



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*

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81<sup>st</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 9 & Friday, 10<sup>TH</sup> May, 2024

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**PARLIAMENT OFFICE  
HANSARD DIVISION**

*The Assembly convened at 10.30 a.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

**MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)**

**Speaker (1)**

\*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P., Speaker of the National Assembly

**MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)**

**Peoples Progressive Party Civic (38)**

**Prime Minister (1)**

Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark A. Phillips, M.S.S., M.P., Prime Minister

**Vice-President (1)**

Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P., Vice-President

**Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)**

Hon. Mohabir A. Nandlall, S.C., M.P., Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

**Senior Ministers (16)**

Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P. (Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni), Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip

Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation

\*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P., Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance

Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P., Minister of Public Works

**\*Non-Elected Member**

Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P., Minister of Health

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

\*Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P., Minister of Home Affairs

Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),  
Minister of Agriculture

Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P., Minister of Amerindian Affairs

Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P., Minister of Labour

Hon. Vickram O. Bharrat, M.P., Minister of Natural Resources [Virtual Participation]

\*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P., Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P. (Region No. 1 – Barima/Waini), Minister of Housing and Water

Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Minister of Human Services and Social Security

Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P., Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

Hon. Sonia S. Parag, M.P., Minister of the Public Service

#### **Junior Ministers (4)**

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Minister within the  
Ministry of Housing and Water

Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Public Works

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

Hon. Warren K.E. McCoy, M.P., Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister

**\*Non-Elected Member**

### **Other Members (15)**

Hon. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.

Hon. Alister S. Charlie, M.P. (Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)

Hon. Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne)

Hon. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.

Hon. Seepaul Narine, M.P.

Hon. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.

Hon. Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.

Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.

Hon. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P. (Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice)

Hon. Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P. (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)

Hon. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.

\*Hon. Sarah Browne, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs  
[Absent- on leave]

\*Hon. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture  
[Absent- on leave]

Hon. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.

Hon. Nandranie Coonjah, M.P. (Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam)

### **MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)**

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

Hon. Aubrey Norton M.P., Leader of the Opposition [Virtual Participation]

Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.

Hon. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P. [Virtual Participation]

Hon. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P. (Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Hon. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica) [Virtual Participation]

Hon. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P. [Virtual Participation]

Hon. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.

Hon. Volda A. Lawrence, M.P. [Virtual Participation]

**\*Non-Elected Member**

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Hon. Christopher A. Jones, M.P., Opposition Chief Whip  
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Hon. Dr. Karen Cummings, M.P. [Virtual Participation]  
Hon. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.  
Hon. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P. [Virtual Participation]  
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Hon. David A. Patterson, M.P.  
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Hon. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne)  
Hon. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)  
Hon. Beverley Alert, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)  
Hon. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P. (Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)  
Hon. Devin L. Sears, M.P. (Region No. 10 – Upper-Demerara/Upper-Berbice)

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

Hon. Dr. Asha Kisoorn, M.P., Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

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Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A., Clerk of the National Assembly

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

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Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,  
*Reporter*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

### **Condolences to the Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, our condolences to the Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond, on the passing of one of her close relatives. She has asked to be excused from this sitting.

## **PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS**

The following Papers and Reports were laid:

- (1) Minutes of Proceedings of the 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee of Selection held on Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2024.
- (2)
  - (i) Annual Reports of the Guyana Oil Company Limited for the years 2021 and 2022.
  - (ii) Government Notice No. 2/2024, regarding Notification Receipts of all petroleum revenues paid into the Natural Resource Fund during the period 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2024 to 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2024.
  - (iii) Loan Contract No. 5828/OC-GY dated December 8, 2023 between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for an amount of US\$30,000,000 to finance the execution of a policy-based reform programme to support Human Services in Guyana.
  - (iv) Financing Agreement Credit No. 7473-GY signed on December 15, 2023 between the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the International Development Association (IDA) for an amount equivalent to SDR26,700,000 to support the Enhancing Policies for Human Capital Accumulation Development Policy Financing Program.
  - (v) Term Loan Facility Agreement dated December 22, 2023, between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and His Majesty the King in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of International Development, acting through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (Global Affairs Canada), and done through the Sovereign Loans Programme for an amount of CAD 120,000,000.00 to support the budget of Guyana, including supporting Guyana's social protection priorities in combating human trafficking, gender-based violence, women's economic empowerment and enhancement of the safety net for vulnerable populations.

(vi) Supplemental Agreement dated December 29, 2023 between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Bank of China Ltd. to amend and restate certain terms and conditions of the Original Facility Agreement dated December 30, 2022, for an amount equivalent to Euros 160,852,464.00, to partially finance the New Demerara River Bridge (NDRB) Project.

(vii) The Swedish Export Credit Agency (EKN)-Covered Facility Agreement dated January 12, 2024, between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, represented by the Ministry of Finance, as the Borrower, and the UniCredit Bank Austria AG, as the Original Lender, and the UniCredit Bank Austria AG, as the Agent and Arranger, for an amount of EUR 135,000,000. The purpose is to finance the design and build of, and the delivery of medical equipment to, a New Hospital Campus in New Amsterdam, Guyana.

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

10.36 a.m.

(3) The National Schools (Board of Directors) (Amendment) Order 2024 – No. 16 of 2024

*[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and  
Government Chief Whip on the behalf of the Minister of  
Education]*

(4) Audited Financial Statements of the Central Housing and Planning Authority for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2021.

*[Minister of Housing and Water]*

## **REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES**

The following reports were laid:

(1) Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Public Accounts of Guyana for the years 2017 and 2018.

*[Mr. Figueira, Chairman of the Public  
Accounts Committee]*



- (2) Second Special Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services on the Visit to the Hugo Chavez Centre for Rehabilitation and Reintegration in Region Five and the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute in Region Four on Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2023.

*[Minister of Human Services and Social Security,  
Chairperson of the Parliamentary Sectoral  
Committee on Social Services]*

## **ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**Mr. Speaker:** I did receive, from the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, a notice seeking to ask an oral question without notice. I mentioned to her this morning that I would not be able to allow it as it contradicts Standing Order 20(e), which speaks to information in the press and supposedly in the public domain. I have so informed her. I think she can engage with the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs privately on that.

## **QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

### **[For Written Replies]**

Hon. Members, there are 8 questions on today's Order Paper. Questions 1 to 3 are for written replies and questions 4 to 8 are for oral replies. For written replies, question 1 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, and it is for the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. Question 2 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, and it is for the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip. Question 3 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, and it is for the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip. The answers to all of these questions have been received and have, therefore, in accordance with our Standing Orders, been circulated.

### **1. Names of Neighbourhood Democratic Councils that did not receive Subventions from the Government.**

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** Can the Hon. Minister inform this House of the names of Neighbourhood Democratic Councils that were not given a subvention (in the form of cash transfer) from the Ministry of Local Government, for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, and up to June 2023?

**Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Persaud]:**

No.	Name of NDC	2023
1	Moruka/Providence	0 (Subvention request is currently being processed)
2	No. 52/63	0 (Subvention request is currently being processed)
3	No. 64/74	0 (Subvention request is currently being processed)

**2. Members of the delegation that accompanied His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali on overseas trips**

**Ms. Ferguson:** Can the Hon. Minister provide a detailed list to the National Assembly, of the persons who accompanied the President on overseas trips, from 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020 to 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2023?

**Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]:** Following the response given to **Notice Paper 281 (Q 211 Opp 211)**, the delegations that accompanied His Excellency the President on the overseas trips listed in the table provided in that reply for the period 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020 to 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2023 comprised of various Cabinet Members, the President's ADC and media personnel, and senior government technical officers. On occasion when there were representatives of non-government bodies the Government did not pay for their travel overseas.

**3. Members of the delegation which accompanied Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo. M.P., Vice-President, on overseas trips**

**Ms. Ferguson:** Can the Hon. Minister provide a detailed list to the National Assembly, of the persons who accompanied Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P., Vice-President, on overseas trips, from August 2, 2020, to May 17, 2023?

**Ms. Teixeira:** Following the response given to **Notice Paper 282 (Q 212 Opp 212)**, the delegations that accompanied Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P., on the overseas trips listed in the table provided in that reply for the period 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020 to 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2023 comprised of his security detail and government technical officers.

**[For Oral Replies]**

**Mr. Speaker:** For oral replies, question 4 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you may proceed to ask your question.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A pleasant morning to the House, and I welcome us all back after 97 days of being away from the House. That being said, Mr. Speaker, I now put my question. Mr. Speaker, you will agree with me that this question has been overtaken by time – months, Sir, to be exact. It is for the Hon Bishop Juan Edghill.

**4. Full dimension of the plot of land for the construction of the office complex in the Houston area for the Mandela/Eccles interlinked road.**

During the consideration of Budget 2023 under the Ministry of Public Works, program - Policy Development and Administration, Project code 214800 — Government Buildings – a contract for the sum of \$15,874,143,300, was awarded to Caribbean Green Building Incorporated for the construction of an office complex in the Houston area on the Mandela/Eccles interlinked road.

Can the Honourable Minister inform the National Assembly the full dimension of the plot of land in the Houston area where the complex is to be constructed?

Mr. Speaker, before the Hon. Member rises to his feet, at the time of putting these questions to the House, we were told about the second location for this particular project. It moved from Kingston to Houston. So, I do not know how the Hon. Member intends to answer this question. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. Hon. Minister of Public Works, Bishop Juan Edghill, you have the floor.

**Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Hon. Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member did inform you and the House that this question has probably been overtaken by time in the sense that this question was answered in the Committee of Supply when we dealt with the budget estimates for 2024 earlier this year. So, for the sake of the record of the Parliament and for the sake of the public, I would like to give the information so that the Hon. Member and all other Members could be satisfied.

The full dimension of the plot of land at Houston, which was designated for the building of the office complex, was a plot of land measuring 1,458 feet. That was the length. The width was 600 feet. My apologies, Sir. I retract the first part. The length of that lot, Block SIH, at Houston, which was the first site, was 1,089 feet and the width was 400 feet, which is equivalent to 435,600 square feet, which is equivalent to 10 acres.

At the time, during consideration of the budget, I did inform this House and the Hon. Member who is asking the question that we have since benefitted from a larger and more spacious allocation for the same project, which has been moved from Houston to the connector road at Haags Bosch to Ogle. The honourable House would be pleased to note that road is now moving from a two-lane road to a four-lane road - from the Jaguar roundabout all the way to the Ogle/Eccles alignment. So, the plot of land that is available there now is equivalent to 20 acres. We have moved from 10 acres to 20 acres. The full dimension of that land is 1,458 feet by 600 feet in width, an equivalence of 874,800 square feet or 20.08 acres of land. That land can be located, if one is heading east, on the northern side of the road when he/she is leaving the roundabout of the Jaguar. This is a much more suitable location. It provides more space. With the anticipated capacity of this office complex, which could accommodate about 6000 staff, one will need to ensure traffic flow and that congestion is not created as a result of that development.

While the Mandela/Eccles interlinked is a four-lane, which has brought significant relief to the people of the East Bank and is one of the game changers in terms of Guyana's transformation where transport infrastructure is concerned, we did not want to create an additional problem when we solved a problem. So, we continued to work with the various stakeholders, and we were able to engage to get twice the size of land. We have moved it into an accommodation which means persons who are coming from the East Coast would go straight there, down the new Ogle/Eccles four-lane and get to the office complex. Those who are coming from West Demerara can go over the new Demerara River bridge, there is a connection, and they can get straight to the office. Those who are coming from Georgetown have several other routes. So, traffic flow and congestion and everything else... Yes, I have given you the dimension of what would have been at Houston, and I am now giving you the dimension of where we are at the new location, which is seeing ongoing work now. So, the project is in progress at that location. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Mr. Speaker, I do have a follow-up for the Hon. Member.

**Mr. Speaker:** Go ahead, Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for your extensive explanation. My follow-up question to you is, can you say what is the current status of works being done at the moment on the plot of land?

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, you would agree that all three of the questions that the Hon. Member have listed on the Order Paper are related. They are sequential in terms of where the land is, the size of the land, the works, and where it has been. They are all related. So, I am not sure what to say when, and on which question, but I would attempt to give the answer. Right now, if any citizen or any Member of Parliament (MP) goes to the location that I have just described on the connector road between the Jaguar and the East Coast/East Bank interlink, he/she would see that the entire site has already been cleared. Tonnes upon tonnes of truckloads of sand have already been done for the landfilling. All of the geotechnical boreholes have already been completed. The soil sampling and everything have been completed. One would see the mobilisation of equipment on site. So, the contractor has also submitted his design, based upon the new location and layout, and that is awaiting the approval of the supervisory consultant.

*10.51 a.m.*

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Guyana – the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration – has been very and extremely careful as it relates to the management of our projects. For projects of this magnitude, we have not only gone out for civil works contractors, but we have also gone out on the market to recruit the best possible skills to supervise the work that is being done. So, while there are engineers of some ilk and experience within the Work Services Group (WSG) at the Ministry of Public Works, who have been doing a fantastic job – I have commended them here in the National Assembly– we also have engaged supervisory firms to act on and represent on our behalf. So, all of the preliminary works that need to be done have been completed. The consultants have signed off on that. Those approvals will determine the procurement of the necessary materials. You will note that this is a steel-framed structure that is being put up. The dimensions and the rest of it are being worked out. So, we are very well advanced on this project at this time. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you have the floor.

**Mr. Ferguson:** Mr. Speaker, I have a follow-up to the Hon. Member. *A picture tells a thousand words*, Sir. So, this is where we were on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2024 – the bushy area with the billboard of what the project will look like.

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

Even before I go to the follow-up question, the Hon. Member just mentioned that a number of equipment is currently on site. I visited the area on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2024 and this is what I recognised: a few excavators – about two, Sir – and half of the land stockpiled with aggregates. I do not know if it is for the four-lane road. The other half is being sand filled.

**Mr. Speaker:** *A picture tells a thousand words*. We just heard four thousand words. Ask your question now.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Okay, Mr. Speaker. My follow-up question to the Hon. Member: this area is located just around the dumpsite area. Could the Hon. Member state whether an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was done? Mr. Speaker, if you can see where this arrow is pointing, that is where the dumpsite area is. If you are putting an office complex...

**Mr. Speaker:** We have to be careful because from my point of view, that is showing the arrow pointing to the sky. I am very serious.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Mr. Speaker, I am going to tender it so you can have a proper look at the picture.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay.

**Ms. Ferguson:** To the Hon. Member, could you say if an Environmental Impact Assessment was done to determine whether the area is conducive for an office complex of that nature? Thank you very much.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Mr. Speaker, just before the Hon. Member answers, this area is very smelly on a daily basis. It is very smelly, and we cannot put humans there, Minister.

**Mr. Speaker:** I will concur with you. It is not only there, but it is all the way to the Demerara River. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for the question. I hope that she went to the right location. I would like to believe that the Hon. Member has the nation's interest at

heart and is not making light of the matter. I would be surprised if she was. One cannot ascribe improper motives to a Member in this National Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, where we moved from the 10-acre location to the 20 acres is all in one circle. Regarding the issue being raised, any Guyanese who is operating, driving, perusing or looking at the development that is taking place in that corridor, would see the volume of work. A hotel is being built in the same circle. I am hoping that we are not looking for reasons to block another good, development project for Guyana. I am hoping that is not the occasion here, Sir, and I do not want to ascribe such a motive. That entire area, as far as we at the Ministry of Public Works are concerned, has been deemed safe and adequate for the kinds of developments that are taking place. We do have a reality that the Haags Bosch dumpsite is in that.... By the way, Sir, I retract the word. Haags Bosch is not a dumpsite. I would like to retract and apologise to the House for misleading it by saying that Haags Bosch is a dumpsite. Haags Bosch is a sanitary landfill facility; it is a different thing. It is not just the dumping of garbage. It has to be done in a particular way, with all of the necessary covers and all of that. This is a project that we have to ensure is done and is kept in order. I do not think that it has ever arisen at any time during the development of this project or several other projects and activities – based upon the fact of what is taking place at Haags Bosch, its *modus operandi* and how it needs to operate – that there was some issue in the air for the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson.

**Mr. Patterson:** Thank you, Sir. I have a follow-up on the same question.

**Mr. Speaker:** Actually, let us keep to the question. I think we are at question five – the percentage of the work allocated/spent for the construction of the office complex.

**Mr. Patterson:** Yes, Sir. May I proceed on that? Could the Hon. Minister state exactly how much money the Ministry has expended on the project to date? [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Remember, God is watching you.]

**Bishop Edghill:** I guess he only watches some of us. Some of us have the liberty of speaking without God watching. Mr. Speaker, I anticipated this question. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*) prepared for it.] I have my pictures too. That is what I am saying, but I am not going to pontificate in the House. A check at the Government's financial system – Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) – which is the authentic and reliable place to gather information as it relates to financial expenditure of the Government....

I am not relying on any other place. At the end of 2022, the sum of \$2.6 billion, which was intended to be the mobilisation advance, was expended. [Ms. Ferguson: On what?]

Everybody knows that a mobilisation advance is to mobilise; that is what it is for. It is an advance to mobilise. So, that advance has been paid, which is in keeping with the terms and conditions of the contract.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, you have the floor.

**Mr. Patterson:** Mr. Speaker, I accept this answer. However, during the estimates, there was a larger amount expended in 2023. So, it is either the IFMIS is incorrect or there was an error in the estimates. Sir, which is it? Could I ask the Hon. Member or the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for the Finance and the Public Service to say which it is?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

**Bishop Edghill:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, \$2.6 billion was expended in 2022. For what the Hon. Mr. Patterson is referring to, the IFMIS will show that \$4 billion was expended in 2023.

**Mr. Patterson:** Mr. Speaker, I asked for the total amount. I do not know if any was expended in 2024 because we are getting partial answers – by year. Could I ask the Hon. Minister to give us the total amount expended as of 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2024?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

**Bishop Edghill:** As of when?

**Mr. Speaker:** It is as of the 9<sup>th</sup> May.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** How much went into your pocket?

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to say very, very carefully that I reject, outright, the suggestions of the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul – he should carry that conversation elsewhere – when he asked how much money went to my pockets.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, he was not on the...

**Bishop Edghill:** I take offence to that, Sir, and I will not allow it. [An Hon. Member: He apologised.] We must not do things knowingly and then apologise. It is simple – \$4 billion plus \$2.6 billion is \$6.6 billion. All of the moneys that have passed through the Ministry of



Finance's IFMIS, as I stand here today, is \$2.6 billion and \$4 billion. Thank you very much, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, you are perfectly in order. I did hear the comment and he imputed that you were putting the money in your pocket. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

**Mr. Patterson:** Thank you, Minister. [Mr. McCoy: *Patto* was the worst crook ever.]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, Mr. McCoy, please.

**Mr. Patterson:** Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Minister, in his explanation for the first part of the question, said that the land was cleared; they have loads of sand; and they have machines, *et cetera*. He also said that the plans have been submitted for the supervisory consultants to approve. During the budget debate, the Hon. Minister made a statement that the steel had already been procured and were to be shipped. You could recall that. Is the Hon. Minister saying to us that the contractor went ahead, procured steel and all these things without the approval of the supervisory consultant? As you just said, they just submitted their plans for approval.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, give some clarification.

*11.06 a.m.*

**Bishop Edghill:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the consideration of the Estimates of *Budget 2024*, when the questions were asked about the \$4 million, this Hon. Minister said to the House that money was for the procurement of materials. The record will show that. [Ms. Ferguson: Steel.] Steel. It is a steel-framed building. Materials. What the Hon. Member is asking is if we bought the steel without the approval of the supervisory consultant. The supervisory consultant came on board in 2024. Since then, we have asked the contractor to ensure that, before he starts shipping his materials into Guyana, the consultant, which the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, is concerned about, gives the necessary approvals because we are not taking chances with our development.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Minister, ...about the metal materials. When someone mentioned "steel", I was associating it with pocket. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

**Mr. Patterson:** Thank you, Sir. The Hon. Minister is confirming that the contractor procured steel. Could the Hon. Minister say to this House what exactly would be the position if the

supervisory consultant rejects this steel since it was done before they came? I want it on the record.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I would give you a chance to respond and then I will curtail this particular line of questioning because it has gone beyond the scope of the question. Then, I will move to question 6. Go ahead, Minister.

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Chairman, a contractor put in a bid, a contract was awarded, and the contractor was going ahead. We stalled the contractor to say that we were moving from here to there; hold for us a minute, please, so we could get situated there. You had already started to do your investigations there, come over and do investigations here. In a similar manner, we have said to them that, before they start shipping your materials for the superstructure, they should wait until we get the approval of the consultant. The question that Mr. Patterson is asking does not arise. Thank you.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the Hon. Member that, in his response to the National Assembly during the budget, you said some of this money was used for procuring steel. It is in the *Hansard*. We could go to the *Hansard*. [**Mr. Patterson:** (*Inaudible*)] Exactly. Mr. Speaker, let me also remind the House that it is not \$6.6 billion. It is about \$7.6 billion because we approved some \$1 billion and change for 2024.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, please, we are moving from question five to question 6.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Okay, Mr. Speaker. The sixth question speaks to the issue of the percentage of work that has been completed as of 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2023.

**6. Percentage of the work completed for the construction of the office complex in the Houston area, Mandela/Eccles interlinked road.**

During the consideration of Budget 2023 under the Ministry of Public Works, program – “Policy Development and Administration, Project code 214800 — Government Buildings a contact was awarded the sum of \$15,874,143,300, to Caribbean Green Building Incorporated for the construction of an office complex in the Houston area on the Mandela/Eccles interlinked road.”

Could the Honourable Minister inform the National Assembly what percentage of the total sum allocated for the construction of the Office Complex has been spent as of June 16, 2023? Could

the Hon. Member state what is the percentage or percentages of work completed to date for the sand filling, the procurement of the steel? I need it like that...or the percentage of work.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, before the Hon. Member proceeds, let us be fair to him with respect to the question being asked on this Order Paper, which is for June. He would have prepared for that. I do not know if he is prepared right now to answer the revised question that you are putting.

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, at all times, we must be very fair, especially to people who are listening to us. In 2022, the budgetary allocation was \$2.6 billion. I have reported it to the National Assembly that the IFMAS will show that has been disbursed. In 2023, the budgetary allocation was \$4 billion, and I have reported to the National Assembly that the IFMAS will show that money has been disbursed. The budgetary allocation for 2024 is \$1 billion and, as of now, that \$1 billion has not been spent. I cannot stand and account for \$7.6 billion when only \$4.6 billion has been recorded on the IFMAS. I think we need to clear that up.

The question that is being asked of me is: as of 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, what percentage of works has been done? The answer to that would be zero in terms of civil works on a site because, at that time, we were busy moving the project from the Mandela/Eccles interlinked road to where it is now located. That would be my answer. While I am on my feet, Sir, if the Hon. Member would allow, I can get the consultant who is now supervising the project to give me a percentage of the works that has been completed now on the new site. I am answering the 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2023 question which is that there were no civil works on the site at that time.

**Mr. Patterson:** I am just following up. The Hon. Minister is saying that he is unable to tell us what is the percentage of works completed to date. Could I ask him if he is unable to give us the percentage of works completed to date, Sir?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I think all of us heard the answer of the Minister and I am sure that in the ensuing contributions later in the day, we will probably hear *res judicata*. I think he did answer. Minister, a question was asked of you, and I put it.

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, I just answered that exact question.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have a follow-up. Could the Hon. Minister state for the House the duration of the contract? Sorry, Sir. If I may, could he give us the initial duration? Since there have been some revision to the contract, because as of

16<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, there was zero work on the land... Perhaps, he would have that kind of information to share, the revised contract period. Thank you.

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, the contract period has always been and has remained 913 days from the commencement order. Thank you.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the Hon. Member. Could the Hon. Member state the date of the commencement order? Thank you.

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, I could get back to the House on that because I do not want to mislead the House. But if I am not mistaken, the commencement order for the construction to begin would have been after we would have moved from the Houston location to the new location, which would have been a date in early January, 2024.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Member, since you do not have the date of the commencement order and you do you not intend to mislead...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, the question was very specific, and he answered. If you have exhausted question 6, let us move to question 7.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Mr. Speaker. I would like to put one more question under question 6. I would just like to find out from the...

**Mr. Speaker:** Let us be a little fair to the Minister. Question 6 speaks to the percentage of work completed as of 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2023. Let us keep to that.

**Mr. Ferguson:** Mr. Speaker, you will have to be fair to all of us, to me also, because this is no fault of mine that we are answering the question in May, 2024.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am fair to everyone in the House. I am being faithful also to the question. Thank you. We will move to question 7 which is in the name of the Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley. Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, you may ask your question.

## **7. Skills Audit of Venezuelan Migrants**

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of Labour. Can the Hon. Minister indicate whether the Ministry of Labour has conducted a skills audit of Venezuelan migrants at any time between 2020 and June 16, 2023?

**Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to preface my answer to the Hon. Member by reminding her that in 2020, they were in office for some seven months. Part of the question should be answered by them. They were in office from January to July-August, 2020, as I remember. The second issue is that question cannot be answered because under the previous administration, there was no Ministry of Labour. Those are two things that I have put aside. Between the time when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) took Government to this period – I am going beyond 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2023 – several things have happened. One, we have engaged and continued to engage partners to help us in this regard. We have had several engagements and reports done by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). We are having conversations with United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR) in this regard and also with the International Labour Organisation. So, before we can get to definitiveness, we are doing the data collection regarding this matter.

Firstly, we have to get an understanding as to how many migrants are here. Secondly, males and females. Thirdly, those with the requisite skills. We are having conversations with the UNHCR for an intervention by the Board of Industrial Training (BIT), paid for by the UNHCR, to train Venezuelan migrants and for those who might have a skill, to work with them to ensure that they can be accredited and certified.

*11.21 a.m.*

So, all of these things are a work in progress. I want to believe that by the end of the third quarter we should have a preliminary report to speak in a definitive way about what has happened since August, 2020, up to today, regarding the issue about an audit of skillsets of Venezuelan migrants.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley.

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just one follow-up. I heard the Hon. Member say a lot of things just now in terms of who they are engaging. I am trying to get a sense of what stage they are currently at, at this particular point, because the question did say June, 2023, but the Hon. Minister indicated that he has gone beyond that. At what particular stage is this process at this particular point? As far as I am aware, based on the questions I have asked before, and based on the numbers given, we have a sense of how many migrants are in Guyana; so that should be dealt with. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports have

been done and I have read them. They do not really speak to the skills of the Venezuelan migrants in Guyana, those that I have read. I am trying to figure out at what stage of the process you are currently at to get a sense of exactly what the skills are.

**Mr. Hamilton:** Mr. Speaker, I just said, firstly, we have to know how many migrants are here. Secondly, we have to engage to do an assessment. The IOM report dealt with the migrants that are here. I just said also that we are engaged with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to do a project they indicated they will pay for to deal with the specific matter of skillset among and within the Venezuelan migrants. That is a work in progress. Further, I went on to say that, hopefully, by the end of the third quarter, we might have that type of information to present to the nation. This is a work in progress. Let me take us back, because if the nation listens to the question in a vacuum, we are moving from a place where in five years there was no Ministry of Labour. We are moving from a place where there was no structure in place to do the necessary things to be done. All of that we had to fix and, therefore, these things take time. I have said that, hopefully, by the end of the third quarter we will have a preliminary report to present to the nation about the matter.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Let us move to question number eight. Hon. Member, Ms. Sabitha Sarabo-Halley.

#### **8. Codification of the Labour Regulations and Legislation**

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** I have another question for the Minister of Labour. Could the Hon. Minister of Labour inform the House whether the Ministry of Labour has commenced the codification of the labour regulations and legislation under one code for reference?

**Mr. Hamilton:** Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, what I can report is that the Ministry of Labour and the Attorney General's Chambers, as I speak, are engaged with this matter to deal with the legislation, labour legislation, amending legislation, new legislation and codification of the legislation. So, that again, is a work in progress. We have also had conversations with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to help us in this regard. So again, I will say, before the end of 2024 we should be in a position to have a codification of all the labour legislations.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, I thank the persons asking the questions and the Ministers for answering.

## **PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, during the budget debates and consideration of the estimates, we had the issue of Ms. Philadelphia making some statements which were challenged by the Hon Minister of Education. The Hon. Member, Ms. Philadelphia, wrote me at the end of those debates and she did apologise by writing an electronic mail (e-mail) and said she would do so in the House at the next sitting. This is the next sitting. I am just calling on Ms. Philadelphia.

**Ms. Philadelphia:** Mr. Speaker, thank you very much and good morning. I do want to say to you that my e-mail stands and I do withdraw the comments.

**Mr. Speaker:** And apologise to the Minister. Thank you.

**Ms. Philadelphia:** ...and...Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member Ms. Philadelphia.

## **MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER**

### **Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 54(1)(a) and (2)**

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders Nos. 54(1)(a) and (2) be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed at its sitting on Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2024, with the second reading and the remaining stages of the ICC Cricket World Cup West Indies Bill – Bill. No. 4/2024.”

*[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and  
Governance and Government Chief Whip]*

**Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]:** We have tabled a request for the suspension of the Standing Orders Nos. 54 (1)(a) and (2), to allow for the International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket World Cup West Indies Bill 2024, Bill No. 4/2024 to go through its second and all the remaining stages during this sitting. I must put to the House that this was mentioned a few weeks ago to the Hon. Opposition Chief Whip and formalised more in this week. I did not hear any objection to the proposal. In

addition to that, just for the record, the ICC Cricket World Cup will start on the 2<sup>nd</sup> June to the 29<sup>th</sup> June and commences in Guyana, which is a great honour.

