister state what is the issue with the Guyana Consumers Association?

Ms. Walrond: We have been reaching out to the Guyana Consumers Association because there is an amount, as the Hon. Member mentioned, that is given to them every year. They have not responded. They have to respond with their compliances and their budget, and we have not gotten a response. We may have to consider removing them from the subvention.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: That same line item, 6321. For the Guyana Real Estate Agents Authority, I see that there is a budgeted amount. I am just enquiring what systems are being put in place, since real estate seems to be the going thing, by the Ministry to assist the agents in upping their game in terms of real estate this year? What support is being put in place by the Ministry, minus the funding?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, as this Committee would know, the Real Estate Agents Authority Act was recently passed. Just two weeks ago, the board was constituted. The Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce supervises. The Minister is the one who oversees this Authority. The Authority will meet, and they will identify a chairman and they will identify the procedure by which they operate. The Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce has oversight over this board. There will a board that will inform how they move forward.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister say whether the board has been constituted, if there are members of the board or are they now in the process of filling those positions?

Ms. Walrond: The board has been constituted as of two weeks ago.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Is it possible for the Hon. Minister to state the individuals or lay over the individuals who are on that board?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, this is a matter of public record. It was published in the *Official Gazette*. I do not know the names of the persons off-hand, but the Act provides for bodies to be represented.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Understood. I guess I can get it from the *Official Gazette*. In relation to the Competition and Consumers Affairs Commission, that is under line item 6321, would the Hon.

Minister be able to state how many complaints they received for last year, the responses and how many were amicably resolved?

Ms. Walrond: The number of complaints that were received in 2023 were 492. The way it was reported, they were resolved to the value of \$481 million and 85% of those cases have been resolved.

Programme: 233 – Consumer Protection – \$166,615,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

1.56 p.m.

Programme: 234 – Tourism Development and Promotion – \$870,063,000

Ms. Hughes: Thank you. Line item 6291 – National and Other Events: Again, we have an increase. Could you just explain what is responsible for the increase?

Ms. Walrond: Once again, the increase relates to Guyana’s participation in the Japan Tourism Expo that is slated for 2025.

Ms. Hughes: Hon. Minister, where do you put your other local events?

Ms. Walrond: The same line item 6291 has local events provided for also.

Ms. Hughes: Okay. Could you disaggregate and just give me an idea of what is the figure for your local is *vis-a-vis* the international?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, support for events such as the Guyana Energy Conference, Mashramani, school talks at Berbice High School and Linden Foundation, Clash of the Titans, support for events in Q2 that is the Korean International Martial Arts, Moraikobai Off Road Safari, T20, rodeo, Golf Academy, the Inter-schools Kayaking Competition, which is conducted in Region 10, Kids Cooking Academy and others. There is the Rupununi Music and Arts Festival, Berbice Expo, Guy Expo, Building Expo, Agri Investment Forum and Expo, Seaboard Marine Race of Champions, CPL Cricket, South Rupununi Safari, Guyana Restaurant Week and Rupununi Expo.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member...

Ms. Walrond: There is the Christmas Village.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry. Go ahead.

Ms. Walrond: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, I am not finished.

Ms. Hughes: I had actually asked you to just disaggregate the local vis-à-vis the international. So, two totals would suffice.

Ms. Walrond: The local, Mr. Chairman, is \$70,990,000.

Ms. Hughes: Sorry, Minister. Did you say \$70,000,990?

Ms. Walrond: Under the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA), the local events are \$70,990,000 and under the Ministry's Department of Tourism, it is \$27,000,802.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, I am looking at Volume 2. Under Tourism Development and Promotion, one of the strategies is to prepare and implement aggressive tourism development. I am wondering if there is an active tourism development and destination marketing plan that the Ministry is actually utilising at this particular point to position Guyana as a globally recognised tourism destination.

Ms. Walrond: Yes, there is. Please, Hon. Member, there is a tourism strategic action and marketing plan.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Is it possible for you to lay that over?

Ms. Walrond: Yes. We absolutely can. There has been a reason that tourism has been seeing the success that it has been seeing right now. It is with a clear vision and a plan, and that plan is innovating.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you for the plan.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Sarabo-Halley, do not forget that you have a current and three former tourism ministers in the House.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): I would like to ask the Minister if she can just give us a briefing as to who are the beneficiaries and in what areas.

Ms. Walrond: This caters for the training through the Department of Tourism and the hosting of regional workshop with the Regional Tourism Council. I believe the Hon. Member is the Chair of one of those councils. Region 10 will be benefitting from this. There would be training in budget and financial report for five staff, training of trainers in the regional committees as well and stakeholders in budget preparation in all 10 regions, and hosting of workshops to gather information for the development of community-based tourism handbooks.

Mr. Mahipaul: Under maintenance of buildings, does this sum cater for the maintenance of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, yes. It does cater for the maintenance of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre, especially in light of our present occupancy.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much. Hon. Chairman, may I have a follow-up? I am going through the revenue and if I am correct, this building is also being rented out as a building that can bring in money. Am I correct with that?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, can the Hon. Minister tell us how much money was received? I am actually going through the estimates, and I am not picking up the Arthur Chung Conference Centre.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I think we went through that twice today about revenues. We do not question revenues, but I am sure in one of these appendices you will see the breakdown. Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Mahipaul: I am going through the revenue. Thank you for the guidance.

Mr. Chairman: You are welcome, Sir. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In Volume 2, there is an indicator for number of visitor arrival in 2024. Would the Hon. Minister be able to lay over a disaggregation as to where visitors are coming from and where they are going once they get here, if that is possible? It is just to lay it over and not necessarily to go through it, because it is a large number.

Ms. Walrond: Yes. We do have our main markets which are the United States, Canada, Europe, the Caribbean, Latin America and other, which is not stated, but I can lay it over. Most of the time, Region 9 and the Essequibo circuits are the main areas that they visit, but we can lay this over.

Mr. Figueira: Line item 6303 – Training. Would this training that you would be offering cater for the uniqueness each region offers as a tourism piece for the preparation of the pamphlet or magazine that could help promote tourism holistically but also provide individual regions with the tourism product that each region offers across the country?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, I believe that the Hon. Member is referring to the regional tourism travel guide, and we are developing it for each region. As you can see, this is specific to Region 10. Yes, indeed, it highlights the attractions for that region.

Mr. Figueira: Would that be done for each of the regions?

Ms. Walrond: We are doing seven this year. Last year, we did Region 2. I probably should have those guides. This is the Region 2 guide. So, it is specific to Cinderella County. It is specific to Region 2 and all the attractions, tours and experiences we have built out in Region 2 and we will be doing that for each and every region every year.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, this is not specific to a line item, but if you may indulge me, I would like to ask the Minister if any subvention is being catered for the regional tourism committees across Guyana.

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, the idea is for the regional tourism committees to ultimately be independent and to drive tourism. We would like to see it driven by the private sector. We are giving, at the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, the support that is needed for the tourism committees to ultimately be able to sustain themselves and to drive...Most of the members are private sector and are already engaged in some tourism service and tour guides. Initially, we do have a \$6 million allotment for regional tourism development.

Ms. Hughes: Hon. Minister, I know in the budget speech and, of course, during this process over the last two weeks, we have become aware of more than six new hotels coming on stream. Of course, we think it is a great thing. Yes, it is this year. I want to know what specific plans the Ministry is putting in place to assist the private sector and these investors in bringing the necessary

training and having our local people trained to fill those positions. This ties into your second performance statements and your strategies – support businesses that are involved in new processes and products in the sector. So, just an idea of what you are planning for this year to assist.

Ms. Walrond: We have the hospitality institute that is currently under the Ministry of Education. That contract has been signed and the institute is about to...Well, I believe the Minister of Education would be able to speak more about that. We are about to start the consultancy for the build-out of that institute. The Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce will be supporting the curriculum development for the institute. In the meanwhile, we continue to train several...Throughout the regions, we have trained about 1200 persons in safety, cuisine management, and hotel management and we continue to do that throughout all of the regions.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes.

Ms. Hughes: I am finished.

Programme: 234 – Tourism Development and Promotion – \$870,063,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

2.11 p.m.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 231 – Policy Development and Administration – \$72,500,000

Ms. Hughes: Project code 1214700 – Buildings: Provision for upgrading of facilities. I know they say it is a parking lot and bridge. Could you say where this is located?

Ms. Walrond: This is the bridge at the National Exhibition Centre.

Ms. Hughes: Just a clarification, is the parking lot at the same location?

Ms. Walrond: Yes. It is at the same location. It is almost 4,000 square metres.

Ms. Hughes: Are there any other questions on this one? I want to go on to Business Development, Support and Promotion, if there are no other questions.

Mr. Chairman: Before I allow you to go on, I have to put the question and I so put.

Programme: 231 – Policy Development and Administration – \$72,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 232 – Business Development, Support and Promotion – \$6,464,600,000

Ms. Hughes: Project code 4403100 – National Quality Infrastructure: I note in the legend it refers to laboratory facilities. I am wondering if you could give us an update on this project – the status of this project – and a little more information on the laboratory facilities.

Ms. Walrond: The main laboratory building is a two-storey building of about 38,000 square feet. The completion date is July of this year, 2024. The contract duration is for 18 months, and we are on target.

Ms. Hughes: Where exactly is the two-storey building?

Ms. Walrond: This building is in the National Exhibition Centre compound where the Guyana National Bureau of Standards is also situated.

Ms. Hughes: I am looking around to see if anyone wants to ask any questions.

Mr. Chairman: You have someone behind you. It is Ms. Sarabo-Halley.

Ms. Hughes: Okay.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am at project code 4502800, Rural Enterprise Development. If I am correct, I see that there is support for enterprise development initiatives. Could the Minister please state what support she intends to give during this year and which rural enterprises she is speaking about?

Ms. Walrond: For the rural enterprise development, there are two call centres in Region 5, which we expect to create an additional 800 jobs, and the other co-investment projects that the Government will identify, which may include the call centres as well.

Ms. Hughes: Project code 4404200 – Small Business Development Fund: I see an increase of \$150 million. I know that this is a small business development fund. Could you give us an idea of how many people are expected to benefit from the fund this year and say how persons are selected to be beneficiaries?

Ms. Walrond: For context, we at the Small Business Bureau have given out 4,000 grants to the tune of \$999 million in the past three years. Just for context, the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) gave out 900 grants in the five years that it was with the Small Business Bureau. So, one can make an assessment of which one was more selective than the other. This grant is open to all Guyanese small and microenterprises that wish to apply, and to all regions.

Mr. Rajkumar: Project code 4503300 – Industrial Development: Could the Hon. Minister say how much money is allocated for the completion of the Essequibo Industrial Estate?

Ms. Walrond: One minute, please, Mr. Chairman. For the Onderneeming industrial development works, \$835 million has been allocated for the continued development of these 52 acres of land for the purpose of industrial development in that area.

Mr. Rajkumar: Could the Hon. Minister say when this project is expected to be completed?

Ms. Walrond: This project is expected to be completed by 4th October of this year.

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you.

Ms. Hughes: Hon. Minister, could we ask that the list of all the recipients of the fund be laid over?

Ms. Walrond: Just for clarity, what recipients of the fund are you referring to?

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Hughes, the Hon. Minister needs a clarification.

Ms. Hughes: Project code 4404200 – Small Business Development Fund.

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, is she referring to grants since grants and loans are under the fund?

Ms. Hughes: It is the grants.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, it is the same question I was going to ask, but I wanted to specify grants.

Mr. Sears: I am just going back a little bit to project code 4404300, Single Window Automated Processing System. I would just like to ask the Hon. Minister, in terms of percentage, how much of this fund has been expended from the Inter-Development Bank (IDB) to date.

Ms. Walrond: I am advised that 40% of the US\$6 million has been expended.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, forgive me, but I did not hear the response the Hon. Minister gave to the request for the layover of the list of the recipients for the grants.

Ms. Walrond: I am faced with the difficulty of releasing people's personal information. This would be their names. I could release the number of recipients for every single region. I do not know that I could... *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Minister. I am listening to you.

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, we have had concerns from the recipients of our grants that they are targeted when their names, the names and locations of their businesses are published. I do not know that they will be comfortable with their names being released, but we are willing to release, by region, all of the persons and sectors which their businesses represent, whether it is agriculture or barbering. We are able to release that kind of information but to release individual names, I believe it is teetering on the point of ...

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. The Minister will release by region and sector in each region the number of persons who have received these grants.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, would the Minister be kind enough to tell us the specific criteria that were used to disburse these grants?

Ms. Walrond: The criteria is under the Small Business Act. The Small Business Act lists the criteria for the classification of a small business in the sense that it has to be registered with the Small Business Bureau, it has to have a certain size and capital. That is the criteria that are governed by the Small Business Act. We have not made this up. The other criteria are that persons have to be National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) compliant. That is it, please, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sears: Project code 4503300 – Industrial Development: I would like to ask the Hon. Minister... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I am trying to hear the Hon. Member, Mr. Sears.

Mr. Sears: We have observed that this project received a reasonably allocated sum in 2023, and, of course, that was passed. We are in 2024. I do understand that this project is an ongoing project with relations to the industrial estates in Essequibo and Linden. What percentage is this project at in Essequibo and Linden and when is this project scheduled to be completed? This is in relation to industrial estates.

Ms. Walrond: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. Is it project code 4503300 – Industrial Development?

Mr. Sears: That is correct.

2.26 p.m.

Ms. Walrond: For the Onderneeming industrial estate is the 4th September and the Amelia's Ward that is moved to... What is it, the date of completion? That land is now being cleared so we expect that by the end of the year we should have advanced the works.

Mr. Sears: Just a quick follow-up with regard to the industrial estate at Linden. Are there any other challenges other than its location right now? If the Minister may shed some light.

Ms. Walrond: Yes, Mr. Chair. We have had to move because of the discovery that the lands we were using at Amelia's Ward has substantial bauxite deposits. We have decided to move the industrial estate to a location that is more conducive.

Mr. Sears: Just one other question, my final question on this line item. Could you say specifically where the location is? Is it still in Amelia's Ward or somewhere else?

Ms. Walrond: It is at York Plantation.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I now put the... Hon. Member Ms. Hughes.

Ms. Hughes: Just a follow-up specifically. I know you gave us information on the other two estates. The industrial development at Wales, could you give a status update on that one?

Ms. Walrond: The aim of the industrial development at Wales is to increase the level of value-added activities in the Wales development zone. We will now begin to... that project is now going to start this year.

Ms. Hughes: A follow-up. When you say the project is going to start, what specifically are you referring to?

Ms. Walrond: The estate is being identified so it is for the consultants to charter a way forward in terms of development of this estate.

Ms. Hughes: Just to clarify, you do not actually have a plan in terms of similarity to the industrial estate, let us say in Lethem where you know you have the incubators. Is it a different structure that you have not identified as yet?

Ms. Walrond: In terms of the actual rolling out of the development, no, we do have a vision which is to propel value-added activities, and at the completion of this estate it will take advantage of the low energy cost that we will have on the gas-to-energy project and to catapult our manufacturing sector; that is the overall vision of this estate.

Programme: 232 – Business Development, Support and Promotion – \$6,464,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 233 – Consumer Protection – \$5,000,000

Programme: 233 – Consumer Protection – \$5,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 234 – Tourism Development and Promotion – \$44,000,000

Ms. Hughes: Just one question. The provisions for furniture and equipment, what furniture is that specifically and, also, the equipment? If it is a long list, I just want an idea of where it is going. At project code 4100400, it is the only one under Tourism Development.

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chair, is the question what sort of equipment?

Ms. Hughes: What furniture and where is that going? Then what kind of equipment are you referring to here?

Ms. Walrond: This is at the Department of Tourism, the head office: a magazine stand, an uninterruptable power supply (UPS) battery backup and four desktop computers.

Ms. Hughes: Yes, that is for furniture. The equipment, is it any large pieces of equipment or a specific type or purpose?

Ms. Walrond: Under the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA), there is one 24-seater bus and a satellite phone.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chair, may I have the floor?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Under project code 1208300, I see a provision for a security hut. May I ask the Hon. Minister where will this security hut be? Is it the existing one at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) we are dismantling to put up a new one or somewhere else?

Ms. Walrond: This is at the southeastern panel room. It is the panel room that is currently underutilised and it will be converted into a guard hut at the emergency exit gate.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you.

Programme: 234 – Tourism Development and Promotion – \$\$44,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, thank you, and we thank the staff for taking us through your agency. We actually used up two minutes of the 10 minutes of saving. Hon. Members, let us invite the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, the Hon. Mr. Vikram Bharrat and his team, to take us through his agency. The Minister could use the station on the right.

Hon. Members: *(Inaudible)*

Mr. Chairman: Is the Prime Minister heckling now?

Agency: 26 Ministry of Natural Resources

Current Expenditure

Programme: 261 – Policy Development and Administration – \$460,249,000

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chairman, line item 6116, Contracted Employees. [Hon. Members: *(Inaudible)*] Could the Minister explain the significant increase?

Mr. Chairman: I think you have to repeat because your Hon. Colleagues have been having a good laugh at someone's expense.

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]: I heard him.

Mr. Holder: The Minister said he heard.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead Hon. Minister.

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me thank the Hon. Member for the question too. Mr. Chair, the increase in line item 6116, Contracted Employees, one, it accounts for the increase given by the Government, which is retroactive, as well as an increase in three employees under this programme. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: Could you give the designations and other information on these employees? Could you say...?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, the three new members of staff's designations: Principal Assistant Secretary (Finance), a Procurement Officer as well as a Biodiversity Specialist. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. You can sit, Hon. Member Mr. Holder, put the microphone close to you and we will get the full volume.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Cde. Chairman, line item 6284, Other: there is an increase from the revised sum of \$41,225,000 to \$56,280,000. Could the Minister explain that increase?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, at 6284, Other, beneficial ownership consultancy: for the creation of the beneficial ownership register, \$20 million. I will give you the breakdown as well Hon. Member. The consultancy for the systematic feasibility, \$14 million, and that is to ensure we have systematic disclosure based on the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) standards; the Youths

in Natural Resources Programme, \$8 million; Legal Advisory Services, EITI Secretariat, \$10 million; and advertisement brochures, \$4 million, accounting for the total of \$56 million.

Mr. Holder: Could the Minister lay over the information?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, I am not clear.

Mr. Holder: Could you lay over the complete breakdown so I can go through it?

Mr. Chairman: Was that not the complete breakdown Minister?

Mr. Bharrat: That is the complete breakdown. I can repeat it for the Hon. Member.

Mr. Chairman: Once he says it here, it is now part of the permanent records and will be in the minutes and the transcript in the *Hansard*.

Mr. Holder: I am guided, Comrade Chairman. Line item 6302, Training. Could the Minister explain the number of persons that are being trained and in what areas?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, this will account for the continuous training of staff. We have a system at the Ministry where we do continuous training in the courses such as leadership, management, conflict resolutions, and communications. So it will account for training in those areas for all members of staff under this programme. Thank you.

2.41 p.m.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings: There is the rental for a building for \$26 million. Could you say what is the purpose of the building and where is it?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, the rental of this building is for our annexe which is located at 55 Main Street. This is the building that houses the Guyana Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (GYEITI) Secretariat as well as the Compliance Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Line item 6284 – Other: In 2023, you had a budget for \$404,136,000 and in 2024, it is actually \$710 million.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, I think this is the wrong programme.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Is it the capital?

Mr. Bharrat: This is Programme 261. I think you are referring to Programme 262.

Mr. Ramsaroop: It is Programme 261; I am sorry.

Mr. Chairman: We are at current.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you.

Programme: 261 – Policy Development and Administration – \$460,249,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 262 – Natural Resource Management – \$979,487,000

Mr. Holder: Could the Minister explain the decrease in the sum for line item 6116, Contracted Employees? I noticed that the employment moved from 32 to 33 but we have a decrease rather than an increase.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, there is a slight decrease in the allocation from 2023 to 2024 mainly because of leavers and joiners. We had four leavers in 2023 and three joiners. However, the four leavers were at Warden I, meaning a higher grade of salary, and the three joiners started as Warden II, which accounts for a lower grade of salary.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Minister. Line item 6281 – Security Services: There is a significant increase, moving from \$4.287 million all the way to \$11 million in 2024. Could the Minister please explain the increase?

Mr. Bharrat: Yes. Mr. Chair, what happened in 2023, at the Main Street annexe building, we made provision for 12-hour shift security. What we are doing in 2024 is to increase that to a 24-hour shift system so that we would have more protection at that building.

Mr. Holder: Minister, what coverage did you have prior to 2024 in terms of security service? I may have missed it.

Mr. Bharrat: Through you, Mr. Chair, it was a 12-hour shift and now we are switching to a 24-hour shift system.

Mr. Holder: All right. Line item 6284 – Other: We see a huge increase there from \$404 million to \$710 million. Minister, in this allocation, is there any sum for the mineral mapping survey which you spoke about in your budget speech?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, the direct answer to the question is, yes. If I may be allowed to explain further so that the Hon. Member, the Committee, and the people of Guyana can truly understand the reason behind the increase in the allocation of \$305 million for this programme... Yes, Hon. Member, there is an allocation of \$400 million for the mineral mapping project as phase 1. I am sure you are aware that to conduct a project of this scale in all the mining districts throughout Guyana will range from US\$30 million to US\$40 million. I think this was one of the hindrances as to why a new mineral inventory and mapping was not done for, maybe, over 40 years now. It is badly needed, and it is part of our commitment to the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030. What it will seek to do is assist us in the allocation. This is in a more informed way of allocating claims and mining blocks that have evidence of mineralisation rather than award blocks or claims that we have limited or no data on, or outdated or old data, thereby reducing deforestation significantly.

We have committed as a country to keeping our deforestation rate at a very minimum to where it is today, 0.036%. This project will assist in keeping our deforestation rate low, put us in an informed position in the awarding of blocks and claims to miners and, also, it will reduce the cost of prospecting our exploration, especially to the small and medium scale miners in Guyana. As we know too, medium- and small-scale mining in Guyana is done only by Guyanese miners – no foreign companies. So, it will assist the sector a great lot as well as keep our commitment of a low deforestation rate.

Another allocation of \$300 million will be going to land reclamation and reforestation. Mr. Chair, you would recall that in 2023 we had a similar budgetary allocation. If I may be allowed to, I am happy to report that this project has commenced and has advanced significantly in Region 10. It was an area of almost 60 acres which was identified for reclamation and reforestation. That project has advanced significantly, employing over 100 persons in Region 10 and about three to four permanent staff. This allocation is for a continuation of the project but not in the same region. We are now targeting Regions 8 and 1, especially around the Mahdia area where there are significant mined out areas close to the township, and also the Mathew's Ridge area where there

are significant mined out areas. This will help significantly to boost our capacity as a green country – our forest coverage – and in the long term, add more carbon credits to our already verified credits by Architecture for REDD+Transactions –The REDD+Environmental Excellence Standards (ART TREES).

The other \$10 million will go towards advertising costs and developing mining policies within the Ministry, giving an account for the allocation under the line item 6284. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Minister, for that breakdown. Could the Minister say which specific areas this first phase of mineral mapping, or the \$400 million allocation, will cover? What is the time frame or, the expected completion time? Could the Minister also say what minerals, other than gold and diamond, will be surveyed for?

Mr. Bharrat: To answer the last question first it is gold, diamond, and critical elements. Critical elements are becoming very sought after right now around the world, especially with the world's commitment to achieving 100% renewable by 2050. Thereby, there is the need for batteries and solar panels. We know that lithium is in big demand across the world. As a matter of fact, last year, the production for lithium was just about half a million tonnes. The demand was three million tonnes. So, it is a much sought after element around the world. We know that there are a few countries in South America that are producing lithium. We believe that there may be a possibility that we do have that critical mineral here too. So, that is why we are focused not only on gold and diamond but also the critical elements, especially lithium.

Mr. Chair, we will be focusing on a few of the main mining districts first. As I mentioned, it will cost a lot to do all the mining districts. We know the main mining districts as being the Mazaruni area, the Puruni area, as well as North West District. So, those are the main mining districts, and the ones that we will focus on in the first phase. Also, this project will entail a lot of in-house work before we actually start the physical survey. As you would understand, we need to do that before we actually go out and start the physical. There is some amount of data that is available at the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) that needs to be analysed by the consultants when they come on board before we can actually go out and start that physical survey. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chairman, one of the major concerns of small and medium scale miners is the availability of land. So, my question to the Minister is, in this survey, will you be covering lands

previously mined out, for example by Troy Resources Incorporated and Omai Gold Mines? Is that the direction you are going or are these fresh lands? The problem in the mining industry is that you work these lands, rework them, and work them again. You share out blocks, for example, from Troy Resources Incorporated which were worked before, hence my question.

Mr. Bharrat: To the Hon. Member, he is correct in that miners tend to rework the said land over and over. They even rework the tailings ponds over and over, mainly because our recovery rate in Guyana is very low. It is something that we need to address. Our recovery rate in Guyana is probably 35% to 40%, if we can get up to that amount. This is very low compared to large scale companies that use the cyanidation process. They would go up to a 90% and 95% recovery but for our small- and medium-scale miners, especially the ones who do not invest in methods other than using mercury, their recovery rate will be low. Hence, this is the reason why they rework the land over and over.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Chairman, is also right in terms of the cry by the miners. It will always happen; it has happened for generations. It will always continue to happen in that miners, like loggers, would always want more land. They will always want more blocks and they will always want more claims. That is something that I do not think anyone of us can actually end. It will always happen because as you finish working a claim or a block, you look for a new property to go and to start working on. The mention was made of Troy Resources Incorporated. I am happy that he mentioned it because that is one way that we are seeking to address the cry for land by small miners especially – not the medium-scale but small miners – to access their own land to work. In the past – again this has happened long before all of us – small miners were used to do what I term as ‘prospecting’ on the medium scale landowners’ property.

2.56 p.m.

They are given permission to work on a property and as soon as they find some sign of mineralisation or gold, they are put off of the land. There is never a proper formal agreement between the landowner and the small miner, mainly, because of the terrain they operate in. We have been trying to address that. We have a standard agreement which we have given to Mines Officers to give to small miners so that they can sign that agreement with the landowner, so they are not chased off of the land when they find the gold, because it is a common practice. What we

have done in Troy Resources Inc., since we have taken over the property at Kairuni, is to start looking at claims that shows some amount of mineralisation, but you would understand our limitation in doing the prospecting or the survey because we do not have the kind of equipment or technology in-house to do a detailed survey. You may very well find us giving a claim to a small miner but when they go into the property, it may not realise the true potential that they actually want. That is why we have made into the agreement that if you are not satisfied with the claim that you are given, then, you can relinquish it and another claim will be given to you. We are limiting it to 100 claims. A claim is 27 acres. To date, we have already awarded 82 claims to 82 Guyanese small miners, whether persons are already in the sector or whether they are now getting into the sector. We planned to award 18 more *via* a lottery. It is done *via* a lottery, so we do not determine which claim is given to which small miner. They have to actually put their hands in a bag, and they will pull the claim number that they will be working on.

We will also target some new areas because we have seen, and it was well ventilated last week, that gold production and deceleration was down. It has continued to dip since after 2016. In 2016, we peaked; we were over 700,000 ounces and then we started to decline, from 2017 right down to 2023. It is a known fact. One of the main reasons is because we have been working the same land for decades and we keep reworking and reworking but at some point in time it will obviously diminish, the minerals will diminish from it. It is definitely important that we look at the new areas available and to do the survey in some of those new areas as well as some of the existing areas, because we believe that some of the existing areas have not been worked out fully, mainly because of accessibility. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Holder: Could the Minister lay over the plan in terms of the areas that will be covered? I will be grateful.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, I think I mentioned the three mining districts that we will focus on first, which is the Mazaruni mining district down the Mazaruni River, that will include the Issano, Pappishow, Tamakay area, going all the way up there, which is a very rich area. The Hon. Member said he worked here. The Puruni areas, also, which we know is a heavy mineralised area. That is where the Toroparu deposit is and there are many small and medium scale mining operations in and around that area as well as the North West District, especially around the Eclipse Falls area

where we have a mining station, and most of the mining activities are taking place in and around that particular area, or the Port Kaituma–Matthews Ridge sub district. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chair, my final question on this programme. The Minister mentioned that there is a \$300 million allocation for land reclamation. I know he mentioned some areas in Region 8, Matthews Ridge, could he state how many acres this will cover to complete?

Mr. Bharrat: This allocation is being catered for 24 to 25 hectares which is equivalent to close to 60 acres of land. It will be subdivided because I did mention that we will do some in Region 8, especially around the Mahdia township, and some in the Matthews Ridge area. It is a total of about 60 acres of land.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Cde. Chair, under this same line item 6284, the Hon. Minister mentioned land reclamation. Do you have an idea of the total lands to be reclaimed and is it a gold mining area or a bauxite mining area?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, the project that is being done is in the implementation stage in Dakouria, Region 10, the Linden area. It is an old bauxite mined-out area, as in old mines as it is commonly known in Linden. The old mine is on the Wismar side of the river. The Matthews Ridge and the Mahdia area are gold mining, these are areas that have been worked out and they are very close to the residential area. We are not going to do reclamation as yet over the areas that are still being worked. These are mostly areas that are closed. If anyone flies into Mahdia and takes a look, one will see the amount of work that is needed within the boundaries of the township.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Cde. Chair, last year \$300 million was spent and this year we are spending another \$300 million. That is a reason why I asked the area size that was available for reclamation. I do know it is quite expensive to do reclamation. There must be an objection. Sixty acres as compared to the area that needs to be reclaimed is probably just a fraction. I just want to know the objectives for the land reclamation overall. It is a lot of money to do this; it is not cheap.

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Hon. Member, Mr. Ramsaroop. I think you appreciate the cost of reclamation, reforestation. It is a very expensive exercise. When I was defending our budget to the Minister and the Ministry of Finance, my exact words to them were ‘look at it as an investment and not as an expense’ because we are already earning money from our forest. We are already

earning a minimum of US\$750 million for only 30% of our carbon credit. If we can get the other 70% sold at the same price, simple Mathematics will show you the amount that we will earn from it. So, it is more of an investment, and it is needed. It is needed especially in the context of climate change and our Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), our nationally determined contribution to fighting climate change, and our commitment as a country to all the agreements that we have signed – the Paris Club Agreement and our own Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). But I agree with you. I, myself, question it, but it is a very expensive exercise.

The Hon. Members Mr. Figueira and Mr. Sears will tell you the condition of some of the mined-out areas in the bauxite belt in Region 10. We are talking about big gorges, valleys, that you have to basically landfill, re-fertilise and then the planting exercise. It also includes the establishment of a nursery. We do have a nursery at Wismar right now, we have one at Yarrowkabra, and we are going to establish one at Bartica as well. That is part of the cost as well. We are not using some of the fast-growing species as you would know, because you know the invasive nature of it. We are using some of the traditional species. It may take longer to grow but it is worth more at the end of the day in terms of carbon capture, in terms of the environment and, also, if we move towards the economic viability of some of these species, not for our generation but generations to come.

If I am permitted, Mr. Chairman, I went into a village in Region 9; I think it was over the Rupununi river behind Annai. When you go into that village, there are some nicely plated trees, you can see that they were planted because they are in rows and well kept. I think those trees were planted by three or four generations before the current persons who are living there. It is a long-term investment for future generations in our country. Thank you.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you, Minister, for that explanation. You brought out one of my questions, what species were important to plant and where. I have a follow-up about the 70% remaining of carbon credits. I know last year he mentioned that there were lots of persons knocking on the door. Do you have an interest or is anyone interested in purchasing the balance or any amount?

Mr. Bharrat: Indeed, the Hon. Member is right. A lot of companies and countries have been approaching us. We have been approaching people too; I can tell you that, but I cannot report any agreement that has been made with anyone as yet. But I can say that we were in discussion with a number of organisations and even countries to purchase the additional 70%.

Mr. Ramsaroop: I have a follow-up, Cde. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Sir.

Mr. Ramsaroop: If you notice, in my presentation, and this is what I was worried about, is the framework or the concept to what we add up to. I think it may pose a challenge for the balance of 70% unless you get Hess Corporation or one of these guys to come back and purchase additional. I think this is where we might have some difficulties. I am looking at this as part of the benefit for Guyana. Maybe you may have to take a relook at the concept of the carbon credit.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, I will take the comment in good light, but I think all of us know that in the future, carbon credits and forests may be better than gold and oil and gas in the manner of which the world is going. Luckily, for Guyana, we have a pristine forest that is almost intact; it is over 90% intact. Yes, we may say that there is not enough interest now, but I believe in the next five to 10 years from now, people will be knocking down our doors down to purchase carbon credit, not to cover for their emission or not to form or create any greenwash by any means, but as a commitment to carrying out their own operations. Many of these oil companies now have to ensure that in their budgetary provision there is some allocation for offsets. That is where we will come in, definitely. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: My final question, the Minister mentioned that we are gaining US\$750 in carbon credits. I think that stretches out up to 2030. That works out, depending on which year you check it, between \$50 to \$100 million or maybe more per year. Are you satisfied that you are only allocating \$300 million toward land reclamation? How does this sum weigh against the rate of forest and land degradation? The point that I am trying to get, if we are going to catch up with this thing in the near future and bring it under control...? Over to the Minister.

Mr. Bharrat: It is not only land reclamation, reforestation that will solve the issue. If I point you to the other programme here, the mineral mapping or the inventory, which will prevent some amount of deforestation as well too, what happens now is if we allocate a block or a claim, many miners do not spend money in prospecting. They just want to go and start mining. If they go and destroy three to five acres of forest because they want to mine there, unknowing what mineralisation exist there only to find nothing.

3.11 p.m.

It simply means that they have to move to another area. They are basically destroying patches of forest as they seek to find minerals. Once we can complete the mineral inventory and have an updated mineral inventory then we can point you in a direction where there is mineralisation, maybe 90% to 95% so there is no need to destroy any other part of the forest as we did for the forest inventory as well too. It is not reforestation, but it is the prevention of the destruction of the forest at the same time. To answer the first question, it is a phased and multiyear project. I am sure that this will have to continue way into the future. The \$300 million this year, we are satisfied with that but I am sure I will go back to Hon. Minister Dr. Singh next year and ask for additional allocation because it is a continuous process.

Mr. Henry: In conducting this inventory of our natural resources, has anything been done about an area called Black Water in the Cuyuni area on our side of the border where we have been told that there are massive *bullfying* and activities have been happening there?

Mr. Bharrat: We will consider all of the areas including Amerindian villages that exist within some of those areas such as when you go down to Isanno, Isseneru and some of those areas when you go down the river. All those areas will be considered but with regard to the border, we may have to be more careful now. It is not that we do not want to do it, but we may have to be a bit sensitive in terms of what is happening. I do not want to rule out the area Hon. Member Mr. Henry but I am sure we will look at it.

Mr. Henry: On the further, Issano, I do not know if it is confidential information, but if you say so I will keep quiet afterwards. Is it true that rare earth has been found in the Issano area and no activities have begun?

Mr. Bharrat: Not to our knowledge, Hon. Member. We do not have any exploration license either over that area for those minerals.

Programme: 262 – Natural Resource Management – \$979,487,000 agreed to and ordered to stand as part of the Estimates.

Programme: 264 – Petroleum Management – \$886,428,000

Mr. Holder: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: I see a significant increase from \$153 million to \$230 million. If you check the Staffing Details you would see that there is only an increase of six employees. Could the Hon. Minister explain this drastic increase in the allocation?

Mr. Bharrat: It is not so drastic as the Hon. Member may want to think. In 2023, we had 29 employees under this programme; now in 2024 we will have 35 employees under this programme, an increase of six. In the year we had three leavers and 10 joiners. Most of these joiners are bonded scholars who have returned from studying abroad and are now placed in the Petroleum Department at the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Mr. Holder: Line item 6284 – Other: Again, there is a drastic increase from \$73 million to \$204 million. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the sum?

Mr. Bharrat: Third-party instruction to be conducted on Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessels for \$6.3 million. This was increased obviously because of our third FPSO. Now, commissioned and almost at full capacity. We are not catering for two FPSOs anymore but a third FPSO named ‘prosperity’. Presently, we have three companies who are doing third-party inspection for us. May I add that this is all part of us monitoring production and offloading on the FPSOs, because I know there has been a lot of noise in certain sections of the media about us not being capable, not having the ability or the equipment possible to monitor production and offloading? There is the third-party inspector. If I may add, Mr. Chairman, it is not only the third-party inspector that is onboard the FPSO but also there is a full-time presence of the Guyana National Bureau of Standards on all three FPSOs and at any offloading of crude into a tanker, the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) must be present otherwise no offloading can be done. Added to that, the meter system is sealed by the Guyana National Bureau of Standards, so without the Bureau being onboard the FPSO no offloading can be done into any tanker. I just wanted to add that.

The second allocation is the Local Content Secretariat consultation and review of regulations for \$50.7 million is being allocated with the view that we will start the consultation in 2024. As you are aware, we had extensive consultation in the later part of 2020 and, for almost the entire of 2021, we had consultation in drafting the Local Content Bill that was passed on 29th December, 2021. We had made a promise that once we reassess our local capabilities within the private sector,

not only in the provision of goods and services but also our human resources, we are going to look back, especially, at Schedule 1 in the Local Content Legislation which currently has 40 services or carve out and each service carries a target. It is not only adding services to Schedule One, but it is also relooking at the targets to see where we can increase targets. This is something that we had promised and we have made an allocation to start the consultation this year. Of course, we must do an assessment of our capacity locally. We cannot shoot ourselves in the feet and say we can do welding fabrication at 100%. Could we build an FPSO? No. We cannot build an FPSO. Could we fabricate parts from the FPSO? Yes. We can do that. We need a true assessment of our capacity in the country which will be done using the allocation of the 2024 Budget, as we move on there are other allocations to do part of this study that I am speaking of. This here is basically for the consultation and the review of the regulations.

The other allocation of \$42 million goes towards S&P Global Platts and the London Tankers. These are regular subscriptions that must be done by any oil and gas country that wants to manage the sector in a prudent manner. This has helped us a lot in the reduction of demurrage fees. I will go through that because there is an allocation for that later in the Budget as well. It has helped us to reduce the demurrage fees significantly by tracking tankers and, secondly, it has helped us with the pricing of our crude so that we get the best price for Guyana's crude. Now, we have managed for the first time to get a premium as well too. When we started, we were paying a marketing fee; today we are paying no marketing fee plus we are getting a premium. This is very necessary as I mentioned for any oil-producing country that is managing the sector in a prudent manner.

There is a \$100 million allocation to review in anticipation of the seventh project that will come on board. It has been a trend by ExxonMobil and partners that for the last three years they have submitted Field Development Plan (FDP). We have dealt with Payara, Yellowtail, Uaru and now we are dealing with Whiptail. We are anticipating that another FDP will come in at some point of time this year. Whether it is oil or gas, that is to be determined, but we are anticipating a seventh project coming in. Obviously, we will need a consultant to do the review of the field development plan in anticipation of issuing a production license. Then, there is a \$5 million for advertisement so that will give you the total, Hon. Member.

Mr. Ramsaroop: I thought the Minister was giving us a thesis there but thank you very much for that breakdown. Under line item 6284, I noticed that there is a \$204 million there which almost double from last year. Could you give us a breakdown of the sum?

Mr. Bharrat: That was line item 6284.

Mr. Ramsaroop: I am sorry; my apologies.

Mr. Patterson: Just for clarification, the subsidies that the Ministry gives to the Local Content Secretariat come under line item 6294 and it is not covered under line item 6284. Is that correct? I do not want to ask the question on the wrong item.

Mr. Bharrat: Just to clarify that there is no subsidy to the Local Content Secretariat. It is a part of the Ministry but this allocation is for consultation and review of the regulations.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, last year, \$8 million was given to the Local Content Secretariat and you said it is a subsidy. Is that no longer the case?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, I am sure there is a good reason for the allocation of \$8 million last year. I do not have that information with me but there is no subsidy.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, could I help the Hon. Minister out? I know he has a lot on his plate.

Mr. Chairman: We have to give him the courtesy to finish his statement before we intervene. I think he mumbled through the conclusion. So, you can ask the question.

Mr. Patterson: I just want to quote from the Hansard Report. This is from the *Hansard*. It is your presentation responses to the same line item. It states: “finally \$8 million will go towards the Local Content Secretariat”.

Mr. Bharrat: We can always give an account for the \$8 million that was given to the Local Content Secretariat. Maybe it was the wrong word that was used but I can assure you that we can give a detailed explanation as to how the \$8 million was spent by the Local Content Secretariat in 2023.

Mr. Patterson: Just for completeness, could the line item 6294, the \$371... I have a series of question so I want to make sure I put them in the correct line.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, could I give a breakdown of the allocation?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

3.26 p.m.

Mr. Bharrat: There is payment to GNBS. As I mentioned earlier, we have GNBS monitoring all production and offloading on the FPSO. For the Liza Unity, it is \$38.8 million; for the Liza Destiny, it is \$22.2 million; for Prosperity, it is \$38.8 million; the legal opinion on the new Petroleum Law, \$15 million and this is where we will have local support to review the regulations being done by S&P Global, that was contracted since last year by the Ministry. There is an allocation of \$250 million for demurrage, as I mentioned earlier, and the hosting of the foreign delegation – \$6.8 million.

Mr. Chairman, if I may be permitted to go through it quickly, it is quite a large allocation for demurrage – \$250 million. In 2020, we catered for 27 lifts. However, there was demurrage on 19 lifts. In 2021, we catered for 42 lifts and there was demurrage on 17 lifts. In 2022, we catered for 101 lifts and there was demurrage on 45 lifts. In 2023, we catered for 142 lifts and there was demurrage on 97 lifts. In 2024, there will be a significant increase of lifts. We are catering for 205 lifts of which we anticipate that there may be demurrage on 80 lifts.

The 2023 figure of 142 lifts but 97 we had demurrage on, Mr. Chairman, if you and the Hon. Member can recall, 2023 was the year when both FPSOs underwent normal maintenance and then we had an issue with the Liza Destiny's FPSO where the main compressor went down, reducing significantly the production. Production was ongoing but it was reduced by almost half below 100,000 barrels per day. Thereby, it contributed to a higher increase in lifts that incurred demurrage cost. Hence, the request for the allocation of \$250 million for 2024 even though we have a third FPSO that we are catering for, that is Prosperity. Thank you.

Ms. Ferguson: If I am to take our attention to line item 6116, Contracted Employees, I note for last year we had more than \$153 million set aside for salaries and benefits. You would recall, Mr. Chairman, that surrounding the issue with the US\$214 million that went missing, the nation was advised that the officer responsible had two weeks deducted from his salary. I am not seeing it

reflected here. Perhaps, the Hon. Minister could tell us where exactly we will see the deduction or the amendment in the salary to reflect the two weeks no pay leave of that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you said ‘last year’. Am I right?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Mr. Chairman because if you look under staffing details under the revised, what was budgeted and also revised...

Mr. Chairman: I just wanted to get some emphasis on last year. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Bharrat: I know the Member wants to ask about the audit. That is just the whole idea by using line item 6116 and the deduction. If I am to answer the question, I will answer it directly. I am not afraid of answering the question I was asked by the Hon. Member. Mr. Chairman, let me put it on the record. **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** Let me answer please.

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, we asked a question and if there are subsequent questions, you will wait when the answer is given and then I will allow the subsequent questions. Hon. Minister, you have my protection.

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think a few Members on the Opposition side know exactly... No disrespect to any other Member. The comment of where the money is or the missing money, simply means that there is a lack of knowledge of what really transpired and there is an understanding by some of the Members that this money was there and somebody took the money. Let me put on record, that is not the case. The Hon. Members, Mr. Ramjattan and Mr. Patterson, I am sure understand the course of doing audits. We had the expenses of ExxonMobil the operator in the Stabroek Block. We did the audit from 1999 to 2017, so we had our auditors examining the books of ExxonMobil. That is how you would conduct the audit. However, as you could imagine from 1999 to 2017, we were supposed to start the audits long before. Unfortunately, it started late so the auditors in other words had to go way back. I am not making an excuse, but I am telling you what the reality of the situation... **[Ms. Ferguson: (Inaudible)]** Hold on. If you want the answer, you have to wait.

When the report was prepared by the company – IHS Markit – that was contracted to carry out that audit it sent back the report to us stating that for US\$214 million it could not find evidence that money was actually spent by ExxonMobil on petroleum activities in Guyana. That is what it simply means. Then, there were talks and negotiations between ExxonMobil and the team at the Ministry. There were documents that were produced and then some were reduced so there was no physical transaction of money there. I just want to state that. It was reduced to US\$3 million but there was no report from IHS Markit that spoke towards US\$3 million. The report spoke to US\$214 million and we can only work with the report. As it is now, it is US\$214 million and not US\$3 million. I just want to state that, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Ferguson: The Hon. Member refuses to answer my question but, based on the explanation...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, he answered...

Ms. Ferguson: I withdraw that Sir.

Mr. Chairman: ...the question. Whether you like the answer, it is a different story.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am not satisfied with the response given by the Hon. Member. My follow-up to the Hon. Member is, based on the explanation he just gave to us, it seems to me, and I guess all right-thinking Guyanese, that the staff did absolutely no wrong. If no wrong was committed, why was the staff surcharged? If he was surcharged, could the Hon. Member state for the records what was the total number of moneys deducted for the two weeks from his salary?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I want to stop this questioning at this time because there is no particular reference you are making to the allocation being sought, but having made the speech, it is only fair that we get the Minister to respond.

Mr. Bharrat: We made a public statement about it. I think this matter was ventilated in the media and elsewhere a lot. I have stated clearly that the Government of Guyana have accepted the report from the IHS Market which speaks to US\$214 million, and the Guyana Revenue Authority which is the sole authority to finalise the audit. They are so doing that now. With regard to penalties towards staff members that was instituted by the Permanent Secretary (PS). Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, if I may?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, you have the floor.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, it may be better if I stand to catch your eyes.

Mr. Chairman: No, you caught my eyes.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Sir. The Minister opened the door so, could I direct him back to the same line items 6284 and 6294? Last year, the Minister reported that the final audit, which is the second, is due in March, 2023. Of course, it is now January, 2024. The second audit has not been released publicly. Could the Minister say why? I know it has been leaked but it has not been leaked publicly. I have a follow-up question on the audit.

Mr. Bharrat: As I mentioned, we made it clear in a statement that the Guyana Revenue Authority is the sole authority or the agency responsible for the audits. We made a further statement before that and said corrective actions are going to be taken with regard to what happened. One of those corrective actions is to have the right body, which is the Guyana Revenue Authority, to deal with all audits. We are just the facilitator, that is, the Ministry of Natural Resources based on the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA). It is the Guyana Revenue Authority who conducts and monitors the audits of expenses.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I prefer to stand actually. With regard to the first audit, there has been a public statement that we will end up in arbitration. Could I ask if any money has been allocated by your Ministry in defence of that, should that be the case?

Mr. Bharrat: A decision has not been made as yet with regard to whether it will go to arbitration or not. Regardless, the allocation will not come through the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Mr. Patterson: In last year's response to these questions, the Minister made reference to several studies in 2023. I will start off with the gas leak and mask to utilisation monetisation plan. We were waxed lyrically that there were two goodly gentlemen from Kuwait at no cost to us, because His Excellency – I hope I can say that – paid a state visit by the state of Qatar to Guyana by two experts the following week. That was in January, 2023. Could I ask the status of this gas leak master plan done by them?