For the record too, this Bill has been drafted and compiled at a Caribbean Community (CARICOM) level, amongst all the countries that are the venue countries, including the new country, that is the United States of America (USA). There are the new venues from the United States of America. This has been a collaborative CARICOM project in which a legislation has been drafted to keep in compliance with the agreements with the ICC Cricket World Cup. A number of countries have passed this Bill already. A number of countries are in parliament, but because they have bicameral legislations they are still going through the process. We are here in the House today and we would like to be able to conclude the discussion to pass this Bill, to allow for the execution of many of the agreements that have to be done to prepare the other territories and Guyana to host the ICC Cricket World Cup. Some of you may have been in the Parliament in the past when we were the host in 2007. There was what was called the sunset legislation which allowed the countries to do this. It was the first time the region was hosting the ICC Cricket World Cup. This time, there has been a slightly different approach to ensure that the legislation is maybe a sunset legislation, but it would remain in the legislative annals of the various countries.

This is not, I believe, a controversial Bill. I am sure. And I trust that the Opposition Members of Parliament recognise that a lot of preparations have to go on, including training. A lot of training has to commence. The centres that are in the schedule of the Bill have already been assumed/taken over by the ICC. We need to make sure that we are in line. In 2007, Guyana and the other countries did a good job. I am sure that this Cricket World Cup, in the region, will be of outstanding levels and standards and do us proud as a region. I seek your support for the suspension of the Standing Orders to allow us, when we come to the Bill, for it to go through all three stages. Thank you very much, Sir.

*Motion proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Standing Orders suspended.*

**Mr. Speaker:** In accordance with Standing Order No. 28(2), I have given consent for the following motion to be placed on the Order Paper and that is the Suspension of Standing Order No. 54(1)(a) and (2).



## **Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 54(1)(a) and (2)**

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders Nos. 54(1)(a) and (2) be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed at its sitting on Thursday, 9th May, 2024, with the second reading and the remaining stages of the Constitution Reform Commission (Amendment) Bill 2024 – Bill No. 8/2024.”

*[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip]*

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you are all aware, the Constitution Reform Commission Act was passed and enacted in November, 2022. There was a process of consultations with civil society and political parties that led to the appointment, nominations, and appointment of people to the Constitution Reform Commission. However, in the Act, I believe, there was an oversight, and although the Act stated at section (3) that there should be 20 members, in fact 21 were appointed based on section 4(2) that states:

“The President shall, acting in accordance with his or her own deliberate judgment, appoint the Chairperson...”

In order to rectify that, what appears to be a contradiction, the amendment is being brought to this House to allow for the Constitution Reform Commission to be properly constituted and to proceed with what is very important work for our country and our Parliament. I am therefore seeking the support of the House, both sides of course, to support the second and the remaining stages of the Constitution Reform Commission (Amendment) Bill to be debated and concluded in the sitting of 9<sup>th</sup> May. Thank you.

*Motion proposed.*

*Question put and carried.*

*Standing Orders suspended.*

## **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READINGS**

The following Bills were introduced and read the first time:

**ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP WEST INDIES BILL 2024 – BILL NO. 4/2024**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to make provision for the efficient and effective staging of ICC Cricket World Cup West Indies 2024 and for related purposes.”

*[Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports]*

**DEFENCE (AMENDMENT) BILL – BILL NO. 5/2024**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Defence Act.”

*11.36 a.m.*

**FUGITIVE OFFENDERS (AMENDMENT) BILL – BILL NO. 6/2024**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Fugitive Offenders Act”.

**CRIMINAL LAW PROCEDURE (PAPER COMMITTALS) BILL – BILL NO. 7/2024**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the abolition of preliminary inquiries; to provide for the procedure in respect of paper committal proceedings in criminal matters; and for matters connected thereto”.

**CONSTITUTION REFORM COMMISSION (AMENDMENT) BILL – BILL NO. 8/2024**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Constitution Reform Commission Act 2022”.

*[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and  
Government Chief Whip on the behalf of the Attorney  
General and Minister of Legal Affairs]*

**PUBLIC BUSINESS**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS**

## MOTION

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2023 – BILL NO. 10/2023

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That this National Assembly, in accordance with Standing Order No. 52(1), grants leave for the introduction and first reading of the Local Government Commission (Amendment) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 10/2023.”

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Local Government Commission Act.”

[*Mr. Mahipaul*]

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Sir, from the outset when the Local Government Commission Act came into being, by the then Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Mr. Ganga Persaud, he was very clear in his deliberations when he outlined that the intent was for clause 13 to provide to the Commission, the role, power and authority, to oversee the employment, dismissal, remuneration and other related matters of staffing. The intent of the framers of this Act was primarily for the Local Government Commission to oversee the procedure relating to staffing, and then subsequently appointing, based on a structure. What we have found with this current operation of the Local Government Commission is that they are not involving the local government authorities – the 70 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and the 10 Municipalities – in the execution of that function to employ staff members at the respective local government authorities or local government organs.

What this Bill seeks to do is to address that issue by way of having the local government organs play a role in terms of having a structure and then they put a recommendation to the Local Government Commission. The Bill does not seek to take away any authority from the Local Government Commission, for it is the Commission that is vested with the authority to appoint, but it must be done after this meaningful consultation with the local government authorities. Some of my friends who may want to object to this Bill may believe that it comes into conflict with article 78A of our Constitution. I argue and say that the Constitution, articles 71, 75 and 78, in my humble opinion, and that of many legal experts I sought advice from, are intended to work in harmony; and that harmonious relationship that the Constitution foresees for local

authorities must maintain their autonomy and their ability to function under articles 71 and 75, that is, they must have that authority to make decisions that are binding and in favour of the community in which they are serving.

Cde. Speaker, we cannot overlook the significance of local government in our democratic system. article 71(1) of the Constitution explicitly declares that local government is a vital aspect of democracy, one that should involve as many people as possible in the management and development of their communities. Therefore, any legislation or practice that impedes this development and involvement, not only runs counter to the spirit of the Constitution but also weakens the foundation of our democratic principles. The proposed amendments seek to rectify the imbalance by ensuring the meaningful involvement of local government organs in the decision-making process, regarding the employment of staff members, by inserting the clause, ‘after receiving a recommendation from the elected council of the local government organs’ into section 13 of the Principal Act. We are re-affirming the importance of local input and accountability in staffing decisions. Some may argue, as I said, against this amendment, citing article 78A of the Constitution which empowers Parliament to establish a Local Government Commission with broad authority over matters relating to the regulation and staffing of local government organs. They may assert that any law enacted after an existing law, takes precedence, thereby implying that article 78A overrides the constitutional provisions outlining articles 71 and 74.

However, it is essential to recognise that constitutional provisions are not hierarchal in nature; they are complementary and mutually reinforcing. While article 78A grants the Parliament the authority to establish a local government commission, it does not absolve Parliament of its duty to uphold the broader principles and objectives outlined in the Constitution. The purpose of constitutional provisions, including articles 71 and 75, is to set the overarching framework within which subsequent legislation must operate. Therefore, the proposed amendment does not seek to undermine the authority of the Local Government Commission, but rather, to ensure that its actions are consistent with the constitutional mandate of local autonomy and democracy. By incorporating the input of elected councils into staffing decisions, we are fostering a more collaborative and accountable approach to local governance, one that empowers communities and strengthens the fabric of our democracy.

In conclusion, I urge all my friends on the other side to consider the broader implications of this amendment beyond mere political Opposition. It is not merely a matter of us being on

opposing sides and objecting to each other, but a question of upholding the foundational principles of our democracy. By supporting this amendment, we reaffirm our commitment to local autonomy, accountability, and citizen-participation, thereby advancing the collective well-being of our nation. I remind this honourable House that this amendment was premised on the actions of the Local Government Commission. To cite, three examples were: the appointments of staff members at the Tuschen/Uitvlugt NDC, which was done without the Tuschen/Uitvlugt Neighbourhood Democratic Council playing a role; the appointment of a staff member at the Linden Municipality, where the Linden Municipality Councillors did not get to play a role; and appointments of many staff members at the Georgetown Municipality, where the Councillors did not get to play a role.

We saw from that how it disturbed the functioning of these local authority organs and, to some extent, there was political interference from politicians in higher offices. This Bill seeks to correct that mishap. I remind this House, in closing, that the intent, at the time, by the then Hon. Minister, Mr. Ganga Persaud and everyone who sat in this House and passed that Local Government Commission Act, was for the Local Government Commission to oversee the employment, dismissal, remuneration and other related matters pertaining to staffing. He even went on to say that we sought to modify that, using our majority at the level of the community. We talked about empowering the local authorities, we talked about giving them the greater autonomy, we talked about enhancing local democracy, and talked about democracy at the grass root level. This is what we did. We said that every appointment indeed must be made by the Commission, but the process must be overseen by them to ensure that the democracy exists at the level of the local democratic organs. With that, Sir, I put my case to this honourable House and seek leave for the First Reading of this Local Government Commission (Amendment) Bill 2023, Bill No. 10/2023. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Mr. Mahipaul. Just to refresh our Members, the Hon. Member is seeking leave of the House to introduce this Bill. According to Standing Order No. 52(2), if there is a Member opposing, that Member will be allowed to make a presentation, then we put the question. Hon. Member and Attorney General, Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall.

**Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]:** Thank you very much, Sir. I begin by sharing the sentiments of the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, insofar as he underscores the importance of local democracy and the important role that local democracy must play in the administration of our country's affairs. It is from that backdrop that the Act, which my

friend seeks leave of this House to amend, was crafted. Perhaps I should begin by reciting the historical evolution of the Act itself, so that we appreciate the road that the Act has travelled and to appreciate why what is stated in the Act must not be lightly interfered with.

*11.51 a.m.*

Sir, you have been in politics a long time and you remember the 1997 General and Regional Elections, the violence and public disorder which resulted therefrom, the appointment of the ‘three wise men’ by CARICOM as well as the establishment of the Herdmanston Accord, and the diminution of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C’s) Government tenure from a period of five years to three years. All of that was done to move into certain reforms of our governance structure through a constitutional reform process, and that process was embarked upon with the philosophical underpinning and thematic intention to reduce powers that were then concentrated in the Executive and to devolve those powers into other organs of state, including this honourable House, the local government structure, the Leader of the Opposition, and many other important state agencies in our constitutional apparatus. That was the focus of the reform. So my friend is perfectly correct because an important and fundamental segment and direction of those reforms was to empower local organs.

In fact, one of the mischiefs identified was the overriding power of the local government minister. And the question arose, where should that power be resided? We had complaints about ministers suspending elected neighbourhood councils and establishing, as a substitute there for, interim management committees. That was found to be undesirable and a whole host or plenitude of ministerial powers were found objectionable. Where should we reside those powers? It was decided, as a matter of policy, that those powers must reside in a local government commission, which must be elevated to constitutional status, and that commission must have, as its most fundamental characteristic, its autonomy and independence as a commission. That is why it was elevated to a constitutional commission because constitutional commissions are endowed by the Constitution with a repertoire of independence and autonomy by the Constitution itself, without the need for enabling legislation. Mr. Speaker, out of that context article 78A was born and this is what it says.

“Parliament shall establish a Local Government Commission...”

This was since 2001.

“Parliament shall establish a Local Government Commission, the composition and rules of which empower the commission to deal with as it deems fit...”

The independence is ensconced and entrenched; it must deal with matters “as it deems fit”. I pause here again, not upon the advice or after consultation with anyone or any authority or any agency. The drafters of the Constitution had they had such an intention could have easily inserted that phraseology, to consult as they deem necessary, but the Constitution Reform Commission, which was a bipartisan Commission resolved... [Mr. Ramjattan: Article 13 (*Inaudible*)] I will deal with article 13. The Constitution Reform Commission crafted this language:

“...as it deems fit, all matters related to regulation and staffing of local government organs and with dispute resolution within and between local government organs.”

“As it deems fit”, lawyers would know, means the widest of discretion, the most untrammelled discretion, only with legal limits that these discretions cannot be absolute so as to become abusive. Once the legislator legislates the term as it deems fit, or in his opinion, or in the exercise of his deliberate judgement, it is the intent of the legislation and the legislator to endow the decision maker with that power and not make it subject to the input of another. That is what the Constitution, our supreme law, has endowed the Local Government Commission with. Mr. Speaker, out of that came the Local Government Commission Act.

The Local Government Commission Act has a particular history as well. From 2001, it did not reach the National Assembly until 2013. There was a governmental task force established again between the People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) and the PPP/C to trash out a whole regime of local government bills of which this was only one. They took from 2001 until 2013, until they produced the Local Government Commission Act. When the Act was being debated, and I want to go to the debate. An important principle of law-making is that we must ensure that when we have the power to do so, we make laws of the quality and type that we must be able to endure and be comfortable with when we do not have that power.

In 2013, we had a minority government. The PPP/C was a minority government, and the record of this Assembly will palpably demonstrate that only bills that found the support of the then one-seat majority-Opposition were able to pass. The record of this Assembly will record how many nationally important bills were rejected, and the projects putting us in international problems and economic problems locally. We got a judgement from the Caribbean Court of

Justice (CCJ) in the Rudisa Beverages and Juices N.V. and Caribbean International Distributors Inc. (CIDI) matter in the sum of US\$6 million because we were unable to get your support to amend the Customs Act – that cost us US\$6 million. Then the series of Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AMLCFT) Bills, we were unable to get your support as a result of which we were blacklisted. We were unable to get your support on a number of projects in budgets, and they were all slashed – Amaila Falls, speciality hospital, Amerindian development projects, and I can go on. The point I want to make emphatically is, that was a Parliament that could only have approved that which you approved, and you approved this Act that you now want to amend; and I want to make that point. What you approve when you have the power to approve, you must be able to live with it when you do not have that power. That is the fundamental point I want to make.

To his credit, Minister Bulkan, the then Member – listen to the Hon. Member Mr. Ronald Bulkan, who detailed the history of this Bill. Mr. Speaker, I invite your attention specifically, your undivided attention – described the travail and journey of this bill. Listen to Mr. Bulkan, the Hon. Member. He said that for the majority of this House to have agreed to such a proposal... Sorry, let me get to Mr. Bulkan himself. This is it. Sorry. He said he was speaking of the Bill, it being worked on since 2001. This is what he said, ‘that even if we take the period from December, 2001, when the joint task force was commissioned, to now, is a period of 140 months’. One hundred and forty months, and now you want to come and change it just like that. One hundred and forty months we laboured, and listen to how Mr. Bulkan described it, the Honourable Member then: ‘the gestation period, which is the period from fertilization to birth, we are all aware that in the case of humans it is nine months, in the case of a donkey it is 12 months, in the case of a goat it is five months, in the case of a whale it varies between 16 to 20 months, and for an elephant it is 20 months. In this period, we could have brought forth 15 cycles of humans, 11 cycles of donkeys, 28 cycles of goats’ and it goes on. With that biological evolution cycle, how can we revisit this after a couple of months? Look how many animals were born during the period that it took to birth this bill, and Mr. Mahipaul invites us flippantly this morning, and Mr. Mahipaul invites us almost summarily, to reconsider this Bill and change it. We are not going to do that Mr. Mahipaul. Too many donkeys were born in the process, we cannot insult the animal kingdom like that.

More importantly, this matter, although the bill spent so much time in its preparatory stage, when it reached the floor of the National Assembly, it went into a select committee. A select committee that you took the majority of, historically, creating history; and a select committee,



with a bill from the government, you took chairmanship of that Select Committee, not the Minister. Every select committee... [An Opposition Member: *(Inaudible)*...majority.] I know you were the majority, so that is why I am detailing it to understand the control that you had, to understand the intent that you imparted in the terms of this Bill. They took not only the majority in the committee, but they took the chairmanship of the committee and invested that responsibility in that man of legendary competence, the then Hon. Basil Williams, and he presided over that Committee. So nothing could have passed muster there. And do you know what?

*12.06 p.m.*

There are karmic forces operating. The Bill from the Government went to the Special Select Committee with provisions to broaden the discretion of the Commission; *to give it a little more teeth*. Do you know what was the policy position of the Opposition? No, the Commission's autonomy and independence must not be interfered with at all. Today, they come to interfere with and dilute the very independence. [Mr. Ramjattan: That is not the truth.] I have the *Hansard* in front of me. [Mr. Ramsaroop: Read it; read it.] It states that the Commission must remain autonomous. Section 13 was specifically considered. Mr. Bulkan said that the Commission must remain true to its constitutional parameters. It is not that the Hon. Member could have said anything different because the Constitution is the supreme law, as I will demonstrate at the second stage of my argument.

The point I want to make is that in the debate the then Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, also emphasised the need for an autonomous commission and the Commission must function in accordance with the spirit it was imbued with by the Constitution. To make it even abundantly clear or even clearer, the bill, which it did not have to do, enacted Section 3. To further send that clear message that the commission must remain independent and must make its decision as it deems fit, to ensure that plenitude of power given to it by the Constitution remains intact, this Parliament, when it passed the bill, reregistered what the Constitution emphasised. We have to follow the Constitution. We do not have a jurisdiction to depart but Parliament overemphasised it, by putting it back again in the legislation in Section 3. It states:

“In the exercise of its functions, ...”

– whether the functions are recruiting staff, whether the functions are disciplining staff, and whether the functions are overseeing the work of the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) and the local democratic organs –

“... the Commission shall not be subject to the direction or control of any authority.”

That is in keeping with the language. This was not necessary; this is redundant. This House reregistered its pure position that no departure from the Constitution on this matter. In other words, it made it extra and crystalline on the issue. [Mr. Mahipaul: *Inaudible*] This Bill did not have to state that, because the Constitution, as I said earlier, endows all constitutional commission with a similar power. Mr. Mahipaul, listen to me. Article 226(1) of the Constitution, our supreme law, states:

“Save as otherwise provided in this Constitution, in the exercise of its functions under this Constitution a Commission...”

The Local Government Commission is one.

“... shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority.”

The Constitution itself prevents any dilution of that independence. We did not need Section 3 of the Act because, in any event, if Section 3 of the Act, had conflict with the Constitution it would have been unconstitutional. The Constitution is *intra vires*. The Constitution itself reinforces, at Article 226, that one cannot depart from or that one cannot derogate, rather, from the independence which constitutional bodies are endowed with. I am not going to leave the matter there because this matter also received judicial interpretation. I heard the Hon. Member speak about how we should interpret the articles of the Constitution. Not to detract or in any way to cast aspersions on the Hon. Member’s demonstrable ability to interpret constitutions, we have an agency authorised by the State, by our Constitution, called the judiciary. It has the conclusive authority to pronounce on interpretation of any provisions of any law we pass, including the Constitution. The judiciary, as the authorised agency, has pronounced upon the provisions of the Constitution. The Constitution allows for criticism and appeal from judicial decisions. This decision, as you have me on appeal, was not appealed. This remains the conclusive pronouncement from the judiciary on the matter.

It is the judgment of the honourable, Mdm. Justice, Jo-Ann Barlow, in the case of the Town Clerk of Georgetown against the Local Government Commission – 2021-High Court-

Demerara-Civil Society-226. That is the case number assigned to the case. In this case, the functions of the Local Government Commission came under judicial review. I will not detain you unnecessarily by going through the entirety of the judgment. I will select the relevant parts and I will distribute the judgment for your record, Mr. Mahipaul. One of the contentions identified by the court as the issue, on the third page of the judgment. It is highlighted. When it comes to you, you will see it highlighted in yellow. It states:

“Was the defendant...”

That is the Local Government Commission.

“... under a duty to consult with the Municipality before arriving at a decision?”

Was there a duty to consult? That is the very question you want us to offend the Constitution by inserting in the provision which you are seeking. You want us to offend the Constitution in its current form because the Constitution states this Commission must act as it sees fit, but you are on the Commission to consult. That is the very issue that is before the court. Let me pause here to say... [Ms. Teixeira: It is not consult; it is to recommend.] It is to recommend; you went even a step further. Let me say that consultation is a desirable concept. Let me say that consultation in the political realm and the realm of administration is obviously desirable. Everyone should consult. After reading the provisions of the Constitution, Article 78A, and emphasising the words “deemed fit”, the Judge, in her Ruling on the issue – I will go straight to that issue as expected – paid great recognition to the concept of consultations and said it is good for good administration; it is good for governance; and it is good for accountability and transparency. All of that the Judge did and then concluded the matter this way. This is what the Judge said. I am reading verbatim from paragraph 27, after highlighting the importance of consultation. It states:

“In the case of the Commission, consultation must be what the Constitution in its own deliberate judgment determines that it needs. In the absence of a legal duty to do so, no practice or expectation can oblige the Commission to consult with any entity ... that it must regulate.”

If it decides to do so, it has the power to do so because it can make decisions as it deems fit. There is nothing stopping the Commission from consulting but if one makes it an obligation to consult, then he/she is running afoul with the freedom that he/she has not to consult. That is what ‘deems fit’ means in the circumstances. It has the power to consult and perhaps it has a

duty to consult, but the Constitution invested it with the latitudinal freedom also not to consult and you cannot take that away from it. It is only the Constitution that can take it away from it. You are a member of the Constitutional Reform Committee and when we begin to work, you can amend Article 78A, but your legislative attempt here cannot achieve that objective.

There is still yet another Court Order that I want to reference because, my Friend, again, in exercising, as I said, his well-known ability to read and interpret the Constitution, sought to explain to us the important canons of constitutional interpretation and we must read the provisions in harmony so that they make sense; one can depart from the other. I recognised that and I salute you for that outstanding legal principle. Now, that very issue, the issues of these very provisions, and the apparent conflict to which you adverted, were also the subject of court proceedings. This time, it is the Mayor and Councillors of the City of Georgetown against the Attorney General and the Local Government Commission – Action number 2022- High Court -Demerara-CIV-FDA, fixed data application number 294. This was a case where they went to court and did the same thing. They asked the Court to rule that one provision of the Constitution conflicted with others. Among the same things, they asked:

“A declaration that Article 75 of the Constitution of Guyana is the leading provision and should prevail over Article 78A of the Constitution.”

It is the very argument that you have advanced.

“A declaration that article 78A of the Constitution ... is inconsistent with article 12 of the Constitution...”

A declaration that Article 78A of the Constitution ... is inconsistent with Articles 71 and 74 ...”

*12.21 p.m.*

Article 78 came under severe scrutiny. It was the focal point of the attack because, like you, there were some inferences that it collided with the rest of the articles. There was a whole page of declarations that the Court was invited to consider. The Court ruled. Unfortunately – the Judge – Justice Navindra Singh, did not deliver a written judgement but I have the Court Order. I will distribute this too. Having recited everything that were asked for by applicants – the Georgetown Mayor and City Council (MCC):

“THIS COURT ORDERS that this Application be and is hereby dismissed with costs to the First Named Respondent [the Attorney General] in the sum of \$200,000 two hundred thousand dollars) and costs to the second named Respondent, in the sum of \$50,000 (fifty thousand dollars).”

Mr. Speaker, not only have I demonstrated politically – when it was the Opposition’s turn, this motion which is the current Local Government Commission Act, was brought to this House. I have the *Hansard* of the debates which I can circulate. You will see several places in the debates where they emphasised that they want this Commission to act independently and autonomously, in keeping and rightfully so, within the spirit and letter of article 78A. That is why they fashioned the Bill in the manner they did; they had the controlling vote in the House. It is also the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) who brought the Bill into force by an order of Mr. Bulkan, dated 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2017. [Ms. Teixeira: The Bill passed in 2015.] The Bill was passed in 2015. If they had any misgivings...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Attorney General, you will have to get an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for an extension for my Colleague, to allow him to conclude his presentation in accordance with the Standing Order – I think – 38. I may have the wrong number.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Nandlall:** While in Opposition they passed it. Then, while in Government, they had an opportunity to change it in the manner that the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, now recommends. Rather than doing that, they brought it into force. They brought it into force by an order of Mr. Bulkan. They appointed the Commission in its current construct and stood by it until the people of Guyana bid them goodbye on 2<sup>nd</sup> March General and Regional Elections. You did not see it fit to change. What you were comfortable with in Government, you must be comfortable with in Opposition. That is the political lesson. The legal lesson is that you must bring laws that are consistent and are in compliance with the Constitution. The supremacy clause of the Constitution states very clearly that any law inconsistent with the Constitution would be unconstitutional – null, void and of no effect. The Local Government Commission (Amendment) Bill that the Hon. Member is seeking leave to put before us, runs patently and manifestly on a collision course with our Constitution.

Let me recite a case that all of us know. This is the case of Dr. Ali and Mr. Jagdeo which went to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). The Chief Elections Officer (CEO) sought to denounce 172,000 votes. One of the challenges before the Court was whether Order No. 60 which authorised the recount – a subsidiary legislation – which the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) was empowered to make in certain circumstances. They argued that Order No. 60 was inconsistent with the Constitution. Through the mouth of the President of the Court, the Hon. Justice Saunders – any law, moreover subsidiary legislation which is/are in tension with the Constitution would be void to the extent of that tension.

Insofar, this Bill seeks to circumscribe the powers of the Commission as benevolent and benign as it may appear to be. Once it seeks to circumscribe that power that the Commission has in its decision making – whether it requires it to consult as a matter of law or, worse yet, to act upon recommendations or some external and extrinsic agency – that will run afoul of article 78 of the Constitution that invest in the Local Government Commission the power to make decisions as it sees fit. With those few remarks, I ask this honourable House to refuse leave to the Hon. Member to proceed any further with this matter. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, AG. Hon. Members, I will now put the motion that leave be granted for the introduction and first reading of the Local Government Commission (Amendment) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 10 of 2023.

*Motion put.*

**Ms. Ferguson:** Division.

**Mr. Speaker:** I heard calls for division, so let us ring the bell and give Members an opportunity to get in place. While we are waiting for that time to expire, we have a number of motions and Bills for this session. Leaving out the Constitutional Reform Commission (Amendment) Bill's list of speakers, I have 43 speakers on record. Given the four breaks, that will take us to midnight tomorrow night. At least I will give four hours of break at some time, so we can look at early Saturday morning. Unless the Chief Whips meet and look at how we can proceed in a more efficient manner, I will make arrangements for us to continue tomorrow and possibly on Saturday.

[*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

The Clerk will proceed with taking the division.

*Assembly divided: Ayes 30, Noes, 33 as follows:*

**Noes**

Dr. Kissoon

**Ayes**

Mr. Sears

Mr. Sinclair

Ms. Alert

Ms. Philadelphia

Mr. Jaiprashad

Ms. Flue-Bess

Mr. Rajkumar

Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Cox

Mr. Patterson

Ms. Fernandes

Ms. Ferguson

Ms. Singh-Lewis

Ms. Sarabo-Halley

Dr. Cummings

Mr. Henry

Mr. Ramsaroop

Ms. McDonald

Ms. Walton-Desir

Mr. Jordan

Mr. Jones

Ms. Hastings-Williams

Ms. Lawrence

Mr. Duncan

Ms. Chandan-Edmond

Ms. Hughes

Mr. Holder

Mr. Ramjattan

Mr. Norton

*12.36 p.m.*

**Noes**

Ms. Coonjah

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Williams

Dr. Smith

Mr. Jaffarally

Dr. Westford

Dr. Ramsaran

Ms. Pearson-Fredicks

Mr. Narine



Mr. Datadin

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Seeraj

Mr. McCoy

Mr. Persaud

Ms. Rodrigues

Ms. Parag

Mr. Ramson

Dr. Persaud

Mr. Croal

Mr. Bharrat

Mr. Hamilton

Ms. Campbell- Sukhai

Mr. Mustapha

Ms. Manickchand

Dr. Anthony

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Todd

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Nandlall

Mr. Jagdeo

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips

**Absent**

Mr. Forde

Mr. Indar

*Motion denied.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Mr. Isaacs. The motion is defeated. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension for lunch. We will return at 1.45 p.m.

*Sitting suspended at 12.40 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 2.12 p.m.*

Thank you, Hon. Members, please be seated. We shall resume. We might not see a quorum of people in the House but there are 10 persons online which will give us the minimum required for a quorum. We will now move to the Recession of Resolution No. 35 of 2022 – Amendment of Standing Order No. 82 (Public Accounts Committee).

**Rescission of Resolution No. 35 of 2022 – Amendment of Standing Order No. 82 (Public Accounts Committee)**

WHEREAS the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was established in British Guiana in 1957 by Standing Order 70 (2) and is now provided for by Standing Order 82 of the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) derives its mandate from Article 223(5-8) of the Constitution of Guyana (2003) and Standing Order (82) of the National Assembly

AND WHEREAS the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) exercises supervisory oversight of the functioning of the Audit Office in accordance with the Rules, Policies, and Procedures Manual, the Audit Act, and any other Law;

AND WHEREAS the duty of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is to examine the accounts showing the appropriation of the sums granted by the Assembly to meet Public Expenditure and such other accounts laid before the Assembly as the Assembly may refer to the Committee together with the Auditor General's Report thereon;

AND WHEREAS the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) examines the economy and the efficiency of the administration of these public expenditures by: a) All central and local government bodies and entities; b) All bodies and entities in which the state has a controlling interest; and c) All projects funded by way of taxes, loans or grants by any foreign state or organization;

AND WHEREAS the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) exercises powers in keeping with the Legislative Bodies Evidence Act, Chapter 1:08, allowing, for the summoning of witnesses to give evidence and or provide documents to the Committee;

AND WHEREAS Resolution No. 35 of the National Assembly of Guyana passed on Wednesday, 13th April, 2022, amended Standing Order 82 by inserting immediately after paragraph (3), the following paragraph - "(4) A quorum shall be five (5) members, two (2) representing the Government, two (2) representing the Opposition and the Chairperson;

AND WHEREAS before Resolution No. 35, a quorum for the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was in keeping with Standing Order 95 (6) which states, "Unless the Assembly otherwise direct, three (3) Members shall be the quorum. In ascertaining whether there is a quorum present, the Member in the Chair shall not be excluded."