Mr. Bharrat: Indeed, we did report last year that we would be receiving assistance from a number of countries and organisations that would be helping us in building out the framework to manage the oil and gas sector. The Hon. Member is right. We did receive support from Qatar, support that we do not have to make allocations for, in terms of gas studies and also in helping with the drafting of the petroleum activities bill. We did receive support from Qatar so we are thankful for that and there was no budgetary allocation required.

With regard to the other studies, gas leak and mask to utilisation monetisation plan definitely is linked to the gas to energy project. I am sure within the \$80 billion for the Office of the Prime Minister, there is allocation for that but I am not sure if it was asked of the Prime Minister.

3.41 p.m.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, the Ministry of Natural Resources released with much fanfare a gas monetisation plan, which was then later downgraded to a discussion paper. Could I ask who prepared this, the name of the consultancy and how much did we pay for our monetisation plan, which is now a discussion paper?

Mr. Bharrat: I think this was already mentioned in the public domain. I think this very question was asked of the Vice-President at one of his weekly press conferences. It is the former Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I am not sure if I can call names in the Committee. It is a former Energy Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The sum is \$20,000.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, the Hon. Minister also made mention of several other studies that he would be carrying out and that are to be done. This is in the *Hansard*. Could I ask the status? Could I ask when the country will be privy to these studies that you have carried out with allocation given to you in 2023?

Mr. Bharrat: I know that the question that the Hon. Member is asking is not related to the current expense in petroleum, but I want to assure him that whatever studies, such as the gas studies that was done, and we have made that publicly, the gas strategy, monetisation and utilisation studies, studies are being done by ExxonMobil as well. In this year's allocation, when we move to the Capital Expenditure, we do have some amount expenditure there for further studies to be done.

Mr. Patterson: Could I refresh the Hon. Minister's mind? I am quoting from page 52 of the *Official Report Hansard*, 60th Sitting, dated 31st January, 2023:

“I have a list here of all the studies that are ongoing. I could probably go through a few. For example, conducting the produced water study, conducting the Block Seismic Activity study, conducting the effective drilling, production activity and marine environment study. There are a number of studies being done by independent consultants.

He finished it off by saying, it reads:

“What I can say presently is that all these studies are currently ongoing ...”

You have an opportunity a year after, Sir.

Mr. Bharrat: Most of the studies that the Hon. Member is speaking about is built into the production license. The used water study, the gas study are all built into each production, whether it is Yellow Tail, Waru or whether it is Pyara. Most of these studies are being done by the operator but are being facilitated by the Ministry. It is the operator's responsibility and the license to conduct these studies and to ensure that they are shared with the Ministry of Natural Resources, once they are completed.

Mr. Patterson: Is the Minister saying that because the operator conducted these studies, even though he is the facilitator that there is no responsibility for this to be laid over to the people of Guyana? Is that what he is saying?

Mr. Bharrat: I am saying that the operator is conducting these studies. The studies are ongoing by the operator.

Mr. Patterson: I anticipated that the Hon. Member would go down this line. The Hon. Member just proudly announced that he ...

Mr. Chairman: There is a Standing Order with respect to anticipation also.

Mr. Patterson: That is just for me, it is not for the Hon. Member. I forewarned him at lunch that I am going over what he said because we have a cordial relationship. I forewarned that I am going over it. Sir, he made mention, and you could go back to the *Hansard*, that the Ministry has

approved six production licenses and they are coming with a \$100 million Whiptail. Obviously, the operator would have conducted his studies and concluded his studies, which would then label the goodly Minister to pen his signature to these production licenses. Could we ask that he provide this information?

Mr. Bharrat: All of the production licenses are made public. The license compels the operator to conduct the studies. Under the license, they will have to do the study and not the Ministry of Natural Resources will be doing the studies but, as part of the requirement in each production license, the operator must conduct studies.

Mr. Patterson: I would not detain the Hon. Minister. Is the Hon. Minister saying to the Committee and the people of Guyana that the operators have not provided him with the studies in which he has reviewed himself and, I assume the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)? You have here that \$100 million is for a consultant to review Whiptail. Obviously, when they conducted their review of the last four or five names, Yellowtail, Uaru, they submitted all these things. You are only seeing them. Your Petroleum Department is seeing them. Why can the people of Guyana not see them?

Mr. Bharrat: Again, I think the Hon. Member is mixing up the studies that we are speaking about. The ones that we spoke of in the budget last year are the ones that the Ministry has started or has responsibility for. I think some of the studies that are being mentioned are commitments by the operator that is enshrined in each production license. For example, Waru was signed last year but there are no operations, this means that there is no Floating Production Storage and Offloading operating under that production license as yet. Some of these studies would have to be conducted when or just before FPSOs arrive or when they start production then some studies will have to be completed.

Mr. Patterson: I know I want to get on to something. In response to the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry's question last year on studies on fishing, biodiversity, *et cetera*, the Hon. Minister also committed to having that done. God forbid, damage in the long term to these things. I am quoting him, Sir, not only to ExxonMobil and countries worldwide, the Hon. Member committed on the studies in particular Mr. Henry was on biodiversity and fishing stock. Could we ask for an update? Could we ask when is that study or does that remain under the purview of ExxonMobil as well?

Mr. Bharrat: I think the study that the Hon. Member mentioned, a report was made publicly already. At that time, when we were debating *Budget 2023*, there was a report of a drop in catch with the fishing industry and it was rumoured or claimed that the oil and gas exploration activities offshore is affecting the fishing industry. I think a detailed study was done. I think that was the question the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, was asking because he was obviously speaking about the low fish catch and the claim that the operation offshore is affecting the fishing industry. I think that study was done. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), I think, did that study. That report is public.

For the production license for anyone of the developments, it means that Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) must be done for each of those developments as well, which will include some of the studies that the Hon. Member spoke of. What we have done since the Pyara and for Liza I and Liza II, is to not only make the license public but also the environmental public for each of the licenses that were issued. It is also public. It is the license plus the Environmental permit that are public. Thank you.

Programme: 264 – Petroleum Management – \$886,428,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 261 – Policy Development and Administration – \$4,000,000

Programme: 261 – Policy Development and Administration – \$4,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 264 – Petroleum Management – \$707,500,000

Mr. Patterson: Hon. Minister, \$1.638 billion has been expended so far in this Programme. One of the targets would be the creation of oil and gas data management system. Could I ask for an update on that particular item?

Mr. Bharrat: The intention is to create our own data repository in the country. Presently, and since the inception, as a matter of our petroleum sector, our data has been stored externally. We believe that it is time or it must happen at some point in time that we store our data locally – in

house. We believe that we can get the true benefits from our data because the data from Guyana's basin is very salt after and valuable. We have seen that during the current bid round, when people had to pay millions just to get data in order to submit a proposal for the blocks that are up, the allocation is to move towards setting up data repository in-country, so that we can have our own data in Guyana.

3.56 p.m.

Of course, this is not the total allocation, it costs way more than this. This is just phase one. The Hon. Member would know how expensive it is to establish a data repository in-country. Not only to establish a data repository, but the analytical work behind a data repository. This is because having the data and not being able to analyse it is basically a waste of time. You must have the capacity to do the analytical work behind the scenes so that your data can be presented in a format that companies will pay for.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Hon. Member, Sir. I asked what progress was made. Permit me, if you may, Mr. Chairman, to read from the *Hansard* and tell me if this sounds vaguely familiar. This is from the *Hansard* of last year's budget, page 50.

“Mr. Chairman, indeed, part of the allocation is to ensure that we start the process of having our very own data repository right here in Guyana. The disadvantage that we face right now is that our oil and gas data is not stored in Guyana. The issue with that is that we can make a lot of revenue by having that data in the country and us being the sole agent responsible for it. Presently, it is being hosted by one or two different companies in Houston that has the type of capacity to hold our data.”

Sir, I could go on and on. Did it sound vaguely familiar to the response I just got? That is the exact response the Minister gave me last year. [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*) consistent.] He is consistent, I will give you that, Sir. I asked what progress has been made. That was my question. Last year, he told us why it is there. This year we are asking what progress has been made.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, we already have the consultant working or already recruited. The consultant is now looking at not only the hardware but software requirements. Obviously, they will have to look at the volume of our data and what type of analytical work must be done. It is a

work in progress. This will definitely be a multi-year project. So, what the Hon. Member mentioned about last year, I am happy that it is consistent, and I am not misleading the House in any way that it is a multi-year project. It cannot be done in one year. We will probably come back next year for the final allocation then to move towards the actual physical establishment of the data room and to have our data come to Guyana.

Mr. Patterson: Yes. I will cede to my Colleague who seems (*Inaudible*). Sir, I am glad to hear that progress has been made, we have a consultant recruited. Could the Hon. Minister inform this House when this consultant was recruited, who is the consultant, the contract sum, and, of course, the contract period? Sir, he said there is a consultant in place.

Mr. Bharrat: The consultant was hired in 2023. I was told it is the same consultant that designed the Norway data repository system. As you are aware, Norway is somewhat of a model country when it comes to managing the oil and gas sector. It is not only the way in which they manage the sovereign wealth fund, but the entire framework to manage the sector – they can be seen as a model country. It is the same consultant that actually designed the Norway repository, and that consultant was hired in 2023. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, yeah. My last question for the Minister on this head, under this same project code: one – enhancements and legal institution framework, obviously, for management and oversight of the oil and gas sector. We spent \$1.6 billion, and we are spending \$700 million here. I recall that the Minister also has an additional – what is it – \$50.7 million for lawyers included under 6284, I think it is. Could I ask the Minister, if he is doing an enhancement of the entire oil and gas sector, why is it that you are now... Obviously, this is an Inter-American Developed Bank (IDB) project, if I am right, an International Development Association (IDA) project. Why is it that you are now budgeting for an additional sum? Is that not a duplication of efforts?

Mr. Bharrat: The Hon. Member is right, there is an allocation of \$50 million under line item 6284 of the 264 programme. Then there is an allocation under component A of the World Bank funded project. Mr. Chairman, I did mention that the \$50 million budgeted under Programme 264, line item 6284, is for local support to the consultant, S&P Global, for the finalisation of the regulation for the Petroleum Activities Act. This budgetary allocation in the capital estimates is for direct payment to S&P Global, probably one of the best consultants in the world with regards to, the

Hon. Member would know that the oil and gas sector and developing the legal and regulatory framework for countries around the world. They have been contracted by us, they have worked with us on drafting the Petroleum Activities Bill, and they are continuing. It is an 18-month contract that we have with them. They are also assisting too with the bid round process. So, it is not only the Petroleum Activities Bill, they are also working on the regulations. This allocation here is for direct payment to S&P Global for their work with us. The \$50 million under line item 6284 is for local support for this company in reviewing the regulations. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: I want to go back to data availability. Mr. Chairman, after much pressure from the Opposition and the public for transparency in publishing the daily data production in 2022, the Government made a big splash about their website where this data could be seen. However, the sites have been sporadic and is several months behind in reporting data. Could the Hon. Minister explain why this is so and why this piece of information cannot be updated daily since the data recorded in real-time on the Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSOs) could be transmitted immediately or at least daily? As I recall, Sir, data was transmitted to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Energy on a daily basis under the Coalition. Could the Minister explain how this budgetary sum will change this situation?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, I think the Hon. Member is mixing up the data repository with the data that is being made available on the website with regards to production. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, would know that with the data repository, the data is basically the seismic data and the other technical data that you will retrieve from shooting seismic studies. Those are the kinds of data that will be housed in the data repository and that is why I mentioned that it requires a lot of analytical work because, to make that data useful to anyone who wishes to bid for a block in Guyana, they cannot buy the raw data, it has to be analysed before it is bought. That is with regards to the data repository where this allocation would go towards. To speak towards the comment, I think it is more of a comment that was mentioned by the Hon. Holder with regards to production data. I think if you check our website, you will see that the production data is being published, delayed by a month. So, if this is January, you would have information up to 31st December. When we go over into February you will have information for January.

You are also correct that we have the capability at the EPA, and I am happy that you mentioned it. This is because I think the Opposition has been supporting sections of the media in saying that

there is no way to track production or to track what is happening offshore on the FPSO. I am happy that you mentioned it, that the EPA has that ability to track what is happening offshore, even with regards to marine traffic in real-time and also production. What we do at the Ministry of Natural Resources is to ensure that we verify the production data with what we have. The operator, the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS), will also have their record, Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) will have their record and, once it is completely verified, then we will post that for public consumption. So, it is being posted, but once it is verified. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: Yes. I am not satisfied with the answers, but I will move on for the sake of time. On the same production monitoring, Mr. Chairman, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change Government had recognised the dire need for capacity building to oversee the oil and gas operations, so it approached the World Bank, which provided US\$1 million and brought in an expert from Mexico, I believe, to develop a 36-member petroleum unit. These are specialised professionals in petroleum engineering and other related specialties. As I understand it, the plan was to recruit internationally and fill those positions by 2020. Of course, we had no budget; the APNU/AFC did not have a budget because of the elections. When this was made public in 2021, Minister, the Hon. Minister first claimed that he had no knowledge of it, it never happened, and he did not know anything about it until the cover of the World Bank document appeared in the newspapers. The Minister then responded that the plan was not abandoned. I am certain the Minister can remember this. If the Minister is correct in saying that the World Bank plan is still being executed, could the Hon. Minister say, what is the status of fulfilling it and how many of these technical positions have been filled and or will be filled through this budgetary sum?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister... I think I saw some movements. I do not know if it is the Hon. Edghill who is responsible.

Mr. Holder: It is just one line item, one item.

Mr. Chairman: We are stopping the clock at 4.09 p.m. Have the technician quickly come and tighten the connection. Well, I wanted to say this in the Assembly and not in the Committee, so I will wait until we resume. Just to update the Chief Whips, we have gone as of now three minutes over the allotted 1h 30mins and so we have eaten into the few minutes we have. We now just have

about five minutes remaining when we return. Hon. Minister is switching let us hope... Okay, so we are resuming at 4.10 p.m. We just lost a minute and a half.

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think the Hon. Member is a bit confused with regards to what is happening in the petroleum sector.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, could you pull the mic down a little?

Mr. Bharrat: He spoke to several issues in his comments or question. There were several issues that he spoke to. First of all, to bring clarity to what we are discussing, Mr. Chairman, this allocation, the total allocation, Capital Expenditure for Programme: 264 – Petroleum Management – is funded through the World Bank project. That is the first point I want to make.

4.11 p.m.

Secondly, I think what the Hon. Member was getting at was the petroleum commission, the design for the petroleum commission; the staffing for the petroleum commission; the technical units or the units, rather, that would be created to manage the affairs and advise the commission. We have mentioned on several occasions that we will have a petroleum commission in place at some point in time. As it is now, we have been working with consultants through the World Bank to build out the framework to manage the sector.

The other thing, I think, the Hon. Member is referring to is an article or comment made by the former head of the EPA where they were going to build a unit at EPA to monitor what is happening offshore. That has happened. I am happy to report that. I think last year I did mention it. If one goes back to the *Hansard*, like the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, did, one would see that I did report last year that there was a unit at the EPA with 13 trained personnel, and that we could actually have real-time monitoring of our marine space, including offloading of crude into tankers from the FPSOs. The entire perception that we do not know what is happening offshore is not true. We are actually monitoring that in real-time. We know when a vessel is moored alongside a FPSO. We know when it leaves. We know which company it is registered to. I think, maybe, there was a mix-up, but I want to say, clearly, that all the allocations here are from the World Bank project. Basically, we are continuing the work that has been started from the creation of the oil and gas sector in Guyana. There is no side track or deviation from what we want to create as a world-class

framework to manage the oil and gas sector. I fully support the comment made by the Vice President in that we have one of the better managed oil and gas sectors around the world, especially, for new oil producing countries.

If I may be allowed to just give a quick example. Countries like Norway discovered oil maybe in the 1950s or 1960s or in 1969, and then they put a sovereign wealth fund in place in 1996/1997. Some of these countries producing oil for decades or many centuries, do not have a local content legislation in place. We have moved toward having a local content legislation. All of this is being done under the World Bank project. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have actually used up all the time we have, not only for this head, but the savings too, so I will now have to put the question.

Programme: 264 – Petroleum Management – \$707,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Thank you, Hon, Minister, and your staff for taking us through your agency. Thank you, very much. The House will resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Minister Edghill, I know you have your staff here. Let us take a break and invite them to partake in whatever refreshments we have so we will give them a fresh start. Hon. Members, before we take the suspension, I just want to remind the Hon. Member, Ms. Philadelphia, about that list she promised to provide to the House, failing which you would have to do the necessaries to the Hon. Minister. We have a lot of other promises to layover documents. Please, those who have promised to layover, let us have those documents presented to us. Thank you. This is a good time to take the suspension for our afternoon break.

Sitting suspended at 4.16 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.50 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Agency: 31 – Ministry of Public Works

Current Expenditure

Programme: 311 – Policy Development and Administration – \$2,662,564,000

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and a pleasant evening to you. To my special staff of the Ministry of Public Works, a pleasant evening too. If I could turn the Committee and the Hon. Members' attention to Staffing Details on page 173, Mr. Minister, I recognise there is a decline by 10 staff as compared to 2023. Could you explain to the Committee what would have caused this decline by 10 staff?

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: I would like to thank the Hon. Member for the question and her expressions. We would be happy to have her on staff. The reason for the reduction is because persons have either resigned or departed for other reasons. That is the short answer. I could give the long answer but that is the short answer and I think the House wants the short answer at this time.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his very short response to my question. I now turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6264, Vehicle Spares and Service. Hon. Member, I recognise that in 2023, you had \$7 million and then there was a revised sum of \$12.255 million. The first question is, could you explain to this Committee of Supply what would have caused this increase and how the Ministry was able to spend more than what was actually budgeted?

Bishop Edghill: I am sure the Hon. Member who was a part of Government is fully aware of the process of virement. The money was vired. She would appreciate that with the stellar performance of the Ministry of Public Works and the magnitude of what is being done in the country, our vehicle fleet came under tremendous stress because we are working in every single region. That is the reason. Right now, the reason we still have [*inaudible*] a small allocation for 2024 is because we are recapitalising our fleet with new vehicles.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: Were you saying something, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. You started talking before I gave you the floor...

Ms. Ferguson: Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: That is okay.

Ms. Ferguson: You know anxiety.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6281, Security Services. I note we had a revised sum of \$220 million for 2023, but in 2024 there is an increase as against the budgeted sum for 2023. Could the Hon. Member explain to the Committee of the Supply what would have caused this increase from 2023 to 2024?

Bishop Edghill: I would like to advise the Hon. Member and the House that, during the period of 2023, we went out for open tender to procure security services. You would be aware that there was a raise in the minimum wage in Guyana, so some of our security people were normally in the lower paid brackets. In the new bids, in order for security companies to satisfy the Minister of Labour and the regulations he had made, we cannot pay people below the minimum wage. Coming into where we are now, this would adequately take care of the contracts that we have in place for the security services that are to be provided.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response, but I have a follow-up on this particular line item. Mr. Minister, I am fully cognisant that the Ministry of Public Works, then as it was, had security services being provided by the Special Constabulary Unit of the Guyana Police Force. Am I to understand that, under this new dispensation, you all would have dissolved the services provided by the Special Constabulary Unit, hence, you have now contracted private security services? That is one. Secondly, could you say which security firm is currently providing services at the Ministry of Public Works?

Bishop Edghill: I would be pleased to inform the Hon. Member and the House that the Special Constabulary Unit still provides that useful and valuable service at the Ministry of Public Works. What we have here is augmented services to take care of the magnitude of what is taking place at the Ministry of Public Works. I can tell you that we have two companies apart from the Special Constabulary Unit that are providing services. They are Sheriff Security Services and Elite Protection Services – both were procured through open tender.

6.00 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I guess, like me, as you traverse around the city and across this nation, I have recognised a number of blue and white signs posted all around the place – Sheriff Security Service. It seems as though that this particular security service is a special, special service. That being said, Mr. Chairman, moving on, I now turn the Hon. Member's attention to 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, I have noted an increase in the revised sum of 2023 to \$1.89 billion. Could the Hon. Member explain the reason for the increase as against 2023 and that of 2024? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member could follow as a Member of this House and know that we came to the House for a supplementary for the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD). No fault of the PPP/C. Because of the empty coffers at the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), we had to be providing a subsidy to the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority. That is the reason we are here, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I just want to remind the Hon. Member that he is a man of God so, whenever he comes to this House, he has to be truthful. Speak the truth and it shall set you free, Bishop. Moving on Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, at 6322 – Subsidies and Contributions to International Organisations. I have noted a very small increase between 2023 and that of 2024. Could the Hon. Member state for this Committee of Supply what would have occasioned this increase? Thank you very much.

Bishop Edghill: I accept the admonition of my dear Sister, but just to indicate, truth cannot speak lies but liars can tell the truth sometimes. While we proceed with this, Sir, I will just indicate that this is as a result of our contributions to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which is the International Civil Aviation Authority worldwide body and the Caribbean Aviation Safety and Security Oversight System (CASSOS), which is our regional body and it is based on our assessment.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Amanda Walton-Desir, you may have the floor.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am deeply interested in the Minister's statement on the empty coffers, and I am wanting to ask the Minister whether he could...

Bishop Edghill: What line item are we on?

Ms. Walton-Desir: It is a follow up from the item 6321 that Ms. Ferguson would have posed. I was trying to get your attention before the last question.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Yes, I wanted to ask the Hon. Minister whether he could clarify for this House the effect of the cessation of flights during the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and its impact on the revenue of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority. This is because I would hate to think that he is inferring that somehow empty coffers were as a result of something else, other than the fact that flights were grounded and there was no revenue coming from that and that is the primary earner of revenue for the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority?

Bishop Edghill: When we left Government in 2015, the GCAA had at least \$1 billion in its accounts. When we returned to Office, Sir, I argued at the time, if you recall I presented *Budget 2020* to this House. We had to come to this House for moneys to keep the reserve of the GCAA at the legal limit because the expenditure had even gone into the reserves. If you check the books of the GCAA, you will see where the moneys went. It was not transferred to the Consolidated Fund, it was expended. The expenditure that was made, we could argue here for the rest of the night if it was justifiable or not justifiable. For example, paying rental for offices for a chairman that is non-executive. Furnishing the offices of a chairman, that is not an executive chairman. I would not want to go into the details of that since names might have to be called. The bottom line is, if we manage well, we will be able to manage even in difficult times like the PPP/C would have done in the past.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Cde. Chairman, I intend to follow up with this because I have a problem with us not being clear on certain things. The Chairman of the GCAA, was he housed differently from the general office? The other clarification that I want to ask, coming off of the Minister's question is whether or not, in the period of 2015 to 2020, did the Civil Aviation Authority not up its compliance ratings with ICAO to seventy how much per cent? I cannot remember the exact figure.

Was there not expenditure incurred as a result of us having to become ICAO compliant? You have not yet answered my question as to the depletion of the revenue for the year and something, close to two years, that our airspace was closed. Overflights were cut by how much? Bring the facts to the House please and do not make insinuations.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I would like to stay away from dog fights tonight but the Hon. Member who is asking the question would know that there is an exchange of correspondence as it relates to her appointment and her presence in a particular organisation, which did not have the approval of the Government of Guyana, so to speak. The Minister concerned was not even assured that was an appointment that was made. The correspondence is all there. I am saying, recklessness as it relates to spending on things that are not policy-driven. COVID-19 had an impact. We lost revenue because of the absence of overflights, but that did not contribute to the total deficit that we reached. The annual reports of the GCAA and the audited statements have all been tabled in this National Assembly.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, I have a follow up and, maybe, the Hon. Member will be kind enough in the interest of time. I happy that he has said to this Committee of Supply that the revenue was depleted because of the lack of overflights. It was the first question I asked. I wonder whether the Hon. Member would be kind enough to lay over that information, in terms of the overflights, the revenue garnered from the overflights and the levels of depletion due to the almost two-year hiatus of overflights from our airspace. We would be happy if...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the request dealing with revenue, he is not responsible for. Again, Hon. Members, if you want to give a speech, I will allow the Hon. Minister to respond, but you can speak to the policy for which the allocation is being sought. Let us keep our questions to that. I do not have a problem with tracing back the year and if it is a rollover project but, if you are going to make the speeches, then we will be here until tomorrow morning. Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the audited statements and the annual reports of the GCAA are before this National Assembly. Every Member of this House can have access to that. I think it was properly examined that part of the problem was the super salaries that were being paid, of which,

the Member asking the question was a beneficiary of that super salary. She did not go to work for months. I said that publicly and I said it in the House.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, may I have the floor.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, you may have the floor.

Ms. Walton-Desir: If I may, I could do this all evening because the Hon. Member must understand that professional...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, this is not a debate over the Estimates, so at this time you will need a question pertaining...

Ms. Walton-Desir: I have a follow up question. I do. I think we ventilated this matter in the public enough. Hon. Minister, I know that there is an audit that is upcoming, we are on ICAO contributions, could the Hon. Member indicate the percentage of compliance that we are at currently in terms of our ICAO compliance?

Bishop Edghill: Whatever was the compliance rating at the last audit, that is where we are. We are due for an audit of which we are preparing for now.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I have a follow up. Has there been any interim activity or audit undertaken since the last audit, either in the person of a full audit or what is called an interim International Quality and Value Institute Advisors (IQVIA)? Has there been that? If so, when was it?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, for full disclose in preparing for the ICAO audit, the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority has been receiving technical support and help from the South American region of which we are working with in preparation for an audit so, any assessments would have come from there to tell us how to prepare for our audit. That is where we are.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, if I can take us back to line item, 6321, Contributions to Local Organisation. If we are to turn to page 470, Mr. Chairman, I recognise that the Berbice Bridge Company was given \$160 million plus in 2023. There is a revised sum there of \$245 million and change. I have two questions on this, first, could the Hon. Member explain the reason for the variance? Secondly, I note, for 2024, you are requesting \$215,200,000, could you explain the reason for this decrease in 2024? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: The Hon. Member would be aware that we came to this House for a supplementary and that supplementary was largely to take care of the arrears that existed in the years before as a result of the increase of usage because there was a subsidy and the numbers that we have come to this House to be appropriated is based on the best estimates we could have for 2024 at this time.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you Hon. Member for reminding me. I am aging, so kindly excuse. Mr. Chairman, the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority, I note there is close to 100% increase from last year's allocation, which was \$348 million and change, could the Hon. Member explain or provide a breakdown or disaggregation of what this \$705 million and change will be utilised for? Thank you.

6.15 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, for the benefit of you, Sir, and the House, I will just deal with the Berbice Bridge first. We have had a 14% increase in traffic across the Berbice River Bridge. In 2022, we saw 1,138,328 vehicles. In 2023, we had 1,298,342 vehicles. This is a 40% increase.

To the Hon. Member, the increases in the allocation for the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), which will receive the full support of the Member asking, is for us to take care of expenditure as it relates to the audit that is expected later this year. This is to ensure that we have the necessary expertise in country, working with our people and all the rest of it. Right now, the GCAA is in a mode of readiness and preparation for the audit. This money is largely to do with ensuring that we do well at the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO's) audit; that we have necessary compliances; that Guyana is on the map; and that Guyana is doing well. I am sure every Member of this Committee wants Guyana to be doing well.

Ms. Walton-Desir: On this same item, I am very glad that the Hon. Minister mentioned that we wish Guyana to do well. That is indeed the case. Hon. Member, do you have a disaggregation of that sum in terms of how much is being spent on, for example, the information technology (IT) component of it? Is there any expenditure on the information technology component? There is the regulatory and there is the IT. Do you have a disaggregation of those sums?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I can tell you that the total sum being spent for the audit is \$287 million. The moneys are being spent to ensure that wherever there are deficiencies, we have the necessary framework because we are assessed on our own law. I am sure you are aware of that. We have a situation where we must do quite a lot of work. Even though we had a new Civil Aviation Act of 2016, the compatibility of the Act and the Regulations were not necessarily in place. It is for those deficiencies that we are having all the experts in at this time to help us and there is quite a lot of work that is being done. I do not want to be discussing all of that in detail in this Committee at this time since we are going up for an audit. The support is to ensure that Guyana does well.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, you know you must give praise where it ought to be given. When we took Office in 2015, the compliance was 44.4%. When you took Office in 2020, it was above 80%. So, the Coalition Government must be given praises where that is concerned. Mr. Chairman, I think I have exhausted my questions under this current expenditure. So, thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you can address the issue of compliance record.

Bishop Edghill: I want to take this opportunity, Sir, to join with the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, to salute the professionals at the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority. A country's ratings have nothing to do with the government that is in place. It has to do with the policy framework and the professionalism and everything of our people. You would realise, and I am sure everybody in this Committee know that the country was not compliant because a government changed in 2015. There was work that was being done by the professionals before the Coalition went into Government, and they continued to do their work to ensure that we got the rating that we got the last time. I want to congratulate them and say that this entire House wants to work, with their support, to ensure that we do well this time again. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions under this programme.

Programme: 311 – Policy Development and Administration – \$2,662,564,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 312 – Public Works – \$8,228,522,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, just a second.

Mr. Chairman: It is Programme 312, current expenditure.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the Hon. Member, under staffing details, I recognise an increase of about two staff. What is heavy is contracted employees at line item 6116. Last year, we had total of 204 staff members. This year, you are adding another 28 persons. Can you explain the reason for this vast increase in the contracted staffing details, Sir?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, with a programme that delivered 4,260 roads between 2020 to now, you need people in this Ministry to work. With a programme where we have had more than 282 projects in the hinterland, we need more staff. With a programme where we maintained more than 123 kilometres of roads in the interior; built more than 15 kilometres of rigid pavement roads in Regions 1, 7, 8, 9; built about 14 kilometres of asphaltic concrete roads in the interior regions; worked with the massive public and main access roads for projects in Canal No. 1 and Canal No. 2, Black Bush Polder; and several places in Region 5, namely De Hoop Branch Road, Cane Grove and Mahaicony Branch Road; with the kind of work that is being undertaken in Georgetown and happening right now at Conversation Tree and Cemetery Road, even though they are delayed; with the Independence Boulevard, Arapaima Street and the four lanes at Aubrey Barker Road; the development at the Kingston Seawall; the development of the green spaces across the country in collaboration with the First Lady; and the massive work that we are doing in terms of maintenance of sea defences and building new ones, Engineers, Clerks of Works and Technicians need to be in place. There need to be people for the laboratories – the soils and material laboratories – and people to check on the quality of work. It is just the scope and magnitude of what is happening. I want to take this opportunity to say that, even though we are understaffed, in comparison to what we are doing, the men and women at the Ministry of Public Works are doing a fantastic job.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I have a follow-up to the Hon. Member. I heard him make reference to Laboratory Technicians, people to check off the work and all manner of things. Can the Hon. Member state for this Committee of Supply whether these positions will be advertised? If so, what procurement method will be utilised to have them hired?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member, who was in Government, knows that you do not budget for vacancies. So, you know that these numbers here are people who are already catered for in the system. So, I do not know if we should go down the line. I will tell the Hon. Member that a lot of the people who we have now at the Ministry of Public Works, she would be proud to know, are some of our Guyanese scholars, people who have been studying in this field and who are serving their country while they are on contract at the Ministry of Public Works. They are young, bright, Guyanese men and women.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, while I hear the Hon. Member about the scholars serving in the Ministry of Public Works... [Ms. Manickchand: *(Inaudible)*] Mdm. Manickchand, just give me a hearing, please.

Mr. Chairman: I am giving you all the ears, please.

Ms. Ferguson: ...in the Ministry of Public Works, I am fully aware of many political lackies serving above these very qualified people at the Ministry of Public Works.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you were going so well. How are you going to refer to staff at the Ministry as political lackies? Come on, strike that; I would not even ask you to withdraw.

Ms. Ferguson: They are political appointees; I stand corrected, Sir. All right, I am moving on.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I think I owe the Committee a response.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Minister. She did not ask a question; she made a statement, and you have every right to respond.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, there are two politicians at the Ministry of Public Works – yours truly, the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill, and my colleague, the Hon. Deodat Indar. These are the only two politicians at the Ministry of Public Works.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, be careful with making statements rather than asking questions.

Ms. Ferguson: Well, I withdraw, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, may I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6241, Rental of Buildings? I recognise a small increase for 2024. Last year,

it was \$1.8 million and this year you are asking for \$1.920 million. Can you explain to the Committee of Supply what caused the increase in rental? That is one. Secondly, where are these buildings located? Could you also provide the Committee of Supply with a disaggregated amount for the various buildings the Ministry will be renting?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, there will be no need for that. These are three buildings that the Ministry of Public Works is renting from the Mahaica Mahaicony Abary/Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) at Onverwagt; government to government. Look at the low amount of money. It is to put up staff who are working in the region. The only reason there is an increase is because the MMA/ADA has to maintain its buildings and it asked for a small increase in rentals. Thank you, Sir. There is no need for a disaggregated amount. These are three buildings.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. May I turn the Committee of Supply's attention to line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads? I note that we have a small decrease from the revised sum of \$3.8 billion for 2023. I noticed that the Ministry is now asking for \$3.6 billion in 2024. So, perhaps, in the interest of time, Mr. Chairman.... The Hon. Member oftentimes boasts about the 4000 plus roads that they have been doing across the communities. So, it would be good for the Hon. Member to lay over to this National Assembly a breakdown of the roads that will be done and the cost associated with these projects. Thank you very much.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy for the opportunity for this conversation, Sir. The Hon. Member, who presided as a Minister at this Ministry, would know that under this line item we do maintenance of roads, which is not just pothole patching, but we do weeding and cleaning. We must do striping of the roads to ensure that they have the proper markings.

6.30 p.m.

Then, there are emergency works because of damage and the rest of it. I am sure that some of us would have been seeing in the media the stellar work of the Ministry's Special Projects Unit that is taking place right now on the Rupert Craig Highway, because of the cracks and craters that were developing out there, to ensure that you have a comfortable ride, traffic is not slowed up and safety is improved. This is what we do.

When we talk about maintenance of roads, it is not just Georgetown; it is across the country. We have had situations where the Corentyne Highway – and I am sure the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, is aware of this – because of its years and the *wear and tear*, the usage of the road, it has been deteriorating at different sections. We have made a decision that we have to build out a new four-lane ... upgrade that highway. The 99 structures are currently being expanded but while we are doing that, six lots had to go to maintain that road. We have had situations where roads were maliciously damaged, and we have spoken about this. Whether it was protest or what, public roads and bridges must not be damaged by people. We have had to maintain those roads. When the fires were finished, we had to go in and get those roads fixed. That is what we are doing here, and we would like to do more. I can tell you that the Special Projects Unit, apart from the maintenance that is happening, whether it is from the airport to Georgetown, for which we have had to do a significant amount of maintenance...

Mr. Chairman, I hope, at some time, when this House discusses this issue of weight restrictions, we will have the support of everyone in this House. I would have liked to have the scales right now, but, Sir, you know the story. We do not have them. The issue is that checks showed, Mr. Ramjattan, that trucks that are built to carry axle load of 8.2 tonnes are currently fetching 25 tonnes per axle. That means the weight is not on the axle, but the weight is on the road. If any Guyanese traverses the East Bank Road from Soesdyke to Georgetown, you will notice that the western side of the road is what deteriorates because that is the side on which the trucks come with the load. On the eastern side, there is some amount of damage but not the full amount of damage. As a country, all of us must come together and say that we cannot be throwing money in fire. We are building roads with international standards, but our people are not following the standards when it comes to the loading of trucks and the usage of trucks. It is not just the driving, but it is when they stop, or they have to slow down in traffic. That moment of take-off is when the road comes under stress. You get bulges like we have at Grove. Right now, a team is out there doing some work. We have to look at this issue.

I also want to address the issue of trucks going into communities. We cannot have these log trucks, because the man wants to visit his wife, driving into the community to park. Trucks with 60 tonnes are going into communities and breaking shoulders and the rest of it. Commercial traffic will be in Guyana with us, especially with oil and gas, but we have to be able to say that these are roads

that are built to highway standards to take tonnage of 100 tonnes, but the axle load must also be balanced. For these community roads, if you want to take stuff in, you have to destuff your container; you have to destuff the canters; smaller vehicles to get in. We cannot break a front road while we are trying to build a back road. We have been very strong, even with contractors who are walking excavators on a new road to go in and build one for which they just got a contract. We have to be able to come together as a country and say, listen, this nonsense must stop. Together, we have to maintain our roads. We cannot throw money to fire and have to keep maintaining.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Hon. Member for his lengthy explanation. Before I put the other question to the Hon. Member, I would like to say to this Committee that the works being done by the Special Projects Unit of the Ministry of Public Works is as a result of former Minister Patterson and I equipping that unit to do extensive works in communities. I just want to put it on record. The Hon. Member made reference to the huge trucks traversing our roads. The question I wish to put to the Hon. Member is, who approves of the importation of these trucks and their registration?

Bishop Edghill: First of all, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for recognising the work of the SPU but indicate that a name change does not mean that something did not exist before. Minister Benn had a Force Account. It is the same Force Account that is now being called the Special Projects Unit. We have always had a Force Account. I would like to thank the Hon. Members of this House because we came here with a supplementary and if you remember the questions that I had to answer at the end, in December... We have just equipped the Special Projects Unit with two additional teams. Rather than having one team, we could now have three teams. You would recall that in 2022, you approved moneys here for us to be able to buy a milling machine for the first time in this country. We are doing what we need to do, whether we call it Force Account or Special Projects Unit. Thank you for the support.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a follow-up for the Hon. Minister. Where are we with the crafting of weight limit regulations? I know there are some that are old, maybe from the 80's. Where are we in terms of updating the regulations?

Bishop Edghill: We have a consultancy that is being undertaken right now with support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Let us discuss this issue. Weight restriction must not

become another form by which one could do a hustle at the side of the road. When a truck comes through from a quarry on the Linden-Mabura Road with 25 tonnes per axle, when its only supposed to be carrying 8 tonnes per axle, it destroys everything coming down there – the Linden/Soesdyke Highway to the East Bank. While we see the East Bank more often because lots of us do not go to Linden, the Hon Members, Mr. Figueira and Mr. Sears, will tell you about the undulations that are happening there because of those same weighty vehicles. Even with the maintenance of the roads... The Hon. Member, Mr. Robeson Benn, who is quite experienced in this field... When the rain is falling and these trucks are ploughing through without stopping, the potholes become huge craters. My idea and the House's idea should be like what happens at the airport. If JetBlue says 50 pounds, one has to go to the corner and take it out. It is not just about a fine because if you fine the person and you allow them to come through with the weight, the damage will be more exorbitant than the fine. One has to take out and put at the corner. One has 12 hours to pick it up. If not, then one would have further trouble.

We do that with the Demerara Harbour Bridge. We knew that we had to save the Demerara Harbour Bridge because of the weight restrictions, the breakages were happening. When the trucks are going over, they have to go on the scales and then you will see them like they are weighing sugar. They are with their shovels, and they are taking it out because we would not allow it. We have to come together as a people, as a mature country and as a people that is modernising Guyana. We are building out Guyana. Whether we are Government or Opposition, these are things that we want to see – better maintained streets. We want to be able to see safety on the roads. This is something that everyone wants together. These are things that we have to work on jointly. I will look forward to that, Sir.

Ms. Walton-Desir: You are absolutely right about that. Road safety is everybody's business indeed. However, outside of the mechanics of how craters, *et cetera*, are formed on the road, Hon. Minister, do you have an idea as to when we would have draft regulations? I just want to say that, of course, the regulations will not be 'fining' but they will set out the entire framework for the restrictions. Do you have an idea as to when those regulations, maybe in draft, would be sent to the Attorney General's (AGs) Chambers?

Bishop Edghill: Hon. Member, through the Chairman, I can say to you that we are anxious to have them in our hands. It is a work in progress. While we are waiting for it, there must be some

voluntary compliance. If all of us in this House say this is wrong and we lend support, collectively, people will start pulling themselves up. I believe that is required.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I have one final question, not to belabour the point. Could you advise the Committee on the reporting mechanism? I live in a particular area. There is a truck that is there driving and mashing up my street or there is a bulldozer or whatever heavy equipment on a road that it should not be using. What is the reporting mechanism available for public spirited citizens who may want to report that?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the reporting mechanism that exists right now is public-spirited citizens informing the Ministry. Some of them even take pictures and put them on *Facebook*. It is a shaming campaign and some people do not have any shame. I do not know if I could say that in this context in the National Assembly where ‘shame’ is a prohibited word.

Mr. Chairman: It is.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, listen, I believe in strong and tough legislation, but we have to be able to get society to collectively cry out against something. This is where the gravamen of the argument is. People must not allow it. If they see it, they should bring it to our notice. Our *Facebook* pages; people make telephone calls; we send out the engineers and sometimes we get the images from the cameras. [Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Okay. We will come to that just now.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, in the interest of time, I would have to forego so many other questions that I have because the Hon. Minister is just *gyaffing* his way through to eat up our two hours but before I...

Mr. Chairman: I think the *gyaffing* is happening equally between you and him.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay, Sir. Before I bring the curtains down on this particular programme, I would like to turn the Member’s attention to line item 6272 – Electricity Charges. I recognise that we had a revised sum of \$379 million in 2023 and I note for 2024, Hon. Bishop Edghill, you are now seeking \$416 million. Could you explain for this Committee the reason for the increases and which offices are likely to benefit from this line item? Please do not go too long in your responses, Sir.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, this is what is called being a victim of your own success. This is to pay for the additional streetlights that people are demanding, and which we have to put in communities.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, and to the Hon. Member, I thank you very much for responding to my questions. I will end on this note, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much.

Programme: 312 – Public Works – \$8,228,522,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

6.45 p.m.

Programme: 313 – Transport - \$324,996,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, I recognise there are no staffing details here. There is zero for staff, but the Ministry is requesting in excess of \$324 million for this particular programme. I note maintenance of other infrastructure. I guess that relates to aerodromes. Am I correct, Bishop Edghill?

Bishop Edghill: Very correct.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. Good, Sir. The other thing, Mr. Chairman, is on line item 6282, Equipment Maintenance. I note we have a large increase from \$119,000 in the revised column for 2023 and you are now seeking \$195,000. Can you explain to this Committee the reason for the increase and what equipment will be maintained?

Bishop Edghill: I will go back to what I said earlier. In areas like these, you will see increases because of the scope of work. We have to maintain more computers and we have to maintain things for special projects. The staff of the transport section are catered for as contracted employees that you asked for. This is just a programme, but they are part of the Work Services Group (WSG). For equipment, the more use, the more maintenance. I do not think I want to go on. We have other, bigger things to discuss in a trillion-dollar budget – getting computer servers and all the other things. The sum of \$119,000 is what we are talking about here in a trillion-dollar budget.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, like I said before, there is so much I would like to ask, but I will hold my questions for another time because we have other, bigger things, as the Hon. Minister

stated earlier, to discuss. So, I have exhausted all of my questions on this programme. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Even to say no, the Hon. Member has a speech.

Programme: 313 – Transport - \$324,996,000 agreed to and ordered to stand as part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 311 – Policy Development and Administration - \$1,014,000,000

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good evening to the Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill and his staff. Under Government Buildings, under capital works, \$6.699.387 billion was expended prior to 2024. In 2022, we expended \$2.4 billion. In 2023, we expended \$4 billion. Can I ask the Hon. Member the status of this project?

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You would recall that this is a question that is before the House as well and so I would also give some information. The Government of Guyana has determined that we will seek to consolidate our offices into strategic places for efficiency and economy. We are building an office complex of four towers, 12 storeys high, that could accommodate 6,000 staff with other amenities to create that environment for greater efficiency. At the time of the engagement, we were going with 10 acres of land, which I had identified at this House. But when we went back to our drawing board and reviewed our connectivity network... We are seeking to reduce congestion and increase accessibility. We might have been creating a congestion because of where we were locating it on the Eccles-Mandela interlink road.

So, we have since been able to move the location of the project to the new interlink road that will be between Ogle and what is now called the Jaguar Monument, along that one kilometre away from the Eccles-Mandela interlink road heading east. It means that there will be direct access for those who are coming from the East Coast, Berbice or from the East. For those who are coming over from the West Coast, the Demerara Harbor Bridge would be able to get over through the Bridge into Peters Hall, connect and they can get to that building. People from Georgetown will have several accesses using the Eccles-Mandela interlink. Those coming from the upper areas of

Linden and West Demerara...So, the area that is now located is more suitable for accessibility, and we have been able to get 20 acres as against 10 acres. So, there is no mystery about this. So, what happened is we had to ask the contractor, after he signed his contract and was in the mobilisation stage, to wait with us until we could have gotten that sorted out. His procurement process had already kicked in. So, we were in a holding pattern, but you would have seen the land that the land has not been identified. The sign board that the Hon. Member asked to be put up is already up and we are advancing with this project now.

We apologise to the nation and to the House for the delays. But the delays are for the good of all of us because we want to ensure that what we are doing is bringing relief and not bringing struggle. Right now, anybody who comes down the Heroes Highway and gets into Sheriff-Mandela knows that at eight o'clock in the morning the congestion is massive. Think about 5,000 to 6,000 workers plus people wanting to do business heading to that building along that artery, and what it would have caused. So, the removal of the site not far away but down the Haags Bosch road... We have all of the contracts out. The Haags Bosch road is going all the way out to the East Bank Highway with four lanes. We have just also awarded a contract from the Jaguar Monument going all the way to connect where the India Project starts. The India Project comes through from Olge to Eccles and there is a connection. So, that entire artery of Haags Bosch is being widened to be able to accommodate. We will be on the northern side of that road. That is where the construction will take place.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you for that lengthy explanation. Sir, I am still trying to get the Hon. Member to say how and on what we have expended 44% of the contract price? May I remind the Hon. Minister that he is the one who is always at Public Accounts Committee (PAC), of which he is a Member, saying that they can only pay 10% and you pay for measured works? So, can I pose this question to the Hon. Member? What authorisation and in what form did you pay for the 4%, Sir?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the project is \$15.874 billion. So, the Hon. Member could do the math and he will know that his percentage is not correct. That is the first thing. We should come to the House with clear explanations. The mobilisation advance was \$2.645 billion, which is in keeping with the standard bidding document and percentages to be paid, and that was in 2022. It was \$2.645 billion from \$15 billion. Do the math and you will see that it is not 44%. The 2023

allocation of \$4 billion is what...We had to ask the contractor to stop bringing supplies and materials because...It is a prefabricated structure that will be going up in keeping with the new technology that is going. You are seeing some of the same kind of construction with the hotels and all the other things that are taking place. So, we have not spent 44% of the contract sum. That is the first thing that is not correct.

Mr. Patterson: You spent \$6.7 billion out of \$15.9 billion. So, you do the math. Sir, can I say to the Hon. Minister and I go back...Yes, do the math for yourself. **[Bishop Edghill:** But... *[inaudible]* mobilisation.] It was 43%. I rounded it up to 44%. Do not worry about the Bishop. Sir, my question is: You said that this money is going towards a prefabricated building. In the 2023 Budget, the Hon. Bishop said that the contract was signed, and they were building a 12-storey building. The contract was awarded to Caribbean Green Building Inc., and it was signed on 30th December (*inaudible*). Sir, in your press conference, you said that you are now building a 14-storey building. Sir, first and foremost, this House and everyone would like to know where this \$4 billion worth of materials is – because the Auditor General obviously missed this one – stockpiled? Where is that which you had to beg the contractor to stop bringing, Sir?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, we are confusing things here. We are making a statement and then the question does not relate to what is being asked. It is like if I say to you: an airplane is flying at 275 miles an hour and the wind is blowing at 60 miles west, what is the age of the pilot? That is where we are here. So, we are talking here about simple management and procurement.