AND WHEREAS since the existence of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), its work has always gone unhindered up until Resolution No. 35 of the National Assembly of Guyana;

AND WHEREAS the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is yet to complete the examination of the Auditor General Reports for the years 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021;

AND WHEREAS the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is yet to submit reports to the National Assembly for the financial years 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021;

AND WHEREAS since Resolution No. 35, eleven (11) meetings of the Public Accounts Committee have been cancelled due to the lack of a quorum;

AND WHEREAS on all eleven (11) occasions it was due to no member of the Government side showing up for the Public Accounts Committee.

BE IT RESOLVED:

"That this National Assembly rescinds Resolution No. 35 which was passed by the National Assembly on Wednesday, 13th April, 2022."

[Mr. Mahipaul]

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. I rise before you once more to bring this motion to the National Assembly for its consideration as we, in the APNU/AFC, seek to rescind Resolution No. 35 which was passed by the National Assembly on Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. The matter surrounding the Public Accounts Committee and its work is in the public domain and has been there for quite some time. Since the passage of this Resolution No. 35 a series of issues have caused a breakdown of the guardrail of our democracy in our conclusion. When we debated Resolution No. 35, it was posited, by my Friends on the other side, that this Resolution will not hamper the work of the Public Accounts Committee.

After two years and one month, on this side, we have concluded that this Resolution was bad and causes great harm to the Public Accounts Committee. In so doing, this motion, the Rescission of Resolution No. 35, is now before us. In the 25 months since the passage of Resolution No. 35, we, as a Public Accounts Committee have met only 14 times – 14 times in 25 months. That has never happened before. If I am to consider recess, it is a matter of minus four months. If we are to take away those four months, we will have 21 months with 14 meetings. Never before has that happened. Not only did we only have 14 meetings, but we were unable to complete the Report of the Auditor General for the Year 2019, which we are currently working on. The Auditor General has laid in this National Assembly the 2020 Report of the Auditor General; the 2021 Report of the Auditor General; the 2022 Report of the Auditor General; and, by the end of September, we are expected to have the 2023 Report of the Auditor General.

It is a clear indication that the work of the Public Accounts Committee has been severely hampered with the passage and adoption of Resolution No. 35. In that context, I am taking into account that the Public Accounts Committee is a body who is supposed to guarantee any democracy good governance. It is supposed to guarantee, in any democracy, accountability. It is supposed to guarantee, in any democracy, transparency. If we are to achieve good governance, accountability and transparency, then the Public Accounts Committee must function effectively.

The Public Accounts Committee is stifled right now with attaining its objective of being and upholding the current Government with accountability and transparency. For reiteration purposes, Sir, I must say that the Public Accounts Committee came into being in 1957. From 1957 to April, 2022, the Public Accounts Committee enshrined in the *Standing Orders of the*

*National Assembly* a quorum being any three Members. That position of having any three Members served this country with 23 years of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) being in Government; it served the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) in Government; and also the APNU/AFC for their term in Government and never was it touched. Even *Sir Michael Davies' Report* that was done extensively on procedural matters surrounding the National Assembly, there was no attempt by Sir Michael Davies to touch the quorum of the Public Accounts Committee. The Public Accounts Committee is and should be a guardrail of our democracy that requires full protection and functioning.

In that context, knowing that we have deliberated on this matter extensively in the past, today I stand before you to bring this motion with the full hope that my Friends on the other side will recognise that there is need for us to revert and there is need for us to go back to where it was that led to it functioning effectively. Today, unfortunately, it is not. This motion seeks to ensure that we get that opportunity to once again function effectively. Sir, I would like to bring it to your attention. I know that we have a list of speakers to share their views, make their points known and I will get the opportunity to come before you, again, to reply, where, hopefully, I will address some of the concerns, if any, that my Friends on the opposite side may share. With that, Sir, I humbly submit to you and hopefully, this House see it fit to pass. Thank you, Sir. [Applause]

**Mr. Nandlall:** Thank you very much, Sir. Again, I rise, and it is with regret that I have to register my objection to the motion that is before the House. There is no doubt that the distinguished Member has espoused the importance of accountability, transparency and good governance. Those are concepts that we are all wedded to. However, that is not the issue that is before this House. Our population who are following must understand what the issues are.

2.23 p.m.

If the issues are as my distinguished Colleague articulated them, we stand in support. We have never deviated from the canons of transparency and accountability. That is not the issue that is before the House. The issue that is before the House is one that is even more or equally fundamental and it is the procedure that we govern ourselves by here. We, as an institution created by the Constitution, enjoy great autonomy in the way we conduct our business. The Constitution states that Parliament is free to regulate its own procedures and by its own rules. Our Constitution is established upon the doctrine of separation of powers. That doctrine entrenches even further our independence, and, most importantly, precludes the Judiciary from

coming into the business of the Parliament and trying to regulate or – not to use a harsh word – interfere with the intramural affairs of the National Assembly. Those protective safeguards are there. The Members of this House are very well aware that, only recently, the Hon. Justice Damone Younge reiterated those principles in a well-researched judgment that the Judiciary, and no other institution of the State, must influence the way we conduct ourselves. We have that freedom. Therefore, it is imperative and incumbent upon us to ensure that we regulate ourselves with propriety, that we regulate ourselves in accordance with our Standing Orders, and, even most importantly, that we interpret those Standing Orders in a sensible way.

Now, every institution, like the Parliament of Guyana, has an inherent power to guard its processes from abuse and must conduct its business and interpret its rules in such a way that it does not allow abuse of its process and its procedures. In every institution, like the Parliament, there has to be mechanisms that prevents redundancy, repetition and monotony, for want of a better word.

The Judiciary has similar principles. When a case is litigated before a court, and whatever the outcome of that case is, it cannot be re-litigated before that court. These Standing Orders capture that principle in many respects. The principle in the judiciary, as the lawyers here will tell you, is called *res judicata*, which means that the matter has been heard and determined by a tribunal that has the power to do so, and it can be taken to that same tribunal to argue it again. What is the utility of that rule? You will have continuous litigation over and over again. Transposing that principle to us, on this side, in this House, you have rules of similar effect and purport. Now, it is common ground in this House that motions are the preeminent vehicle through which we debate matters in this House. So, when a motion comes to the tribunal that has the jurisdiction to determine admissibility, that tribunal has a responsibility to apply those rules to ensure whether that motion is admissible in the first place. We have Standing Order 26 that speaks directly to that issue. It states: “Admissibility of Motions.” This is the preeminent regime of principles and criteria which must apply in determining whether a motion is admissible or not.

It is common ground also that a motion came before the House, the subject matter of that motion and the quintessential issue in that motion was the then configuration and composition of the Public Accounts Committee. With that proposition, no one can disagree. The composition was in a particular fashion, and it was felt, rightfully or wrongfully, that that composition ought to be revisited. A motion to that effect was brought to this Assembly,

debated and determined by votes in a particular manner. I do not think anybody will dispute that. I do not think anyone reading this motion and listening to its presenter a few moments ago, can be in doubt that this motion seeks to undo that which was accomplished by the previous motion. That is to say, a reorganisation of the composition of the Public Accounts Committee. The Hon. Member said so repeatedly, and he gave reasons why. In his reply, or in others' who will speak after me, cannot in good faith and with credibility, come here to say that the pith and substance of this motion is about anything other than a revisiting of an issue that has already been determined by a motion. That is what this is about.

Let us go to admissibility of motion, which I believe is the first rule that ought to be applied when a motion comes. You have to determine whether it is admissible or not. There may be other rules that you may have to consult but this regime of rules ought to be the governing one, and sense and purpose must be given to the interpretation of these rules to make sense. Now, it cannot be that this House or any parliament for that matter, especially since decisions here are made by vote, will find acceptable a practice of bringing motions upon motions to determine issues already determined by a motion. If that is the rule or that is the practice, then we will be here every single session re-debating a matter that has already been settled. When that occurs, that becomes an abuse of the process of the Parliament, as it is an abuse of the process of the court by the doctrine of *res judicata* to relitigate a matter that has been relitigated.

Unless we apply that rule sensibly, Mr. Speaker, in an adversarial parliamentary system because... [Mr. Mahipaul: That is your opinion, Mr. Nandlall.] I am only here to express my opinion. My opinion is what I am here to express based upon the law and the interpretation of the law. In an adversarial unicameral legislative assembly, you will have one side voting one way and the other side voting the other way. If it is that it is a free for all, and that one can bring a motion at every sitting of the Parliament, all we will be doing is debating motions and voting against them over and over in a cyclical manner. That does not make sense; that cannot be the business of this Parliament; that cannot be the function of the Parliament. That is why, in their wisdom, the drafters of the Standing Orders, drawing from a tradition dating back to 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1604 when the rule was crafted against repetition on motions – I will deal with this a little later – out of that rule and rationale, came the current Standing Order 26:

“In order that the motion may be admissible, it shall satisfy the following conditions...”

‘Shall’ we know is the mandatory command form. There is no discretion here, Mr. Speaker. It shall comply with these requirements. The reverse is, if it does not, it is inadmissible. That is

why I am saying this has to be the governing Standing Order. I am going to deal with another Standing Order that allows for a rescission. That Standing Order must bend and bow to the glory of the governing Standing Order on the matter, because a motion that does not satisfy this, cannot be admitted. So, no other Standing Order will even come into play. That is the absolutist position. What are the issues that this Standing Order prohibits? It states:

“(e) It shall not receive discussion of a matter which has been discussed in the same Session.”

Why the same session? It is expected that after this session is completed... This session will run its course and the people, the electorate, have elected one set of parliamentarians, they are expected to last for that session, that elected term of five years and a new body will be elected after those five years. That new body can revisit or deal with a matter that was determined in a previous motion, in a previous session, because they have a fresh mandate and there may be a new parliament. The thing has great sense in confining it. It means that you have one session to determine what your business is, and you are not to repeat it. There is a similar Standing Order that speaks to anticipation of legislation. You cannot have a motion that will debate a matter and there is going to be a Bill coming in the same session. Why? That is another rule against repetition and abuse of valuable resources and time of the Parliament. We have to understand the *rationale* for these rules or else we will never be able to interpret them and be able to decipher the intention of the framers of the rule. These rules can be read literally. They are expected to be read with elasticity that would enable them to be interpreted in a reasonable manner or else the rule book to govern us will be this thick. It will be this thick. We have to read them sensibly and purposively. It states:

“it shall not receive discussion of a matter which has been discussed in the same Session.”

2.38 p.m.

Now, that is the fundamental prohibition. Have we discussed this matter in this session before? Have we discussed this matter, which is the configuration of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the composition of the Public Accounts Committee, before in this session? The answer is yes. If the answer is yes, the motion is inadmissible as not having satisfied the basal and basic requirement. It is as simple as that. Like every institution, we do not have appellate procedures here. Once we make a decision, because of this rule, we cannot revisit it. In good



sense ... [Mr. Ramjattan: The Speaker already admitted it.] I know the Speaker has admitted it. [Mr. Ramjattan: You are talking academically.] No. I know the Speaker has admitted it. That does not mean I cannot speak against inadmissibility. I am rejecting the motion, and I am chronicling all my reasons for rejecting it. I am chronicling all my reasons.

In recognising that there must be due flexibility in our ability to review, once all of us agree, Parliament has given us a residuary power of review. That is how that power of rescission is to be interpreted. [Mr. Ramjattan: We could (*inaudible*)] You do not have to accept my word, Mr. Ramjattan. I am quoting now from *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice, 13<sup>th</sup> Edition*. It speaks to this vexed question of revisiting matters already settled.

“The rule was urged (2<sup>nd</sup> April 1604) that a question, being once made and carried in the affirmative or negative, cannot be questioned again, but must stand as a judgement of the House.”

That is the rule. Once determined, it stands as a judgement of the House.

“Also, by a rule formerly in force, a second bill, at variance with the provisions of a bill passed during the same session, could not be introduced. Further, rescission is opposed to the spirit of the existing rule that no question shall be offered which is substantially the same as one with judgement has been expressed during the current session.

They are saying to you, that rescission offends that rule. They are admitting that. That is what the *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice* is saying, I continue and this is the rationale, “...the practical...” And this is the rationale, Mr. Speaker.

“...inconvenience of a rigid rule, especially where the House as a whole wishes to change its opinion, has proved too great for a body confronted with the ever-changing problems of government...”

Do you understand why they permitted the rescission rule? It was to give the House an ability as a whole, when it decides as a whole, to revisit a particular matter – only then. Here, there is no decision of the House as a collective. A rescission motion is almost a unanimous motion. That is what they are saying here, when the House as a collective says we need to revisit that thing in our common interest. Here it is not a common interest. It is a partisan interest. The rescission rule is inapplicable. It continues:

“...the rule prohibiting reconsideration of a decided question, has come to be interpreted very narrowly...”

That rule that allows you to comeback must be interpreted very narrowly:

“... so as not to prevent open rescission when it is decided that that is desirable”.

It is not to open rescission. It must be done very narrowly. It continues:

“The power of rescission has been exercised only in the case of a resolution resulting from a substantive motion, and even then sparingly”.

It continues:

“It cannot be exercised merely to override a vote of the House”.

Take notes, Mr. Speaker, please and Mr. Clerk. It cannot be used merely to override a vote of the House. This motion seeks to do that – merely to override the vote of the House. It cannot be exercised merely to override the vote of the House, such as a negative one. In this case, it was a positive one. Proposing a negative question a second time for the decision of the House would be, as stated earlier, contrary to the established practice of Parliament. Bringing a vote, determining a question already determined would be contrary to the practice of the Parliament. Sufficient variation would have to be made. That is the first point. What is the variation here? It is the same – reconfiguration of the composition of the Public Accounts Committee. There is absolutely no variation:

“Sufficient variation would have to be made, not only from the form but also from the substance of the rejected question, to make the second question a new question.”

Oh my. You have to have substantial and substantive difference in the question itself, in order to render it a different question for it not to offend the rule. You cannot just add the titular label of rescission on top of a motion and bring back the same question. That makes a mockery of the rules. That is what I daresay is what the Hon. Member is guilty of. It is a flimsy disguise – the question. I come to the Standing Order. Having said everything that I have said, we go to Standing Order 25 (3). Standing Order 25 (3) must be interpreted against the backdrop of the learning that I have imparted to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, who came in here completely uneducated on this matter. It is against that backdrop that we have to interpret Standing Order 25 (3), upon which the motion is predicated:

“When a question for debate has been proposed, debated and decided, it shall not be competent for any Member to raise a question substantially identical thereto in the same Session except upon a substantive motion for rescission.”

After I have said all of that, the prohibition against the substance of it, you simply cannot defeat all of that by adding rescission to the title of the motion and it defeats all the rules, and all the rationalities and all the bases against repeating a motion or a question already decided. This Standing Order has to be interpreted narrowly and from that perspective. When a rescission motion comes to the House, it has to raise a question that is substantially a different one. I am not saying so. The *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*, the authority that we have accepted as the authority to guide us, says that. That is it. With those remarks, this motion is inadmissible, *ab initio*. It is on the floor. I ask you, Sir, to revisit your Ruling in admitting this motion. If Your Honour refuses to refuse or exercise your discretion against my request of reviewing it, then I invite my Colleagues on this side to reject this motion as an abuse of the process of this House and in violation of the Standing Orders. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Attorney General (AG). I am tempted to interject substantially here but I will just say that the Attorney General reminded me of a former Hon. Member, Mr. Basil Williams, who used the word *ab initio*. In spite of all that the Attorney General said and the excellent case he has presented, I allowed the motion. With due respect to issues raised I and the Clerk consulted, looked at different jurisdictions and, in most of them, this clause for rescission is there and has been used and will continue to be used. In spite of the excellent plea by the AG, we shall continue to debate this motion. Our next speaker is the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira.

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker for disregarding the learned Attorney General's proposition. The eloquence of the learned Attorney General and his ability to articulate intellectually and nonsensically, simultaneously, has the ability to hypnotise the listeners, if they are not discerning, to agree with his postulations. The issue in this motion is founded on irrefutable facts that the change in the quorum has handicapped the work of the Public Accounts Committee. This is a very different issue all together. Initially, learned Attorney General, when this motion was put, the arguments we put forward were that if it was successful and it is, that our work would be handicapped, so the matter that is before us must be debated.

2.53 p.m.

You, as a learned Attorney General, I think one of the best Guyana would have gotten for some time, I give you credence. One of the best alongside the Hon. Basil Williams, Sir Shridath Ramphal and the many other Attorney Generals. You would agree with me, Sir, that the soul of the law is experience. The Court and, more so in this instance, the Parliament, Mr. Speaker, you will agree, is not robotic. It transcends with the passage of time and our experience must inform the decisions we make. You of yourself, in your expressions earlier, said that this Parliament is independent to man its affairs and in manning its affairs, we must take into consideration the experiences of the society. I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, the experience that we believed when this motion was passed would have been forthcoming has presented itself to be true, that the work would have been handicapped. Today, the proof is there to see. My Friend, Member Mahipaul and my Colleagues to come will add in verifying the evidence of the handicap this motion would have passed. The motion that we are debating here and now may have in the minds of many, after listening to the learned Attorney General, especially by the Members on his side of the House, and Mr. Speaker, I would even venture to be bold in saying that even you, Sir, may have concluded that the fate of this motion has already found its conclusion.

Mr. Speaker, I am not one to believe that we are just here to have our say and the Government will have its way. Despite the mountain of evidence in this regard that exists in the scarcity of us coming to this House, I still possess an unwavering optimism that common sense will eventually lead to the decisions of this House in the direction that best suits the people of Guyana. Such an opportunity is again being presented to the Government side of this House to do the right thing in the decisions pertaining to this motion's most honourable and noble request on behalf of the people of Guyana by rescinding this resolution. Mr. Speaker, you and a few reasonable men and women on the other side of the House would accept that in the heart of any democratic system lies the sacred principle of accountability, for it is the cornerstone upon which trust between the government and the citizens is built. But, in recent times, this cornerstone has been constantly chipped away at, eroded by the shadows of opaque decision-making and unchecked power by the ruling party.

The Resolution, as it is now, which altered the quorum of the Public Accounts Committee from three members to five members, inclusive of the Chairman, is a direct assault on the very essence of accountability and transparency. Moreover, it was not a creature of the Public Accounts Committee in itself, it was derived from the most senior MP, the most senior Member of Parliament in this House, the honourable woman in whom I give unfettered respect for her

service to this country, but, this act was a selfish act which was derived from emotions and less logic. The Hon. Member said in this House, and I quote,

“This motion is not from the Public Accounts Committee. It is from me as a Member of the House, who has a right to bring a motion on the floor.”

But this Hon. Member, can you see her feistiness in saying that? This right the Hon. Members so eloquently spoke of comes with much responsibility in service to the people. It is our belief that the Member was being irresponsible with the right she asserted to have. Let us be clear that the Public Accounts Committee serves as the guardian of the public’s purse, tasked with scrutinising Government’s expenditure, past and present, to ensure it is lawful, efficient and in the best interest of the people. The Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, in her weak attempt to justify the change in this quorum of the Committee was, as she claimed in her speech in this House, to ensure recognition on both sides of the Committee. As if that was not always the position. However, this noble purpose and intent is being undermined by the deliberate absence of our own Members during crucial Committee meetings. We know they do not want to see the Auditor General’s (AG’s) Report from 2020 to present because issues like the Bamia Primary School, the pump station in Region 3 and the electronic ID issues will surface among many other issues found in the AG's Report. The costs associated will make the issues in the 2015 to 2019 Reports look like cherries. Let us look at the oil audits, the associated costing and how the AG is zooming in on those macro issues that will have a lasting impact on this society. Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, be careful with that line because you are imputing at this stage. I would not allow you to carry on with that line. I want to say to other Members who are saying out loud what is in their heads, many unparliamentary words, I could always ask that you excuse yourself for the sitting.

**Mr. Figueira:** Mr. Speaker, I will always heed your advice and guidance. Some records do not lie, they stand as a silent witness to government's blatant disregard for its duty to be transparent and accountable to the people it serves. The Hon. Member's request for recognition simply requires them, simply, to just show up. Just show up at the meetings. When the meetings are called every Monday, for you to get the recognition that you rightfully deserve, our simple request as fellow members of the PAC is for you to just show up – show up. If you cannot, we are confident that you have other very capable Members on your side of the House who can sit in for the very ministers whom the Hon. Member argued very passionately, very eloquently,

should not be on the Committee. To get your recognition and I agree you should get it, all we ask is that you show up.

This resolution in its present construct is not only unjust but also dangerous. It grants the ruling party unchecked power to deny the Committee, as we have argued long before, opportunities to properly scrutinise and give oversight in a timely manner. This recipe for disaster is unwittingly inviting the spirit of corruption to flourish in the dark corners of bureaucracy, where accountability cannot be reached and where it is not allowed to be reached by those doing so. Our desire is to give the Hon. Members of the Public Accounts Committee the desire to be recognised and we ask them to come, to show up. History has taught us the grave consequences of unchecked power. Consider the landmark battles fought to uphold the principles of transparency and accountability in one of the countries that is considered to be the greatest democracy, the United States of America (USA) vs. Nixon, where the Supreme Court ruled that even the president is not above the law, compelling the release of the Watergate's tapes in the name of transparency and accountability. Similarly, again, Mr. Speaker, in the USA, Brown vs. the Board of Education, the Court struck down racial segregation in schools, reaffirming that the interests of the people must always prevail over political desires. This Resolution, Mr. Speaker, is an example of the Government's political desire over the people's interest in transparency and accountability.

Our intention here today was simply to put to the Government's ear the people that they are deaf to and to say to them, this is what the people want. Simply, the people want a functioning Public Accounts Committee, and all it requires is the rescinding of this piece of legislation, it is the rescinding of this resolution. This motion is a battle for the soul of democracy. A struggle to ensure that the voices of the people are heard above the clamour of partisan politics. We cannot allow the Government, with its one-seat majority, such defiance to dictate the terms of transparency and accountability. We must stand firm and resolute in our demand for the Public Accounts Committee's quorum that reflects the true spirit of democracy, one that is inclusive, transparent and accountable to all. To those who argue against this demand for change, I ask, at what cost do we sacrifice transparency and accountability? Is it worth the erosion of public trust? Is it worth the betrayal of the very principles upon which our democracy stands? We must remember that power, unchecked and unchallenged, is a double-edged sword that can cut both ways. Today, it may serve your interest, but tomorrow, it may turn against you with vengeance. In the words of Justice Louis Brandeis, learned Attorney General, he said,

“Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants...”

In the darkness – but instead, let us shine the light of transparency and accountability for all to see. Let us uphold the integrity of our democracy, of our democratic institution, and safeguard the trust of the people by our actions in rescinding this Resolution. Mr. Speaker, I urge the Government to heed the call of the Opposition and return the quorum for the Public Accounts Committee to three members. Let us not betray the trust of the people, but instead let us honour our commitment to transparency and accountability, the principles of democracy behove us to do so. In 2015, Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, and friends chastised the then Government for having ministers on the PAC. Chastised with great passion, great eloquence and great antics. She was very flamboyant in her display in her arguments put forward. Mr. Speaker...

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Hon. Member, I did not name earlier, but the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, continues to abuse his privileges in the House. (*Inaudible.*)

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.      [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)]      I am on the floor Mister. Mr. Speaker, you cut my flow.

3.08 p.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thanks to the Hon. Member.

**Mr. Figueira:** I was going well. In 2015, the Hon. Member, Minister Teixeira, and her friends on the other side of the House chastised and ridiculed the Members of the Government side for having Ministers, such as herself, on the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Today, she uses the busy schedule of Ministers for their absence at the PAC meetings and for the lack of a quorum. The stakes are too high, and the consequences are too grave to do otherwise. Stop moving the goalpost for accountability and transparency. I join with my colleagues on this side of the House in beseeching the Government to let good sense prevail and rescind this diabolical resolution. I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. I just want to reiterate that I have not signalled support for anything here. My job is not to support or oppose, but to apply the rules. So, I allowed the motion because, on my reading of the motion, a motion for rescission can be allowed, and that is what we are debating here. The next speaker is the Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin.

**Mr. Datadin:** Mr. Speaker, good afternoon.

**Mr. Speaker:** Good afternoon.

**Mr. Datadin:** [Mr. Duncan: I want you to talk about rigging today, Mr. Datadin. Talk about rigging today.] Mr. Duncan, you would not be disappointed. Mr. Speaker, regrettably, I do not support the motion and I would ask those on my side to, similarly, not support the motion. Permit me, at the outset, to endorse the views of the Hon. Attorney General which were that which has been determined in this House cannot be brought for determination again in the same session. It is interesting that this has arisen because the source of this... On 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2022, this House was asked to debate a motion that had been brought by the Hon. Minister, Ms. Gail Teixeira, to change the quorum at PAC meetings. It is useful as to why that became necessary.

What happened was this: As a Member of the PAC, the PAC was asked to determine an issue. The issue was about payment to Members of the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) – their salaries and benefits and what had to be paid. What happened one day in December, 2021 was that three Members of the Opposition, who are Members of the PAC, were alone present and voted a certain way. When the Hon. Members, Minister Edghill and Ms. Teixeira, asked for a reconsideration of that motion and that the matter be brought for reconsideration, we were told that, in accordance with the same Standing Order 25(e), it could not be debated again, and it was therefore final. When at the PAC itself, it was asked that a motion that had been brought be rescinded, that was not done because it was the same session. [Mr. Figueira: Mr. Datadin, do you want to go down that road, brethren?] We are going to go down a lot more, Hon. Member Figueira.

This motion is not about scrutiny. It is not about transparency. It is not about accountability. The PAC, if we can go back briefly, is made up of Members of the Opposition and Members of the Government. [Mr. Ramjattan: It was 1641.] It was not 1641, my friend. It was the 1800s. [Mr. Ramjattan: It does not matter whatever it is.] Well, then do not say 1641. In the event we have forgotten, there are quorum rules that apply to all committees. However, we have to take into consideration that accountability, scrutiny, and transparency are best achieved when both sides are there. It is never achieved with one side only. For an argument to be advanced that that, somehow, improves accountability and improves transparency would simply not be true. If the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, would like to see the Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira, more often...If you want a motion about attendance, bring a



motion about attendance. Do not come and try to say that what you are doing has anything to do with transparency or accountability.

The Chairman of the PAC, the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, spoke about unchecked power. Passing legislation after a no-confidence motion is unchecked power. Mr. Duncan, I hope you are not disappointed. Refusing to obey the Constitution to hold an election within three months of a no-confidence motion is unchecked power. Appointing a chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) in breach of the Constitution, that Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, is unchecked power. Now, the Hon. Member came here and spoke about the soul of democracy. The nerve to speak about the soul of democracy. Fighting the rigging of an election, Hon. Member, is what fighting for democracy is. Going to the courts when one is declaring numbers that are magical and mysterious is fighting for democracy. Fighting fraudulent results is fighting for democracy. Fighting for bedsheets and spreadsheets, when you came up with your imaginary declarations, was fighting for democracy.

In any event, we should also tell everyone about the things that have been discovered and exposed at PAC meetings. Forgive me, Mr. Speaker, for quoting from the *Hansard* of 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2022, and from the speech of one, Mr. Datadin. What I said then was simple. We discovered that \$500,000 had been paid for scales. For those scales, the procurement of which is now public knowledge, the contract was before or very close to the date on which it had been approved. Delivery, however, never took place. The delivery has never taken place. That was exposed at the PAC. Then, \$500 million was spent to build D'Urban Park, and another \$500 million was spent, and we do not know why, but it is attributed to D'Urban Park. It cannot be accounted for. It cannot even be explained at any level of procurement. Those are the things that go on at the PAC.

We have to understand that the PAC, as said earlier, is made up of two sides – Government and Opposition Members. The purpose of the PAC, as is stated in the motion, is rightly stated to exercise supervisory oversight over the functioning of the Audit Office of Guyana and to scrutinise the Auditor General's report. Mr. Speaker, that takes place better and more effectively with the current quorum rules, which require that there must be representation from both sides of the House before any meeting can go forward. So, it cannot be that the Government side alone will attend and make decisions, nor can the Opposition side alone attend and make decisions. The concepts of transparency and accountability would be best served if both sides of the House participate in the PAC. Now, we would like to have a rule for the quorum of the

PAC to guarantee that takes place. The present position and the present Standing Order, as amended, as it relates to the PAC, guarantees that takes place. If it is for any reason one side or the other were to ever have control of the PAC, that would be a recipe for the absence of scrutiny and transparency because partisan political views would be able to dominate. The quarrel is about whether or not we should have the PAC move forward with the years 2019 and 2020 – a time when the Government had fallen; a time when expenditure was unchecked; and a time when, effectively, there was no sitting Cabinet.