7.00 p.m.

A contract was signed, a mobilisation advance was paid, and a site was identified for the construction of the building. **[Ms. Ferguson:** Initially Kingston.] It was never Kingston. It is the site at the Eccles/Mandela interlink, and I told this House that. We have moved the site to another location and our engagement is to get this building done. At this particular stage, we are coming to the House for 2024 only for an additional billion dollars. The reason why we are coming only for a billion dollars is we recognise that because of the delay there is work that has to be done to catch up before we even come for more sums. We have put in place a consultancy that is now supervising this project, which is VIKAB (Guyana) Limited, and the Hon. Member is free to ask any questions. There is no mystery and there is no money that has disappeared or anything

of the sort. We have to deliver to the people. If I said in my press conference, Mr. Patterson – and thanks for listening; and you should do that more often – 14, I was wrong and I could admit when I am wrong. It is always a 12-storey building. Thank you.

Ms. Ferguson: This project is really dear to my heart because so much of moneys have been approved in this National Assembly. I cannot see a design and I do not know about the site and all manner of things. Anyway, the Minister stated in 2022, \$2.6 billion. When we asked the question where this building would be constructed, you said at the existing area in Kingston. Let us go to the *Hansard* of 2022. You came to the National Assembly in 2023 for an additional \$4.6 billion. When we asked the question, it was now shifted from Kingston to Eccles/Mandela. At your press conference in December, you stated – without giving any plausible reason why this Mandela location was now shifted – Ogle Road.

My concern – and I guess the Hon. Member can help us here – one, the contract has been awarded to Caribbean Green Building Incorporated. I did my research. The Caribbean Green Building Incorporated does not have a website. It is that very contractor that is building the Sheraton Hotel at the same Mandela to Eccles after the *jumbee* bird. That is what is happening. We saw the sod turning for the Sheraton Hotel in early 2021. Why we *ent* get a sod turning for this 12-storey building? My question to the Hon. Member, since we approved \$2.6 billion in 2022, and a further \$4.6 billion in 2023, close to \$7 billion, and since the contractor has not delivered, could the Hon. Member state whether the \$7 billion or a portion of that money has been returned to the Consolidated Fund? If so, when, or was all the \$7 billion paid to Caribbean Green Building Incorporated?

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. I believe I said in this House, and several times before, that we have to optimise the use of space we have in this country. The Ministry of Public Works is in the Kingston area. In a modernising and developing country, I said in this House, should offices remain there, or should we allow for the development of our waterways for other things? I said in this House that the entire Carifesta Avenue, could you see hotels down that entire...? Should we allow cricket grounds to be occupying that prime real estate or should we move to other areas for cricket and we build out our infrastructure with the boardwalk that the Hon. Member wanted the Government to do which could be a private sector development project? Progress and planning are never static. Programming and planning are never static. The

decision for the moving of the office complexes is to ensure optimal use of facilities that could be of great benefit to all of us, no matter who is in government. I would say that on this particular matter. While we are here tonight examining and asking for a billion dollars, I can assure this House that there is no money that is missing. [Mr. Mahipaul: We cannot take your word for it.] You can have an investigation.

I can assure you the structures that need to be imported to put up the 12 storeys and the four towers that are there, is a work in progress. Just to put this matter to rest, even if the Caribbean Green Building Incorporated is building the Sheraton Hotel, which is a private sector investment, for this project, Caribbean Green Building Incorporated got their contract as a result of an open tender. If I am not mistaken, that tender for the office complex and the tender for the new police station at Brickdam, went out almost at the same time. Thank you. That is all I will say on this matter, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I am not satisfied with the Hon. Member's response. I asked specifically, this money went out and it was approved by this House. We *ent* see any building yet and we *ent* see anything. Was this money returned to the Consolidated Fund? Let us say that \$1 billion was given to the contractor for mobilisation, or \$2 billion, it will leave us with \$4 billion plus. Where is the \$4 billion plus? Was it returned to the Consolidated Fund? As I am on my feet, I heard the Hon. Member state in his response to the National Assembly sometime in 2023 about ten acres of land. I have read the *Hansard* of 2023 and I *ent* see anything about a ten-acre of land. When I learnt about the 20 acres of land was on 31st December, at the Hon. Member's press conference. Let us say the project site is now located at the Ogle Road. That area is where you have the dump site and it is smelly, especially whenever it rains. What I need to ask the Hon. Member is whether an environmental impact assessment was done to determine whether this location is appropriate for the construction of an office complex?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Minister, you have a re-ask and two other questions.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chair, there are about 25,000 Guyanese families that are living on lands that were swamp and cane fields. We now have a new road that is making the lives of people easy, that is passing that same dumpsite, that is making life easy for people on a daily basis, and that is going all the way out to Soesdyke, eventually. We are now coming through a green field project from

Ogle all the way to Eccles, and eventually onto Providence to connect with the bridge. I am sure the Hon. Member who asked the question has travelled, because I know she has travelled. She would have seen in other parts of the world, including industrial areas, where hotels, golf courses, malls, and other things have been set up where there was landfill or even sewerage facilities. That is a fact. We are not going to put Guyanese in danger. We are not going to be forever dumping garbage at Eccles. We have development in mind. Some people, when they look out and they see bush, they say that is waste. When the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) look out and we see that bush, we see 50,000 house lots and we would be putting 50,000 other families out there to live. When people see swamp, we are seeing 1,000 homes. I am simply saying that while we, right now, have all kinds of concerns, so to speak, I will ensure that I invite the Hon. Member to accompany me to visit the facilities. I would also ensure that at the ribbon cutting ceremony she is visibly present with a pleased smile to know it was done for the people of Guyana. So that is all I would say on this right now, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Patterson: I am hearing all of these things. Of course, everything here is on the records, so we want to know. This Minister, is it not that the public accounts is berating our accounting officers on the public procurement...

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I would like to object. I do not berate anyone, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, it is advising. I withdraw that.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Hon. Member for withdrawing.

Mr. Patterson: Advising our accounting officers that the standard bidding documents and the procurement laws state that you can pay a certain amount of money for mobilisation and all other payments come on measured works? So, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, under the question of payments outside of the mobilisation bond, did the engineer do an inspection? Did you send your engineers out when the contractor submitted his bid just like you said? Did they go and inspect the steel or whatever you said you paid for, that is all of the developing works, and sign off on the location to ensure that it is still there? Could you say to the House, specifically, on what basis did the Ministry pay the extra \$4 billion in 2023? Sir, as I am on my feet, every year the location of this building changes, as you would quite know. On the very first year/occasion, myself and you Mr. Chairman, asked about parking when they said they were going the same place, and you, Sir,

supported my call to find out where the people were going to park. In 2022, it was going at Kingston. In 2023, it was going at Houston next to the Sheraton Hotel. The Minister also said that they will have a hospital there, they will have a hotel there, they will have all sorts of fancy facilities for the betterment of our people. In 2024, now, we gone to somewhere else. My question specifically, Hon. Minister, how and on what basis did you pay the money in 2023?

7.15 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: I think the Hon. Member believes that we are at the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). We are in the Committee of Supply. The Auditor General is the authority to pronounce on matters that he is asking about, and he will certainly have an opportunity at the Public Accounts Committee to ask those questions, like we normally do. That is the first thing I would want to say. The Auditor General would have an opportunity to pronounce on this. There is a supervisory firm in place – VIKAB (Guyana) Limited. I told you. I will take you to the site so you could be more *au fait*. I would not want to continue to go into an argument with anyone on this. I think we have been going well all evening. We have to be careful in Guyana, not because you do not understand something it has... I used those words in uplifted commas because we did not have the Amaila Falls Hydropower project because some people did not understand some things. I can go into a debate if we want to about environmental impact assessment. We built a stadium at D'Urban Park. Did you do one? [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] It used to be a horse racing track and we built a stadium. We could go into things like that, but we do not want to go there. This is about developing Guyana and we are very, very focused on developing Guyana. Sorry that you are not satisfied, but I will ensure that you are there with the smile on your face when we are cutting the ribbons to get it open. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure with his plethora of staff and technical advisors... [An Hon. Member: Public Works.] Minister of Public Works and the Chief Works Officer (CWO), is unable or unwilling at this time to tell this nation, taxpayers, how he paid \$4.6 billion, what for, if anyone of his staff – I see that they are all here – actually inspected, signed off... I do not know if the consultant signed off on the payment certificate for the \$4.6 billion... [An Hon. Member: \$4 billion and (inaudible)] ...four billion in excess, if you want to quibble. If any of his staff signed off, what exactly they signed off? Where is this material? That is because he started off saying that the contractor started by bringing to

Guyana a prefab building. Obviously, we could go somewhere right now. You alluded to it earlier that at one occasion we suspended the National Assembly to go and inspect somethings that are on the ground. I will invite you to do that as well because that is what the Minister is claiming. Is he unwilling or unable to respond to that, to say that we have to wait on the Auditor General's accounts to know exactly how he spent his money... [An Hon. Member: *Inaudible*] The nation should be the judge.

Bishop Edghill: The first thing is, I never said, and we could check the record... I said we had to stop the contractor from going ahead with his mobilisation of materials into Guyana because of the changes that we were making. He is asking me to inspect something that is not in-country. I am saying to him, if he is concerned about the transactions, at the end of every project or even during the project, the Audit Office of Guyana has the right to carry out an audit. He can make a report to the Public Accounts Committee, which he wants to make the Committee of Supply into. I am reporting to the nation that the PPP/C Government, as part of its modernisation and transformation of Guyana, we are consolidating for efficiency, economy, and for higher levels of service, our offices into a complex that we are undertaking. The Hon. Member will have an opportunity to ask all his questions if he is dissatisfied with anything. I am sorry that I cannot satisfy them tonight. But I can tell you [*inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much Minister.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, while I am here, it is sad that we come here and pontificate and we go on. The Auditor General has not been able to see the scales that were 100% paid for, the Auditor General has never seen the scales, and the gentleman asking me this question... I do not want us to go down that road. Please do not let us go down that road.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, thank you. Let me just caution the persons operating these cameras that are on the monitor. Please, let us maintain the decorum in the House. I am seeing some images of MPs on this screen which I do not approve of. I do not approve of you taking those shots. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is indeed sad, when we as leaders sit in this room and try to go *tit for tat, butter for fat* against each other. When we come here, this is where we approve taxpayers' money, and by right when we ask the questions, we must be given

the appropriate responses. I have written extensively in the newspapers to the editors, calling that Bishop Edghill must account for the appropriated \$7 billion...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, we have had you asked the question with respect to, one, the location; two, the material paid for; and it was repeated by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson. I think now we should move on.

Ms. Ferguson: I am moving on. Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, at your press conference you stated 20 acres of land. Could you say to this Committee whether you have procured the land from the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission (GLSC) or the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA)? How was the land procured?

Bishop Edghill: From the Central Housing and Planning Authority.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, did the Member... Sorry. Did he say he procured it? [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*]

Mr. Chairman: If you would listen to the answer, then you would not have had to seek clarification from your colleague.

Ms. Ferguson: I was distracted.

Mr. Chairman: We have to ask the question... and I know we are going on in time, but if we just ask the question, listen to the answer, then ask again, please.

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

Mr. Chairman: You are going great though.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much. Since the Ministry procured the land from the Central Housing and Planning Authority, could you say at what cost?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the lands were acquired from the Central Housing and Planning Authority at no cost. It will be a government to government transfer.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Mr. Chairman, if my memory serves me accurately, this 10-acre area comes under the remit of the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission

and not the Central Housing and Planning Authority. I can stand corrected. Secondly, earlier Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member stated that 10 acres of land was acquired. Could he say to this Committee, what has become of that 10 acres of land?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have two issues. Is it the CHPA or the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission?

Bishop Edghill: The only thing I can tell you is, we have indicated our 'no longer interest' in the land that we were going with at first, and the authorities would have to answer what they intend to do with that land.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson ...

Mr. Patterson: Just for the record, could the Hon. Minister say the commencement date of this project because the last time was 30th December, 2022? The last time he was here last year, he said all the geotechnical studies and those things were completed. Could he say if they have been completed now to its new location? Could he say when is the anticipated, not the contract start date, the completion date.

Bishop Edghill: The life of the project is 913 days.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, you...

Mr. Chairman: I am listening to you. Go ahead.

Mr. Patterson: I asked three questions. The official start date and, therefore, he said the life is 320 days. That is great. He informed this House previously that geotechnical studies, *et cetera* were done for this 12-storey building at the second site. This is now the third site. Have they been completed for the third site?

Bishop Edghill: I am advised that the geotechnical for the current and permanent site is ongoing.

Mr. Chairman: It is ongoing. He has given the time to complete. That is the answer. Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions for this Programme.

Programme: 311 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,014,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 312 – Public Works – \$217,216,587,000

Mr. Patterson: Sir, we go to the new Demerara River crossing. This contract was originally signed in July, 2022; a two-year contract. There was a big statement that US\$25,000 or I think it was reduced to US\$15,000 penalty per day. July, of course, is another six months from now. Could I ask the Hon. Minister, what is the commencement date? I know that he said the commencement date, irrespective of signing... What is the completion date now projected? Let me break it up before...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister... Do you want to ask the other question and he will make a note of it while his staff gets in place?

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir, with no, of course, deduction of time. The Hon. Minister has said in this National Assembly, which we took for granted, that the removal of residents – I think it is about 48 to 70; I cannot remember exactly – was completed and all the residents had agreed; that was when we were discussing it. Sir, that was in 2022. Could I ask the Hon. Minister what is the status of that? Have all the residents agreed? That apparently is not so because it is in the press. Secondly, the payment for the residents that have to be relocated, is this catered for here?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Minister, you have the first question and the second.

Bishop Edghill: The effective commencement date for the new Demerara River Bridge was 2nd January, 2023. Remember this is a design-build project. The second issue that the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, is raising is concerning the relocation of residents. I am sure he has an interest since he is one of the valuers that is advising the persons there. We have been engaging all of the residents. As a matter of fact, I can tell you there were three stages and most of the residents agreed when they were engaged by the Ministry of Housing and Water; 40 persons identified that they will accept lands, commercial property elsewhere. We now have a situation where the prices that were agreed then has since escalated. I think the distinguished gentleman asking the question is fully aware of that because he has provided some of the documents with that new price with his signature. But moneys have been provided in this year's budget for the relocation of those residents. And since some of them might be listening I want to say quite emphatically, the

Government of Guyana will uphold the law. If there is compulsory acquisition of a property for the public good, which will be done under the signature of the Minister of Public Works, we will obey the Constitution, which says you must pay market value, and we will pay market value like we have done to every other property owner for every project that we have had to engage in the acquisition of property, so there is no question about that. The Attorney General's Chambers has engaged lawyers to negotiate final settlements and agreements with the persons who are to be relocated, and that is an ongoing process. Moneys are provided for in this year's budget to deal with that, and once those agreements have been signed and agreed by both parties, the payments will be made. We have to get the right of way, and we will follow the law, and we will obey the Constitution and we will honour our obligations.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you for the professional plug-out. Everyone now knows where they can get valuable service. Thank you for mentioning that, Sir. Could I now confirm that for the contract, the commencement date was the 2nd January, 2023? So a two-year contract, I assume that (*inaudible*). Therefore, on the 3rd January next year there will be a completed bridge. I am just seeking to confirm that from the Minister.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, our contract with the contractor is for that period with clauses that say if it goes beyond what would obtain and clauses to say if the delay is as a result of Government, what would be our responsibilities as well. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, has the contractor made any claims for variations with the structure thus far?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I am unaware of any such claims for variations. The contract is proceeding as agreed with the design with the consultants.

Mr. Patterson: I will move on, Sir. I have the information on record that I need. Sir, I will go to project code... I am looking at Volume III, can I just simply tell you the...

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, the East Bank–East Coast road linkage. Sir, if I recall, the Minister also stated two years for this project. I see that we have spent, so far, about 40% of the sum. Could I ask for an update, the completion times, and variations on this project, which is the East Bank? My apologies for not stating the project code, but I am reading from the... [*inaudible*].

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, this project is at 32% completion. If I will daresay, Sir, this is one of the projects that we at the Ministry of Public Works are quite satisfied that the contractor has shown the goodwill to execute this project within the time frame. We are moving on this.

Mr. Patterson: Just a follow-up so that we can have dates. I am glad that the contract is showing goodwill, and I am glad that the Ministry is pleased about it. Could the Hon. Minister state the completion date based on the contract. When it was signed you said two years.

Bishop Edghill: 6th October, 2024.

Mr. Patterson: And you are 32% at the moment. That is what you just said. Thank you. Sir, I go now to Soesdyke, Linden, Sir, if you would once again accept my apologies for not flipping back. I cannot flip back to Volume I to get the exact project codes. Sir, \$5 billion was budgeted in 2023. From the breakdown I see \$55 million was expended. Could the Hon. Minister give us a status of this project? That is because these are all massive projects that make up his largest-ever portfolio.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, this project is being funded by the Islamic Development Bank. The method of procurement for this project was international competitive bidding. We also went out for a consultancy, which is already in place, Al-Habshi Engineering Consultants from Kuwait in association with C.B. & Associates Incorporated. The consultant was engaged because the consultants will participate in the evaluation of the civil works contract. You would know that the closing for the civil works contract took place on 10th January, so we are at the evaluation stage for an award, and we expect that works will begin immediately thereafter. So the moneys that we are asking to be appropriated is to facilitate expeditious implementation of this project. For the people of Linden and all the users of this thoroughfare, you should note that it is going to be the rehabilitation of 73 kilometres of roadway that will include two roundabouts, one at the Soesdyke–Linden junction and the other one at Millie’s Hideout. This project is going all the way into the arch when you are going to the Mackenzie–Wismar bridge. It is going to see significant improvements. It caters for highway lighting, which is one of the features that the people have been asking for, for a long time, so users of the Linden–Soesdyke Highway would have lighting, greater access for – What do we call it? – laybys so at all material times we will have the lanes free. Even if there is a truck that has to stop for whatever reason, it is not on the lanes, but has the

laybys where it could get in. It is a very significant improvement to our transport infrastructure. I thank the Hon. Member for asking the question.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you. Sir, I am asking these questions just to get on the record so that we can note and we can refer it back, because as we notice, all of these major projects that I have asked for... Could the Hon. Minister say when the project will start, in your estimation, when will it be completed?

Bishop Edghill: This is a 36-month project. We expect as soon as we complete the evaluation and we have the no objections from the Islamic Development Bank that the civil works contract will be signed, mobilisation begins and the work is going to be executed.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. I now turn the Minister's attention, to Linden–Mabura. Sir, once again, this is a 2-year project. Once again, 2024 is the scheduled completion year of all these projects. Once again, I do not think that we will hit that target, but I am asking the Hon. Minister to update us on the works percentage completed, when is the contracted completion date?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, this contract duration period is 1,095 days, so I do not know if I should continue based upon the wrong assumption it is a two-year contract.

Mr. Patterson: Very good, Sir, 1,095 days. Could the Hon. Minister give us the contracted completion date?

Bishop Edghill: June, 2025.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I asked for the percentage completed to date.

7.45 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: The project is behind and the physical progress is about 13%.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I know my Colleagues want to get... I just want to get. For Success/Timehri, could the Hon. Minister give us an update?

Bishop Edghill: We are at the negotiation stage with the contractor. This is a project that is funded by the Inter-Development Bank (IDB). We went out to public bidding. We got the evaluation report. We got the Bank's no objection. We are concluding the negotiation for signing to begin

execution. We already have the supervisory consultancy in place. We are now awaiting the signature of the Civil Works contract to begin. That is a 36-month project as well, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: I cede to my Colleague after this. For the East Bank upgrade, it is the same question.

Bishop Edghill: The Grove and Success/Timehri is the East Bank.

Mr. Patterson: Sorry. It is for the East Coast. My apologies.

Bishop Edghill: Okay. Mr. Chair, you notice, I have been quite patient without even taking project codes because I want to help the process along.

Mr. Chairman: While we all have been patient, there are six minutes remaining on this allocation of time.

Bishop Edghill: The East Coast Road improvement project commenced on 23rd June, 2023. The completion date is 22nd July, 2025. We are actually, in terms of process, about four per cent but work is moving apace.

Mr. Chairman: I think it is time for the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Bishop Edghill: Sir, I would just need to say for the Hon. Member, this is also a designed build project so there were timings in this project for designs, then a period for design and then bid.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Just one quick question. For the Aubrey Barker Road, could you say what is the completion date, who is the contractor and what is the contract sum for that particular road?

Bishop Edghill: The Aubrey Barker Road is being done in two lots. While I get the paperwork with the details of the contractor, it would be useful for me to take the time to tell the nation through you, Sir, that the Aubrey Barker Road is being made into a four-lane road. The intent is for it to get all the way to Enmore. It will get all the way to Enmore eventually with the support from the Ministry of Housing and Water because as you know there are lots of housing developments that are taking place there now.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, if my Colleague...

Mr. Chairman: The Minister is on the floor.

Mr. Patterson: Oh.

Mr. Chairman: I stopped the clock for you. Two lots into a four-lane highway that is going all the way to Enmore eventually; that is the answer so far.

Bishop Edghill: There are two contractors who are currently working on the two lots. They are Colin Talbot Construction and Surrey Paving and Aggregate Construction Limited. The sums are of \$227 million and \$237 million for the first two lots.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, I asked the completion date for that.

Bishop Edghill: We are beyond the completion date.

Mr. Chairman: There are delays. The completion date has passed.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Is there no new timeline or is it just whenever they decide to finish?

Mr. Chairman: Is there a new timeline, Hon. Minister?

Bishop Edghill: Obviously, Sir. There would be new timelines. It is the first quarter of 2024.

Ms. Ferguson: Project Code 1214900 – Infrastructural Development: Could the Hon. Member inform the Committee of Supply for the project, currently, ongoing at Cemetery Road, whether there are provisions included here in this \$12.5 billion?

Bishop Edghill: There are no funds in this programme for that road, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. To the Hon. Member, since I have asked about that project, could you say to the nation and people like me who traverse that corridor, what is the new completion date for that project?

Bishop Edghill: This project is beyond its time. We have had extensions. I just want to make sure I get the correct date to give the Hon. Member. Mr. Chairman, the project engineers have advised me, based upon the most recent evaluation, we should get this project completed by 31st March, 2024.

Mr. Chairman: Did you say 31st March, 2024?

Bishop Edghill: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister and Hon. Members, we have exhausted the time and even the little addition that we had. Hon. Member, I chipped in on your behalf with respect to Cemetery Road.

Mr. Patterson: Sir?

Mr. Chairman: I have to put the question now. We have staff waiting for the other heads.

Programme: 312 – Public Works – \$217,216,587,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 313 – Transport – \$6,661,500,000

Programme: 313 – Transport – \$6,661,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, thank you very much to you and your staff. I know you still have a lot of work to do.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, may I, through you, take the opportunity to thank my staff for lending support in ensuring that we give the answers to the Hon. Members of this Committee. Just to let you know we will work hard to deliver to the people of Guyana. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister and staff for taking us through that head. Please, do some whipping on that Cemetery Road Project, please.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I also would like to join with the Hon. Member in saying good work to the highly professional staff of the Ministry of Public Works. Continue to give your best service to Guyana until we return. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Consensus. We will now invite the Minister of Labour, the Hon. Joesph Hamilton and his staff to take their place in the well.

Agency: 38 Ministry of Labour

Current Expenditure

Programme: 381 – Policy Development and Administration – \$755,316,000

Hon. Member, before we start, let us move the motion to suspend the Standing Order to go beyond 8.00 p.m. to complete the business of today. Prime Minister (PM), you have the floor.

Suspension of Standing Order 10

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No. 10 be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to continue with its business beyond 8.00 p.m.”

[Prime Minister]

Prime Minister [Brigadier Ret'd Phillips]: I so act that we suspend the Standing Order and go beyond 8.00 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: We see that there is an increase of three contracted workers. Could we have the status and emoluments for these individuals?

8.00 p.m.

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: The driver, Public Relations Officer (PRO) and a Receptionist.

Mr. Jaiprashad: At line item 6281 – Security Services: Could the Hon. Minister indicate the name of the security company who will be providing the services for the Ministry?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you may have the floor.

Mr. Hamilton: The names are Strategic Security Service and I-Secure Security Service Inc.

Mr. Jaiprashad: At line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contribution to Local Organisation: It amounts to 501 million. Could the Hon. Minister indicate the allocation?

Mr. Hamilton: Hon. Member, 500 million will go to the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) and \$1.5 million would be spent on the labour market information system that we are developing.

Mr. Jaiprashad: A follow-up, through the Chair, Hon. Minister, could you indicate if all the regions will be having programmes from the BIT?

Mr. Hamilton: Did you say all regions?

Mr. Jaiprashad: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Hamilton: Yes. For that matter, we have a schedule already prepared with 141 programmes. I was looking at it. I can indicate the regions: Region One – 10 programmes, Region Two – 16, Region Three – 18, Region Four – 17, Region Five – 14, Region Six – 17, Region Seven – 12, Region Eight – Eight, Region Nine – 11 and Region 10 – 18 have projects; 141 training programmes here.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow-up: The Labour Market Information System Commission, I see \$1.5 million budgeted here. However, I do note also that \$1.5million was budgeted in 2023. Could the Minister say what prevented that payment from going to the Labour Market Information System Commission?

Mr. Hamilton: I am advised that the \$1.5 million at the time when it was budgeted was to reestablish the statistics department but that did not happen. We now have a consultant working with us to develop a statistics department that we hope to do this year, put employees there and to develop along with the Ministry of Finance, the Labour Market Information System we are talking about.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chair, I am at line item 6284 – Other: Could the Hon. Minister state whether the consultant is still being paid under this particular line item?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Member state whether a strategy has been completed for the Ministry? Where is the Ministry on the labour force survey?

Mr. Hamilton: I know that several reports have been made available to us by the consultant. We are now collating all of that information and I can lay over that information to the National Assembly, the several reports that were submitted to the consultant by the consultant of the Ministry. Of 2023, we have done the skills and manpower requirements for Guyana, income and employment in rural Guyana, labour market information, concept note for the national productivity council, technical assistance for the Board of Industrial Training for the traces study and that is trying to get information and know what has happened to everyone that the Board of Industrial Training. We were trained, employment and all of that.

In 2024, the manpower requirement for the health sector that is... Even though the consultant is based at the Ministry of Labour, he is also working with Sister Aid Ministries and other agencies in Government to deal with the skilled and manpower requirement for the housing sector, skills in manpower requirement for the construction sector, the strategic plan for the Ministry of Labour and technical assistance with data and statistics for the Ministry of Labour's statistics department. Those are the things to be done in 2024.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Hon. Member. Could the Hon. Member say what is the percentage of completion of the labour market information system at this particular point? If I understand it, the consultant is supposed to be creating or assisting in the creation of either the system or the putting together of the commission so that when he leaves after the end of his contract, there is something there that the Ministry would be able to continue.

Mr. Hamilton: Okay. I am advised that all the information I just spoke about is being inputted as I speak. By the end of the first quarter, the Labour Market Information System should be online.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: The Hon. Minister just stated a number of different reports that were completed by the consultant, could you say when those reports were completed? Why is that they are not seen in the indicators for this year's Budget?

Mr. Hamilton: I am advised that the reports are being reviewed by social partners and our stakeholders. When they are completed, we will leave the reports available to the public.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Hon. Member. Could you say what is the timeline for the completion of that?

Mr. Hamilton: It is the first quarter.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Is it the end of the first quarter?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister state what percentage of the oil and gas sector has been effectively regulated by the Ministry of Labour and if there are plans to up that percentage in this year?

Mr. Hamilton: Let me put the oil and gas sector in context: Guyana, we found oil in 2015; we had a Government in place for five years – from 2015 to 2020 – and we started production in 2019. The Government at the time never saw it fit to do many of the things that we have to do now. I will give you one instance. When the Ministry was re-established in 2020, there were only had two persons in this country who were trained and can be sent on a Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO). Importantly, they had to acquire more training to be able to do that. I am talking from the level of the Ministry.

The second issue is, the complement of Occupation Safety and Health Officers, when we re-established was just nine persons. It was just a coastal Georgetown operation. Today, we can report that the complement allowed for at least 32 Occupational, Safety and Health Officers. As I speak to you, some have already been allocated into other regions beyond Georgetown and that is a work in progress. We have done training. We trained 14 officers as ISO45001 lead auditors as regards the oil and gas sector itself, the legislation we have presently at that time did not contemplate oil and gas. As I speak, in this National Assembly, we are engaging the Attorney General's Chambers who are helping us to retool and redo legislation, not just occupational safety and health (OSH) across the spectrum in labour.

Secondly, we have had commitments from the International Labour Organization (ILO) to help us via technical support with regard to the oil and gas legislation specifically to supervise the oil and gas sector. Whilst we have engagement with the oil and gas sector, firstly we have to build capacity to be able to supervise the oil and gas sector. There is a subsector in the oil and gas sector, the

employment agencies. We now have to have the Certificate in Risk Management Assurance (CRMA) and the law refined to allow for them to supervise those establishments now in Guyana with a new thing. All of these things are a work in progress – legislation, amendment and new legislation from the labour side bringing all of our labour laws together, building the capacity of officers, and to have them specialised. I suspect we have made some tremendous stride and success. The question is, I suppose that in a year's time we will be in a better position as regards to the supervision that properly the Occupation, Safety and Health Department of the Ministry of Labour should be able to do and would be able to do as it regards the oil and gas sector.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chair, the Hon. Member said a lot, but I am still not clear. Is it that the Hon. Member said that there are only two persons right now who have the capacity to be able to effectively regulate the oil and gas sector? I am trying a sense of how many are there currently dealing with occupation, health and safety at the Ministry of Labour. How many do you expect by the end of 2024?

Mr. Hamilton: Okay, let me repeat. When I became Minister, we only had nine OSH officers – n-i-n-e. There were only two persons who were trained somewhat to go on a FPSO to inspect. Since then, we have moved beyond that. We have allowed for the staffing compliment of OSH is 32. As I speak, we continue to employ people. I think we are at 14 now. We had a situation where we trained, in 2021, 14 persons for ISO45001 lead auditors and seven of those persons left for the oil and gas sector. We have to, in a sense, start back. Importantly, the fact that now there is the type of facility in Guyana at Lusignan, it now would allow for us to train more people for the same cost that we had to send people to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to be trained. Just about a month ago, we had five staff – if I remember the number – who were involved in training at the private facility that is at Lusignan on the East Coast of Demerara.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Hon. Member. I have one final question. There seems to be continued issues in the public service, not just on what you just stated but with persons being trained and getting the benefit of Government training sometimes free, most times free. Then, they leave for the private sector or go farther field.

8.15 p.m.

As the Minister of Labour, seeing that this is happening in your Ministry, has there been any conversation about ensuring that the staff get adequate remunerations so that they will remain once they have been trained? We seem to be training persons for everywhere else, except to stay so that they could do the work that we need them to do in the public service.

Mr. Hamilton: Let me answer that by saying this – right now, there are more people leaving the private sector to come and work in the public sector. Let me repeat that. Right now, there are more people leaving the private sector to come and work in the public sector because of better remuneration and better remuneration packages. The point that you raised in some instances goes the other way. My position on this matter is – these persons still serve the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. They are still here as far as I know. We would have to continue to train more persons. We would have to bring more persons in. We would have to collaborate with the private sector and Government agencies to allow for more training and have people specialised in different areas. I do not wring my hands with regard to this specific matter. Since those people have left more people have come, and more people are coming to become Occupation Safety and Health Officer.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chair, I would just like to kindly say that this Mr. Hamilton suits us best in the National Assembly. It is nice to meet you, Sir.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister turn his attention to the *Estimates of the Public Sector, Volume 2*, and the Indicators therein under this programme head. There are three indicators which state:

“1 Number of Labour Market Information Bulletins published annually

2 Number of Social Services Bulletins published annually

3 Number of Occupational Wages and Hours of Work Surveys published annually”.

It is reports in 2023 there is zero, zero and zero – none published for either. The targets for 2024 is two, two and one. Could I ask the Hon. Minister what hampered him from actually publishing these bulletins of the Ministry? What is being done differently in 2024 to actually achieve this target?

Mr. Hamilton: When I joined the Ministry there was a Statistics Department on the ridges. That is being developed and that is a work in progress. The answer to the question you asked is – we did not have a functioning staffed department to undertake the specific function that you are talking about. We are now dealing with that issue.

Ms. Fernandes: I have a follow up, Sir. Could the Hon. Minister say what is informing his progress report, particularly for this programme head when all the indicators are reporting zero progress? If one is to read this document and these are the indicators when it comes to the performance statement, it would give the impression that nothing is being done at the Ministry. If we do not have these reports and so forth, what is informing the Minister's decision making for moving forward. Basically, it states that you have failed to achieve any of your performance objective at the Ministry.

Mr. Hamilton: To say that is not to understand what is happening. One, we can depend on the Guyana National Bureau of Statistics (GNBS) for information. Secondly, we have done assessments in collaboration with partners. In the International Labour Organization (ILO), we had a joint study done on the oil and gas. We can tell you now the number of jobs, types of jobs and the most important jobs. In the construction sector, we have the data funded by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) which we utilise. Right now, the Centre for Local Business Development has just completed a study which we had a discussion about and the centre will be publishing it very shortly. There are several areas, agencies and partners that we have been engaging over the period. The private sector has been informing us as to labour market trends and all the things happening. We are now at the stage – as I said earlier – where we can now compile all that information and be in a position to forecast on all the other things that the Ministry of Labour should be doing.

Ms. Fernandes: It is not encouraging, first of all, that the Hon. Minister is actually depending on the Guyana National Bureau of Statistics because the last report was published – the Guyana Labour Force Survey (GLFS) – I believe, in the third quarter of 2021. If you are depending on that, Sir, it may hamper you a bit. There is one last question to you, Minister, Mr. Hamilton. I am going to ask this – you mentioned a few minutes back that a lot of persons are moving from the private sector to work in the public sector. Could the Hon. Minister please point me in the direction of that data?

Mr. Hamilton: You go and consult the private sector and it will give you the data.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say if the Ministry of Labour did any study that informed him that persons are moving from the private sector and seeking jobs in the public sector?

Mr. Hamilton: I am still saying that the information you seek, you can get it from the private sector. That information was made available to me by the private sector. It has a concern that it is losing staff to the Government.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say if he is not in possession of information as to the number of persons working within the public sector; and if he is relying on the private sector to feed him information?

Mr. Hamilton: Labour market development systems is not a public-sector alone activity. It is a public sector and private sector activity. It is an activity where you involve other stakeholders to develop. The private sector can properly advise us even in our training – what to train. One is not understanding the matter, if one is suggesting that the information sought can only be had via the work of the public sector. It is done in conjunction with the public sector, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Finance, the Guyana National Bureau of Statistics and the private sector – as I have just outlined. We have a report that we are now studying, and which will be made public by the Centre for Local Business Development. The ILO study is a public document, if people would only try to read. The study done by IOM is a public document. The only information that is now being reviewed and which will be made public shortly, with regard to this matter, is that of the Centre for Local Business Development. It will publish its information. All that information, we will bring it together and that will help us to develop the labour market information system. We will be in better position to manage labour trends. We will be in a better position to develop our training and all of those issues.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I just have one final question. The Minister just made a statement which suggests that the private sector is guiding him as to whom he should train. Did I hear that correctly? I heard you say that the labour market information system is not up and running yet and that is what you are aiming towards. I am hoping that once that is up and running, it would be the other way around, where it will be the Ministry of Labour putting out the reports that would guide the rest of the society.

Mr. Hamilton: Look, most of the people who will be trained in technical skills will go and work for the private sector. Properly, to get an understanding about labour market trends, we have... I have continuous conversations with the private sector. It is not the private sector guiding us. The private sector is a partner. It is the private sector who will come to the Ministry to say that it needs 40 Welders and Fabricators – not the public sector. Therefore, we depend on the private sector. Whether it is for construction or heavy-duty equipment operators, it is the private sector who will say to us that it cannot find good Mechanics. We depend on the private sector as a partner to advise and give us the necessary information so that it can help us beyond the labour market survey. It can even help us with our planning and training programmes, not just holistically but regionally. I will give you this to finish this.

In Bartica, Region 7 – as I speak to you – we are about to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Reunion Gold Corporation, whereby the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) will train all the staff to work in the gold mines at our facility in Bartica. That is the type of... We had interventions by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and projects with the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA) to train females. As I speak to you, again, we have another project that the World Bank will fund to train females as Solar Photovoltaic Technicians (PVT). There are several partners who are participating in the labour force development and training. We look to our partners in the private sector to collaborate with us and help us to fashion what we are attempting to do.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, this has exhausted the half an hour which we have allocated for this agency.

Programme: 381 – Policy Development and Administration – \$755,316,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 382 – Labour Administration Services – \$332,724,000

Programme: 382 – Labour Administration Services – \$332,724,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 381 – Policy Development and Administration – \$195,935,000

Programme: 381 – Policy Development and Administration – \$195,935,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 382 – Labour Administration Services – \$10,000,000

Programme: 382 – Labour Administration Services – \$10,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Hon. Minister, thank you and your staff for taking us through your agency. Thank you. Let us invite now the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security, Dr. Persaud and her staff to take their place. This is just to inform you that there are some snacks. We will go through without a break. You can step out and in at your own leisure. Let me invite the Hon. Deputy Speaker to take over from here.

[Mr. Chairman left the Chair.]

[Mdm. Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair.]

8.30 p.m.

Agency: 39 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security

Current Expenditure

Programme: 391 – Policy Development and Administration – \$440,050,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Good evening, everyone. It is late. Madam Chairperson, may I direct your attention to line item 6113... One second, please. Forgive me. Let me just clarify that we are going to look at all of the current expenditure then the capital expenditure?

Mdm. Deputy Chairperson: Yes, Hon. Member.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Madam. Line item 6116, Contracted Employees, we are seeing here an increase in 24 contracted employees within one year. Could the Hon. Minister indicate the designations of the 24 staff and the grade scale (GS) for each of the employees?

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]: Good evening and thank you, Mdm. Chairperson. Thank you for the question. It caters for a 6.5% salary increase and 23 new

recruits notably the Head of the Information System. We are trying to look at the architecture of our digital system and it is part of the revamping of our digital architecture to increase our efficiency. At the Ministry, there is an Engineer, the emolument – \$294,511; Head of Information Systems – \$454,643; one Technical Assistant – \$189,354; one Systems Development Officer – \$177,797; one Assistant Accountant – \$116,659; one Procurement Officer- \$127,963; one Administrative Assistant – \$111,628; five Accounts Clerks II – \$90,759; four Data Entry Clerks – \$84,662; four Vehicle Drivers – \$86,150; three Typist Clerks – \$80,892; and there is a reclassification or a transfer from line item 6111. The person is now an Administrative Assistant – \$111,628.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mdm. Chairperson, between line items 6111 and 6114, there is a decrease. I am assuming that those are now vacancies, 13 vacancies. Could the Minister confirm that and say to this House what has caused that decrease?

Dr. Persaud: We have had retirements, we have had reclassifications, and we also had resignations, transfers and the passing of one person.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: How many vacancies do you have at this point?

Dr. Persaud: It is just as you said, and so, we are projecting to replenish that this year.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Could I direct you now to line item 6284. Could the Minister disaggregate the sum stated and tell us what does the sum caters for?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you. We have rental of photocopy machines for the Registry. This is because we had a lot of repairs done to those machines and we managed to rent machines because of that. That will be done at a cost of \$500,000. We have to do the advertisement for public tenders and vacancy notices, invitation of interest at \$2 million; a Microsoft license renewal suite; annual renewal of license; editing of interviews, television programmes for the Ministry and that is \$3 million. A subscription renewal which will be for Zoom, Facebook, Adobe, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and other programmes that the Ministry will use. Carpets and blinds – sanitact services; Microsoft license for accounts in particular; a firewall renewal; and we are looking at safety across the Ministry, so servicing of fire extinguishers and we had the Guyana Fire Service guiding this process. We are also looking to develop a reliable and secure information management

service so that we can track and monitor adoption cases, ensuring transparency. I am sure that by now, you are aware that we are setting up the Central Authority to resume international adoptions. That is going to resume at the end of February. We are catering for the Central Authority now. Provision is also made for venetian blinds for the office space and licensing for services.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Let us look at line item 6294. The sum stated there has increased by almost 100% over a few months. Tell us, what are the activities that required you to go almost more than 100% increase?

Dr. Persaud: What we have seen at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security will be the overall expansion of all our programmes, introduction of new services and, also, in many ways, we have increased access by decentralising many of our services. We have catered for more persons accessing those services. This line caters for a number of things, notably, work students. We are taking on all of our work-study students to help them to transition into the world of work. We are looking at the annual staff conference because we want to do team building, we want to encourage and motivate our staff, we want to do training, to an extent, of our staff. We are also looking at the stipend for the Ministerial Tender Board, which is standard, and payment of evaluation of the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) projects, so we have to look at the increase in the number of evaluations being done for the Ministry.

We are also looking at extending our digital services. Some of the money is towards repairing and providing the digital infrastructure, cables and hardware. We are also looking at donations to organisations, aprons for cleaners, upgrading of our Personal Computers (PCs) and tools for Information Technology (IT) Engineering. A big part of this is the introduction of the Central Authority. It is a brand-new facility; it is a brand-new service. Much of this will go towards that, including signage and network surface mount.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Minister, I have a follow up. I noted in your explanation there, you are catering for training of your staff, and it is not captured under line item 6302. Is this training not something that the Ministry of Public Service can do or is it not training that can be captured under the heading of Training?

Dr. Persaud: That is right, so let me clarify. I probably should not have used the word 'Training. This is more like building team spirit. This is doing motivational thoughts, leadership thoughts and

that kind of thing. I probably should not have used the word 'Training' there because we do. We utilise the services of the Public Service Ministry (PSM) and we do offer training under the 'Training' line in particular.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you very much, Mdm. Minister. Could I turn your attention to line item 6302? Could you tell us who are the recipients of the training or whether this captures any form of scholarship?

Dr. Persaud: This will be for all of our staff Members. We are looking at change management because we are restructuring the Ministry, and we are looking at new systems. The introduction of digital systems, in particular, will require that level of change management. What we are looking at is the reduction of service time and service delivery. We need to have everyone buy into the new system and understand it. Change management is significant in terms of the training we are doing here.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I have a follow up on that. If you are going to have change management training and you are moving from hard copy to a digital system, are you going to do training for all of your staff, countrywide, or is it just your Georgetown branch?

Dr. Persaud: All the staff because the intention is to increase not only access but to have all of our staff, across all of the regions, geared towards moving and transitioning to the new system which will require things like furnishing them with tablets so that they can input data, that data can be processed faster and so we can have a faster turn over time. That is the plan for this year.

8.45 p.m.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you very much, Mdm. Minister. Line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, I noticed that we have been giving, consistently, I think it is \$4 million to the Guyana Relief Council. Could the Minister indicate whether for the last two or three years, if the Ministry would have received any report from the Guyana Relief Council? If so, would the Minister be willing to layover?

Dr. Persaud: Yes, we have received reports, and I will be happy to do that.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you very much.

Ms. Fernandes: Madam Chairperson, can I have a follow-up on that line item?

Mdm. Deputy Chairperson: Go ahead Hon. Member.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you. Could the Hon. Minister say what prevented the payment transfer for the Amerindian Handcraft Association on the women in the environment? I noted that there were both budgeted for last year and, again, is being budgeted for this year but no payment was made. The money was never transferred to them last year. What prevented that and what should we expect to be the change in 2024?

Dr. Persaud: All of the persons who did not uplift their money last year, we will once again reach out to all of those organisations this year. The procedure requires a request and, if that request is not made, even though we may have reached out multiple times, we cannot do the transfer. It a process that has been there and predates me, so we keep on reaching out. What we also do is make the effort to ensure these organisations are functional, they are still in existence and so we exhaust every effort until they do.

Programme: 391 – Policy Development and Administration - \$440,050,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 392 – Social Services - \$45,463,908,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Madam Chairperson, could the Hon. Minister say to us, of all the technical and craft skilled or the semi-skilled operatives and unskilled, how many probation welfare officers do we have between those two lines, if any?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you for the question. There are 49 Probation and Social Services Officers.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Could the Hon. Minister either indicate or layover which regions we have probations and welfare officers and how many?

Dr. Persaud: We have them in all of the regions and I can share with you. In Region 1, we have three; Region 2, three; Region 3, five; Region 4, eight – that is the East Coast Catchment Area. In Region 4, East Bank, six; Region 4 Georgetown, ten; Region 4, this is the special unit, this is the Family Enhancement Unit, we have eight; and Region 4, this is actually in Georgetown at the Central Office, ten. Then we have the Prison After Care Reintegration Services, we have five.

Region 5, we have seven. Region 6, we have another seven. In fact, we have 13 in East and Central Corentyne and, if we add what is in Upper Corentyne, we have 16 officers in Region 6. In Region 7, we have two; Region 8, one; Region 9, two; Region 10, six.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, for those regions with sub-regions, Regions 7, 8 and 1, how are those officers dispersed, and are they living in the sub-region or are they at a central location?

Dr. Persaud: Some are living in the area; some are dispersed. As you know, we want to have officers in every sub-region and that is something we will be working toward, to really be able to effectively and efficiently do the work of the Ministry. I want to really thank and compliment all the officers who are currently and who have been in all of the regions working above and beyond and may be carrying a lot of the workload. So, we are moving in that direction to increase our capacity because there is a need to have in all of the sub-regions.

Ms. Lawrence: Follow up, Madam Chairperson. Minister are those officers in those regions from the region or is the Ministry still sending people from the coastland to those regions? And what is in train to train more people from those far-flung regions who have a better understanding of the culture and the dynamics of the communities?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you very much. I am glad you asked that question. The officers in Regions 1 and 8 actually lived there. They are from those regions. There is a process where we are looking to have more of those officers from those regions being trained, being involved and, pretty much, once they are interested in working with the Ministry, we interview them, and we work along with them. The difficulty is having those persons who have the necessary qualifications, commensurate with what is required for that. I am sure, as a former Minister, you had those challenges too. But we are working on expanding those numbers and working with those persons from the regions. This is because, like you, I believe they have a very good understanding on the ground of what should be happening. Thank you very much for that question.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister, in the Ministry of the Public Service, there is a large allocation there for scholarships. Perhaps, we can begin to look at having the Ministry make provision for those persons to come out and do their studies. This is because if we do not help them, we are not going to get qualified persons from those regions. I think there needs to be some collaboration.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you very much. There is collaboration. That is the usual request from the Public Service Ministry, where we ask for specific scholarships for specific persons trained in a particular area that would best suit the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. So, yes, I think we are on the same page. Thank you.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I want to turn your attention to line item 6292, Dietary. Could the Minister give us a breakdown of the institutions to receive this sum and how much each institution will receive?

Dr. Persaud: This sum is dispersed or disaggregated among a number of institutions. We are looking at \$67,525,000 for the Palms Geriatric Home; \$5,110,000 for the Mahaica Hospital; \$87,465,000 for the Night Shelter; and \$71,175,000 for the Hugo Chavez Rehab and Reintegration Centre. For our Domestic Violence (DV) shelters, I will say each of them will be accorded or allocated over \$3 million. For our Trafficking In Person (TIP) shelter, both of them, over \$5 million for one and over \$3 million for the other.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Hon. Minister, I am happy that you have mentioned \$71 million for the Hugo Chavez Centre. I know that the centre had a self-sustaining programme, could you give us an update on that programme?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you. In fact, it was recently resuscitated as of late last year and that programme will intensify and amplify this year. Our challenge, in terms of having that programme run, was because of the people who are there and their capability. We have since been working with the region and we will continue to have that programme moved towards self-sufficiency – very recently, as in terms of late last year.