*3.23 p.m.*

We also have to consider, when we hear murmurings about the work of the PAC.... The Hon. Member, Minister Teixeira, had made public what relates to the work of the PAC. At the very simple part, without going into the details, the Tenth Parliament had 58 meetings; the Eleventh Parliament had 44 meetings; and the Twelfth Parliament – this Parliament – so far, has had 61 meetings, with two Ministers sitting on that PAC. The quarrel is about how much work the PAC is doing. Mr. Speaker, I humbly submit that the quality of work is more important than how fast the PAC moves. There are good reasons that the PAC should not proceed with undue haste. Those reasons are very simple. On many occasions, persons who should come to answer questions about public expenditure are not available, either deliberately or otherwise. On more occasions, at almost every sitting of the PAC when the Report of the Auditor General is being examined, there is the request or need for further information. So, the accounting officers who come to the PAC would be asked to provide further information. That further information would take some time. It is useful and beneficial to the Members of the PAC to have that information before we move on. It is inimical to proper examination that we leave so many of them half-finished while we say we are moving forward in other areas. Now, the time within which it takes for that information to be produced is... On some occasions, it is usually a week, but on some occasions, we do not get that information within a week. It takes a little longer sometimes for the accounting officers, for whatever reason, to be able to produce it. If we then proceed – move on to the next item, move on to the next Ministry, or paragraph – the place at which we are, the scrutiny and our focus would be diminished.

If what is being sought is better transparency and accountability, that is achieved with more inclusion. That is achieved with more meetings and with both sides being present. That, as we presently stand, following the amendments made in this House on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2022, is in the most beneficial interest, not only to the PAC, but to the nation as a whole. If we were to allow

the motion that is presently before the House, which is couched in terms that better transparency is being sought, then this motion, respectfully, Mr. Speaker, is not required. If better accountability is being sought, this motion is not required. If what we are trying to do is to make sure that there is scrutiny of the Auditor General's report in a manner that is worthy, then this is not required. The references are about speed. The Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, mentioned the haste with which he would like to get to 2020. He will get to 2020. There is no dispute that, as the work progresses, the year 2016 has been completed, 2017 has been completed, and 2018 has been completed.

The Hon. Member, Minister Teixeira, has just reminded me that the Chairman of the PAC, Mr. Figueira, today, tabled the years 2017 and 2018 in the House. It is not that the work of the PAC is not going on. It is not that the scrutiny that is required by the PAC is not going on. It is simply that this is a naked and transparent attempt to remove scrutiny and accountability for the years 2019 and 2020, which are underway, and which was a time when we had no Cabinet or Parliament sitting; when appropriations, as are the norms, had not been voted upon; and when allocation of public funds was done arbitrarily, without reference to a parliament and without reference to even a Cabinet. That sort of expenditure is surely deserving of a PAC that comprises both sides of the House. Whether you claim that the expenditure was as a result of necessity at that time, it was not. You should have held the elections three months after the no-confidence motion. It could not have been a necessity. Even the most elementary of books on law would inform you that necessity could never be self-induced. You cannot put yourself in a situation where that would be the only option available. You could have held the election. You could have gone to the polls. You could have appointed a chairman of the GECOM in accordance with law. Those things would not have happened. When we are doing the work of the PAC and when the scrutiny of the years 2019 and 2020 is ongoing, I am sure that what you will hear is how, when and, most importantly, who authorised the expenditure. It may be and it is, of course, of great interest for what that expenditure was authorised. Mr. Speaker, forgive me, with those few words, I do not support the motion on the floor, and I would humbly ask my colleagues to do likewise. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin. We will now have the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, make her contribution. Before she does, let me thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, for informing us that a rescission rule was not enforced at the PAC when the Committee was asked to revisit a decision.

**Mr. Datadin:** It was enforced.

**Mr. Speaker:** It was enforced; I am sorry. I think it is the principle of equity, Mr. Datadin, which states when one comes to the courts, one must come with clean hands.

**Mr. Datadin:** Indeed.

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

**Ms. Fernandes:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will start by saying that it was good to hear from my colleague, Mr. Datadin, who sits as a Member of the PAC also. We can say, Sir, that for the longest while, his participation has been very seldom at the level of the PAC. Mr. Datadin is one of those Members who we can count on not being in the Chamber when we have PAC.

**Mr. Datadin:** Mr. Speaker...

**Ms. Fernandes:** I thought that Mr. Datadin put on his microphone to say that although he is not in the Chamber, he signs in online.

**Mr. Datadin:** Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Which Standing Order?

**Mr. Datadin:** The imputation of things to me.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin?

**Mr. Datadin:** Yes, please.

**Mr. Speaker:** Mr. Mahipaul is not the Speaker as yet.

**Mr. Datadin:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** You are trying to provide some clarification. If you are to so do, I will have to ask the Hon. Member on the floor if she would give you leave.

**Mr. Datadin:** With respect, Mr. Speaker, I am not asking for clarification. An imputation of something about me is false. I am allowed to defend myself.

**Mr. Speaker:** That one passed me. I will have to go back to the records, check and then we can have it corrected. I missed what she said.

**Mr. Datadin:** We could do it easily. The imputation is false, and I can defend myself.

**Mr. Speaker:** Let me check and see if she imputed your integrity. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

**Ms. Fernandes:** Thank you, Sir. I will continue by saying that my colleague at the PAC, Mr. Datadin, is always kind enough to sign in online. We can check the Record of Proceedings of the Public Accounts Committee and the Minutes of the PAC to see his contribution, if any, for the longest while, Sir. I must address a few things, which were said by Mr. Datadin. Firstly, he made reference to one side of the House basically not being able to control what goes on. Sir, at the level of the PAC, one side does control what is going on, and that is why we are here today seeking to have that changed. For the public's consumption, I have to say – because this is being livestreamed – that the PAC is made up of nine Members, four of whom come from the Opposition and five of whom come from the Government's side. That was not enough for the Government's side. What they further did was make it in such a way that two of their Members must show up in order for us to even have a meeting. That, in itself, is a definition of control by one side.

3.38 p.m.

The Members of the Government's side, at the level of the PAC, were never not allowed to give scrutiny, as Mr. Datadin sought to say in his arguments put forward. Sir, I can further say that we have had many instances in which Members of the Government's side stepped out for a break, came back, and wanted to go through questions that we had just completed. Sir, they were always allowed because scrutiny at the level of the PAC has always been important to us and that is what we are asking to emphasise further at this point.

Mr. Speaker, a very important point raised by Mr. Datadin was in relation to the attendance of accounting officers. This, in itself, is one of the key reasons we are here today. Sir, we are currently examining the 2019 *Report of the Auditor General*. This is 2024. What Mr. Datadin did not go on to say is that we have had several issues and difficulties in even locating former accounting officers because a lot of them have moved overseas and, in some instances, some of them have even died. So, to come here and make an argument that persons are not showing up, without even saying the reasons behind those persons not showing up, is not giving justice to the arguments put forward by the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin. That by itself should be put as reason for us to seek to move forward when it comes to the work of the PAC, so we will not have this issue as we move forward. Very, very importantly, when it comes to the request for

further information, the Hon. Member could say that as a PAC, we have collectively requested further information from various agencies, and we have left paragraphs open where we believe more information is necessary and it has never been an issue. So, for me to hear that here today at this level is quite surprising. I do note that the Hon. Member and his colleague who spoke before, Mr. Nandlall, were hoping that somehow, they could have wrung your hands for you to not allow this debate to move forward, but I am happy that you stood your ground, as you always do.

**Mr. Speaker:** Do not impute.

**Ms. Fernandes:** I said, as you always do, Sir. Mr. Speaker... [Mr. Duncan: Gracious Speaker.] Gracious Speaker, as my colleague said, Mr. Nandlall, in his argument, spoke extensively about guarding against abuse and that is why we are here. We are here to guard against the abuse meted out at the level of the PAC and, by extension, the level of this Parliament when it comes to the abuse of the one-seat majority that the PPP/C has in the House. They believe they can stymie democracy, transparency and the institutions which they come to this House and on which they claim to firmly stand. We cannot, at any point in time, say to ourselves and give the PPP/C the scope to say they practice democracy. But when it comes to transparency and accountability, then they stand in this House and make all sort of frivolous arguments against why they should move forward in a process that should be the most transparent process ever.

Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that we will hear further arguments by the Members of the Government, but one of the things that we cannot get away from is the fact that successive Governments before did not see a need to touch this. We have had disagreements on so many different things that government passed, but no one sought to touch the Public Accounts Committee because everyone before understood the level of importance of that Committee. We do not stand alone. We could talk about the Parliament of Guyana having autonomy, operating by ourselves, making our own rules and regulating ourselves and all of that, but there is a reason we have so many different studies being done at the level of the Commonwealth. There is a reason so many trainings are being done between parliaments and so forth, and there is something called best practices. Best practices are something that we cannot shy away from. At this point in time, I have to say that since I have been a part of the PAC in this Twelfth Parliament, we have had a few trainings at the level of the PAC, particularly, when it came to being in Canada and examining their systems. Ms. Teixeira seems to be surprised; she was not

aware of these training, Sir. It so happens that it was Member Seeraj who accompanied the team on that training. It is important to note, and I am glad Ms. Teixeira showed her shock, that no emphasis is placed on these trainings when it comes to the senior Members of the PPP/C. They always send someone from whom they would take no recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I can say this also, and Ms. Teixeira could challenge me if she wants. The reason the composition was changed was not because all five of the Members could not have come to the PAC meetings. They changed the composition because, apparently, they do not have confidence in two of their very Members. So, if the three of them cannot be there, then the meeting cannot go on. It is important for us to note that we do not operate in a vacuum in Guyana, particularly now. We heard examples given and I am going to give some examples of the Audit Office of Guyana's Reports that were laid in the National Assembly. I think we had up to 2022 laid. We heard examples given by Mr. Datadin. In one particular example, he spoke about some matter from 2018 or 2019. I cannot recall. He sought to speak about a matter and pushed the financial aspect of it, the scrutiny, and stated that is what we should be doing. Sir, we are currently in the year 2024 – we have Dr. Ashni Singh there – with a budget of over \$1 trillion. I cannot understand the argument are coming from the PPP/C when they are seeking to slow down the work of the PAC so that we will not be able to examine these extensive budgets that they have been bringing to this House.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to give an example. I will give an example from 2022 *Report of the Auditor General*. I will speak specifically to this because of some of the misinformation that was put out there. We are looking specifically at the Amerindian Development Fund. We must know these things. This is why it is necessary for me to go into this argument. Currently at the PAC, we are examining the 2019 *Report of the Auditor General* while we are in the year 2024. This morning, we listened to several questions that were answered today, but the questions were overtaken by time. I think this is what we are seeing, the mechanisms being put in place to make sure that these things are overtaken by time also. By the time we get to it, there would be something new happening and no one would be concerned about it anymore. I am reading specifically from the 2022 *Report of the Auditor General*. It states:

“The sum of \$1.835 billion was budgeted in 2022, for: (i) Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme; (ii) Presidential Grants (iii); completion of National Toshias Council's Head Office and, (iv) Amerindian Development Project and Programmes. During the year the Ministry sought and received a supplementary

allotment in the sum of \$3.116 billion, increasing the total funds available to \$4.951 billion. According to the Appropriation Accounts, as at 31 December 2022, the sum of \$4.950 billion was expended. The Ministry sought and received approval to transfer the sum of \$3.116 billion from the Amerindian Development Fund into the Amerindian Purpose Fund (APF).”

They came to this House and said that they wanted the money for the Amerindian Development Fund. Then, they went after that, and they sought and received approval to transfer it to the Amerindian Purpose Fund. Some people may ask, what is the matter? There is no problem there. Let us now go to the Amerindian Purpose Fund. I hope I get the attention of the Minister of Amerindian Affairs with this. Sir, it states:

“Despite several requests the Ministry did not present Financial Statements for the year 2022.”

This is for the Amerindian Purpose Fund. It further states, Sir:

“An analysis of the Cash Book for the year 2022 revealed that amounts totalling \$302.454M were received...”

You are not hearing about the billions as yet.

“...\$302.454M were received...”

This is the cashbook for the Amerindian Purpose Fund, the fund into which over \$3 billion was put. The only record they had was a cashbook in operation, according to these audited statements from the Audit Office. They stated:

“...while amounts totalling \$90.921M were expended.”

When you question why is it that the PPP/C would come to this House; why it is that Mr. Nandlall would stand, after the motion had already gone through all the processes and try to say that this does not have merit and it should not have been applicable.... When we talk about the work being stymied and about not getting to scrutinise what is going on with the accounts under the PPP/C, this is what we are talking about. Sir, we have over one trillion dollars being spent in 2024. I can only make reference to the last report because that was 2022 that was laid in this House before us. Ms. Teixeira is a little upset with me right now and I understand why. I will not spare my colleague; I am not seeing him in the House right, but I will not spare my



colleague from the Ministry of Health. At the level of the PAC, if persons go online, they will see everyone, particularly... Where is he? [Mr. Mahipaul: Dr. Mahadeo.] Dr. Mahadeo; thank you, Mr. Mahipaul. Dr. Mahadeo makes it his duty to talk about drugs and medical supplies. So, I thought that Dr. Mahadeo had a perfect system running with drugs and medical supplies. When it comes to the 2021 report... This will be my last reference to reports because this could take days. When it comes to the procurement of drugs and medical supplies, it states that 19 inter-departmental warrants totalling \$3.153 billion were received by the Ministry of Public Health from the ten Administrative Regions for the procurement of drugs and medical supplies. The Material Management Unit (MMU) cost listings indicated drugs and medical supplies valuing \$5.981 billion were dispatched to the Regional Administrations. However, there was no reconciliation to indicate what were the items received for the amounts warranted.

*3.53 p.m.*

I cannot wait for us to get to these reports. This is 2022. We are in the year 2024 right now. This has almost been overtaken by time already. We have an urgency and persons can interpret this. The public understands why there is an urgency for us to get up to date, because only then can we have true scrutiny of these reports. There are so many others. I keep telling persons, Guyana does not operate in a vacuum. We have the eyes of the world on us right now. You can go online. I have examined several of the Commonwealth of Nations' (Commonwealth) Parliaments, particularly when it comes to their Public Accounts Committees (PAC). I pulled various articles, and I am going to share them with the National Assembly. With regard to the United Kingdom (UK), it states that the UK's PAC is renowned for its effectiveness and robust oversight. What are they going to say about Guyana?

It states that in Canada the PAC plays a critical role in assessing the government's performance. We had an examination of the way in which the Canadian system works. We had them come over here to Guyana, twice, and do workshops and so forth. It was done online and physically here in Guyana. One of the things that one of the Auditor Generals of Canada, British Columbia, that province, said – and I am going to mention it in this House right now – is that he will not even be seen with any government ministers because he does not want his office to seem compromised. There is so much for us to learn and there is so far for us to go as a country. It states that the Parliament of Australia holds regular hearings where public officials are called upon to explain the discrepancies in government accounts and so forth. It states that in India,

the Indian PAC is known for its rigorous and comprehensive examinations of government expenditures. We are not coming here today and asking for something that is unheard of. What we are coming here today to do is seek to remove something that is unheard of in any other parliament in the Commonwealth. Mr. Speaker, the truth hurts.

When we talk about having the rescission of this motion, and we talk about the damage that has been created, we are seeking to build stronger institutions. When we talk about building stronger institutions, I can tell you this, Sir, and it has been my fight at the level of the PAC to bring to light the fact that over the years, sometimes it is cut and paste in the Auditor General's report. The issues keep repeating themselves over and over again. The Audit Office is now forced to keep repeating in the audit report the same things because they have been reoccurring. This cannot be changed unless we are up to date with our examination of these reports. When you talk about fuel and lubricants and mismanagement, every single Auditor General's report has the same thing. The issues are not new. We can come and we can play the politics back and forth, but that does not change anything. The only changes that you will find over time are the changes of the accounting officers with the responsibility to govern these various levels. We have to get to a point in which we can be up to date and make decisions of the current issues that are before us.

In the 2019 Report, we can talk about record keeping. We refer to records that were formulated in 2003, which are things that need to be updated. In 2024, we have so much integration of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) and all of that, none of which is catered for. We cannot even begin to fix those things because we are not up to date in examining the reports of today. These are the matters that are absolutely crucial for us to examine. I have to say, in closing, that we can come and we can speak extensively on these matters. However, there is one thing that is lacking at the level of this Parliament right now, and that is, the political will from the PPP/C to actually institute change that will benefit the people of this country and that will strengthen democracy and transparency at the level of this House. Today I have to say, I have to plea with the Members of the PPP/C to not go down this road in soiling their own record. I am going to end by saying, as Mr. Anil Nandalall stood in this House this morning and said, what you are comfortable with in Government, you must be comfortable with in Opposition. Thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to make my contribution to this debate. I feel that I suffer a great disadvantage, because when you have to speak about the same

thing more than once, you stand the chance of repeating yourself and contradicting yourself. So, I have to be very careful of how I navigate my contribution to this debate.

It would appear that the politics of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) is one that says, describe your opponents by who you are. You are unwilling to scrutinise, to be accountable, to have your record of good governance examined, and you put the blame on the Government by saying they are not. The bottom line of this – and the people of Guyana must hear this and hear it clear – had we not changed the Standing Orders to ensure that both the Government and the Opposition is present, the Chairman, Mr. Mahipaul, Ms. Fernandes and Mr. Patterson could have met in the absence of the Government and disappeared the years of 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, as if nothing ever happened. That is the problem. The mischief this change that came to the Standing Orders dealt with was to ensure that a government that is now in opposition does not escape scrutiny by using its opportunity to disappear those years. Now they come to the National Assembly and make it sound as if the Government does not want scrutiny. That is the first thing that we need to establish.

I notice that some people, especially when they have no moral ground to stand on, and they cannot be believed no matter how loud they are in the public spaces, what they tend to do is to attack the personalities and the character of others whom they could never ever measure up to, like what is happening here, currently, as I speak. We have to examine some things. Ms. Fernandes just stood up here and read from the 2022 Auditor General's report, and that is a good thing. I would like to remind the people of Guyana, that there was a time in this country when there was no Auditor General's report. Under the years of the PNC, the Auditor General, for many years, could not provide a report to the National Assembly. You should be able to listen to the writings and the speeches of the then Auditor General of why he could not provide a report. It is the PPP/C's Administration that moved the Auditor General's office from being a department of a ministry making it independent. It is under the PPP/C that every year an Auditor General's report came to the National Assembly. It is under the PPP/C that a functioning Public Accounts Committee was really operational, because in the absence of an Auditor General's report, a Public Accounts Committee was just people with names but with no report to examine. This afternoon, we are having some amount of theatre since it is Private Member's Day and people need to say they made some representation – scramble together some thoughts and put it in a motion so that we could get some camera time – when it has no merit whatsoever.

There are some issues that we have to examine. The first speaker, which was Mr. Mahipaul, the Hon. Member who moved this motion... the proverb says, and I hope that the Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan listens to this. You could leave because that is what you normally do. The proverb says that, 'the first to bring his case *seemeth* right until it is examined.' That is the principle of how justice works. You bring your case, it has a right to be cross examined. It is a biblical principle. Let us now examine Mr. Mahipaul's case. He said that because we are not meeting, the functioning of the PAC and the effectiveness of the PAC is being hampered. This motion comes at a time when Mr. Mahipaul, the Hon. Member who moved this motion, and his colleagues in the PAC, are trying their utmost to camouflage, curry favour over, prevent as if it never happened, the wrongdoings of the APNU/AFC Government from 2015 to 2020. As a matter of fact, the evidence would show that, in the PAC, I have had to raise objections when Members of the Committee on the Opposition side were answering the questions and not allowing the accounting officer to answer the questions. That is the state of affairs that is taking place. As a matter of fact, the record will show the undue haste of putting paragraphs.

*4.08 p.m.*

In a normal functioning Public Accounts Committee, we would put 10 paragraphs or 15 paragraphs at a time. There are times if you only go to the bathroom and you come back you will hear all the remaining paragraphs are put, so you have to go back to paragraphs that you have marked for scrutiny. Could you imagine what would have happened if the Government Members were unable to attend the PAC meetings? That would be the end of the scrutiny and everyone would go home and the report would state 'a clean bill of health'. It is in this PAC that is here, that consistently, previous accounting officers, who were appointed under the hand of the APNU/AFC, refused to show up, showed up and could not recall and almost wanted to make a mockery of the examination of the Estimates.

As a matter of fact, the record would also show that Mr. Mahipaul, the mover of this motion, in particular, seems to want to attack technical officers when the law says the accounting officer must answer. He shifts the blame consistently from the accounting officer and tries to say it is the programme head, the engineer or the technical officer. Those people were not appointed by the Government. They were appointed by the Public Service Commission or the Public Service Ministry under a contract. The political appointee is the accounting officer, who is the Regional Executive Officer (REO) or the Permanent Secretary (PS). Because they were operatives of the then Government, the APNU/AFC, they seek to obfuscate the issue of the accounting officer

answering and putting pressure on the technical officers at the PAC. Had it not been for our presence and representation, those technical officers, in many instances, would have been humiliated. [Hon. Members: (*Inaudible*)] That is the reality.

I want to go on to what Mr. Figueira said – the PAC is handicapped. Mr. Speaker, Mdm. Teixeira is going to speak. The fact that the Hon. Member is going to speak, and I know she has already answered the effectiveness of the PAC in the public spaces. Since she has put out her missive showing the number of meetings and the work done, not even the Member who moved the motion dared write a letter or even responded to it in the public spaces. Do you know why, because facts do not lie. The Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, joined the debate, and he would like to suggest to the people of Guyana that the effectiveness of a committee is determined by the amount of times it meets. That is their argument – the effectiveness of a committee is determined by the amount of times it meets. The effectiveness of a committee as the PAC, has to do with the thoroughness, the intelligence, the following of the rules, the examining of the rules and ensuring we get the correct answers from public officers; that is the effectiveness of the PAC. I would like to put to you, Mr. Speaker, and all the people of Guyana who follow the PAC online, that this PAC is one of the most effective PACs in bringing people to account. As a matter of fact, it is so effective that it would appear that there is almost a consensus among previous accounting officers, that they cannot recall, they hide or they do not come. That is the reality.

The born-again approach of a group of people who have misled and deceived Guyana about transparency and accountability is something that must be *rejected out of hand* and seen for what it is. You do not behave in a certain way in the eyes of the masses, where people know that you say one thing and do something else, where you hold yourself up with fancy-coloured suits and fancy dresses, but when your actions are examined they are different, and you hope to get people to believe you, that something else is different. People are seeing and people are knowing the truth. The PAC, unlike any other parliamentary committee – and many of us sit on parliamentary committees; we sit for two hours or the maximum of three hours – is a committee that sits sometimes for an entire day. There are times when we are there into the nights in hearings. Our effectiveness is not on the amount of times we meet but it is in what we do when we meet. At one time it worried me when I was hearing this debate and why we do not meet more often. I was wondering if it was a financial reason that was involved, like the travelling, the claims and so on that people were actually using as a way of subsidising their

parliamentary income. At one time I was wondering about that, but I think my colleagues... I am still wondering about it.

The Attorney General and Mr. Datadin have already dealt with the whole issue of trying to undo what was done. This House sat and debated for hours. I think it was late into a night I spoke, and I said ‘my contribution is coming here late in the night’. We made a resolution that we should put this change. At that time, I addressed the issue of an abuse of power. I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, who made some remarks about the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, whom I have very high regard for. I wondered, is it that the APNU/AFC is afraid of the presence of people like Ms. Teixeira at the PAC – her effectiveness, her level of knowledge, her willingness to share her experiences to ensure that we get a better governance architecture in Guyana. Is it that they are afraid that the performance of people and the participation of people like the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, at the PAC, shadows, or I should say causes the participation of some Members of the Opposition to disappear into the shadows because it is unmatched? **[Hon. Members: (Inaudible)]** We should stop these attacks on individuals. We are intelligent people. We know when people are saying but they are not saying what they really want to say, because we hear what you are saying and we understand that.

It would appear that the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, would like for us to forget 2015 to 2020 so that she, the Hon. Member, could get into what she desires, to be able to bring into public notice what the Auditor General wrote about the years of the PPP/C in Government. We will get there. As night follows day, we will get there. We had a royal fight at the PAC when we moved the motion to say we want to examine 2019 and 2020 separately. As a matter of fact, the Chairman disallowed me to even interject at the PAC, that the years 2019 and 2020 were years when a government had fallen, and it had no right being in Office and spending public money. He used his prerogative of the Chair to even instruct the Clerk to strike the mention of that from the record. As a matter of fact, Mr. Mahipaul and the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, went to task to explain that that had nothing to do... **[Mr. Ramjattan: (Inaudible)]** What? There was a reason why we wanted to examine and we are still examining, Mr. Ramjattan, the expenditure of public officers who were directed by a fallen administration throughout 2019 and most of 2020 – an illegal caretaker government that should not have been in office that was directing public expenditure.

We have to examine, and this is what is causing the problem, because people of the likes of Mdm. Teixeira and my colleagues, Mr. Datadin, Mr. Seeraj and Dr. Mahadeo are examining in

the Auditor General's report the growth of employment in 2019 and if they had authority to hire. We had to examine and deal with issues of one REO who determined that the contracts in a particular field were all given to one man, locking out a whole set of others, because he felt that the excavator boom needed to be of a certain description. There was no procurement process whatsoever. When we brought to the attention of the PAC who was the man... [Mr. Ramjattan: It was a PPP man.] Yes, you will say so now. [Mr. Ramjattan: Yes, I will say so now.] You were a PPP man too; 'Ramjattan' used to be a PPP man. Guyana must remember that 'Ramjattan' used to be a PPP man. It must be reminded that 'Ramjattan' used to be a PPP man. [Mr. Ramson: Just like the man he *seh* was a PPP man.] *Eh heh*, like the man he *seh* was a PPP man. I noticed that some of the Members who spoke have since decided to take a break at this time, and they have left the Assembly.

The 'first to bring your case always *seemeth* right until it is examined'. Let us examine it further. At the PAC, let me tell you why it is important that the Government be there. We have accounting officers who come to the PAC and on certain matters, 'he cannot recall, he cannot remember, nothing he knows', but on certain instances, *oh* yes, he could even be so brazen as to want to rebuke and insult Members of the PAC. That is what we have to deal with at the PAC. That is the level of crassness. Maybe that is an unparliamentary word and I apologise. But that is the level of low that is taking place right now. This motion by Mr. Mahipaul, for us to go back and revisit and change something that we have already determined, is an attempt by him and the Members who surround him to salvage whatever little is remaining because we still have a lot more of 2019 and 2020 to go into. I would not want to remind Mr. Mahipaul that they lost an election in March, 2020, and remained in Government for five months... [Mr. Ramson: Illegally.] ...illegally, spending public moneys, transferring lands, cars, and properties to themselves and others in the Government, and it must be dealt with and examined. That is what you are afraid of.

4.23 p.m.

[Mr. Ramson: That is what they are hiding from.] That is what you are hiding from; this motion is to hide that fact. I put it to all the mover of this motion, I put it to all the Members of the Opposition, that if you want transparency, accountability, and to get current, like you are debating, when we finish 2020 come to the PAC with a motion to say we are going to examine 2021, 2022 and 2023 together. Come with that motion. If you are sincere, prove me wrong that it is not hide you want to hide your years. If you want to bring it current, get Mr. Patterson, get

Mr. Figueira, get Ms. Juretha Fernandes and get yourself to come to the PAC and say let us examine 2021, 2022 and 2023 together so we can get current for 2024. Until you could do that, *your slip is showing*.

In an environment of social media and mass communication, there is nothing stopping the Opposition from publishing what they call wrongdoings of the PPP/C every day. There is nothing stopping them, but we are dealing with not what 'Edghill' says, we are dealing with what the Auditor General and the Audit Office say. There are still moneys outstanding that cannot be accounted for D'Urban Park. They still have an issue to answer on the procurement of drugs, which went to the Public Procurement Commission. They still have answers to give on where are the scales that were supposed to be procured from a campaign manager and advisor that has never been delivered, as yet, to the Ministry of Public Works. They still have to answer those questions. That is not what Bishop Edghill says, that is what the Audit Office says. We still have to answer for how many persons got contracts without following the procurement rules. We still have to answer, based upon the Audit Office, on what authority and who authorised expenditure in projects that the budget did not even cater for, without even a change of programme that was given by the Finance Secretary. Those are the issues that are before us. [Mr. Ramjattan: Twelve years... (*Inaudible*)] The long and short of this story, and I would just like to say, Mr. Speaker, to the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, if you could convey that to him, Sir, that this speaker will never, ever be afraid to speak the truth because of some taunt, insult, or derogatory language that is used by him and other members of his ilk. It never stopped me because the truth does not need crutches, it could stand by itself.

We cannot support this motion. This is a mischievous piece of work that is seeking to create an environment that will not provide for transparency and accountability, because it wants a lopsided arrangement that if for any reason the Government is not present, you could go ahead, get your work done, gloss it over, and let us pretend it never happened. This was already debated and determined, and it should not have been here. If you want us to be able to go to the continual debate of who was who and who was who, I would like to remind you that every time we sit in the Public Accounts Committee and we are asking accounting officers to answer the questions, the people remember these words 'for transparency, accountability and good governance vote APNU/AFC'; that is where the problem is. The people are remembering 'vote APNU/AFC for decency', 'vote APNU/AFC for transparency and accountability'. The people are remembering that, and the people saw that *your slip is showing*, and it is being exposed



every time we meet; and we will continue to do so. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.  
[Applause]

**Mr. Patterson:** Mr. Speaker, I have a short address because I do not want to go over and over several of the points. However, the first thing I want to do, I would like to wish my colleague, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond a happy birthday. Unfortunately, because of the death of a close family member, she is not here.

Mr. Speaker, I am speaking not to my friends over there, I am speaking for the public out there, because they may have heard the lamentations and the comments from the speakers from the other side and they may be confused. They may be confused as to what the Public Accounts Committee does, how it is comprised and how it operates. Mr. Speaker and for the members of the public, there are nine members of the Public Accounts Committee, five from the Government side and four from the Opposition side. In the first instance, they have an inherent majority, which means, for the members of the public, that anything we decide, it has to be approved by them because they, the Members over that side, have the numbers to overrule any decision, and they have done that. They have done that before. So the idea that they are trying to portray to the nation that should we revert to what we had before, that it will be a runaway train, is totally not true.

Sir, I want to say this, they have the power because of their majority to reopen any paragraph and they have done that before. They have the power because of their majority to recall any agency, they have done that before. The honourable gentleman who just spoke, the Hon. Bishop Edghill, like Rip Van Winkle, slept through a whole meeting, came two weeks after and he said, *oh*, when we were going to the minutes, I cannot recall this, bring back the agency. Sir, we had to bring them back, because they have the majority. So, the idea that they are trying to portray that if you revert to the quorum, whereby any three members is a quorum, that is a runaway train that we are trying to gloss through our years, that is not true. The pace of examinations of our agencies can be dictated by them, if they are present; it is five against four. They can sit down and ask as many questions as they want, and they can bring back the agency. How our PAC works, ladies and gentlemen, is that if one single paragraph is left unanswered, that agency has to come back and answer that question. Therefore, the idea that they are trying to portray that we are trying to gloss over our years is a total fabrication. Sir, you would have thought that the PPP/C, if they wanted to shine some light on the malfeasance of the APNU/AFC, would show up and they would bring the same agencies three or four times in

front of them, have them there for four consecutive meetings, so that they could prolong their interrogations, they could go letter by letter, but no. What do they do? They do not show up.

Sir, we are willing, on this side, to allow our years to be scrutinised as fast or as slow as they want. What we do not like, what we do not want, is how they simply cancel meetings. I have always said... [Ms. Teixeira: *Inaudible*] Thank you very much, Mdm. Teixeira.

The members of the public need to know this, and Mdm. Teixeira is there, she is up next, she can clarify if I am speaking anything... She just reminded me. Here is how, members of the public, PAC meetings are called or cancelled: On Wednesday, today, or Thursday, the Clerk of the Assembly sends around the notice of the meeting and she asks to please indicate if you are available. On every single occasion the four members of the Opposition write religiously, every single week, immediately, on the same day, saying 'we are available'. *Lo and behold*, on the Friday, and the record is there... I am a person I like records. [An Hon. Member:

*Inaudible* scrutiny.)] Yes, and that is how you could... Sir, on the Friday, nine times out of ten – and I will get into the numbers – the Clerk of the Assembly responds, 'the meeting of the next PAC has been cancelled'; and we have a roll call. Let me give you the roll call. This is the last meeting; this is a roll call for the people there, Hon. Ms. Gail Teixeira, excused; Hon. Bishop Edghill, excused; Hon. Mr. Dharamra Seeraj, unable to make contact; Hon. Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, excused. [Mr. Seeraj: Dharamkumar] My apologies, my brother; my

sincere apologies. Hon. Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, excused; Hon. Mr. Jermaine Figueira, available; yours truly, available; Hon. Ms. Juretha Fernandes, available; Hon. Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, available for scrutiny. Then, of course, the poor Clerk just copies and pastes; the poor Clerk has to write, 'due to the unavailability of Members please be informed that the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, slated for Monday, the last Monday, has been cancelled'. Sir, that is exactly, for the record, what happens every religious Friday. [An Hon. Member: Every?]

[An Hon. Member: Almost every.] I will come to that. The Devil, as always said, '*the Devil is always in the details*'.

The motion reducing the quorum was passed on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. And I took the time to count all the available possible dates excluding public holidays, excluding the time when we are at parliamentary recess, excluding the time when we are at budgetary debates, excluding the times when we have a sitting on a Monday. Here are the numbers; 63 occasions we had from 13<sup>th</sup> April, when the motion was passed to last week – 63 occasions. The Hon. Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul said that 31 meetings have been cancelled, that is 49, almost 50% of the possible dates of meetings of the PAC have been cancelled because the members of the PPP/C were unavailable.

4.38 p.m.

I would like the public to know. How does that mean that we, in the APNU/AFC, are running from scrutiny? That absolutely makes no sense. One would have thought it is the opposite way around, which is that we would have stayed away because we do not want any light to be shed on our years. That is absolutely incorrect. The Government have used several excuses. In particular, you can hear the reoccurring excuse, – I do not think the word ‘excuse’ is unparliamentary – that we were spending money unconstitutionally. What better Public Relations (PR) can they ask for than come and expose this unconstitutionally ...but they do not. Why do they not do that? They just want to use this here as an excuse. I see my good Friend... They will come and tell Members that money is missing here and there for 2019, 2015, *et cetera*. It is the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, who always goes back to some speeches from the 2020 election. That is quite good and those things like that. One would have thought that the Hon. Member would have wanted the PAC... The Public Accounts Committee is broadcasted live. It is almost as the sittings of the National Assembly.

The Hon. Member Bishop Edghill and Hon. Member Ms. Gail Teixeira insist on having their way in the PAC. All the time they sit and the poor Chairman, Mr. Figueira, is there constantly battling. Then, the Hon. Member gets up and says that Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, would like to transfer the blame from the accounting officers to the engineers, *et cetera*. The Hon. Member is there. All the Hon. Member has to do is retransfer it. This is all the question... All the Hon. Member has to say is, well, no. The Hon. Member can get up and ask a question if the Hon. Member is nimble enough, but he is not and that is the problem. We are very willing to have our records examined. We challenge the Government now with this. We challenge them to hold PAC meetings regularly. We challenge them to revert to it.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, made reference to a decision made by the PAC which was the cause for them to come to the National Assembly to change the Standing Orders. The question of gratuity to the PAC came up in the Eleventh Parliament. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Of course. Who was in charge of the PAC? Who was a Member? The Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill was a Member. Who was the Chairman? This came out and was on the Minutes. It was an outstanding matter that had to be resolved. Mdm. Teixeira is here. The PAC met. This was discussed with the entire PAC. It was not just simply with the three or the four commissioners from the Coalition side. This was discussed at several meetings. The Finance Secretary (FS), in December, came to the PAC in his capacity – he is a member of the technical advisors – and

said that provisions have been made to pay the commissioners of the PPC their gratuity and, in another week, we have to close off the accounts because it is the end of the accounting year. please, PAC, make a decision. That is what we did; we made the decision at the request of the Finance Secretary.

The duly constituted discussed the addendum. We said fair enough. Instead of returning the money, you have already made provisions for... We asked in particular to please confirm that the Public Procurement Commission has the funds in it. That was the week before. The entire body was there the week before. The Finance Secretary came back the next week and said, Members of the Public Accounts Committee I have written to the PPC and they have confirmed that the moneys to pay the gratuity which was discussed since the Eleventh Parliament was there. He said that it only has a short time because it writes up the vouchers and sent them to the treasury – the Integrated Financial Management and Accounting System (IFMAS) – and so on; if it is not done within the next week the money will be returned to the Consolidated Fund. The Government come here and make that the cause for them to remove the quorum requirements. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Sir, I do not think I could use that word but I am saying these things so the public can know the people we are dealing with. They come with all these fancy things that we are trying to hide. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] That is exactly what I am trying to say, Sir.

The Bishop and the [*inaudible*] the pulpit and preaches as if he wants to disappear our years – disappear our years. The Report of the Auditor General is laid by you, Mr. Speaker, or your predecessors in this National Assembly. It is enshrined here. We cannot make it disappear. We sit and we call each and every agency. Right now, ladies and gentlemen, we are not even halfway through the Report of the Auditor General for the Year 2019. In another two or three months, the PPP/C will be in Office for four years and we cannot even pass 2019, purely, because of the PPPC's decision. I do not know if the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, raised this. I would like the public to also know, we, on the Opposition, proposed a motion where we said, because of the backlog – when we came in, I think when the Government change we were at the Report of the Auditor General for the year 2016 – let us meet at least twice per week so that we could clear up the backlog so that our accounts examination can be current and get rid of Reports of the Auditor General for the year 2016, 2017, 2018; whichever year the Government wants to stop at. That was the first thing they rejected. They tried every single aspect and, of course, they used their one seat majority to come and change it via the National Assembly. That is the first proposal they rejected; they would not speak about that. The Hon Gentleman, the

Bishop did not say anything about that. We proposed twice per week so that we could finish them but they rejected that.

We said to them, fair enough, let us now use the precedent they used in other PACs in previous years which is to do two years at a time – double up as one would say, not in the minibus sense – so that we could become current. They insisted that we should finish the Report of the Auditor General for the Year 2016 as a singular Report. We took almost two years to finish the report Auditor General for the Year 2016. They agreed to do the Reports of the Auditor General for the Years 2017 and 2018. It took us two years to finish even though we doubled up things. We made a motion. Once again, they are not telling you these things but all they are saying is that we do not want our thing... We made a motion stating to let us to do the Report of the Auditor General for the Years 2019 and 2020, but they said no. What you did there must come to light. We said, fair enough, let it come to light. Do you know what it did, Sir? There was the Report Auditor General for the Year 2019 and they moved a motion with a restriction of 49% of all possible meetings. It is in the *Hansard*. Mdm. Teixeira is there and I know the Hon. Member will lose her voice trying to shout and make up... What did they do? They moved the motion. Even with the examination of the Reports of Auditor General for the Years 2019 and 2020 individually, the 50% that they excused themselves out of, we would have been able to complete. Here is the jeopardy. On two different occasions, we, in the Opposition, made proposals to bring it forward. Of course, once again, – I know I cannot use tyranny – I know that I cannot use that. [Mr. Ramjattan: They used their majority.] They used their one seat majority to bring us to where we are at.

What is stopping the PPP/C's nominees? I must commend... There are certain members who have 100%. It is so laughable at times. My good Friend, Mr. Seeraj, turns up if they do not call him in time, religiously. I must commend the Hon. Member. I must say that publicly. The Hon. Member turns up, sits, takes his place and wait on the other Members. We sit and we chit-chat. Then, half an hour later the Hon. Member would get a call. The Hon. Member is there. *Way yuh deh?* We are like... It is true. Our good Friend, Mr. Seeraj is right there; the Hon. Member is free to repeat; *way yuh deh?* The Hon. Member would shake his head, gets up and leaves. Then, the meeting is cancelled. When the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, wonders if we go to meetings for expenses or those things such as that, the Hon. Member is speaking of the Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj, as well that he is trying to supplement... The Hon. Member is taking a dig at his own Colleague. [Mr. Mahipaul: And Mr. Datadin too.] Mr. Datadin does not turn up. It does not really make a difference.

What is really stopping the PPP/C from attending the PAC? They know that when we get to their years, they will make... I cannot use corruption; I cannot use... Unaccountability... I do not know if that is a word. Mr. Khemraj, you are good... [Mr. Ramjattan:

Unaccountability.] Yes. They will carry us to stratospheric heights and unbelievable heights. They know that. They know... [Mr. Ramson: Do all of you know about that?]

Yes. I do. I am speaking. Yes; I am. the Auditor General can no longer say why a school in Bamia was awarded to a company who was struck off the register and is going into its fifth year. If students attended Bamia school, they would have been coming out in long pants by now. Sir... [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] No; come on. They would want to

know, under their years, how a contract could be awarded to a company, started last year, gets up and says... [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] One has to provide financial records.

...oh, it does not have any financial record and the evaluators at the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) went, *tick*, that is okay. It would be asked that it has to have certain equipment, such as a bacco, this... The company writes to say, sorry, we only started last year, we do not have those equipment. The evaluators then went *tick*, you are okay. The company was asked that it must have done a similar project and define a similar project, a specific A, B and C. The company wrote to say that it was awarded a contract in February and March, two months before the tender. There is a private wharf where the people who built the private wharf said, *he ain't mek it; he can't mek it*. The evaluators went, *tick*, it is okay. The people said to send a letter of guarantee from a financial institution. It sent a letter from a waste disposal company – a waste disposal company. It did not have the thing to come and put it on something [inaudible]. It used a waste disposal company as its financial reference and the evaluators went, *tick*, you are okay.

4.53 p.m.

That, Sir, is the bid bond. They speak about us and numbers. The bid bonds supposed to be one per cent; that is simple. The company made a bid for \$865 million and the bid bond supposed to be \$8,650,000. The company submitted a bid bond for \$1 million less than what is required by law. The evaluators went – *tick*, you are okay. That is the reason they do not want to come to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). That is reason they do not want to come to the PAC. That is why they do not want to get to their years. There are things that we want to know. There are things that we want to examine and what we will love to know. A Sheik turned up in Guyana to do some houses, look at some agriculture and left this country with \$22 million of Sputnik V vaccines. We would like to get them there to find out how the Sheik managed to convince

the Government that he has Sputnik V vaccines for sale. He came to look at houses. They went – *tick, tick*, you are okay. [An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*)] That is right; that is right. Sir, I do appreciate my Colleagues on that side for their reverence in silence. We do not normally see them so quiet, so I do appreciate it; I am honoured. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I would like to commend this motion. I will ask the PPP/C to do what they do normally – support the Motion and put a tick next to it. Thank you very much, Sir. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. It is now time for the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip. I have just ticked you on my paper.

**Ms. Teixeira:** I was quiet, because I was absolutely shocked at the level of debate. I will try, Sir. I will certainly try, as I always do. This is a Motion to reverse a previous decision of the House. It must be taken seriously and the arguments that have to be put must be based on truth and fact also. Why do the Members of Opposition want to reverse a decision of the House? Now, all this talk about *control-freakism* and the other nonsense that was talked about earlier are to try to justify an unjustifiable issue. Let me say why, by starting with the Hon. Member Ms. Fernandes. The Hon. Member ended her statement by saying – what you are comfortable with in the Opposition, you must be comfortable with in Government. [Hon. Members (Opposition): The Hon. Member quoted Mr. Nandlall.] Okay, so, the Hon. Member quoted Mr. Nandlall and I quoted you, so what? I am giving you credit where you did not deserve it so why do you not be quiet.

The issue is that sometimes I am afraid in our country of the level of amnesia, convenient memory or deliberate... [Mr. Duncan: Your memory is convenient (*inaudible*).] My memory should not be of concern to you, Mr. Duncan. I do remember a lot about you that should be locked up somewhere else and I would not like to recall it in the House. Mr. Duncan keeps tempting me to go IN THE RING with him. The problem is, I know if I go IN THE RING with him, I will beat him up. I have no fear of that. Let us get on to the facts. The issues are this is a motion that states – according to the speakers – look, we want to go back on the quorum; we want to go back to what it was before the quorum came in, because the quorum is holding back the PAC from functioning; the quorum is holding back the transparency and accountability of the public funds of Guyana because we do not show up – those are the reasons. We need to go back to the situation anti, which means quorum of three. One has to examine that is in whose interest.

I have heard a lot of people in and outside of the PAC talk about the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation (CAAF) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) which have done training with us – both virtual and overseas. Yet somehow the words common in all the training for the Public Accounts Committees have to do with consensuality or consensus between the two sides. This is to ensure that what comes as a PAC report, based on the findings of the annual report of the Auditor General, would have the weight of both Government and Opposition on the floor of the House. It appears as if you *are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea*. You are talking about transparency and accountability but you do not want consensus. How do you arrive at consensus? In the whole Constitutional Reform process of 1999/2001, the Parliamentary Management Committee (PMC) and the amendments to the Standing Orders with the *Sir Davies' Report* and all these people, found that the Parliamentary Management Committee should have equal sides and a quorum of two:two because it dealt with the business of the House. It is a unique model. It does not, as far as I know, exist in any other part of the Caribbean. I cannot talk for the Commonwealth.

There was understanding, even in the PAC and all the training, – the Members of the PAC have gone through it – to do with trying to find consensus on the issues between Government and Opposition. In fact, the word is that it should be non-adversarial between the Government and the Opposition. Unfortunately, again there are short memories. This is an example of a resolution of the House. There are two famous motions. One was a rescission which shows the level of opportunism of some persons on the other side. In 2012, a Motion was brought after the General and Regional Elections of 2011 by the Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs who, at that time, was Mr. Nagamootoo. It stated that the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Selection (COS) which was made up of nine people, be amended to have the leader in the House for the 10 Member Committee – five for the PPP/C, four for the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and one for the Alliance For Change (AFC).

“...WHEREAS.... ‘each Special Select Committee being so constituted .... as far as possible, the balance of parties.... be reflected in the committee””.

Therefore, the PPP/C had 32 seats; APNU, 26; and AFC, 7. Therefore, the decision was made in 2012. By the way, this never went to the Standing Orders Committee. This was put straight to the floor. The Standing Orders Committee had no opportunity to look at this motion. It went straight on the floor and was voted right on in terms of the balance in the Committee Of Selection to reflect the new version of the Parliament at that time, where we were in the



minority. Very interestingly, in July, after the 2015 General and Regional Elections, another motion was brought to change that so the Standing Orders would read – with the seat allocation of the political parties in Parliament because the APNU/AFC was now in Government. And that it found itself, based on the Standing Orders, an amendment it made, it would now be in the minority, which is what it put us in when we were in Government.

This level of opportunism to take the Standing Orders and willy-nilly deal with them by all sorts of motions and rescinding decisions, fundamentally, although they may not have said it, was to ensure that they kept the control of the majority that they won in the House. These comments about five:four have been in the Standing Orders for years. I want to remind you that motions can be changed. Both of these were changed on the floor of the House. They never went to the Standing Orders Committee where they should have gone for discussion, because that is what the Standing Orders Committee is about. This was passed because the view was – I remember some of the speakers on the floor that day – that we have the numbers now so we must have the committees. When they got into Government – *oops*, we are now in the minority; *oops*, we better change it quick. Within two months, they changed it so they were back in the majority as the Government in the committees. Remember these things.

I have heard a lot of things about transparency and some of my Colleagues have spoken on this. You know one of the issue you Guys have not raised is trust and confidence. People do not trust you. They do not trust what you did in 2020. They do not trust what you did 20/30 years ago. [An Hon. Member (*Inaudible*)] You talked about transparency and accountability, your history is *lang – lang, lang, lang*. It had nothing to do with accountability. Let me just read from the *Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of Guyana and on the Accounts of Ministries/ Departments/ Regions for the Fiscal Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 1992*. I will relate it to the PAC. This is where the Auditor General at the time, Mr. Anand Goolsarran, who was appointed in 1990, confessed on page one in his summary on the Audit Certificate. He states:

“The last set of financial statements which was submitted for audit examination and certification was in respect of the fiscal year 1981, ...”

This is the Report of 1992. He goes on in depth to state:

“...and the Auditor General's report thereon was laid in the National Assembly on 18 December 1987.”

That was six years later. It goes on to state:

“...gap in financial reporting covering the period 1982 - 1991 existed.”

It goes on to talk about the lack in reconciliation regarding the public debt and gave a statement on the finances of the revenue of Guyana and the outstanding loans and credits. **[Mr.**

**Patterson: (Inaudible)]** Listen and learn, my Dear. You might learn something. Therefore, he ends by stating:

“I am unable to form an opinion whether [these accounts and expenditure] properly present their respective state of affairs as at 31 December 1992:”

He therefore went on and state:

“I am unable to report on the following statements because they have not been submitted for audit examination and certification:”

These relate to:

- “- balances held on deposit by the Accountant General at the close...; and
- current assets and liabilities...”

Maybe, for the younger generation, this is a historic document. You should read it to see many billions of dollars – billions... This was in 1992 when billions were a lot of money. What was missing from the people and how the people suffered as a result of it? They suffered without drugs, with collapsing hospitals, with collapsing roads, collapsing schools and no schoolbooks. All of you come and play God here. All of you come in here and quote from the *Holy Bible*. All of you quote from all sorts of things here. How dare you? How dare you? The issue of accountability and transparency is not a one-off shot; it is a continuum of building integrity and accounting systems, and being able to show that there is movement. We can say, after this document from 1993 onwards, there has not been one gap in the annual Reports of the Auditor General to the Parliament of Guyana. This is for the last 32 years, unlike before.

Let me add this to the report on the public accounts, if there was not a Report of the Auditor General from 1981, then, what was the Public Accounts Committee doing? What could the Public Accounts Committee meet to do? You come here holier than thou, but the Public Accounts Committee did not meet from 1987. **[Mr. Mahipaul: Like you want to be the President.]** I have a right to express my opinion. I have no interest in presidency. Do you

think I could keep up with Dr. Ali? I love him to death but I cannot keep up with him though. I have no pretense to that. I have no desire for that. It is time for the young people to get up and go on. The issue is that from 1993, we are proud of the track record and the constitutionalisation of the Office of Auditor General, away from what it was before – after the Constitutional Reform where this country has not had a situation in any year between 1993 onwards of no Report of the Auditor General.

*5.08 p.m.*

Therefore, the Public Accounts Committee could function. There was nothing for you. I know some of the old Members who were on the PAC in those days. There were no meetings; what will you look at? There is no report. The arguments that are presented today on quorum makes it appear that work is not being done. I have heard some figures provided by my Colleagues here in the House. It is good to come here and call numbers. I say, as usual, people make accusations, leave and do not hear anything after. I will say this, I put out a statement on 1<sup>st</sup> April; I put out a statement 26<sup>th</sup> April and for the purposes of this House, I will read into the data that we had. This is because you could talk about how many meetings we missed or how many you think we missed, when we were not there. That is good for the soundbites but facts are a different story.

Let me show you, the Tenth Parliament between 2012 and 2014 had 58 Meetings led by Chairperson, Mr. Carl Greenidge. In that period, 2012-2014, one PAC Report was submitted for the year 2009. It was tabled in the National Assembly on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2012. That Public Accounts Committee was headed by the Opposition, with no Minister on the Committee and took almost three years to finish one report. Of course, there was no movement on the PPC in that Parliament either because we had to get two-thirds majority. My Friend on the other side who makes a big thing of the PPC should know that the PPC require a two-thirds majority. It would be improper to indicate to the public that somehow, only one side was holding it up. We know there are records and Minutes. Do not think that I do not have those available.

In the Eleventh Parliament, 2015-2019, the Chairperson was Mr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. This Parliament met 44 times, which is less than the Tenth Parliament. However, it produced three Reports covering six Annual Audit Reports. This Committee headed by then Opposition Member, Mr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali who was the Chairperson, combined reports of the years 2010 and 2011: tabled on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 2016; the combined Reports in the Public Accounts for the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 were tabled in the National Assembly on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2017,

and the Report of the Public Accounts for the Year 2015 was tabled in the House on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2018. This Committee did six annual reports. It brought itself up to date in the 2019 period up to 2015. This was done with 44 Meetings, two Ministers of Government, namely: Ms. Volda Lawrence and Ms. Annette Ferguson... [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] I was not on that PAC; maybe, that is why it worked. I was not there.

In the Twelfth Parliament, the PAC has covered two Reports and three annual Audit Reports with 61 meetings. The Tenth Parliament had 58 meetings. The Eleventh Parliament, between 2015 and 2018, December, when the no-confidence motion came, had 44 meetings. The Twelfth Parliament which was from 2021 to present, had 61 meetings. It has produced the Report on the Public Accounts for the year 2016. It was tabled on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2022. It was debated and the Treasury Memorandum was issued. The Combined Report on the public accounts for the years 2017 and 2018 were tabled today in this House. The Chairman is Mr. Figueira. What is interesting about the Eleventh and Twelfth Parliaments is that they brought the Members of the Public Procurement Commission in August, 2016, and again on 13<sup>th</sup> April, 2022, under this PAC. The view that, somehow, this quorum is holding you back is not based on facts. Therefore, it seems to be two things. Some people may have a pecuniary interest in meeting every week and there are others who just want to rattle the drum and run to Stabroek News, Oh, we are not meeting; the Government is not there; Ms. Gail Teixeira is not there; you wring your hands and make a story when the real story should be, at the last meeting in the PAC, we looked at the violations of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA), the violations of the Procurement Act by different regions and Ministries under your Government. No, no; you would not do that. Your problem and your preoccupation obsession are that you do not want the quorum because you cannot run through roughshod over the periods that you were in Government.

We have made it clear at the PAC. There is not anything here that I am saying that is new. We made it clear here that the end of 2018 to 2020 is an aberration – it is aberration. The Report of the Auditor General for the Years 2018 and 2019 did not come until 2020 because there was no Parliament. The Government continued which was unlawful and they spent money. Secondly, the 2020 Report came in 2021 and 2022 came in 2023. Ms. Juretha Fernandes is suddenly discovering all sorts of things in 2024. The 2024 Report will not be done until the end of 2024. It would not come to this House; the report for 2023 will come to this House in September. This view of we are somehow hiding things in 2024... The audit report for 2024 has not reached as yet. As a private Member, if the Hon. Member wants to bring questions, wants to go the

Sectoral Committee on that issue or wants to report to the PPC, the Hon. Member is free to do that. To try to convey to this meeting and the Public that somehow there are things in 2024 that we are preventing being discussed is not true. We deal with the Reports of the Auditor General and its findings in the Public Accounts Committee.

Secondly, in what way have we interfered with the examination of the special performance reports from the Auditor General? There are about 10 of them now on what was happening to medical supplies that were distributed prior to 2020, what were the issues to do with school textbooks before 2020, the orphanages and all of these things. There is no appetite on the path of my Friends on other side to address these issues. I have asked but they are on the agenda with asterisks. I asked so many times when we were dealing with this. We started with one and somehow, it was a little too much for you. It was a bit overwhelming for you. [Mr.

**Mahipaul:** *(Inaudible)* No. I am not closing off. I have my time just like you did. The Speaker will determine whether I am allowed or not, not you.

My Colleagues have talked about a number of scandals which we are finding and more than what we have even thought about. The number of scandals in the Report of the Auditor General are much deeper; much more profound; and, sometimes, whether people have to go and come, they can go and come. That is what they have to do before the PAC. How many times they have not said here... How many times are documents missing because when you want to keep questioning, the documents are not there? They cannot be found; the minutes cannot be found at the Tender Board for the period. The documents were burnt; I remember. Mr. Speaker, you and I share certain memory of many things that the younger ones might not. I remember the fire on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1992, where the incinerator that was burning all the time in the Office of the President led to all the Cabinet documents being destroyed. I think you and I can remember that well and that fire went on for days. That is why when we got into Government, there were no Cabinet records. They were gone. This is sort of a memory of that again of what we are going through now because documents cannot be found. They cannot find this and they cannot find that, which is why the people have to go and come. Sometimes the documents cannot be found because they are gone. The issues that we come to; I mean this issue is one of transparency. I can quote from a number of newspapers in 2021 about gifts to certain Members of the PAC of the sole sourcing of \$170 million, for an external counsel which was 2020 during the elections. I could talk about the cart before the horse which has to do with contractors receiving \$75 million in overpayments for the Infectious Diseases Hospital in 2020; I could talk about the 2019 Report being handed over in December, 2020.

With all of these things of using timelines and not sticking to the truth. There is the criminal prudent and rental of the Sussex Street. Now, who could forget the Sussex Street bond? Goodness gracious! That is historical; that has to go into the annals of the corruption history of Guyana. The Sussex Street bond again was exposed right here in the National Assembly. It was not the PAC who exposed it. It was right here in the House where it was exposed. There are issues that have been raised here by different persons, such as the PPP/C is being accused by Ms. Fernandes of abusing our one seat majority. We know what happened when you had one seat majority and how you behaved. I saw a comment about being comfortable in Opposition or Government... In what way do we abuse the one seat majority in the PAC?

Maybe I am wrong but, I believe, this idea in the PAC of expecting and anticipating each other have the best interest in examining the Government's expenditure and the use of taxpayers' money. In the meetings, in a number of cases, I have found that sometimes the questions are very robust and sometimes both sides are on the same track. You can deny that. Is that not the truth? That is my feeling when I am in the PAC many times that we are both gunning after the same thing but, as I said, maybe this was seen as the one seat majority. I do know, in the PAC, generally, many times there has been consensus on how to move forward. In other cases, the main issue that the Opposition gets mixed up and messed up with is that we are not there. Mr. Mahipaul, these are not numbers that I have created. These are from Committee records that we have complied with the minutes to show that the most active Public Accounts Committee was from 2011 to now, under Chairperson, Mr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. In the Eleventh Parliament there were 61 meetings over 30 months and was able to get through six annual reports – six annual reports. [Mr. Mahipaul: (*inaudible*) cooperating.] I do not know about that. I do not know about that. I know... [Mr. Mahipaul: I will have to bring it up.] You can bring up what you want, Sir; that is your right to speak. I am on the floor.