Ms. Philadelphia: Minister, line item 6343, if it pleases you, can you so advise as to the number of applications received and processed for public assistance in Region 4, for the year 2023 and, if it can be divided into districts – Georgetown, East Coast and East Bank? Thank you.

Dr. Persaud: That will have to be laid over because you will understand that it is a dynamic process. Applications are coming in all the time, and they have to depend on the board members meeting monthly. That will determine the numbers up to this point and I will be happy to lay it over for you.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Just to clarify, under line item 6343, is where we get public assistance from. Is that right? Hon. Minister, is it possible that you can tell us, if you know by hand or lay over to us, the criteria used by the board to determine the applications before them?

Dr. Persaud: Yes, I actually know this. I have managed to do a lot of work to let people know how it works. Public assistance is governed by the Poor Relief Act, it is a very old Act, in the early 1900s. That is actually a piece of legislation we are reviewing to make it more modern. What happens is, a person makes an application, and there are three categories of public assistance. There is the Economic, Medical and Permanent Disability. The policy has been changed. His Excellency, and I have made some declarations and the policy that governs permanent disability have changed. His Excellency mentioned that those persons who applied for Permanent Disability will have access to that until they transition to pension. I made the announcement that if you are applying for Permanent Disability, once the disability would have been established by a medical report and a complete application, only one application is needed for that person to come on the disability register, changing the policy where people had to reapply multiple times. So it is one application. That is the first thing.

The second category – even though that is so, the application still goes to the Local Boards of Guardians because that is governed by the legislation. Then you have the medical aspect of it. Here an application must be done, a medical report is provided but the context in which that report is looked at is that it is a temporary medical condition. Persons need to reapply twice a year, every six months. The book may be reviewed until that person is able to be on their feet or if they move into a permanent state, they could be transitioned to the permanent disability programme. That again is determined by the Local Boards of Guardians.

9.00 p.m.

The third category is the economic category and I think that is self-explanatory. Here again, the decision is made by the Local Boards of Guardian. If per chance the Local Boards of Guardians rejects an application for whatever reason, that must be stated on the form. Then those persons have the option of having their entire case file reviewed by the Poor Law Commission which governs all of the Local Boards of Guardians. I hope that brings some clarity to it.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Certainly, it does, Mdm. Minister. It seems like the Local Boards of Guardians has a lot of important responsibilities. What criteria is used to determine the members of the Local Boards of Guardians?

Dr. Persaud: The Local Boards of Guardians' concept is not new under this Government. It has been there under your Administration. The same criteria governed then as it does now, which is, looking for people from the various communities so that the Local Boards of Guardians is comprised of and constituted by all of those people who are familiar with the various communities. It also includes civil society and faith-based organisation representatives as well.

Ms. Fernandes: Mdm. Chairperson, if I may?

Mdm. Deputy Chairperson: Hon. Member, you have the floor.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you. I would like to turn the Hon. Minister's attention to Volume 2, looking at Indicator number 11. I am on page 163. Could the Hon. Minister say as to the number of reported cases of domestic and gender-based violence? I see it was reported that in 2023 the number was 1,801 and the target for 2024 is 1,400. I have two questions on that, and I may have a follow up. The first question, is this a compounded number when it comes to reports being made at the police station and at the Ministry? Also, what proportion of this number is coming from areas that are non-coastland areas?

Dr. Persaud: It is a very important question. We would like to see this number being reduced. We want the awareness programmes and the mechanisms that we have put in place, especially the prevention and the interventional type of mechanisms work, so that this number will be reduced. Yes, it is an amalgamation of both. You will have some overlapping. We are also looking at the analysis of this. We have found more propensity in the coastal area, not necessarily because there might be more here. One, you have more density of population. Secondly, the reporting might not be as robust in the hinterland, but it does not mean that this does not occur. So, there are a number of factors that will impact and influence on the figure that you see here.

Ms. Fernandes: Just a follow up. I do agree with the Minister's comment, particularly when it comes to the hinterland. My question is what measures are being taken at the level of the Ministry when it comes to accessibility for persons to actually report these situations in the hinterland? I am

asking specifically because when it comes to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Guyana Police Force (GPF), in many cases, in the hinterland areas, in particular, there are no female police officers even at the police station, which would be a part of their Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) when dealing with these matters. There is no conducive environment for women to go and report those matters. Is the Ministry actually working towards putting measures in place, independent of the Guyana Police Force so as to facilitate that environment so persons would feel comfortable to make such reports?

Dr. Persaud: I am glad you made this comment, and you are asking these questions. In fact, Guyana has advanced the Guyana model for gender-based violence response for the rest of the regions, specifically to the Caribbean, where we were able to have a comprehensive and holistic approach to gender-based violence which looked at the number of ways of reporting. The toll-free 24-hour hotline and 914 is accessible. There is the iMatter application. I know you will say in the hinterland that may not be something that people can go to easily, but when the application is downloaded, you can access the application online or offline.

One of the biggest things we have done is to collaborate with the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Guyana Police Force. We cannot be independent of them. They are the custodians of the law, so we were able to train over 2,000 police officers under a very impactful programme called the COP SQUAD Initiative. By doing that, while there may be a dearth of female officers, in all of the regions, all of the police stations across the country will have at least one officer who has been trained under the COP SQUAD Initiative to deal with cases and instances of gender-based violence. This is important because this is in line with what is happening where we have the units in police stations, the domestic violence unit. I know that programme will continue to expand.

We also have the survivor's advocate programme. We have those survivor advocates in some of the hinterland regions. Once a report is made because there might be some level of intimidation, some level of confusion and what other emotions there might be when someone experiences this, that advocate will work along with the complainant, the person who would like to make the report and even take the person to make that report.

We have also recently, as in a couple of weeks ago, opened the Hope and Justice Centre which is a collaboration between the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Ministry of Human Services and

Social Security. While we have the coastal models, we are currently working on a model in the hinterland so that the Hope and Justice Centres can provide all the services anyone needs, whether it is reporting to the police, getting legal recourse, having a medical done or having counselling done. All of those things will be done under one roof.

We are also working on a referral pathway. As part of the spotlight initiative and as part of our gender-based violence response, we have developed an entire referral network or pathway which integrates the responses from all of the agencies or stakeholders from the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to the Guyana Police Force to the Ministry and to the Ministry of Health. That referral pathway will be one that we can roll out this year and have those meetings in all of the regions so that the responses will be more harmonious.

We also rolled out the Community Advocates Network programme. This is a programme that works with communities, members within communities, organisations and all manner of persons who are interested in prevention of, intervention and support for persons who experience gender-based violence. The hinterland has also benefited from some of that training. We also have a support mechanism for people who may be a little scared and afraid to report. What we are looking at is not only the strengthening of the systems and having a system, but we want to also look at accountability. This is a feedback mechanism where persons, if they make a report and they want to make sure that report is dealt with in the right way, they have the opportunity to now fill up a feedback form to tell us what that encounter was like. That is something new that will be instituted this year.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you Minister for using up half of my time. I just wish some of that information could go into the print media and sent out to our population, so that they would know where to find help. I am moving onto line item 6321 – Subsidies, there is a large sum allocated there but I am interested in the one for legal aid. I see there is \$93.2 million for legal aid, separate and apart, from Linden. How many offices do we have that will benefit from this sum and in which region are they located?

Dr. Persaud: Mdm. Chairperson, I do not consider this a time-wasting exercise because there is so much information to share. It is in the print, it is on social media, and it is everywhere. One of the things we will be doing is increasing and amplifying what we do in terms of information. I

hope that Members of the Opposition – will definitely share this information once it is out there so that more people can benefit from our services and more people can get help. To the question of legal aid, we have in four regions, and they are in Regions 2, 4, 5 and 6 along with Region 10.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I want to correct a statement. I did not say to the Minister that she is wasting time. I did not say that, and I want that to be struck from the records. I did not say that.

Mdm. Deputy Chairperson: Hon. Member, the Minister did not say that you insinuated that or said directly ‘you are wasting time’. She said she does not see this as a time-wasting activity. She never accused you of telling her that. Please proceed with your question.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: The inference is there, Mdm. Chairperson, but it is all right. I will move on. I want to go right back to Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. I noticed that, in 2024, there is no sum for the Holy Family Homestead for subsidies. Could the Minister explain that?

Dr. Persaud: An assessment was done and they have not requested these funds for more than three years. As I mentioned, a request has to be made.

Programme: 392 – Social Services – \$45,463,908,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 393 – Child Care and Protection – \$1,026,453,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Line item 6113 – Other Technical and Craft Skilled: one – could the Minister say how many Child Protection Officers are employed under that line? Two – could the Minister say to us how many Child Protection Officers there are in Region 1 and Region 10 and where are they assigned?

Dr. Persaud: We have 35 Probation and Social Services Officers and six Social Service Assistants. Then in Region 1 we have one and in Region 10 we have three. I must remember here one Officer from Region 10, who recently passed, and who was exceptional in what she did.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I am sorry, but could you repeat for Region 1?

Dr. Persaud: It is one.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: In Region 10, did the Officer there die?

Dr. Persaud: There are three Officers and we lost one recently.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Is there any Child Protection Officer stationed at Kwakwani?

Dr. Persaud: That was the Officer we lost.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: There are plans to have...

Dr. Persaud: Of course.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: For this year?

Dr. Persaud: Of course.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you. Are there any plans to ensure that the other sub-regions of Region 1 are staffed with Child Protection Officers?

9.15 p.m.

Mdm. Deputy Chairperson: Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you very much, Mdm. Chairperson. I believe everywhere should be staffed with Childcare and Protection Officers and we will be working assiduously to make that happen. Once persons, as I said, show an interest, they apply, and we interview.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Could the Minister tell me what are the efforts made by the Ministry to fill the vacancies in Region 1?

Dr. Persaud: There were many efforts. Those efforts are trying to have persons from the region, going on outreaches, working with the Public Service Ministry (PSM) and working with other agencies to ensure that they were persons who were interested in applying for the post of an officer in Region 1. We would not stop those efforts. We continue to do that. If we are not able to do that, then we would have to have officers go into the region and function as Childcare and Protection Officers. The intention is to have all of the posts filled. That is the intention, I think, and should be for anybody.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mdm. Minister and thank you, Mdm. Chairperson. The situation has existed for the last three years and so I am hoping that the efforts in 2024 will ensure that we see employment in those sub-regions. I want to move to line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. I noticed that the St. Ann's Orphanage would not be receiving a subvention this year. Is there any specific reason for that?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you. With regard to your first comment, this is a very specialised area, and I can only exhort efforts and try my best, like the entire team is trying its best, to have persons fill the gaps. We cannot have someone who is doing medicine or welding or carpentry to do what the Social Services Officers will do. Now, to the Orphanage. This orphanage is closed and that was for personal reasons. We did reach out. They are no longer functional.

Programme: 393 – Child Care and Protection – \$1,026,453,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 391 – Policy Development and Administration – \$418,395,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I am looking at project code 4405500 and there are three provisions there in that project. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the sum for us?

Dr. Persaud: This has two components – a technical component (TC) and a safety net component. If I am to disaggregate the technical component (TC), it deals with strengthening of the systems at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. One of the things that I have always wanted, since I got to the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, is a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) unit. I think it is important to have M&E in order to have an analysis of data to guide policy. That is something that is very significant in this. This actually started in 2023 and this will roll over to this year.

We are also looking at the information management system. I mentioned earlier that we are digitising. We are actually transitioning much of the data from the old system to the new. One of the things, again, that I inherited was a system through which you had no access to a lot of the technology because it was not reposed within the Ministry proper. It is a brand-new system, and we are looking at operating manuals and a digital specialist to support that development. We are

also looking at software developers to work on a very modern type of infrastructure and we are looking at a dashboard so whenever there are glitches in the system, we can easily identify them.

We are looking at the evaluation of the management system, once it is up and running. Because it is a collaboration between the National Data Management Authority (NDMA) and the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, we are looking at a liaison officer to work between the two agencies. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Sure, I can tell you. Let me start from the top - \$10,500,000, \$15,750,000, \$3,853,000, \$13,553,000 and \$20 million. That is what I have completed. Now, the consultancy for the liaison would be \$7,506,000. The procurement of software and hardware would be required as the hardware is necessary to modernise this...as well as the giving all of the relevant officers the pieces of hardware – \$28,838,000.

Looking at Safety Nets for Vulnerable Populations, there is a component one and that is \$250 million. That is broken down further. We have the Survivors Advocate Programme that I mentioned. Some of this is going to be used to pace those Survivors Advocate Programme. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Do you want the total sum? [An Hon. Member: Yes.] Okay. That should be there. It is a \$100 million plus \$300 million which is \$400 million. It is two components for that sum.

Mdm. Deputy Chairperson: Hon. Member, please put on your microphone, if you are asking a question, so that the Committee could hear. Thank you very much.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: My humble apologies. I did not realise that my microphone was not on. There is a sum of \$400 million. I asked for the sum to be disaggregated. What is the \$300 million for and the other \$100 million for?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Mdm. Chairperson. That is what I spent all the time just doing. The first bit I did comprised the \$100 million of the \$400 million. Now, I will tell you about the \$300 million. I start by telling you, Hon. Member, that I...

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I am fine.

Dr. Persaud: You had enough of the information. Done.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I would like to give my colleague a chance.

Dr. Persaud: That is no problem at all.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you.

Mdm. Deputy Chairperson: Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, proceed. Hon. Members, we have five minutes to finish this particular programme.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you very much, Mdm. Chairperson. Hon. Minister, on the same line item, if you turn to the project profile, you have year three things that you are going to do for this year. You said that the \$400 million is for cash transfers, Survivors Advocate Programme and media campaign. Could you disaggregate it in those three areas?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you very much, Mdm. Chairperson and Hon. Member. That is \$300 million of the \$400 million, Hon. Member. So, \$6.3 million would go to the Survivors Advocacy Programme and \$8.3 million will go to the media campaign. You would appreciate that the Ministry is doing a lot of work in the areas of gender-based violence, trafficking in persons (TIP) and the Women Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN) Programme. There is a slew of programmes. To have more persons come onboard and utilise this, we have to have an extensive media campaign. It also caters for the strengthening of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security's information system software and the infrastructure for the information system software, which will cater for the public assistance and pension, and the procurement of a Statistician for the Ministry. Then, there is \$39 million for administrative costs, and the final wrap up of this will be to the tune of \$10.5 million.

Ms. Lawrence: Mdm. Chairperson, may I?

Mdm. Deputy Chairperson: Go ahead, Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, a component of this social safety network programme is that of mapping – the poverty map. Could you kindly inform us as to where you are with that?

Dr. Persaud: I am glad you asked. In fact, I remember going into the office in 2020 and a staff member handing me four volumes to read. One of those was on the poverty map. It was stuck there since 2016 because the map was done and the data that was used to populate the map was erroneous. We are looking at newer ways to have a poverty map populated. That is in train. I have

had the meeting, and we are looking at technology and using the mapping technology, using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and using some of the other more modern pieces of technologies to do the poverty map or some element of it at least. We were unable to use the one that was done under your Administration because it was just stuck there since 2016, because of poor data.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister turn her attention to project code 1220200, Buildings? Could you indicate which building or buildings will be done this year? I heard you speak about fire escapes. Where are these going, to which buildings?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Hon. Member. The roll over is a part of this and it is completion of the Stores building and a parking shed remodelling. This is just to conclude that. That would be at the East and Lamaha Street office. The other one relates to fire escapes. Right now, both of the fire escapes outside of the building are in a deplorable state; they are rotten; and they are hazardous. We are currently looking to replace those at the East and Lamaha Street office.

Ms. Lawrence: This is my final question. I take you back to project code 4405500, Safety Nets for Vulnerable Populations. Another component was for you to engage a Digital and Change Management Specialist. I think it is two specialists – a digital one...Were these persons engaged and are they on board?

Dr. Persaud: Yes. The Digital Specialist is on board, and we have a consultant who is looking at change management right now. We will later on look at someone else to continue.

Ms. Lawrence: Finally, though the Chairperson, Hon. Minister, would this \$400 million complete all of these things, including all the components that have been set out, or are we going to have to see some input from the Government's coffers?

Dr. Persaud: The intention is to utilise what we have budgeted for to complete and conclude this. We have to be within the terms of the contract. If at all it is necessary, I am sure that our Government would have no difficulty, as it is to improve the infrastructure, the efficiency and the seamless movement of our Ministry to serve the most vulnerable people in the country. Thank you.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Member say when is the expected completion date of this project? We are dealing with project code 4405500.

Dr. Persaud: We have the TC in 2024 and then we have the Safety Nets for Vulnerable Population in 2025. It is two different times.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Okay. So, it is expected that the \$51 million, which is not calculated here, would be utilised in the following year.

Dr. Persaud: Yes.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Okay.

9.30 p.m.

Ms. Philadelphia: Minister, project code 2512400 – Furniture and Equipment. I remember, earlier under current, you said that you were renting a photocopying machine. Is some of this provision for the purchase of same?

Dr. Persaud: Yes, but for different places. Some we will rent and some we will purchase.

Programme: 391 – Policy Development and Administration – \$418,395,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 392 – Social Services – \$496,500,000

Programme: 392 – Social Services – \$496,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 393 – Child Care and Protection – \$287,090,000

Programme: 393 – Child Care and Protection – \$287,090,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mdm. Deputy Chairperson: Thank you, Hon. Minister and your staff.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you very much, Mdm. Chairperson. To the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security team, thank you very much.

[Mr. Chairman assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we now invite the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, Hon. Mr. Croal, and his staff to join us. Hon. Members, we have an hour for this head and we have no savings so far. I have consulted with the Chief Whips, and we have agreed that the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, the two other heads remaining for today, we will defer as the two first agencies on Friday. The Hon. Ministers can have their staff, who have been waiting for a while...If they would like to leave, they can. We cannot do it tomorrow because tomorrow we will spend all of the time on regional development and the staff come from all over. So, we are on Friday for the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. No time will be lost. We will keep the allocated amount of time, but we will just start with those two consequential changes for the other heads.

Agency: 45 Ministry of Housing and Water

Current Expenditure

Programme: 451 – Policy Development and Administration – \$215,071,000

Ms. Ferguson: Good evening, Mr. Chairman, and good evening to the wonderful staff at Central Housing & Planning Authority (CHPA), my staff.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, since this sector is the last, perhaps you can consider giving me an extra half an hour. Mr. Chairman, can I turn our attention to line item 6116, Contracted Employees? I note that we have an increase from 13 in 2023 to 17 in 2024. Can the Hon. Member explain the reason for the increase and provide this honourable Committee of Supply with the positions of these four new designations?

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The positions added are Administrative Assistant, Administrative Officer, Office Assistant and a Cleaner. The reasons are to help with the efficiency of the Ministry and to ensure people are able to work in a clean environment.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. I note at line item 6114, Clerical and Office Support, that in 2023, you had three staff and there is a reduction by one in 2024. Can you

explain whether that person has been shifted to another area or whether he or she has tendered their resignation?

Mr. Croal: It was resignation, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Ferguson: May I turn the Committee's attention to line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings? Mr. Chairman, I recognise there is an increase of \$500 plus million. Can the Hon. Member explain the reason for the increase and state the buildings to be maintained? Perhaps, you can provide a disaggregation if there is more than one building to be maintained.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, under line item 6242, what I see is an increase from \$8.4 million to \$9 million. That is the increase. Anyway, the expenditure will include the main building that you know and which you took a long while to occupy, plumbing and electrical works, some additional works on the roof, the security room downstairs at the main area as you enter, and additional work for the fire escape because we have to enhance the protection of our building. So, those are the categories of the expenses.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his comment. Line item 6261 - Local Travel and Subsistence: We had a budgeted sum of \$15 million in 2023 and there is a revised sum of \$14 million, but I recognise there is an increase by \$1.8 million. Can the Hon. Member explain the reason for the reduction in 2023 and why there is an increase in 2024?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, may I correct the Hon. Member? The \$15 million was the original budget sum and the Ministry spent \$14,935,000. So, do the maths and see what the difference is from \$15 million. Therefore, the increase would be in the vicinity of \$1,000,800. Having said that, the reason for the increase is for travelling to ensure that we are able to do additional monitoring as well as assessment of what is taking place in the field.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for the correction of my little oversight in terms of figures. Can the Hon. Member state for the Committee of Supply who are the beneficiaries of this \$16.8 million?

Mr. Croal: It is the Hon. Ministers and the Permanent Secretary (PS).

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Member, thank you very much for your response. So, the Permanent Secretary would be engaged in inspecting projects and so forth. Okay.

Mr. Croal: That is the gentleman who has to come and account at the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. Moving on, Mr. Chairman. Line Item 6264 – Vehicle Spares and Service: I note we had a budgeted sum of \$14.5 million with a revised sum of \$13.682 million. I note there is a \$92,000 increase for 2024. Can the Hon. Member explain the reason for the \$92,000 increase and also state the total fleet of vehicles at the Central Housing and Planning Authority?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, I will speak to this line item. The fleet of vehicles under this line item are nine and the reason for the increase is that one vehicle was down, and it has been fixed. Obviously, that had to be included.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. Let me take the Committee to line item 6265, Other Transport, Travel and Postage. I note we have an increase for 2024 as against 2023. Firstly, can the Hon. Member explain the reason for the increase? Secondly, would some of this money be used to prepare the audited financial statement for the Central Housing and Planning Authority to be laid in the National Assembly? The last audited financial statement was for 2017, which was laid in 2019, and then we had one for 2020, which was laid in 2023.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, let me apprise the Member about the type of expenses here and then I will give an explanation. Airfare, speed boats, *et cetera* are covered under this line item. Therefore, the increase was because of the airfare and having to reach to various parts of the country. In terms of audited financial statements, which does not have anything to do with the line item, we are up to date. Very shortly, we will have another one being laid in Parliament.

9.45 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Since the Hon. Member provided comments on the type of transport to be used in terms of airfare, could he say to this Committee who will be benefiting from this allocation, the category of staff?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you could pull the microphone closer to you.

Mr. Croal: We are still in programme one. I highlighted, a few minutes ago, that under programme one there are Ministers and the Permanent Secretary. Now, I can add any staff of those secretariats.

Ms. Ferguson: May I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6273, Water Charges? I note there is a small increase for 2024 as against 2023. Could the Hon. Member explain the reason for this increase?

Mr. Croal: First of all, in terms of consumption, the original budget for 2023 was \$3 million and the actual consumption was \$1.4 million. I want to recognise that, first of all. What is being asked for here is \$1.6 million. It is based on our estimated consumption we think that we would utilise for this year, which is not much more than the actual expense.

Ms. Ferguson: May I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6282, Equipment Maintenance? I note there is a very small increase for 2024 as against what was utilised in 2023. Could the Hon. Member state for this Committee what are the equipment to be maintained? If there is more than one equipment to be maintained, perhaps, he could provide a disaggregation for this \$3 million that he is seeking.

Mr. Croal: The disaggregation is as follows: 11 air conditioners, 18 computer systems, 13 printers and photocopiers as well as a generator.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Under Policy Development and Administration, where there are the objectives and indicators, I note that indicator number one states:

“Number of sector policies being implemented and actively monitored...”

What are the two expected policies to be implemented?

Mr. Croal: There is the water sector policy which we have completed to the draft stage; it is under review for implementation to follow. Then, the Ministry's technical team is involved in the Guyana Strategy for Informal Settlement Upgrading and Prevention. This is in its final stages in terms of the Ministry's level. Then, it will have to be taken for Government adaptation which would mean, obviously, the Cabinet next.

Programme: 451 – Policy Development and Administration – \$215,071,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 452 – Housing Development – \$1,516,717,000

Ms. Ferguson: May I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6261, Local Travel and Subsistence? I noted that last year, we budgeted \$5 million but the authority utilised \$3 million and change. I note, for this year, 2024, we are now budgeting \$5 million. One, could the Hon. Member explain the reason for the utilisation of the \$3 million? We are happy that some moneys were saved. Secondly, could you state whether you have over budgeted for 2024, given the fact that he had only expended \$3 million and change in 2023?

Mr. Croal: We do not believe that it was over budgeted. As I alluded earlier, we expect to be conducting far more visits in the field. Then, we also have, as part of our housing programme...in various parts of the country. So, obviously there has to be an increase in travel. So, while we may not have utilised that full amount last year, we expect to use it and even more, if possible.

Ms. Ferguson: Could I ask the Hon. Member whether he would come back to the National Assembly, whether in August or late December, for a supplementary provision since he has been doing a lot of work in housing, and have to travel extensively to inspect some of these projects?

Mr. Croal: The travelling is not just for monitoring projects. It also has to do with responsibility for engagements with communities, meeting people and resolving issues. Whether we would be required to come here for any additional funds, this is what we have received, this is what we asked for and this is what we believe is adequate.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. Could I turn our attention to line item 6284, Other? I noted we had \$30 million budgeted in 2023, which was fully exhausted, but I note for 2024, you are coming for an additional \$33 million. Could the Hon. Minister provide to this Committee of Supply what constitutes Other and what the \$33 million that you are seeking will be utilised for in 2024?

Mr. Croal: There are two major categories of expenses under this line item which we intend to incur. One is Building Expo related and the other is in relation to some of our *Dream Realised* activities.

Ms. Ferguson: Just a follow-up. Hon. Member, is it that this particular line item caters for two sets of activities?

Mr. Croal: It is categories of activities and not just two activities.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. I think my second question was for you to provide a disaggregation. So, I need to know what will go to *Dream Realised* and what will go to the Building Expo from this \$33 million.

Mr. Croal: The sum of \$20 million will go to Building Expo related activities and the other \$13 million to *Dream Realised* activities.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Under the Programme Performance Statements for Housing Development, I note number seven states:

“Number of recreational facilities upgraded...”

Two were listed in 2023. Two are now listed for 2024. Could the Hon. Minister say if the two for last year were completed, what are they, and what are the two expected to be completed in 2024?

Mr. Croal: Activities under this will include Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee for planning and development. This has a relation in terms of focusing on discussion in terms of land use, planning, *et cetera*. Then, there is the inter-agency coordinating. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Ministry of Health and various Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) in terms of their management and enhancement of their communities. We also have ongoing collaboration among the Ministry of Housing and Water, Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) and Guyana Lands and Survey Commission (GLSC). This is in terms of us seeking to acquire lands to continue to engage in terms of the acquisition of lands. The MoU was signed by the Ministry of Housing and Water and Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) with the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs in terms of continuous training for Community Support Officers (CSOs) from various Amerindian communities, which helps in terms of maintenance of the water systems. We also have training for parttime workers as part of this initiative in terms of maintenance for the systems. Those are what this is intended for. The answer to whether the previous policies were achieved is yes.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am not sure if I got the answer because I am looking at what is written here. It states:

“Number of recreational facilities upgraded...”

I see the number two. So, I am asking which two facilities are expected to be upgraded in 2024 and if those in 2023 were completed.

Mr. Croal: In 2023, there were La Parfaite Harmonie and Sophia. The other two you are referring to, for now, would be Enmore and Annandale.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Could the Hon. Minister say if these recreational facilities cater for washroom facilities at these locations?

Mr. Croal: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Flue-Bess: At number nine, it states:

“Number of new housing areas with water distribution network installed.”

I see there was none for 2023 but now there are five. What will be the five areas?

Mr. Croal: We have for Meten-Meer-Zorg, Stewartville, Leonora, De Endragt, Hope, Success, Enterprise, Nonpareil, Two Friends, Lusignan, Great Diamond, Golden Grove, Good Hope, Prospect, Palmyra; that is Track AA, Burma, Balthyock, Shieldstown, No. 75 Village, Bartica, Amelia’s Ward, and Silica City. While the target states five, these are additional we intend to do. So, it is more than five areas.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you for the clarity. Number 14 states:

“Number of housing areas regularised.”

Which are the five new areas to be regularised this year?

10.00 p.m.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, the areas that we plan to regularise in this year actually would be a little more than five, but let me just call out what I have here. We have John’s Port Mourant, Vergenoegen Railway and then Vergenoegen South, Block ‘E’ Christianburg and Blueberry Hill Wismar. Let me provide some additional information for the Committee. In fact, a minimum of 479 lots are intended to be regularised on this year; these also include Philadelphia Railway,

Barnwell Railway, De Willem, De Endragt Railway, Vigilance, Bladen Hall, Strathspey Railway, Beterverwagting Railway and Mocha Arcadia.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, to the Hon. Member, line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships). I note that for 2023 the Ministry had an approved sum of \$710 million and \$484 million was actually expended. I note for 2024 you are now seeking \$700 million. Could you say to this Committee of Supply whether the provisions being sought for 2024 are adequate as against what was actually budgeted in 2023? Secondly, who are the beneficiaries that will benefit from this allocation at the Central Housing and Planning Authority? Thirdly, what area or areas of training will these beneficiaries be exposed to? Thank you.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, customer service, supervisory management; the beneficiaries will include from the two Ministers secretariat and the Permanent Secretary (PS) secretariat; and the fact that we are asking for \$700,000 will tell you that, yes, we [*inaudible*].

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I now move the Committee to line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. I note we have a whopping \$86 million increase for 2024 as against 2023. One, could the Hon. Minister explain the reason for this \$86 million?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, I am looking for the whooping increase, that is why I did not respond. Could you just identify the whooping increase?

Mr. Chairman: Whooping could be relative you know.

Ms. Ferguson: \$86 million, Hon. Member.

Mr. Croal: Okay, let us go.

Mr. Chairman: Is this going to be a whooping answer?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, this is the contribution to Central Housing and Planning Authority as the Hon. Member knows and it comprises of wages and salaries. I will give the main categories and I can give much more breakdown too, as you ask. Total material equipment and supplies, fuel and lubricants, rental and maintenance of buildings; transport, travel and postage; utility charges; other goods and services purchased; other operating expenses; and education subvention and training; that is the breakdown here at \$1.4 billion.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Croal: The slight increase would recognise the increases in new wages.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair to the Hon. Member, you said a portion of this money will go towards wages, salaries, and other benefits. Could you provide to this Committee of Supply the three highest paid positions at CH&PA and their salaries and benefits? Thank you very much.

Mr. Croal: The Chief Executive Officer, Director of Operations and the Director of Projects, those are the three highest.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, may I recall the Hon. Member's memory to the second part of my question, could you provide the emoluments? Since you have given the designation, please provide the salaries and their benefits. Thank you.

Mr. Croal: The Director of Operations receives a salary of \$858,000. I am rounding off. The Director of Projects receives an emolument of \$904,000 monthly and the Chief Executive Officer receives \$1,035,000, and that will be inclusive of allowance.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, would the Hon. Member be kind enough to say to this Committee of Supply, for the three designated positions he provided information on, what were the salaries pre 2nd August, 2020?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, the Chief Executive Officer here would not have been in that position at the 2nd August. The other two positions of Director of Operations and Director of Projects, I would not have that as of three years ago; I would not have that here.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I am moving on. I am not asking for a specific individual, I am speaking directly to the position, not the individual; so you should have that information. But I am moving on. Mr. Chair, I think I have exhausted my questions on this particular programme so we can move on.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much Hon. Member. We move on.

Programme: 452 – Housing Development – \$1,516,717 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$1,496,985,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair to the Hon. Minister, Minister, could you tell us where this department is housed?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, first of all, we have to recognise the staff that you have here, and we do not have any staffing here, it is under the Ministry.

Ms. Lawrence: It comes from the administration.

Mr. Croal: Correct.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Chair, could the Minister kindly explain to the House why we have allocations for Drugs and Medical Supplies at 6221? There is no staff, the staff is under administration.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, are you double-dipping?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, we are the Ministry of Housing and Water so, obviously, the relevant activities are reflected. If you are doing water related matters, then it is reflected.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, I cannot decipher what the Minister just said. I am seeking clarification. Is the Minister saying that the staff employed under administration that do work that deals with water service expansion and management when they fall ill that they go to some cupboard that is marked 'water service expansion and management' and get a band-aid or get a whiz or something? Is that what he is saying? Help me to understand.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chair, it is no different if you have a ministry and therefore there are different activities that takes place there and so when... even for fuel and lubricants sometimes, you have a portion of where you divide that expense.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, the Minister has not answered my question. Field Materials and Supplies at line item 6222, does the staff have long boots that states 'Administration' and long boots that states 'Water Service Expansion and Management'? I can understand the fuel and so on; I did not ask about that. I am asking specifically about these line items.

Mr. Croal: It will be no different whether it is office materials, whether it is field materials, whether it is drugs and medical supply, whether it is print and non-print and whether it is... fuel, we have the vehicle specified.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, could the Minister explain to the Committee at line item 6243, this allocation for Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies, does this portion mean that whichever staff assist with this particular aspect of work that this cleaning supplies clean their area in the administration building?

Mr. Croal: The Ministry is a big ministry and we have more than one department and relevant persons as part of the Ministry so, obviously, we will be referring to physical cleaning, building.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, line item 6283, it is one building, the staff is under administration, there is an allocation here for cleaning and extermination services for the building for \$4.5 million under policy and administration and here, where there is no staff and no building, we are asking for \$350,000 to have cleaning and extermination services. Could the Minister explain that?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, I just alluded to a building so it cannot be that we do not have a building; we exist somewhere. We work from somewhere.

Ms. Lawrence: You said in policy and administration.

Mr. Croal: That is what the cleaning and extermination services refer to; it is right at the Ministry's main buildings.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, could the Minister tell us what comprises line item 6284, Other for \$3.65 million?

10.15 p.m.

Mr. Croal: There are procurement notices, advertisements, and television programme.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: Minister, Mr. Croal, I note an increase of \$80 million between the revised figure of last year and what you are seeking for 2024. Could you explain to this Committee of Supply what occasioned

this increase by \$80 million and what this figure will take care of? I know it is money that is going to the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) but what will the sum be utilised for?

Mr. Croal: May I remind the Hon. Member that this is solely for the hinterland programme. While it is going to the GWI, you will recall that the overhead expenses for the hinterland water programme comes from the State. In the hinterland, you obviously do not have a recovery; this is in terms of somebody paying for the water. So, Hon. Member, this goes towards payment for electricity charges as well as support for the staff in the various parts of the hinterland region.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Croal: Just a bit more information – for electricity, \$705 million will go towards that, and for the hinterland operations, \$775 million. So, for the hinterland operation of the GWI, all the staff are paid from here. As part of Government's contribution for electricity charges to the GWI, it also comes from here. Those are the two categories of expenses.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Cde. Chair, I am looking at the Programme Performance Statements, Indicators from numbers six to nine. I would like to know how often these tests are carried out in terms of the water quality and stuff like that.

Mr. Croal: Hon. Member, what number are you asking?

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am looking at your Indicators from numbers six to nine which states these different tests. I am asking how often they are conducted.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, these tests are carried out frequently, a minimum of once a month in the various locations because we have a requirement to maintain to the World Health Organization (WHO) standard.

Ms. Flue-Bess: After the tests are completed, is this information available for the public so persons can know exactly what they are dealing with?

Mr. Croal: Hon. Member, one can enquire. It is not a case where we go publishing. We do publish a particular result on an investigation, *et cetera*. There is nothing preventing a member of the public from seeking clarity on the water they are receiving. We do have cases sometimes when we have

complaints; we do an investigation, we go back to the community and report on the findings from that testing.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Where can an individual go to access that information?

Mr. Croal: One can engage the Guyana Water Incorporated. You have regional offices and you have the central location.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Member, I think we have exhausted the questions for this particular head.

Programme: 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$1,496,985,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Estimates

Programme: 451 – Policy Development and Administration – \$4,000,000

Programme: 451 – Policy Development and Administration – \$4,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 452 – Housing Development –\$76,517,970,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, for project code 1903100, Infrastructural Development and Buildings, I note that the Ministry is requesting some \$69 billion plus. The explanation given here states:

“Provision for highways, building and infrastructure works in new and existing areas.”

When I turn my attention to the project code at Reference 198, it has a series of activities of which the \$69 billion and change will take care of. One such activity is the provision for the building. Perhaps, the Hon. Member can say to us what portion will go towards building from this \$69 billion. The Hon. Member would recall his explanation last year for the \$50 billion that was approved in the Committee of Supply, Activity 4 in the *Hansard* dated Tuesday, 31st January, 2023, Part 2 on page 8935. This is what the Hon. Member had to say:

“...there is a construction of our new office building. Phase 1, budgeted this year is \$467,500,000.”

Could the Hon. Member state for this Committee of Supply: One, where is this building; what was the \$467 plus million utilised for last year; and from the \$69 billion allocation, what portion will go to this new office and what will that portion represent?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, the building is located in Houston. When you are enjoying the four lanes going home, on your left-hand side you will see the building is being constructed there. The sum we are asking for now is for the continuation of the building; it is \$304 million.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I do not think that the Hon. Member answered all my questions. I asked, what was the \$465 million utilised for last year. You just informed the Committee that from this \$69 billion you intend to utilise \$304 million.

Mr. Croal: That will be this year.

Ms. Ferguson: Pardon?

Mr. Croal: It will be this year.

Ms. Ferguson: That will be this year. Could you say what will the \$304 million be utilised for? What was the \$465 million utilised for last year and what will this sum be utilised for? That is because I *ent* seeing any building.

Mr. Croal: I will get the picture for you. Mr. Chairman, you will recognise that a building of five stories will, first of all, require a lot of expense in terms of the foundation work and pile driving. That is what the expenses went towards. It was to commence the purchase of the piles and start the building. Mr. Chairman, in fact, right now – the Hon. Member said that she has not seen any building – they are already on the second floor. The expense for this year will include the completion of the building as well as the air conditioning, *et cetera*, for the entire building. If I may be allowed, this is the present status of the building.

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

Ms. Ferguson: You will lay it over for me to see properly.

Mr. Croal: The Hon. Member passes there every day. Let both of us go and visit.

Mr. Chairman: We are being invited to visit too many sites now. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, you have floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do not mind accompanying the Hon. Member to inspect this project.

Mr. Chairman: Even at this hour.

Ms. Ferguson: Not at this hour, Sir; I have other things to do.

Mr. Chairman: Are you imputing that you do not feel safe with him at this hour?

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, would the Hon. Member be kind enough... Houston is a big area, so I really would like to know between where and where I can find this building, whether it is on the western carriageway or the eastern carriageway...?

Mr. Chairman: ...whether it is on the Mandela bypass or the public road?

Mr. Croal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let us start our journey from the roundabout at Mandela Avenue and Aubrey Barker Road. You will go south on the four lanes, and you will happen upon some steel structure going up there. There is then a sign that states, Sheriff. Immediately pass that is the building that belongs to the Ministry of Housing and Water. Therefore, it is on your left-hand side. [An Hon. Member (*Inaudible*)] In that case, it will be on the eastern side.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, is this question going to be whether the eastern side is more developed than the western side?

Ms. Ferguson: No, Mr. Chair. No, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: All right, go ahead. Go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I am a frequent traveller on that stretch. What I do know is, you have the steel structure which is the Sheraton Hotel. When I pass the Sheraton Hotel, I notice some big trucks which are marked, Sheriff Construction Incorporated. I think, beyond those trucks, I recognise a two-storey concrete building with T-shores still on it. I do not know if it is that building

the Hon. Member is talking about. But I will keep my eyes on this project just as the 12-storey complex.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, has the Hon. Member arrived at the right location?

Mr. Croal: It seems so, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Member, you may ask your next question.

Mr. Croal: We will go on a date.

10.30 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, can I proceed?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, the other activity under this provision being sought, this \$69 billion, provision for highways; that is Eccles to Diamond, Great Diamond, Meerzorg to Schoonord, Schoonord to Crane, Eccles Landfill Road and Great Diamond, Craig. Could the Hon. Member provide a disaggregation of the \$69 billion for each activity under this project sum? Secondly, before I give the Hon. Member a chance to speak, I recognise the mobilisation for the continuation of the Landfill Road heading west to the main East Bank corridor. Contractors are already mobilised. Is there any provision in this Budget for that particular project?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, may I be given five minutes to respond? The breakdown for the \$69 billion expenditure includes... I will give five categories and then we will go into details. [An

Hon Member: (*Inaudible*)] I listened attentively so it is time for you to listen; \$51 million is what we consider as roll over projects. The roll over projects are: the Ministry's main office that we just spoke about; the four-lane highway for Eccles to Diamond, the retention has to be paid; then we have the four-lane highway to Great Diamond; the Heroes Highway, the retention has to be paid; the four-lane highway from Schoonoord to Crane; we also have from when you cross over the bridge, from Meerzorg into Schoonoord, that portion is a four-lane – I can give total; it depends on how much time you are giving me – we also have the four-lane highway for the Eccles Landfill Road, the one that you just inquired about, yes, it is here; we also have the four-lane highway to continue Great Diamond to Craig. That is here. The last set of expenses under the \$51 billion roll

over would be for roads, bridges, water distribution, electrical networks and land preparation in housing areas.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have arrived at a point where we may regret, but the one hour is up. I will give my good friend, the Hon. Ms Ferguson, the floor to ask her final question.

Ms. Ferguson: Final question, *hmmm*. Mr. Chair, I have so much to say on this Housing.

Mr. Croal: And I have so much to give.

Ms. Ferguson: I guess the Hon. Member would say to this House the number of houses they intend to construct. But what is in the public's domain is that persons have been complaining about the widespread rental of young professional homes, which raises concerns about fairness in distribution process. Could the Hon. Member state for this House whether contractors who are constructing young professional homes are in the business of doing real estate? That in one. Secondly, would portions from this \$69 billion take care of the many defects that are existing on the young professional houses that are being constructed? Thirdly,... **[Mr. Seeraj: (Inaudible)]** Do not confuse my head. Thirdly, is the Hon. Member aware that contractors who are building these young professional houses are actually building houses for themselves in those areas? Fourthly, could the Hon. Member state whether it is the policy of the Central Housing and Planning Authority to have apartment buildings constructed in young professional schemes?

Mr. Chair, since I do not have much time remaining, I would like to ask the Hon. Member my final question. The person who is missing in action from this honourable House went to Laing Avenue and promised 250 residents to have their houses improved. On Monday the Ministry distributed in excess of \$15 million to 60 families giving them \$250,000 voucher to purchase materials and also \$100,000. My question to that Hon. Member is whether these vouchers are to be encashed at specific manufacturing companies or hardware stores? And could you say to this Committee of Supply when the 190 remaining residents of Laing Avenue will receive their \$250,000 grants and also their \$100,000, and whether you feel that this sum is adequate to do what they have to do, since Men on Mission (MOM) are building houses from \$500,000 and million dollars? Those are my questions, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, that was her final presentation for tonight. Hon. Minister, I think you have a five-part question.

Mr. Croal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, let me address the Laing Avenue question, then I will deal with houses and not just young professionals. Allow me to respond. The Laing Avenue programme was a commitment being delivered on the announcement that was made by the Hon. Vice President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, the Hon. Member of this House. The Laing Avenue programme was one where a lot of work went into it because assessment had to be done for each one of those households. The first 60 vouchers were handed over yesterday. Mr. Chairman, note that I said the first 60. That is because those are the persons who have completed their part of the arrangement, meaning, one, they have to show that they own that particular section that they live in, that they are occupying, and secondly, their identification. The first 60 have completed their transactions. We have done 100% assessment of all. That is complete. The remainder is on the beneficiaries themselves; so as they complete their part they will be issued the vouchers. Fifty million dollars have already been transferred to the Central Housing and Planning Authority for this programme. It is continuous until we reach that finite number. The next step is dependent on the beneficiaries themselves.

In terms of recouping the voucher for the material, there are about five to six approved locations or places, and these have gone through a similar initiative like what we have with the steel and cement programme. You have a choice of which one of those you will uplift from. We have arrangement with those suppliers for the consistency of the cost and that is why those have been approved. Those were announced yesterday, so it is not a secret. I can provide the names of where persons can redeem their vouchers. That is the programme; it is moving slowly, and we are proud of that initiative.

In terms of the young professional houses, for the edification of the listeners, the houses that are constructed for the young professionals and the houses that are constructed for low-income or moderate-income, *et cetera*, they are done differently. The young professional houses are done on a reimbursement stage in engagement with the bank, while in terms of the other type of houses that is done through the Central Housing and Planning Authority then, when the beneficiary has their approval from the bank, the bank pays back CHPA for those houses. That is in terms of the houses that we build. We do not just build young professional houses.

The direct question that you asked about contractors, *et cetera*, for those buildings, we go out to what is called ‘expression of interest’, and that is when persons respond. Based on that, they are engaged, and they have a particular cost. It is capped at which cost they have to construct those houses. And anyone knows that generally a beneficiary if building the house oneself cannot build it cheaper than what is being done through the Central Housing and Planning Authority.

In terms of young professionals’ areas and so forth, usage, let us name them. We have the La Bonne Intention (LBI) area, if you are going in, since we are using east and west, that is on your west; the Providence area; Diamond that is now being developed; and Prospect. Mr. Chairman, as I said, the contractors have approval from Central Housing and Planning Authority and that is how they are engaged. The allocation of the houses is not done by the contractor; it is done solely by the Central Housing and Planning Authority.

May I make this point, Mr. Chairman, to end on this note, a lot of things have been said, but allocations are not even done. Recommendations are made but the physical allocations are not even done by any of the two Ministers, contrary to what even happened in the last Government – when you go to the office, and they have the plan in front of them and they decide on the lot that you get. This is not done by us. We recommend, we approve but we do not involve ourselves in the physical process. The beneficiaries for the houses are not done by the contractors. Now let us speak frankly. Yes, we do have some challenges in dealing with some of the houses that are being built and dealing with some of the contractors. That is why one has been terminated, one is on a wanted list and, yes, those that we have... [An Hon Member: *(Inaudible)*] Yes, I see the police issued that bulletin. Yes, we are addressing it, so I would not *curry favour*; we have had challenges with one or two contractors and their performance. Does that cover your parts of the questions?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. I see you are giving your good friend the liberty of closing. Hon. Members, we have actually exhausted and gone 10 minutes over the time allocated. In deference to the hard work of the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, I could not have not allowed her to complete.

Programme: 452 – Housing Development – \$76,517,970,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$20,570,000,000

Programme: 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$20,570,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

10.45 p.m.

Thank you, Minister and the staff of the Ministry of Housing and Water, Guyana Water Incorporation (GWI), and the Ministry of Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA). Thank you very much.

Assembly resumed.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Mr. Speaker, I am kindly asking, there is a...

Mr. Speaker: Just one second, Hon. Member. Are we back in Assembly?

Ms. Manickchand: We are.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: On the issue of the outstanding provision of the names of teachers or even one single teacher who graduated and are now teaching without having completed their courses at Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE), I await that list. It is becoming...I mean if something is going to be said in this House, it should be based on evidence.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I know you are patiently waiting but we are also waiting on a few other promises of laying over. I have reminded that Hon. Member today that we have gone way past the deadlines that I have established. Be a bit [*inaudible*].

Ms. Manickchand: This is being used outside of this House also to cause trouble and so I want to be very... If we are going to say something in here, then give me the chance to act on it or withdraw it.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Let us sleep on that. When we ask for an apology, the withdrawal, if we do not get it.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 1st February, 2024.”

[Prime Minister]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we adjourn and assemble at 10 o'clock tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we adjourn until 10.00 a.m., when we take the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. Thank you very much and safe travel back to your places of abode.

Assembly adjourned at 10.47 p.m.