The issues of moneys spent without National Assembly's approval for almost more than one year, why 2020? The Budget was passed in November, 2018, for 2019, with moneys above that. There were moneys beyond the 2019 Budget which was approved in 2018 that were spent, drawing down on the Consolidated Fund and on contingencies. It got worst in 2020. [Mr. Mahipaul: It is allowed.] You can say it is allowed but it was extended by a Government who was unlawful. Therefore, we have no apologies to make to you or to anyone else.

5.23 p.m.

The periods of 2019 and 2020 will not be combined, and we will go through them with a *fine-tooth comb*. We are not going to be rushed because that is our responsibility. If you do not think it is your responsibility to do that, that is fine with me, but you cannot quell us on the other side for doing what we have to do and what we are required to do under the constitutional law. You cannot tell us we cannot do that. The issue too is, I think there has to be recognition that the Public Accounts Committee is an oversight body. The Office of the Auditor General is a constitutional body that goes into the details of examining the accounts and expenditure of the Government. It is not the only oversight body. There are a series of oversight bodies that are looking into how the Government works, how the Government uses money and whether the Government is corrupt or not. There are layers of them, including the sectoral committees of the Parliament that can look at policies and so on. But we seem to want to make the PAC an important body. I am not trying to diminish that, but it can only function when there is an Auditor General's Report. You can only function when there are special reports and matrices to examine.

The issue was raised with regard to the gratuity for the PPC and, yes, trust and confidence. A meeting was called in December for some reason. Maybe it was near Christmas, we did not pay attention, we did not recognise it and we did not go to the meeting. We did not give an excuse for the meeting because a number of us did not know about the meeting. It was when the Minutes came out in the next year when we met that we then saw this decision was taken about combining 2018 and 2019. Trust and confidence are the most important things for politicians. It does not matter which political side you are on, you have to have the trust and confidence of people around you, whether they like you or not, whether they have the same ideological and political position, or whether they are the public. If you think you can be politicians and Members of Parliament (MPs) and wait until somebody's back is turned to then bring a motion, which you know was a problematic motion before, that is the height of deception and is conspiratorial, how do we trust you after that?

I have no apologies for Mr. Patterson for bringing the motion to do with the quorum because any Government in that situation...If we had done that to you when you were in Government, I bet you would come with the same quorum. This is because you were just as concerned. You dealt with a good Chairman. You dealt with a Chairman who was fair. You dealt with a Chairman who has integrity and who is now the President of this country, so you were lucky. I have dealt with the opportunism of the rescission motion to do with the Standing Orders. Again, this issue of holding back the work of the PAC, may I remind the Members of the

Opposition that with you, as Chairman of the Parliamentary Management Committee (PMC), we could not meet for almost a year because it is two/two. It has to have a quorum. The same quorum for meeting as the PAC now. That is what we copied and that is two/two. Check the record of the Parliamentary Management Committee. We kept calling meetings and they got cancelled because in that case it was the Opposition that was not giving the two. The records would show that. Part of it took place during the suspension and all these other things. The PMC did not meet for one year, a body that constitutionally is required to look at the business of the House and to deal with issues. So, when you want to wash your dirty linen and you want to point fingers, make sure your skeletons are not behind you, make sure your skeletons are not back there, because you can be sure there is some red headed lady around who is going to pull them out of the box.

Mr. Speaker, I think this motion is misdirected to my Colleagues on the other side. Most PACs meet once a month in many parts of the world. I am saying to you, in the Twelfth Parliament, they went through all these reports much more than what we did, but we did not do badly. We did better than the Tenth Parliament, but the Eleventh Parliament has done better than us in terms of it. What was different in that Parliament? You had a PPP/C Chairman, and two ministers. I have the record of their attendance and the number of times they were absent and excused, I am sure with valid reasons. You have two ministers now and you seem to be very perturbed about that. I do not know if it is because you do not like the two ministers and you would like to choose two other ministers or you would like to choose someone else you feel would be nicer. Unfortunately, those are wishes that can be horses, because you will never choose the representatives of the Government at the PAC. So, no matter what you say, it is the Government who will decide who the MPs are. You are stuck with us and this is what it is going to be.

The issue is, if you keep banging this pot... It is like someone standing at a window and banging at a *tinin* pot, 'Oh, they did not turn up'. Every time we do not, we have a thing I know about, that is, *Stabroek News* the next day. Mr. Figueira... [An. Hon. Member (Opposition): I like *Stabroek News*.] I like *Stabroek News*. I celebrate the recognition of their anniversary. They were very important at a certain time. The issue is that... [An. Hon. Member (Opposition): You have to quote.] I do not quote. I am not interested in what you think. The issue is it is like clockwork. You are like on auto reflex. The issue is that it is not being held. We have been having one meeting a month religiously since the quorum was called. That is what we can manage and that is what we do. When we come, we spend as much time as



possible to get through it all. If your problem is that in many parts of the world the PAC meets once a month, and you want to prove that we can sit down and go through that because that is true. Most of the large Parliaments of the world have different subcommittees because they are large. We are nine people. In some of the bigger Parliaments, they have PACs that are much larger. The issue is about the work we do. The Report was tabled today 9<sup>th</sup> May, by Mr. Figueira for the years 2017 and 2018. You talk about production, and that you are being held back. The 2017 and 2018 drafts were ready since last year. When we came back in September from recess, we had the drafts. What took it from September of last year to 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2024, to get tabled in this House?

I kept raising its asterisks – ‘let us talk about it and let us go through it’. The Finance Secretary (FS) did some drafts, I did some changes, and then, all of a sudden, the one day I am in the hospital was the one day you all passed it. I figured this was the quorum issue again, but that is fine. It is before the House. Do not come here and say that people did not want this report to come. It was in draft. Every time you would asterisk it and then suddenly you brought it. I see Mr. Holder mumbling and mumbling. Mr. Holder, you must wait your turn for your side to choose you to go to the PAC. Maybe it is time for a change in the PAC from some of the Opposition people. Maybe. Although, I do not mind Mr. Figueira – he has put a lash on me every time in the press – and Mr. Mahipaul. They are not bad chaps, but when they come with a motion like this to Parliament, I regret to say it, this motion is based on opportunism and attempting to deceive on the issue of transparency and accountability.

When you read the 2016 Report that we tabled here, and you look at the Treasury Memorandum that came out from the Ministry of Finance, there were some important recommendations that we made in the interest of transparency for that Report. We also, in the 2017 and 2018 Reports which are tabled here, made a number of recommendations of how to improve and we agreed to those things. I sometimes think that you are *nitpicking*. You are not seeing the big picture. You are not seeing the macro picture. You are just *fiddle diddling* with, ‘Oh, we did not have a meeting on Monday again’. I know that some people really love the Monday meetings because transportation, hotel and meals are part of the package. [An. Hon. Member (Opposition): You sound ludicrous.] I said some people. I did not mention you. Mr. Speaker, we cannot support the issue of the quorum because we believe fundamentally that the crux of the problem is not the quorum. There is no reason. The crux of the problem is that the Opposition wants to run through, and that is why we had to bring the quorum here. If we did

not dare go to a meeting – run through – we would suddenly find ourselves with issues that should be addressed being scanned over.

I have said it publicly, and I will say it here again, we shall not rush through the Public Accounts Committee. You can talk all you want. I have my example. That did not seem to worry you. In the 2012 Parliament, the Report of 2009 was tabled in 2012. That was the only Report that was done by that Committee from 2012 to 2014. I remember because I was in that one with Mr. Greenidge and we were meeting every week. I was not a minister, so I had more time. We went through fine, paragraph by paragraph of that Report. It is a little different in this PAC. It is a little different. You must think about when you come to the House and want a reversal of a decision taken by this House, come with the rationale of why. You came with a rationale that said the reason why you are coming is because the Government is holding up the work of the PAC. The fact that we brought these reports like, 2016, 2017 and 2018 here and we are doing 2019, is not a bad track record. As I said, no matter who quotes that 40 meetings and 30 meetings have been missed since the quorum, I am saying, from the records of the Parliament of Guyana, that this Committee from 2021 when it was set up to date has had 61 meetings which is more than the Tenth Parliament and more than the Eleventh Parliament. There were 61 meetings with a quorum which means that your argument of the quorum has fallen apart. It is like *dust blowing in the wind*. It has no validity.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Colleagues, which I know they will not change it, but the reasons for bringing this motion we will not support. We do not believe, trust and have confidence in the genuineness of the reasons for bringing this here. We believe that it is to rush through. We believe that any time we do not have the quorum they will proceed.

I will say this... [Mr. Ramsaroop: That happens.] No, no. I will say this. I have sat on the PAC before with Mr. Greenidge, and there was a kind of understanding that you had to have the Government present if you were looking at whatever years of the Auditor General. There was a fundamental understanding that when the PAC brings a report to the House, it would be based on consensus, on agreements and on recommendations that both sides of the PAC made. If you do not want that and you want to remove the quorum and you want to ride roughshod, what you will end up having is what happened in one year where there was a minority report that was opposed to what the PAC was bringing in the Committee itself. That does not bode well for the country, nor for the Parliament, *et cetera*. Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank you and to indicate to the Hon. Members on the other side that we believe their motion

was misdirected and the intentions of the motion, I believe, were not honourable. I believe they were misdirected, and that the wisest thing to do would be to withdraw the motion. If you want to vote, we are prepared to vote. Thank you. *[Applause]*

5.38 p.m.

**Mr. Mahipaul (replying):** Sir, I sat and listened to the presentations made by all the Hon. Members who referenced this motion. I must congratulate the Members on my side who understood the motion, spoke to the motion and defended the reason as to why we are seeking to rescind Resolution No. 35. Unfortunately, the speakers on the other side had a different agenda and deviated completely from what this motion sought to do or is seeking to do. I consider it necessary to respond to the opposite side and their presentations.

They had four speakers: the Hon. Anil Nandlall; the Hon. Sanjeev Datadin; the Hon. Bishop Edghill; and the Hon. Gail Teixeira. Each of them that spoke, I made copious notes on. I trust that the time will allow me to respond to what was said. I want to start with the Hon. Anil Nandlall. His presentation was nothing concerning this motion and what we are seeking to do. In fact, he sought to question the authority of the Speaker and Clerk of the National Assembly. The procedure is, when a Member is desirous of having an item on the Order Paper, it is to be submitted to the Clerk of the National Assembly. After that submission, the Clerk then vets and sends it to the Speaker. Together, they will decide on its admissibility. The Ruling of the Speaker in parliamentary democracy must be respected. That is what the *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice* says.

The Hon. Attorney General was kind enough to quote the *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*. When he quoted, he seemed to have forgotten to quote that respecting the Speaker's Ruling is what is mentioned in the parliamentary democracy. Beyond respecting the Speaker's Ruling, we on this side know that you, Cde. Speaker, have been a long-standing Member, a vibrant and articulate long-standing Member, who made many presentations to the National Assembly before. In fact, what I did was to research your years, and you can correct me, Sir, you were a Member since 1992. I think the gap that you had was 2015 to 2020, when the PPP/C did not put you back in Parliament. You are now the Speaker of the National Assembly with a wealth of experience at your side.

The Clerk of the National Assembly has been in this Parliament since 1992 also. He has been there giving advice all the time. He was good for both Opposition and Government for the 23

years that the PPP/C was in Government and even for the five years that the Coalition sat in Government from 2015 to 2020. I found it very strange that my Learned Friend, the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, who is very good at articulating, who when he posits a case, if people do not know the matter, they are basically forced to agree with him because of how passionate, articulate and commanding he can use the English Language to convince people that his way is the right way and that there is no other way. But, Sir, I did some research, and I am here to tell the Learned Attorney General that his way was the wrong way today. It was the wrong way. I am not going to use words alone to say that it was the wrong way. I am going to share evidence to show that it was the wrong way. I am going to start first with the *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand, Second Edition*,

“Rescission of resolution:

Any resolution or vote of the House may be formally rescinded. A resolution may be revoked even though it was passed many years ago. A motion for a rescission of a resolution passed in a former session can be moved after notice has been given in the ordinary way. If the resolution to be rescinded was passed earlier in the same session however, seven days’ notice of a motion to revoke that resolution must be given. The seven days’ period of notice begins to run from the time notice of the motion for rescission is lodged with the Clerk.”

That is what happens in the Parliament of New Zealand. I am going to quote the *Erskine May’s Parliamentary Practice* too. My Friend, the Hon. Attorney General, quoted the 13<sup>th</sup> Edition. Well, I am going to quote the 24<sup>th</sup> Edition. Perhaps, my Friend does not have the 24<sup>th</sup> Edition at his disposal, but he is in Government. Like the Law books, my Friend, the President can perhaps give him a 24<sup>th</sup> Edition of *Erskine May’s Parliamentary Practice* which will become very useful to him. Cde. Speaker, the 24<sup>th</sup> Edition of *Erskine May’s Parliamentary Practice* says:

“Rescission of Resolutions

There is nothing in the practice of the House to prevent the rescission of a resolution or discharge of an order of a previous session, where such is held to be of continuing force and validity, or of a standing order. Technically, the rescinding of a vote is a new question, the form being to read the resolution of the House and move that it be rescinded.”

When they speak of a previous session, Hon. Attorney General, the one where this motion was passed was a previous session and this is a new session that we have here. We can use that as our argument to say that a motion of rescission is applicable in this sense. Let me go on to say, “Notice necessary to rescind a Resolution”, same *Erskine May’s Parliamentary Practice*:

“Notice is required of a motion to rescind a resolution, or to expunge or alter an entry in the Votes and Proceedings or the Journal, and in no circumstances may the House rescind a resolution during the sitting in which the resolution was agreed to”.

What the *Erskine May’s Parliamentary Practice* is telling us is that if we have a sitting going on right now and we pass a motion, it becomes a Resolution today. The sitting that we have going on today, we cannot rescind it. If it is a sitting that has happened before and we now want to rescind, we can come to rescind it at another sitting. That is what the *Erskine May’s Parliamentary Practice* is telling us in its 24<sup>th</sup> Edition that I have at my disposal. I am not only going to stick to that as my argument. I am going to go further. Do you know what they said, Hon. Attorney General? *Wah good fuh you in government, good fuh you in Opposition too.* That is what they said.

Cde. Speaker, I am going to now present to this honourable House. On Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2017, when my Friends over there were sitting in Opposition, they presented a motion on that day and it was a motion of rescission also. The “BE IT RESOLVED” clause in the restoration of zero-rated items in the Value-Added Tax (VAT) Amendment of Schedules, Order No. 18 of 2016, which was debated in this House in 2016 and which was passed in this House in 2016. That very Session that we had, they brought a motion. It was placed on the Order Paper as Private Members’ Business. It sought to do this:

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Government to repeal the Value-Added Tax (Amendment of Schedules) Order 2016, Order No. 18 of 2016...”

They came with a motion in 2017 to rescind something that was passed in 2016 in the same session of the National Assembly. It is not that alone, Sir. That is not the only motion of rescission that they brought to this National Assembly. There was another one on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2017. This was one that sought:

“...this National Assembly calls on the Government to immediately reverse these new increases of fees for land, drainage and other services for the MMA farmers in the best interest of the nation.”

That was a motion of rescission too. It was a motion that was submitted by the Opposition at the time. Mr. Nandlall, the Hon. Member, was a Member of that House, and the argument then was not made, as is being made here today. That is not just it. Here you have another one. On Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2017, another motion of rescission was submitted by the then Opposition, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic of which the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs was a Member of this House. That Resolution was:

“BE IT RESOLVED:

“That this National Assembly calls upon the Government to invite His Excellency the President to consider revoking the aforementioned Commission of Inquiry in the best interest of national unity and social cohesion”.

If you repeal something, if you are going and revoke something, is that not rescinding, Cde Speaker? It is a motion of rescission also. I have one more here in my possession. This one was for the revocation of VAT on education. This was submitted on Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2017. This one sought to:

“BE IT RESOLVED:

“That this National Assembly calls on the Government to direct the Minister of Finance to take immediate steps to revoke Order No. 18 of 2016 imposing VAT on educational goods and services”.

All of these are motions of rescission that were put by the Speaker of the National Assembly to the National Assembly for debate. I say to my Hon. Friends on the other side and the public at large, it is now convincing to me, and it should be to everyone else that whenever the Learned Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs speaks, we must dig for information to substantiate whatever is being said. We must not allow ourselves to be convinced by flamboyance; we must not allow ourselves to be convinced by good use of the English Language; we must not allow ourselves to be convinced with theatrics. We must dig for substance. We must find the evidence and we must be able to ensure that we deliver on what are the right facts and not things that are alternative to the facts. He said nothing referenced to

the motion and what it sought to do. I will not go down the road of continuing on him since I have dismissed him completely and his arguments that he made there.

I move to the Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin. [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible.*)] I do not know. I really do not know. Sometimes I am at a loss to understand what really Mr. Datadin comes and presents on. I made a few notes here. One of the issues was payment to the Public Procurement Commission (PPC), which was the meeting we had.

*5.53 p.m.*

We had a meeting and we deliberated on the payment for the PPC and that was the issue that came up. That was on the Friday meeting, and I heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, make reference to it also. When we adjourned that meeting on the Monday with the full knowledge and acceptance that we would be meeting on the Friday, we were quorate and then we moved into making that agreement for us to meet the Friday. It is not the fault of the Opposition that the Government side did not show up. They chose that. They chose not to show up. They chose not to come to the meeting. They then came to the Parliament in a haste, acting with emotions, and then went and amended the Standing Orders to change the quorum. Nobody on the Opposition side is against the scrutiny. Nobody on the Opposition side is saying that we do not want to scrutinise these years. What we are saying is, Government side, just show up. That is all this entire motion sought to do. Show up to the PAC meetings.

Mr. Datadin even went on to speak about how both sides must attend, and we agree with that. We agree with that, both sides must attend. The Government side has the responsibility to show up. They have the responsibility to show up and if they choose not to show up, then it is them who is shirking their responsibility, not us. When we met the at first or second PAC meeting, and, perhaps, Cde. Patterson will remember this, we agreed that we would meet every Monday. It was both sides, the Government side and the Opposition side. We agreed that we would meet every Monday and as we were going through the reports and we were moving at a pace, not disenfranchising any Member because any member, whether it is Cde. Edghill, whether it is Cde. Teixeira, whether it is Cde. Dharamkumar Seeraj, whether it is Cde. Datadin or Cde. Mahadeo, whatever or whichever paragraph they want to spend a half of an hour on, an entire hour on, or two hours on, nobody from the Opposition side objected to them doing it. They could spend as long as they wanted on whichever paragraph they wanted, but there came a time when they had no questions. They did not have questions for the Accounting Officer, so by

virtue of them not having questions for the Accounting Officer, we ended up finishing the agency and moving on.

As we kept meeting on a weekly basis, Monday after Monday, we were moving at a pace. We completed the 2016 Report and then we agreed that we would merge the 2017 and 2018 Reports. When we agreed to merge the 2017 and 2018 Reports, we were dealing with each year still. What that merge simply meant was that the 2017 and 2018 Reports were before us, and the accounting officers would answer questions pertaining to both Reports. All we had to do as PAC Members was look at the 2017 Report, see a paragraph that we had an issue with and ask the accounting officer to explain what was going on or tell us what was going on. The same we are going to do with the 2018 Report.

We are not holding back any examination, or we are not trying to sideline or push away any paragraph. Whichever paragraph you as a Member of the PAC wants to dig into, and whichever paragraph you want to ensure that you get full clarity on, you are given that liberty. You have that liberty to do it. We have never put a time cap, or we have never said that, you know what, do not do it or do not take so much time, you have that at your liberty.     **[An Hon. Member:**

*(Inaudible)]*           The Hon. Member, Sanjeev Datadin, well I heard him quoting himself. When somebody has to rely on quoting himself, that alone tells a story. He also said that no appropriation was done for the spending in 2019. This is the second time I am hearing the Hon. Member saying that. I do not know if it is a genuine mistake on your part Hon. Datadin, but I have to remind you that, in December, 2018, a budget was passed for the expenditure in 2019. A budget was passed for the expenditure so how can you say that there was no appropriation, and it is the second time you are saying it? I trust that you will not repeat it a third time because I am correcting you, Hon. Member, that a budget was passed.

Then the Government kept saying that we should have held the elections, we should have called the elections. The Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) said that they were not ready to hold the elections. GECOM said that they were not prepared to hold the elections. That is all over in the public domain. The then President Granger said that when GECOM signals to him they are prepared and able to conduct the elections, and the election date will be named. It was on that premise an election date was named and we went into the elections. I do not know why the Government side keeps saying that we should have held the election. It is not our job, GECOM has to be ready to hold elections and if GECOM says they are not ready, what do you



want us to do, go to an election when we do not have GECOM being ready to hold the elections? It makes no sense.

I turn to the Hon. Bishop Edghill and what he had to say. Sir, Cde. Edghill said that had we not changed the Standing Order, the Opposition could have done away with the 2017, 2018 and 2019 Reports. Now I am a little baffled as to how the Opposition could have done away with the 2017, 2018 and 2019 Reports when Cde. Edghill knows to himself and would always say this in the PAC, 'the Chairman of the PAC is not the authority of the PAC'. The Chairman is the person who ensures that the meeting is done properly but the authority lies with the Committee and the Committee, by way of a majority vote, decides on how we deal with matters at the committee level. The Government side has five members, we have four members. As I said earlier, Cde. Speaker, it was their five and our four when we agreed that we will meet every Monday. It was their five and our four when we agreed that we would have had that meeting the Friday that we showed up to and they did not. It was their five and our four when we took all decisions to say when we will meet again. It was their five and our four when we decided this agency we would deal with and that agency we would deal with on which day, so it was never the Chairman who imposed that on us.

If Cde. Bishop Edghill, Cde. Teixeira, Cde. Datadin, Cde. Seeraj and Cde. Vishwa Mahadeo, come to the PAC, participate in it fully and then use their majority to say we will meet this day or that day or we will meet at this time or that time or we will deal with this agency or that agency, they have that responsibility, Cde. Speaker. It is their responsibility, not ours. If they choose to absent themselves and then we go ahead with the business of the PAC, you cannot fault us for that, you have to fault yourself for not coming to the PAC. That is what you have to do. Do not rely on or hide behind the changing of the quorum as your defence, a quorum that has not been touched for years. I said in my opening remarks, a quorum that has been there since 1957 until 2022 and your only reason for touching that quorum is that you can decide when to come to the meeting. That is not democracy. Parliamentary democracy requires you to honour your responsibility and parliamentary democracy requires you to show up to do the people's business, not at your whims and fancies, or when you choose to come. That is not what it decides on.

Sir, Cde. Edghill said that Ganesh Mahipaul wants to attack technical officers when it is the accounting officers. We all know, those who have served in Government institutions at the level of the region or at the level of the ministry, we all know. If I used to do that and it was something

wrong or I did that and it was something wrong, I never heard Cde. Edghill ever one day say, 'Ganesh, you cannot do that'. But he comes here, where he gets the platform and gets the Department of Public Information (DPI) and the National Communications Network (NCN) cameras and he creates this whole imagery of saying that Mr. Mahipaul attacks the technical officers. We are guided by the fact that technical officers provide advice to the accounting officers. The accounting officers are not civil engineers, they are not accountants and all the others combined. They may have their specific expertise but then they have a series of technical officers that provide them with guidance, just like ministers. We know that the Hon. Robeson Benn has Mr. Harry Gill advising him. We know that the Hon. Sonia Parag has Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj advising her. We know of many other persons who are serving as advisers in their capacity to advise.

It was the same argument I used at the PAC to say that when accounting officers make decisions that come into conflict with the rules and regulations, whether it is the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) or the Procurement Act or the Stores Regulation, I would ask them on whose advice did you operate on. Case in point with engineers, and I will repeat this because I am not wrong with it, we have found many instances where engineers would sign documents saying that the work was completed and measured, and we know that in the Government system you pay for measured works. When we get to the bottom of it, the crux of the matter is really the engineers who created this document, signed it off, and claimed that it was completed and measured and that is how the Auditor General, when he does his work now, goes back and finds overpayments were made.

In an effort to eradicate overpayment to contractors, we had to find a real issue and when we found the real issue in our 2016 Report, we made recommendation to this National Assembly. We said that engineers must ensure that they go out into the fields and measure the work and they do not create certificates of completion without verifying and ensuring that what was placed there is accurate. If they do what is accurate, the Auditor General will not find overpayments to contractors and we will have a reduced Auditor General's Report to deal with, and that problem will be fixed. That is what we did at the PAC. That is what Cde. Edghill embraced and that is what he knows happens. When we find the problems, we make the recommendation. I did take umbrage at the fact that he stood and said that I was attacking technical officers.

Cde. Edghill was kind enough to say that this is the most effective PAC. I am saying to Cde. Edghill that we are effective because the Government side and the Opposition side examine, whenever we meet, all the paragraphs in-depth. We go as far down as we can possibly do and, sometimes, it becomes an excruciating pain to the agency that is waiting outside. Sometimes they show up for a 10 o'clock sitting and, at 6 o'clock in the afternoon, we have not completed the one we are dealing with, and they would have wasted their entire day waiting to be heard. That is indeed true, we are examining these paragraphs, paragraph by paragraph, so it is hard work. But what is causing a problem, is the fact of the slothfulness at which we are moving to come to current affairs.

*6.08 p.m.*

It is current affairs of which my friends on that one side are afraid. They are afraid of current affairs. Cde. Edghill further said that we have to examine the 2019 and 2020 Auditor General's reports separately because 2019 did not get parliamentary scrutiny and whatnot. I am going to tackle this issue immediately in which Cde. Teixeira and Cde. Edghill sought to imply that Members wanted more frequent PACs for meals, transportation and hotels. That was a very low one from them, but I am going to tell this nation something. These distinguished and Hon. Members on that side of the House harped that 2019 was unconstitutional, that the Parliament should not have been functioning, and that we should have called the elections three months after. They did not attend the couple sittings that were held in 2019. They did not participate in anything relating to the Parliament in 2019; absolutely nothing. That was because they held dearly to themselves that it was unconstitutional. They held dearly to themselves that it was not supposed to have happened. Yet, they cannot give back the 12 months of salaries that they collected for the entire 2019. They cannot give back that money and now they are coming to tell people about meals, transportation and hotels. It is utterly unfair.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, just a point of correction. I was not a Member of Parliament (MP) from April, 2019 to October, 2020.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Okay. I am going to exclude the Hon. Member, Hon. Teixeira. Yes, I remember she had to... I think it was the issue with... [Mr. McCoy: *(inaudible)* nobody here.] ...and any other Member who was not a Member of the Parliament in 2019. I do recall that Cde. Teixeira had to resign because of dual citizenship. All the other Members who were not there in 2019, I am excluding them, but there are many PPP/C Members of Parliament who collected their entire salaries for 2019. They argued that the Parliament was not supposed to be

functioning. *What is good for the goose must be good for the gander.* You cannot come here and try to throw any low talk about meals, transportation, and hotel when you filled your pockets with moneys when you claimed that a Parliament was not constitutional.

Cde. Speaker, sometimes it is the response that people get vexed about. When they say what they have to say and seem to want to attack, they believe we are not supposed to say anything else. When we respond, they get hurt, get into their feelings, and then will not call the Parliament for another 90 plus days. But the facts must be laid on the table. I must say that Cde. Edghill said that we are against the 2021, 2022 and 2023 reports and we will not bring them together as one. I am going to say to Cde. Edghill that I support... This is my personal decision as a Member of the Public Accounts Committee. I have not consulted with the Chairman, Ms. Juretha Fernandes or Mr. David Patterson, who are Hon. Members of the Committee, too. I will say to him that because I would like us to reach to current affairs, and because I would like the PAC to deal with matters where it can advise the accounting officers on how to proceed in their respective ministries and regions, I will support the merging of the 2021, 2022 and 2023 reports. My support for that is not premised in a *willy-nilly* way. It is premised on the fact that I know when we merge these reports, it will not take away from me getting the opportunity to examine paragraphs that are in the 2021, 2022 and 2023 Auditor General's reports. What it will do is achieve what we in the Opposition want, and that is to reach to current affairs.

This argument that my friends, the Hon. Edghill, Hon. Teixeira and Hon. Sanjeev Datadin, attempted to make about 2019 being this year of findings that are so scary... Let me make this point first. The Auditor General audited the money that was allocated to each ministry and region. When he audits, he ensures that what it was allocated for it is used. It was allocated in 2018 and it was spent in 2019, and the Auditor General audited it in 2020. It was no different from any other year that the Auditor General audited accounts for this country. It is one procedure. The Auditor General did not have something fancy he used for 2019. It is the very budget that was passed in 2019 that was used. This is the Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Public Accounts of Guyana for the years 2010 and 2011. In 2010 and 2011, some of the findings of the PAC were:

“Across budget agencies, Accounting Officers and/or engineering staff appear to persistently sign off on incomplete projects.”

For the years 2010 and 2011 we found that, and today we are still finding it. It is a problem that has persisted.

“Accounting officers were not implementing appropriate measures to avoid the recurrence of overpayment.”

The very point I made earlier with Cde. Edghill.

“Government agencies seemed reluctant to use the performance based gratuity (specifically the withholding of increments) of Accounting Officers as a means of promoting efficiency.”

This is for the years 2010 and 2011 I am telling you about, Cde. Speaker.

“The re-cycling of Accounting Officers who had been cited for inefficiency from one agency to another.

Performance Bonds and Insurance were seldom utilised as surety by Ministries/Regions against shoddy and incomplete work done by contractors. The lack of clearly defined policies as it relates to the invoking of Insurance and Performance bonds at the appropriate time.

The Auditor General’s Engineering Department appears overstretched, given the number of expected interventions and the increase in capital works across agencies.”

The list goes on, Sir, but for the avoidance of repeating, let me quote some from the 2012, 2013 and 2014 years.

**Mr. Speaker:** Let me stop you there. I do not see the relevance of why it was introduced, but you need to curtail the extended elaboration.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you, Cde. Speaker

**Mr. Speaker:** I had projected four and a half hours on this particular debate, based on my timeline, and we are already at four hours.

**Mr. Patterson:** We have half of an hour remaining.

**Mr. Speaker:** We do not. We can go more.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** I can understand you saying that you do not see the reason I introduced it, but I am going to tell you why I have introduced it. The reason is because the same findings that we are having in the 2019 report are what we had in the 2014, 2012, 2013, 2011 and 2010. It

does not differ. Part of what we are requesting here is to ensure that we do not have that recurring problem that has been occurring since God knows when. If we at the Public Accounts Committee...

**Mr. Speaker:** When you guys meet again, you could debate this more.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Speaker:** When you meet again, you can debate this more. You can continue.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you, Sir. What I am saying is that when we are able to meet more frequently, we will be able to get to current affairs. We would be able to give advice to the accounting officers and they will not ...or if they do, then it would be delinquency on their part. With the advice on current day matters, we would expect them to not repeat what we are finding in the 2019 Auditor General's report, which is similar to what we found in the 2014, 2012, 2011, 2010 and 2009 Auditor General's reports. I now turn to my good friend whom we love, the Hon. Gail Teixeira. Somehow people are running away with this belief that we have a problem with Cde. Teixeira; we do not. Let me put it on record. We do not. We see Cde. Teixeira –and I have said this before in this House – as a longstanding Member of Parliament, as a person with experience and we sometimes lean on her for guidance. I have to say 'sometimes' because we have found equally that many times, either by way of mischief, she seeks to misguide us, and we did have to go against some of her guidance, but we have great respect for her.

**Mr. Speaker:** This woman whom you love, you have just imputed – “sometimes”.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** I withdraw, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** If it is imputation, I withdraw, Cde. Speaker. My friend, the Hon. Cde. Teixeira, spoke about everything that happened maybe in the 1980s. Well, I was not born then, Sir, and many of my colleagues on this side were not born then either. They were not even *au fait* with the happenings of the country. Perhaps, it is only the Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan and the Hon. Teixeira who were around in the political realm of our country in the 1980s and you too, Sir, the Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly. What people are concerned about is current affairs. People are concerned about what it is that we will do as leaders in this 21<sup>st</sup> century to better what was done wrong in the past. People are not concerned about what happened way back

when they were not even around. They want to ensure that we do not have a repeat of those very issues. That is why we have, as you can see on this side, Sir, young Members of Parliament championing the call for democracy, championing the call for transparency, championing the call for accountability and holding the Government's feet accountable for the people's money. That is what we are concerned about.

The Hon. Teixeira did a comparison among PACs and the number of times they met. I am saying that one cannot compare the number of times PAC meet and believe that is his/her argument. The fact of the matter is that this PAC of the Twelfth Parliament has a backlog, and we have a lot of work to complete. If we had met the number of times we were supposed to meet, we would have possibly been in our 90 something meeting, and we would have been able to be where we ought to be as a guardrail of our democracy. We would have been able to be where we ought to be, and we would have ensured that the people's money was accounted for. Cde. Teixeira made another interesting point that there must be Government present. I said this before, and I am going to repeat it. The Opposition wants the Government to be present. We want the Government to be present at the Public Accounts Committee, but it is not our job to get them there. It is their job to come to the PAC. Sir, without using up much more of the time, because I know we have a lot of business to complete at today's sitting, I want to make an appeal to my friends on the other side...

**Mr. Speaker:** Before you make that appeal, I have to make an appeal for someone to give you more time because you have exhausted the 45 minutes allocated, according to the Standing Orders, for your rebuttal. You are entitled to up to 15 minutes more.

**Mr. Patterson:** Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. Can I ask that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes more, as you indicated, to conclude his submission? Thank you very much.

*6.23 p.m.*

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you have 15 minutes to conclude. You cannot get a second extension, though.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you, Cde. Speaker. I am now wondering if I should utilise all 15 minutes. Cde. Speaker, let me say to you that I am making an appeal to my Hon. Friends on the other side to realise that when they passed that motion on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, 2022, and it

became a Resolution of this House, to change the requirement for a quorum at the level of the PAC, it was done out of haste and they acted on emotions. They have, basically, contributed to the delay in the work of the Public Accounts Committee. This appeal is for them to recognise that rescinding that Resolution and taking back the quorum to where it was, would be an act of them supporting democracy. It will be an act of the Hon. Friends on the other side embracing accountability and transparency. If they want the people of Guyana to believe that they are truly accountable, truly transparent, and that they truly embrace good governance, they will support this motion for what it seeks to do. By doing that, they will equally ensure that they fulfil their responsibility of being present at the Public Accounts Committee so that the business of the people can go on. Cde. Speaker, with that, I say thank you very much for the time afforded. I trust that this motion will get the passage it rightly deserves. Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, you have the floor.

**Mr. Nandlall:** Sir, I will be very brief in taking advantage of the Government's right of reply.

**Mr. Speaker:** What Standing Order is that?

**Mr. Nandlall:** It is Standing Order 39(2). Sir, it is important that we do not pollute and tarnish the record of this honourable Assembly with inaccuracies and with prevarications. The Hon. Member made several references to motions, which he described as rescission motions that were passed by our side. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** They were not passed.] Not passed but presented by our side. That is an incorrect statement. Those motions were not rescission motions, and I will get to them. He also argued that a rescission motion can be brought during the same.... He read a passage from *Erskine May Parliamentary Practice*, which he misrepresented completely. I also want to put a correction on the record. I quoted from the 25<sup>th</sup> and not the 13<sup>th</sup> Edition. [**Mr. Duncan:** He never said the 13<sup>th</sup>.] I said the 13<sup>th</sup> and I want to correct that. It is the 25<sup>th</sup> Edition, a copy of which I have in my hand. I want to read briefly from where my friend read. The passage began this way at paragraph 20.101. This is the 25<sup>th</sup> Edition not the 24<sup>th</sup>. He read from the 24<sup>th</sup> Edition.

“Motions for open rescission are rare and the rules of procedure carefully guard against indirect rescission of votes. This reflects the acceptance as a matter of principle that parliamentary government requires the majority to abide by a decision regularly come



to, however unexpected, and that it is unfair to resort to methods, whether direct or indirect, to reverse such a decision.”

There is one sentence there which I would not read. Then, my friend proceeded to this paragraph and stated this: There is a paragraph that starts with this sentence:

“There is nothing in the practice of the House to prevent the rescission of a resolution or discharge of an order of a previous session, where such is held to be of continuing force and validity, ...”

What the authors are saying here is that it is open and there is nothing irregular or rare about rescinding a motion that was decided in a previous session if the current session still considers it to be continuing, in force and valid. What is the point? The point is that the Hon. Member fails to appreciate what the term ‘a session’ means. He explained his lack of understanding by telling us that a session is one sitting, and another session is another sitting. **[Mr. Duncan:** He never said that.] He said that to us; we all heard that. That is why it is imperative that we correct the record. Mr. Mahipaul, I will read how the Constitution defines a session and a sitting. Article 232 of the Constitution, page 255 states:

“‘session’ means, in relation to the National Assembly, the sittings of the Assembly, commencing when it first meets after this Constitution comes into force or after the prorogation or dissolution of Parliament at any time and terminating when Parliament is prorogued or is dissolved without having been prorogued.”

That is a session. When I stood at the podium, I thought I was clear. They complimented me on how eloquent I was, but obviously, the lack of understanding was from the other side. I explained that a session is from one elected term to another. I explained all of that. The Constitution did not leave it there. It went on to define a sitting.

“‘sitting’ means, in relation to the National Assembly [a period during which the Assembly] is sitting continuously without adjournment and includes any period during which the Assembly is in committee;”

So, Mr. Mahipaul, the rescission motion came within the same session. It came at different sittings but within the same session. The other point which I referred to and which I want to debunk is the allegation made by the Hon. Member that we passed several rescission motions.

The Speaker and the Clerk will confirm that a rescission motion bears the title of rescission motion. That is the first thing and that is how one knows that it is a rescission motion.

The motions to which the Hon. Mahipaul referred, let us deal with the first one – private motion. The motion is titled, *Increases in Land Rent and Other charges to farmers in the Mahaicony, Mahaicony, Abary Agriculture Development Authority (MMA/ADA)*. It is in the name of Mr. Seeraj. There is nothing about rescission. There is a lack of understanding. Listen to what the rescission motion must be. The rescission motion is for when a question for a debate has been proposed. What this motion sought to do was to reverse... [Mr. Duncan: You have too much understanding.] That was not a question for debate. The raising of land rents was never an issue determined by this House. It was determined by the MMA/ADA and the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC). It never came to this House. Mr. Seeraj came to this National Assembly and asked the Government, by a motion, to reverse that decision. It had nothing to do with a matter debated in this House. That is how they stand there with their straight faces and mislead this House. That is the first one.

Mr. Speaker, let us deal with the second one. The second deals with – as I go back again – a question to be debated by the House. Debates are done by motions. That is, the Parliament in its deliberative capacity. When the Parliament exercises its legislative function, that is not by motion. Rescission motions deal with motions that have been passed and are revisited. That is what a rescission motion deals with. When the Parliament exercises its legislative function, it is not moving by motion; it is moving by legislation. When the Value Added Tax (VAT) orders were imposed, they were imposed as subsidiary legislation under the Value Added Tax Act. We brought a motion inviting you to reconsider and reverse that order. That order did not come to the House by motion. It came to the House under an Act. That is completely different. In any event, the motion had nothing to do with rescission. It states, *Restoration of Zero-Rated Items in the Value-Added Tax (Amendment of Schedules) Order No. 18 of 2016*. This is a legislation. [Mr. Ramson: It is a subsidiary legislation.] It is a subsidiary legislation. A rescission motion seeks to revisit a matter determined by motion. The increase of VAT was not a matter that was determined by motion, but by legislation. Oh Lord.

Mr. Speaker, the other motion was one in the name of the Hon. Ms. Manickchand. Again, it has no title about rescission. It was, *The Revocation of VAT on Education*. This was another order under the Value Added Tax Act. It is another amendment; a legislative intervention, which we can ask you by motion to revisit. What the rescission motion is about is revisiting a matter

determined by motion. [Mr. Ramjattan: Not necessarily.] How is that not necessarily when the Standing Orders states that? As usual, you have not read the Standing Orders. I keep telling you that. You sit through sessions – not sittings. [Mr. Ramjattan: (Inaudible)] I am correcting what the Hon. Mahipaul said. I am correcting what Mr. Mahipaul said about the PPP/C having brought rescission motions to the House. I am showing, one by one, that they were not rescission motions. The other one deals with the revocation of a decision of a commission. This one deals with the revocation of a commission established by President Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger. This was an extrinsic body and not a matter determined by this House. The Hon. Member Mahipaul cited these as rescission motions.

6.38 p.m.

This was a motion to revoke the Commission of Inquiry Surrounding the Claims of Amerindian Land Titling, the Individual, Joint or Communal Ownership of Lands Acquired by Freed Africans and Any Other Land titling in Guyana. This was a Presidential Commission, and we brought a motion here to review that body and to revoke the findings of that Commission. It had nothing to do with a motion determined here. [Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] And the other one is hollering “exactly”. Mr. Speaker, I hope that I have purged the record of the inaccuracy placed upon it by the Hon. Member, Mahipaul. I do not wish to detain the House any longer, Sir. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Attorney General. Hon. Members, I will now put the motion. Those in favour say aye. Those against say no.

**An. Hon. Member:** The ‘ayes’ have it.

**Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]:** Division.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, there is a call for division. We will now ring the bell and give persons a few minutes to get in place.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Clerk will proceed with taking the Division.

*Assembly divided: Ayes 30, Noes 33 as follows:*

**Ayes**

Mr. Sears

Mr. Sinclair

Ms. Alert

Ms. Philadelphia

Mr. Jaiprashad

Ms. Flue-Bess

Mr. Rajkumar

Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Cox

Mr. Patterson

Ms. Fernandes

Ms. Ferguson

Ms. Singh-Lewis

Ms. Sarabo-Halley

Dr. Cummings

Mr. Henry

Mr. Ramsaroop

Ms. Mc Donald

Ms. Walton-Desir

Mr. Jordan

Mr. Jones

Ms. Hastings-Williams

Ms. Lawrence

Mr. Duncan

Ms. Chandan-Edmond

Ms. Hughes

Mr. Holder

Mr. Forde

Mr. Ramjattan

Mr. Norton

**Noes**

Dr. Kissoon

Ms. Coonjah

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Williams

Dr. Smith

Mr. Jaffarally

Dr. Westford

Dr. Ramsaran

Ms. Pearson-Fredicks

Mr. Narine

Mr. Datadin

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Seeraj

Mr. McCoy

Mr. A. Persaud

Mr. Indar

Ms. Rodrigues

Ms. Parag

Mr. Ramson

Dr. V. Persaud

Mr. Croal

Mr. Bharrat

Mr. Hamilton

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai

Mr. Mustapha

Ms. Manickchand

Dr. Anthony

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Todd

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Nandlall

Mr. Jagdeo

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips

*The motion was defeated.*

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. Cde. Speaker, I am just questioning the count. Earlier today, we had 33 Members who voted. This time around, we have the absence of the Vice- President, but we are still at 33.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much for withdrawing the objection. He slipped in like a ninja. He was online but he was not getting to provide a vote. Previously, you had one who did not get to vote. Mr. Clerk, you may, once again, announce the results of the division.

**Clerk of the National Assembly [Mr. Isaacs]:** Mr. Speaker, 30 Members voted in favour of the motion and 33 Members voted against the motion.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much. The motion is defeated. Hon. Members, I am on track with my projected time. I had given four and a half hours, and we took just over that. So, it looks like we are on track to complete this, perhaps on Monday because our Standing Orders prohibit us from meeting on Saturdays and Sundays. Let us go along merrily. We will take the suspension now for one hour and then we will be back with the third motion.

*Sitting suspended at 6.48 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 8.09 p.m.*

Thank you, Hon. Members. Please be seated. Hon. Members, I have to make an apology to the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson. We should have written to her and to the Opposition Chief Whip, yesterday. The motion that stands in her name, I will have to disallow because it contradicts the Standing Order with respect to anticipation. That Standing Order speaks to the issue of debating matters coming up, substantively, in the form of Bills or Government's Business.

On 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2022, the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Protection did signal that she was overhauling the Domestic Violence Act into a family... I have forgotten the correct name of it. I have it in my notes. The Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Protection did signal that she was engaging in consultations. Minister Teixeira wrote on 7<sup>th</sup> May on the same matter, Standing Order No. 43 (1) and (3) on the issue of 'Anticipation', stating that the new Family Violence Bill is slated to be tabled in the National Assembly, shortly. The Bill is intended to replace the Domestic Violence Act of 1966 and has benefitted from widespread consultation for at least one year. This matter is to be tabled before we go into recess. I would have to withdraw that item from the Order Paper. My apologies for this very, very late notice, Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson. Hon. Member, would you like to say something?

**Ms. Ferguson:** *(Inaudible)*.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. Hon. Members, we look forward to that Bill. We will move on to the Establishment of a Special Select Committee to Review Charges for House Lots for Guyanese. This motion stands in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Before you start, Hon. Members, we need to have a motion to suspend the Standing Orders so that we can continue our work beyond 8 p.m.

*8.14 p.m.*

#### **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 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.”

*[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and  
Governance and Government Chief Whip.]*

**Ms. Teixeira:** ...for the suspension of the Standing Orders, Standing Order 10, to do with the hours of sitting that would allow us to proceed and continue the debate until we finish this item today.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Standing Order suspended.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you can start at 8.14 p.m.

#### **ESTABLISHMENT OF A SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE TO REVIEW CHARGES FOR HOUSE LOTS FOR GUYANESE**

WHEREAS Article 26 of the Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana states that, “every citizen has the right to proper housing accommodation”;

AND WHEREAS the size of Guyana is 83,0000 square miles with a population of over 750,000 persons, of which an average of five persons make up a family size;



AND WHEREAS, the Central Housing and Planning Authority was established in 1948, with its core principle to provide housing for working-class people;

AND WHEREAS, lands for housing purposes are acquired from several state agencies, paid by the Central Housing and Planning Authority;

AND WHEREAS, prices are determined by the Government Valuation Department in many cases after surveys are conducted for housing areas;

AND WHEREAS, many Guyanese who are allocated house lots find it challenging to commence construction because of financial constraints. Additionally, in most instances, the persons are unable to provide 20% of the required loan amount requested by the banks as a qualifying factor to qualify for a loan;

AND WHEREAS, since Guyana is an oil-producing nation with a production of over 200,000 barrels per day, it is evident that housing can become easily accessible for Guyanese who are earning salaries below \$200,000.00.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves of a Special Select Committee headed by the Minister of Housing and Water to examine this grave issue of unaffordability by engaging civil society, financiers, and other stakeholders to submit proposals and make recommendations that may be adopted by the Government to assist Guyanese.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Special Select Committee, on completion of its work, submits to the National Assembly a detailed report with its recommendations and asks that the House approves of the Ministry of Housing and Water to incorporate them into its Policy.

[*Ms. Ferguson*]

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this evening to move the motion standing in my name on the Establishment of a Special Select Committee to Review Charges for House Lots for Guyanese.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge your consideration in approving this motion. Sir, it is my belief that a motion of this nature warrants a holistic approach, finding of consensus from both

sides of the House in addressing the housing situation as it relates to the cost for house lots for Guyanese. I do look forward to a robust and healthy debate on this simple motion. *The Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana* in article 26 is clear as it relates to the right of Guyanese to proper housing and accommodation. However, it is prudent to ask ourselves whether, in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Guyana, Guyanese are being provided proper housing at affordable cost. The answer for me is no.

I know many on the opposite side will continue to shout on the mountain top the famous chorus ‘Coalition did nothing’. This is far from the truth, but I will highlight the many positives shortly. I believe that historical context must be highlighted. The PNC-led Administration of the late great Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson (LFS) Burnham had a three-pronged policy themed: house, feed and clothe the nation by 1976. When it came to housing, the PNC-led Administration had a better and workable policy which Guyanese bought into. We need not look far; just take a walk through south Georgetown – Tucville, South Ruimveldt, North Ruimveldt, North and West Le Penitence, Castello Housing Scheme, East and West Ruimveldt, Laing Avenue, Guyhoc Park, Guyhoc Gardens, Shirley Field-Ridley Square, Roxanne Burnham Gardens, Campbellville Housing Scheme, Melanie Damishana, Wismar, Wisroc and Angoy’s Avenue, just to name a few. These structures are still standing, with many of the concrete roads and other infrastructure still in place. Could the same be said for the many housing schemes built post October, 1992? The answer is a simple, no.

During the construction of houses and housing schemes, Mr. Burnham’s concept was ‘self-help’. After 38 years of LFS Burnham’s vet, and as visits are made to communities, the testimonies are shared of one of Guyana’s erstwhile leaders. Therefore, the passion and vision of LFS Burnham was always to make the small man the real man; hence, Guyanese were encouraged to occupy lands. Contrast this approach today, under an uncaring and unconscionable PPP/C Regime, rather than Guyanese be encouraged to utilise lands, and if they do so in an unregularised or unstructured way, they are bullied, their properties bulldozed, and lands flooded. Even at the establishment of many housing schemes, homeowners were encouraged to plant in their backyards. Today, are homeowners being encouraged by the PPP/C Regime to do so? The lands currently being allocated and even those allocated between October, 1992 to April, 2015, persons in most cases cannot build a comfortable house called home.

I now move to the body of my presentation. The first WHEREAS clause reminds us of both our population size and the square miles of Guyana. This was necessary for me to include in the motion since, from my advantage point, some political leaders believe that Guyana has a smaller population size with less than 83,000 square miles. With a population size of less than one million Guyanese, why is it difficult to acquire a piece of land hassle free? Why do our citizens have to endure years of waiting just to be allocated a house lot? Why those exorbitant prices for a piece of house lot? Why the policy pre-May, 2015 for an individual to be qualified for a house lot? The three principles were applied: You must be 21 years and over and married with children or single with children. This I could not understand until I, Ms. Annette Ferguson, was reassigned ministerial responsibility at the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) on 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2019. The reality hit home. I was livid to see how many ordinary Guyanese were treated under the PPP/C Regime. I have so many stories that came before me, which time will not allow me to share with this honourable House at this time, or with the Members in this honourable House. What I will say though is that persons who visited me personally on my public day had acknowledgement letters dating back from 1993 through to April, 2015. The big question to ask is why? I guess the person who sat in the seat as Minister of Housing and Water, now as the President, can provide the appropriate answers.

These were the common comments told to me by applicants, ‘every month when I visit to follow up, the staff will say we are not at year X for allocation. We do not have lands, or they have to keep updating their application’. In many other cases, whenever there was the one stop at the Providence Stadium, calls were received from staff of the ministry the night before the activity inviting members to attend and walk with \$1 million. When they showed up without 100% payments, they were met with resentment and were boldly told that the full payments must be made. It is happening as I speak, currently. Just two weeks ago they had an activity right here and persons were forced to come with 100% payment for their house lots. Now that the PPP/C is back, they have returned to their old habits. I know the Members from the opposite side who will be speaking to this motion will continue with their famous chorus that the Coalition Government did nothing in the housing sector and that musical chairs were played. Further, they will be advancing arguments on their touting initiative of dream home, number of titles issued, number of house lots issued, number of roads constructed and being constructed under the housing programmes, *et cetera*. Again, the reality is, despite all these glowing initiatives, the big question is, are they result oriented? While allocations are made, many are

finding it difficult to commence construction. Sir, I invite you to take a tour of the housing schemes the PPP/C boasts of allocating house lots across the country.

Mr. Speaker, may I bring to your attention and to remind you of what I shared in this House during last year's Budget debate of \$781.9 billion, where I highlighted the state of a few housing schemes still to have infrastructural development. Mr. Speaker, you would also recall that in *Budget 2024*, I came with evidence to show that many of the housing schemes are still underdeveloped. What the PPP/C failed to do in 23 years, the Coalition Government in its effort to provide affordable housing for Guyanese was compassionate. On two successful occasions, we had two promotions done for the 50<sup>th</sup> Independence celebration in May, 2016 and the 50<sup>th</sup> Republic celebration in February, 2020. Allottees were given an opportunity to pay 50% on the cost for house lots. With this decision, the Central Housing and Planning Authority raked in millions. However, in 2020, an extension was given up to August. When the PPP/C took office in August, 2020, they disbanded the promotion and allottees were forced to pay the full, 100% cost. Today, many people are still reaching out to me, sharing their frustration and challenges with the ministry under this uncaring PPP/C Regime.

Another testimony I wish to share and place on the record involves a pensioner who was allocated a house lot in the Cummings Lodge area and paid for same since 2020, prior to the change in administration. This PPP/C Regime has now entered into its third year in Office, and as of 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2023, the pensioner was yet to be shown her house lot for which she paid in full. Practically two days in the week, that pensioner would reach out to me expressing her frustration and is contemplating to reclaim the moneys paid. I have encouraged the pensioner not to do so.

The second AND WHEREAS clause references the Act which established the Central Housing and Planning Authority. It is apposite to note that the CH&PA is governed under the Housing Act, Chapter 36:20. Since this Act was passed, Act 24 of 1946 on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1948 and was last amended in 1975, some 48 years ago, when one examines the current construct of the Act, it does not provide the Central Housing and Planning Authority with the requisite tools required to address any significant changes in the landscape in the area of housing development.

*8.29 p.m.*

Additionally, the Act vests extensive powers in the responsible minister, including: to name the members of the Central Housing and Planning Authority, referred to in the Act as the Central

Authority; to appoint the Secretary; to approve the appointment and conditions of the officers and servants of the Authority; and to approve the delegation of any powers, duties and functions of the Authority to any committee appointed by the Central Authority for any of the purposes of the Act. The PPP/C, in their initial 23 years of governance, never sought to amend the Housing Act, Chapter 36:20. I guess it suited their agenda and was used to work against the working-class Guyanese. The current Minister of Housing and Water will not state publicly that the caring Coalition Government of President David Granger had prepared a state paper on housing which was done in April, 2017, with a focus on improving the housing delivery system for low-income earners, state employees and youths.

It was a well comprehensive document which highlighted what the Coalition inherited from the PPP/C. It was discovered that the housing programme implemented over the past two decades – 1992 to April, 2015 – focused primarily on the divestment of land and development of site and services schemes. The programmes had mixed successes since it enabled many Guyanese to have security of tenure to land, and amendments made to several pieces of legislation allowed for commercial banks entering the housing market to provide low-income loans at affordable interest rates. With this model, the analysis will show that this was unable to adequately address the housing need of low-income earners. Additionally, what the research proved was that the model was unsustainable since approximately 28,000 or 45% of the 63,257 lots divested have remained unoccupied, though billions of taxpayers' dollars were invested in the development of infrastructure.

The data also revealed that during the 2011 to 2015 period, this very model witnessed a far lower occupancy level of approximately 18.7%. What the data analysis showed regarding low occupancy, points to a myriad of factors such as affordability issues, inadequate and incomplete infrastructure, lack of social facilities and services, proximity to economic opportunities and the challenges associated with households undertaking their own home construction. The then PPP/C Government, between 2011 to 2015, invested approximately \$12.78 billion to develop 20,015 lots. I guess, with the oil resources, the Hon. Mr. Collin Croal will give us a total sum expended since 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020 to 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2023. This motion was laid since last year.

The Coalition Government revisited the model since it was essential given the fact there was a backlog of 25,000 applications in the system still to benefit from the housing programme, of which 17,851 were considered low-income households. It is my desire to hear from the Hon. Mr. Collin Croal that all pending applications are current year, since in their campaign promise

50,000 house lots will be allocated and all previous applications will have been serviced. It will be remiss of me if I fail to place in the official record of this Assembly the Coalition Government's new policy direction for housing, that is, to provide accessible and affordable housing in sanitary and safe communities, with the necessities for wholesome and dignified living. Therefore, the pivot of the Coalition Government's policy direction was moving beyond the approach to simply providing service lots to creating cohesive and sustainable communities.

The third and fourth AND WHEREAS clauses are clear since they both briefly identified other agencies that ensured the mandate of the Central Housing and Planning Authority is met, in terms of procuring lands from the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC), the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the National Industrial and Commercial and Investments Limited (NICIL) for housing development; also, the key role played by the Government Valuation Department to ensure cost of lands are in conjunction with the current market value.

I now turn my attention to the heart of the motion, which lies in the fifth and sixth AND WHEREAS clauses. In my earlier elucidation I did posit some of the factors or challenges faced by ordinary Guyanese, causing them to construct their own dream home in reasonable time. For the average public servant, who works for the minimum wage of \$80,000, thanks to an uncaring PPP/C since coming into Office, with access to oil resources, they only paid 7%, a paltry increase in salary in 2022, though they promised a whopping 50% increase in public servants salary during their 2020 campaign. Let us carefully examine the plight of a young, single public servant, who is a Clerk I at a government ministry, earns a monthly salary of \$80,000, and after deductions is left with a net of \$65,000. From this net value, rent is \$40,000 per month, utility bills are \$15,000 per month, transportation cost on a monthly basis is \$20,000 per month, grocery is \$30,000 per month, giving a total expenditure of \$110,000.

Mr. Speaker, now, the big question any political leader hearing this should ask himself or herself, where is the conscience? This public servant is immediately put at a disadvantage on seeking an allocation for a house lot. He or she would be qualified for a low-income house lot. However, the trouble for this young application is, he or she would not be able to pay for a house lot in Region 4 between \$250,000 to \$1 million, as provided by the Hon. Mr. Collin Croal to several questions put to him *via* Notice Paper No. 240. These are costs in 2021. I guess the *status quo* remains unchanged. In order for the cost to be offset by the applicant, when he or she approaches the banking institutions, they will be met with barriers due to him or her not satisfying the requirements for loans set by the banks. I know the Hon. Member Croal, coming

after me, will serenade the House with the measures in *Budget 2023* of “increase in the low-income mortgage ceiling” from \$15 million to \$20 million, “reducing the cost of borrowing within this range from commercial banks and further incentivising home ownership”. This was taken from *Budget 2023*, page 7.

Accordingly, the very document, *Budget 2023 At A Glance*, page 5, under “2023 KEY MEASURES, Income Tax Threshold” has indicated the monthly income threshold is from \$75,000 to \$85,000, of which 12,000 taxpayers are expected to be exempted by the tax net. The question one must ask, can these 12,000 persons access a banking loan as a first-time homeowner, and will they benefit from the mortgage ceiling? The Hon. Member, Mr. Croal, will also remind us of the steel and cement subsidy provided by the Government to first time home builders. I guess in his presentation, he will inform the National Assembly of how many persons benefitted as of 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2023, and the areas or regions where construction will take place.

In the fifth AND WHEREAS clause, I have alluded to the fact that many of the banking institutions are requesting a 20% down payment on the total loan sum. It is not only the down payment the applicant is required to find. He or she is also required to find legal fees, insurances covering them for health and fire. Now, may I query from the Hon. Member, Mr. Croal, whether the commercial banks and the New Building Society Limited (NBS) were able to provide an analysis of the number of first-time homeowners who were able to acquire loans at the low-income category and what mechanism the Regime has in place to address this situation? If left unaddressed, we will witness a return of the pre-May, 2015, that is, many unoccupied lots. I think since 2020 I have been sharing in this House that if you visited many of the communities, whether Tuschen, Zeelugt, or Providence, you will see what is occurring in those areas, like bad roads. While the ordinary citizen, whether a public servant, a nurse, a teacher or the youths employed at Intel or Teleperformance, continues to be placed at a disadvantage, the forensic report compiled – I want you all to listen to this carefully; I am coming – by Ram and McRae in 2016, on completion of a special investigation of the CH&PA on the Sparendam Housing Project, on pages 3 and 4, paragraph 17, revealed that lots were allocated to five Cabinet Members, including the Hon. Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, as President, and others who had connections to the Government.

8.44 p.m.

In paragraph 20 it is reported and recorded that the valuation provided to the firm, the calculations done, revealed the underpayment by each person to whom lots were issued. The total underpayment, based on the valuation used, is \$247,749,940. The report on this project has also revealed a high degree of bad governance and exposes those who serve in high office exercising their power to flout laws and systems. The report on its findings on page 20 stated:

“...Mr. Jagdeo was the Executive President and Head of the Cabinet. He was previously an allottee of land at Goedverwagting, popularly known as Pradoville 1, of which title was passed to him on October 7, 1998. He constructed a house there which he never occupied but later sold, reportedly for \$120 million in 2010. According to the Land Register kept by the Land Registry, Mr. Jagdeo was allocated land in the Sparendaaam Project on September 2, 2010. Based on clause 10 (ix) of the standard agreement of sale, Dr. Jagdeo was not eligible for a lot being the owner of real property within the three years preceding the allocation.

Mr. Jagdeo signed the Order vesting the Area of Sparendaaam and Goedverwagting known as Pradoville 2 into a Government company, National Communications Network Inc. That land was never sold or legally exchanged by NCN, nor was a proper vesting Order or other instrument effected to remove the ownership of the land from NCN.”

Mr. Jagdeo’s, according to the report here, Mr. Speaker, role appears egregious. He allocated or caused to be allocated to himself not one but two lots totalling 1.9603 acres of land for a consideration of \$9,801,500 or \$5,000,000 per acre. Moreover, the acreage of the land sold to him was approximately six times the average of the other residential lots, the acreage of which ranged from 0.23 acres to 0.3005 acres. I continue to quote from the report, Sir.

“Our investigation revealed that he also caused to be provided three transformers for which he paid GPL nothing. The cost of the three transformers according to the utility company was \$8,137,979.”

Mr. Speaker, the sixth AND WHEREAS clause is simply informing us of the number of barrels of oil produced daily in Guyana. *OilNow* reported in the online publication on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2023, that ExxonMobil is producing about 380,000 barrels per day from the Liza oil field. So far for 2023, Guyana has received US\$421 million which is equivalent to 26% of US\$1.63 billion, while in 2022 Guyana received US\$1.17 billion as of 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2022. The recurrent



question Guyanese frequently ask is, MP Ferguson is where the oil money going? Member of Parliament Ferguson, I am not feeling this oil money, it is not trickling down to the small man; MP Ferguson, is just friends, families, favourites and foreigners getting this oil money. Many of us in this House take ordinary people for granted. Some in here believe that our people went to the famous university on the West Coast of Demerara, or we went to school on Sunday.

Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday, and I am referring to 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2023, I recall you appearing on the online *GlobeSpan 24x7* programme, though I do not agree with you on the issue regarding the Mace. However, Almighty God knows the truth. The point I wish to make here is that, just before the programme, viewers were serenaded by the advertisement that Guyana will be the new Dubai. In that advertisement I recall seeing young people sharing the excitement of healthcare in that country, free education, 0% in housing, and they are receiving free land. Mr. Speaker, since the PPP/C Regime is in Office, can Guyanese truly relate to this advertisement? It is three years of the PPP/C and Guyanese are yet to feel the Dubai feelings.

The proposal in the BE IT RESOLVED clause in the motion is a simple request calling on the National Assembly to collectively support the approval of a special select committee headed by the Hon. Member, Mr. Collin Croal, Minister of Housing and Water, for us to examine this grave issue of unaffordability. I believe the time has come for the National Assembly, along with stakeholders involving civil society and financiers, to determine the best alternatives in solving the housing needs of our people. I would recommend that the special select committee be given a timeline of two months to complete its work, while the BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED clause is seeking to mandate the committee, on completion of its work, with recommendations, to report to the National Assembly, which will eventually aid the Ministry of Housing and Water, specifically the Central Housing and Planning Authority, to implement in the strengthening of its policies.

I have some information regarding the current allocation policy of the Central Housing and Planning Authority, and I do believe that this particular policy needs revising because if you go to page 20 of that very document, it states here, ‘the following criteria shall apply’ and I am referring to the pricing of house lots. ‘The following criteria shall apply for fixing of prices for house lots for low-income wage earners.’ At that time when this document was done, it had \$58,000 per lot. Where in Guyana can you go and get a piece of house lot for \$58,000? ‘Applicable to qualified persons earning a gross salary less than \$29,999.’ Who in Guyana earns this amount of money per month? Then \$90,000 per house lot, and this was applicable to

qualified persons earning a gross salary between \$30,000 to \$59,000. Again, where in Guyana would you find persons earning this kind of money? For the pricing in the middle-income lots, this varies – lots costing some \$500,000, lots costing \$700,000, lots costing \$1.2 million. Sir, I know in today's society middle-income earners are purchasing lots between, let us say \$500,000 to close to \$2.5 million. I do believe that the time has come for the Ministry to carefully examine its current policy as it relates to housing.

Mr Speaker, the other issue I wish to bring to your attention, and I trust that when the committee is established, we will be able to come up with ideas on whether we can have proper quality control at the Ministry of Housing and Water. The reason being, I shared in this National Assembly last year, and also this year, that many of the houses being constructed are being done in a defective way. I am going to share this with you; I am *gonna* share a testimony, what a homeowner is currently enduring. Kindly indulge me, Sir. On 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2021, we entered into an agreement with Synergy Global Incorporated. Synergy Global Incorporated is a sitting Minister whose... Anyway, I will leave that for later. On 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2021, we entered into an agreement with Synergy Global Incorporated, hereinafter referred to as the contractor, for the sale of a constructed house at the location stated above – and I will not call the address for reasons – a copy of this contract is attached for reference. This letter was actually sent to an officer at the Central Housing and Planning Authority. A copy of this contract is attached for reference, for consideration for this agreement. We paid \$1.8 million to the contractor, this left a balance of \$17,010,000 to be paid to the contractor. The contractor stated that the balance of the purchase price in the sum, which is the sum of \$17,010,000, shall become due and payable on the completion of the unit by the company's contractor.

May I make it clear, that this private developer, Synergy Global Incorporated, was actually recommended to the homeowners or potential homeowners by the Ministry of Housing and Water. These are some of the problems that are currently happening. Upon the signing of the agreement, the subsequent approvals from the Ministry of Housing and Water, the contractor began construction of our property. Following this, by the end of December, 2021, the contractor had completed the foundation of the house. This was slated as phase one. Following the completion of phase one, no work was done on the house until July, 2022. Work was stalled on the house because the contractor indicated that we needed to now pay them advances before the start of and after the completion of the new phases of the house. This represented a unilateral change in the contract terms regarding the payment of the balance of the house upon completion.

8.59 p.m.

However, to enable the restarting of the building project, I approached my bank (name given) to consider paying the contractor, as indicated, the remaining advances. After a discussion with the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA), the bank agreed to release advances to myself and many other new homeowners who were building young professional houses under Synergy Global Incorporated. More than one homeowner reached out to me complaining.

**Mr. Speaker:** I now want to reach out to you to tell you that you have to get an extension.

**Mr. Jones:** Cde. Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given an extension to continue her presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you could only get 15 minutes.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you, very much, Sir. I will try to wrap up. During this time, an additional sum of more than \$1,000,800 was paid to the contractor by the bank directly to complete the payments for phase one. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you what is really happening here, which is that the house started construction since 2021. To date, we are in 2024 and these potential homeowners cannot access their houses. They now have to go to the bank to have the property refinanced so that their houses can be constructed or completed. These are the unfair treatments that the ordinary Guyanese went through by the Central Housing and Planning Authority. They tried to seek the intervention of the two Ministers and were treated with disdain. Is this how we want to treat our people? This particular contractor had 15 houses at one time and did not finish any of them. All of the other homeowners had to seek private contractors to complete their houses. Do you know what is the sad reality, Sir? It is that the very contractor, apparently, got a land there and constructed a house – a nice fancy house – where a family member is living in. That is what is happening.

The other matter that came to my attention was also in the newspaper. It is of the same Prospect area. A gentleman since 2021 has paid in excess of \$7 million and, to date, he cannot access his house because of the defects that he is encountering at the moment. Let me quickly... I know time is running out. This is what was shared with me. I am going to summarise it. A Guyanese came back and paid \$1.4 million initially for a 50x100 house lot in the city here. Apparently, the individual wanted a double lot and was advised that she could not get the

double lot because she is only entitled to one lot. Somebody at the Ministry had her place her hands in a brown envelope and pull out a 60x120 house lot. I did not know that the Ministry gives 60x120 house lots. Perhaps, the Minister who is coming after me, could guide me. The woman paid \$1.4 million for a 50x100 house lot and an additional \$1.5 million for a 60x120 house lot. In total, the woman paid \$2.9 million. It was \$1.5 million and then \$1.4, which gives \$2.9 million. Up to now, she cannot get a refund of the money she paid. She wrote, extensively, to the two Ministers and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and is still awaiting a response.

I believe, as I started, this is a simple motion. The housing sector is in a dire state. If we can come together to find solutions – because no solution lies in one person – pool our ideas together, get civil societies and stakeholders on board, I believe that we will be able to solve the housing situation in this country. I trust that the Members who are to come after me will give full support; see the wisdom and the merit in this motion and support it, for the establishment of a special select committee to address the whole housing needs of our citizens. With that being said, I now put the motion for further consideration. Thank you, very much.  
[Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, the Hon. Member, Mr. Colin Croal.

**Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]:** Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I stand here to respond to the motion, which basically speaks towards the establishment of a special select committee to review charges for house lots for Guyanese, which is in the name of the previous speaker, Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson. Let me say from the onset, this motion is quite, and if you want for a better word, confusing. In its present form, it is fundamentally flawed. This motion begins in vague speculation and then crashes to an illogical conclusion that is mind-boggling. There is no specificity in the motion, just words that spring together. When one studies what is presented, there is no basis for the conclusion that it draws. The motion makes several claims and then it sets blame on the Ministry of Housing and Water in the Central Housing and Planning Authority without providing evidence that any policy on our part is responsible for the “financial constraints” that the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, claims.

To be allocated with a house lot and building a house are two distinct components of home ownership. While the Ministry of Housing and Water provides both house lots and, more recently, completed houses, the matter of ownership rests solely with the applicant. As it has been obtained since the formation of the CH&PA and we were reminded in 1948, the primary

objective has been to provide lands to eligible Guyanese for residential purposes. Since then, CH&PA has evolved to provide complete houses and commercial lands. The lands provided have at the start of the programme, rudimentary infrastructure, which is a basic road that was mostly bricks. This is in the commencement phase. Utilities had to be accessed from the individual companies by the landowner. There was no cohesive approach to develop the housing areas as obtained now. We have modified and improved the Housing Programme of 1948. Today, we are established, well-developed and developing housing areas which include roads, bridges, drainage, electricity, water, access to potable water, green spaces, religious buildings and even health facilities or centres.

House lots allocation, while not an exact and perfect science, is based on a few things, namely: the availability of land; the development of the land; and, of course, the applicants. The categories of the lots range from low-income, moderate, middle and high. The same applies to the houses. These are allocated based on the applicant's income and some other factors are taken into consideration. In some cases, applicants have requested a change in their category due to extenuating circumstances and those were considered, and many times facilitated. I want to share with this House the cost for the lots according to the various categories. I will be using from 2015 to the present. The low-income ranges from \$92,000 to about \$250,000; moderate income from around \$300,000 to \$700,000; middle-income from \$800,000 to \$2 million and high income from \$2 million to about \$6 million. Those are the averages. Notwithstanding, the cost of a low-income lot in Region 2 or 10 would be less than that in Region 4. This is carried across the board. These prices are determined based on the infrastructure, the land size and the market price. It is important to remember that these costs are also heavily subsidised by the Government.

On the matter of the deposit required by the bank, the Ministry of Housing and Water and CH&PA have collaborated with the banks to expedite applications for mortgages. The Government of Guyana has engaged the banks to lower the interest rates. In 2020, interest rates were 4%, 5.95% and 6.25%. Following this PPP/C's Government policy interventions, the rates were lowered to 3.5% and, in some cases, 3.2%, 3.75% and 5.7% on the high end. Let me use the New Building Society (NBS) since it was quoted. For example, the New Building Society, in 2020, received 669 applicants and disbursed \$3.5 billion. Last year, in 2023, the New Building Society received over 2,500 applicants and disbursed \$19 billion. In terms of applicants, a 274% increase over three years and, in terms of disbursement, a 443% increase on disbursed loans. That is the power of this PPP/C Government. We care about the people. We

have considered the constraints that they might face. We did not bring a motion to the Nation Assembly or ask a special select committee. We knew what we had to do. The banks are now lending as much as 100% of the cost to build a house.

*9.14 p.m.*

They are using the lands as equity. In some cases, the banks also approve lands' costs as part of total loans. In 2020 and prior, applicants had to have cash equity and the land to be considered for a loan; this has changed. Our PPP/C Government has made this happen. The truth is, despite all these 'constraints' – that the good Member mentioned – the demand for house lots in each category far outweighs the supply. Who are these applicants facing the constraints? To date, in three and a half years, we have allocated over 33,000 house lots, prioritising 2019 and earlier. We have just launched an online portal. We have quadrupled the allocations made from 2015 to 2020 by the previous Administration. I will give the figures. During the initial months of the current Administration from August to December, 2020, when you take into the consideration the period as of now, an analysis - up to last week, the Hon. Member who is not here had an article in the newspaper speaking about discrimination - of the allocations that was done during this PPP/C's tenure has shown distribution done to both of the majority races in this country has been equal. Therefore, one needs to ask, where the cry of discrimination is?

In the hinterland regions, one cannot acquire an individual land title because the lands in the villages are under communal lands. We have a Hinterland Housing Programme, which has positively impacted Indigenous families by providing homes at no cost to the beneficiaries. In fact, if I can provide the record of our stewardship, currently we have the first round with 400 houses under this programme for Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. Of these 400 houses, 125 have been completed in Kokerite, Warapoka, Haimaruni, Lethem, Yakarita, Tiger Pond, Nappi, Crash Water and Rupanau. The remainder will be completed in the next few months. Before this year is finished, we will start on another round of hinterland houses. When that is compared to the APNU/AFC's tenure, 20 houses were constructed in Kako, Waramadong, Kamarang and Quebanang. The other hinterland houses that were done during their tenure was the completion of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funded programme that was left by now President and then Minister of Housing and Water, Hon. Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. Those were the houses that were done for the hinterland. The last Government speak so much about loving the hinterland.

Furthermore, our allocation process demonstrates a clear commitment to equitable, socio-economic development, with 91.8% of our allocations benefitting low-income, moderate income, and middle-income Guyanese. Therefore, that tells us that the high income on our 33,000 allocation was only 8.2%. In fact, let me go more specific. In fact, for low-income allocations, there is 43%; moderate income, 30% and middle-income, 18.8%. This reflects our goal of reducing poverty and fostering inclusive growth. Moreover, in keeping with our mandate to empower youths through home ownership, individuals, age 21 to 35, represent 52% of our allocations. The Housing Development Programme has seen 45.8% of allocations going to women; 27.6% to males and 26.6% being joint applicants. The good Member can provide – I say that with an open heart – direct issues or complaints that confronted the Hon. Member in three and a half years. If you so care about the population, I have never received a single complaint from you on behalf of anyone who is being faced with an issue. I have received from other Members on the other side though.

I want to remind the Members of this House and the people who are listening today of the state of the housing sector under the very Member who has brought this motion and the Minister who preceded me. In fact, it was the APNU/AFC Government who reduced the Ministry of Housing and Water to a department under the Ministry of Communities. I would not want to remind you about the musical chairs that saw three Ministers within that short tenure. The last Minister – Hon. Member – the previous speaker, took eight months to occupy the office when she was appointed. It was eight months and it had to be all green. During their stint, the APNU/AFC Government developed, in 2015 to 2020, only three housing schemes. I will name them – Peter’s Hall, Prospect/Track E and Providence. Contrast to that, in three and a half years, we have developed over 50 housing areas. Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand, their allocation total was over 7534. [Ms. Manickchand: This was in five years.] This was in five years. They failed to develop and design schemes because what they did were all left before 2015. Despite their grand claims of securing 409 acres of land in Lethem, Kwakwani, Amelia’s Ward and Wisroc for house lot distribution, we found that these lands had in fact been only identified and were largely unfit for housing areas. We had to restart the process to secure new and suitable lands.

It is a fact that the construction sector had become lethargic under their tenure. The house lot allocations have become gimmicky. The bulk of their allocations were done in the lead up to the 2020 General and Regional Elections. It would be interesting to learn the answers for their dismal performance. Thousands of Guyanese had letters assuring them that they had been

issued lands but they were unable to get ownership, documents or even to locate the lots. In the absence of ownership documents, it was impossible for an allottee to approach a bank for a mortgage. This is one of the two factors that resulted in low occupancy in those schemes which the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, and her Government boasted about developing. Of the 20 Turnkey homes that they built in Experiment/Region 5, half were left unoccupied when we took over in 2020. It took a supplementary budget in 2020 to fast-track development works in 21 housing areas that they allowed to become stagnated for the allottees to begin building their homes. Given these facts, it appears that the Folks from the other side of the House who desperately needed a special select committee to help them manage the housing sector during their tenure. It is under their Government that people found it hard to cope with the taxes they imposed on the populace. It is under their watch that the business and banking sectors struggled with huge gaps in the availability of foreign exchange; lack of access to finance; and high interest rates, as I highlighted earlier.

Mr. Speaker, may I inform this House that the Ministry of Housing and Water, which falls under the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Economic Services, has appeared twice before that said Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> August last year and 14<sup>th</sup> February this year. In fact, we had a Valentine's Day lunch. The Members of that Committee on Economic Services, which includes Members of the Opposition, had the opportunity on both occasions to raise questions along the issues about house lots, costs, *et cetera* but they did not. I am yet to convince myself that the intention of this pseudo motion is good. We have envisaged the challenges of our people. We are providing intervention after intervention to bring relief to them. Now, more than ever, you can see houses being built everywhere. The lines are as long for new applicants as they are for allocations. The construction sector received new life under this PPP/C Government. No number of spin or tales of the sky falling by this Member of the House will change the achievements made by the Ministry of Housing and Water and the PPP/C Government in the last three and a half years.

Beyond land allocation and housing construction, the Ministry has implemented various community programmes to enhance the lives of the vulnerable population. Mr. Speaker, may I remind that we have the Community-based Employment Stimulation Project (CESP) which has facilitated job opportunities for persons with disabilities. The residents in communities such as Leopold Street, Albouystown, North Ruimveldt, Mocha Arcadia and Victoria have benefitted from this programme. Further, the Laing Avenue Housing Grant programme has assisted 122 families to date with essential materials to rehabilitate their homes. You said to



bring it and I am giving you the data, because we are proud to tell and show our record. The steel and cement voucher initiative has pushed home construction for some 1197 Guyanese families in Government allocated lands across Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10.

*9.29 p.m.*

You asked me for a breakdown; I have all of the information. I am not sure of how much time I have but, if I have time, I will come back to it. We have disbursed over \$300 million to date. Additionally, within the last three years, there has been a steady increase in the number of families who have benefitted from the Government's Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR) initiative. In the past three years, the Government paid more than \$2.5 billion in refunds for more than 15,000 families from every income bracket with mortgage for their homes. Let me put it into context, in 2019, 2,314 Mortgage Interest Reliefs were paid out, which is a total of \$354.9 million. In 2023, last year, there were 5,432 beneficiaries with a disbursement of \$813 million. Therefore, there is 134% increase in three years for beneficiaries and 129% increase in monetary value for Mortgage Interest Relief. The Hon. Member spoke about Laing Avenue and misled this House. It was not the former President...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you can find a better word than that.

**Mr. Croal:** I am sorry. The Hon. Member misquoted the former President at that time when the Laing Avenue houses were built. In fact, both the East Ruimveldt, West Ruimveldt and Laing Avenue were done under the PPP/C's tenure under the then Ms. Janet Jagan who was the Minister of Labour, Health and Housing. The then Minister of Labour, Health and Housing was the one under whose tenure, the East Ruimveldt, West Ruimveldt and Laing Avenue houses were built. They subsequently sold their sections for \$20,000.

The Hon. Member went to lengths to provide information on persons who were affected on the home construction programme. First, let me make this point, in our manifesto commitment to the people of Guyana, we have committed that we will deliver 10,000 house lots annually. That is quoted in the manifesto. It is upon our new policy directive to fast-track home ownership that you have seen in extensive programmes for the construction of Houses. What our records show? This is less than three years because this aspect did not start in 2020. To date, we have committed and we have contracts signed for the construction of 3,607 houses. I will give you the areas and the category so you will have an idea. We have completed and handed over 1,495 houses. Therefore, we have another 1,378 under construction and 734 of which contracts have

been signed and about to commence. Where are those houses that we are speaking about? These are just current contracts. We have more to build. There are 322 two-bedroom flat at Leonora; Anna Catherina – 63 two-bedroom flat; Meten-Meer-Zorg – 25 two-bedroom, Edinburg – 25 two-bedroom; Ruimveldt and La Parfaite Harmonie – another 26; Cumming Lodge, which is right near by – 327 two-bedroom elevated; 82 three-bedroom flat bungalow; and 50 three-bedroom V-roof. Those would give you the picture. Anytime one who lands at Eugene F. Correia International Airport could see what the PPP/C Government have done in three years with transforming an area. In Great Diamond there are 336 two-bedroom flat and in Little Diamond there are 50 two-bedroom flat. I am giving these because I enjoy having someone who is very...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, let me give you some more time. You can get an extension of up to 15 minutes, but someone has to move it.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to ask that the Hon. Member be given time to continue with his excellent presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

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

**Mr. Croal:** The point to note here is that I am giving this information. I am happy that the Hon. Member has been driving in our communities and that is very good. In Opposition, there is a lot of time; it is very good. You could provide us with the information for us to know where we need to make corrections.

In the interest of time, I will give you some of the ongoing other larger areas. At La Bonne Intention (LBI), 91 flat young professional houses; 211 elevated young professional houses; Little Diamond has 104 three-bedroom flat houses and 105 young professional houses that we have just started in the new Silica City. I would love it if the Hon. Member could visit. I could go on and on. In Region 6 – Williamsburg, Hampshire, Ordnance, Fortlands – has 200 houses. Where is the Hon. Member for Region 7? In Region 7, we have just signed the contract to commence the first 40 houses in Bartica. In Region 9, we have the ongoing programme at Lethem and likewise for Region 10. As soon as we are completed with the land preparation, we will start with the additional houses for Region 10.

A mention was made about a programme that the APNU/AFC Government had. I think it was the 'Jubilee Programme', where they only took 50%. It was a promotional programme. Mr. Speaker, may I make two points here? Invariably, one would see comments on social media that state, someone made an application in the APNU/AFC tenure and this PPP/C Government have not honoured it. We have honoured every allocation, every 7,534 allocations that were done by the APNU/AFC. We have honoured every one of them and developed the housing areas. The very subsidy programme they had had a period of time with a closure of the duration of the incentive programme. This Minister honoured that commitment and that programme ended at the end of August. What our housing programme and what this Government's policy have done for a low-income earner, to allow the opportunity for everyone to acquire their own home, in simplistic term, a part-time worker who is earning \$40,000 – Part time, so it means that the person can also have other employment opportunities – at a 3.2 to 3.5% rate of borrowing will pay no more than \$25000 to \$26000 per month for acquiring a low-income house. That is what our policy has done.

Mr. Speaker, what has also been mentioned and I want to rebut quickly is our treatment to squatting. Sometimes, I think, I am not sure who the drums are being beaten for. We have been very clear and consistent with our policy to address squatting. In fact, when we got into Office, we inherited about 21 squatting areas. We have regularised 13. [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*] Let me give you them so that you can on a drive to check. The areas are Charity, Greenwich Park, De Kinderen, Tuschen Railway Line, Stewartville, Vergenoegen Railway Line, Chateau Margot, Annandale Railway Line, Bachelors Adventure and Bare Root – 321 lots were regularised there. Mr. Speaker, as I speak, we are addressing Philadelphia Railways, De Williem, Vergenoegen, Tuschen, Vigilance, Bladen Hall and Beterverwagting Railway. We will be regularising the Mocha Arcadia of approximately 222 lots, which will commence very shortly.

Mr. Speaker, my final rebuttal is, a lot have been mentioned about how lots are allocated *et cetera*. There is a consistent system and policy. I want to leave with this question. Could the Hon. Member clarify how a \$1.2 million lot was paid for and the approximate value surrounding that very lot, for others who paid, they paid \$3 million? I will leave that for the Hon. Member to answer. In conclusion, I strongly believe that this motion... [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*] The Hon. Member will answer. ...if you can even call it that, is without merit; it has no basis; and, in fact, it is a waste of all our time. We will not be deterred

from the mandate of the people of Guyana that has been set by the people nor will we be shirked from the goals of achieving our manifesto's commitment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. I am going to close now so you can take it outside. Hon. Members, it is now 9.53 p.m. We still have seven more speakers on this motion and a slew of other debates to come up. I think we should take a suspension now and resume at 10 a.m. tomorrow.

*Sitting suspended at 9.44 p.m.*

*May 10, 2024*

*Sitting resumed at 10.31 a.m.*

Hon. Members, we are about to resume this 81<sup>st</sup> Sitting of the National Assembly. Let us take a few moments and silently give our thanks and prayers. Thank you. Hon. Members, we will continue with the motion moved by the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson. The next speaker is the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira.

Mr. Figueira, before you start, I just want to remind persons about the bell. While we are starting at 10.32. a.m., I am normally outside, and I am not going to beg any of the Chief Whips or any Member of Parliament (MP) to ensure we have a quorum to start on time. We are big people. We are not in school nor in church and we have responsible positions. So, if you take two hours to get here to get a quorum, I will wait. That is my job. Thank you. Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, you have the floor.

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I concur with your admonition to fellow MPs to be in the House. When I was asked by the Chief Whip to speak on this motion, I reluctantly said, yes. That reluctance was premised on the fact that I was confident that my Colleague who presented this motion was quite capable of representing her stewardship as the former Minister of Housing. More in particular, because of the simplicity in the request of this motion, I do not believe it requires many deliberations for people to respectfully accept it. Having listened to my Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, who, in his embryonic remarks said that he found this motion to be most confusing. So, now I am very happy and elated that I have

seized the opportunity, so that, with my efforts, I can help to bring some degree of clarity and reduce his confusion he claims this motion has.

Mr. Speaker, you will agree with me that in the heart of every thriving nation lies the aspirations for equitable access to shelter, equitable access to housing, a fundamental human right enshrined in the fabric of our society. In recent times, this aspiration has been overshadowed by the harsh realities of skyrocketing living costs, gross and exponential high cost of living, escalating prices of building materials and soaring levels of poverty all across the 83,000 square miles of this country.

Poverty in Guyana is real. I am saying this because, from my own experience, with the work that I do in my own community, where I traverse the length and breadth of Region 10, giving more attention specifically to the most populated area Linden, the poverty is real. When I go into the communities to do the work that I do I see and experience this situation. This motion, I believe, can lend support to bring in some hope in alleviating the dire situation that the poor and the vulnerable in our society face. Considering the challenges of this stark reality, we, the Opposition, on this side of the House, staunchly advocate for the establishment of a special select committee to review house lot charges. This is done with the purest of intent. I want to be very pellucid and abundantly clear that the intention of this motion is directly a reflection of the purest intention. No sinister move is aligned in this motion. No sinister move, Mr. Speaker. [An Hon. Member (Government): Repetition.] The repetition in me saying that is for the point to be registered to the Members on that side of the House because they are deaf to the ears of the poor people in this country.

We believe that this crucial step towards influencing the Government's policy in a positive direction is aimed at ensuring that fair access is available to all citizens of Guyana. On every occasion, the Government never fails to let us know they have created 50,000 jobs – they say. The fact is, thousands of these jobs are the 10 days, \$40,000 per month jobs. I want to make it abundantly clear and to be very pellucid that any offering to bring relief to our people in these hard times, we encourage it. We believe much more can and much more should be done. One is compelled to ask the question, how will these 10 days per month jobs reduce the levels of poverty in the society? The Hon. Minister boasts about how much a person who receives a loan from the bank will have to pay for a low-income house lot. He said nothing more than \$30,000 and we have thousands of people in Guyana working for \$40,000 a month. How can those

parents who are working for \$40,000 a month pay the lowest price for a house lot in this country with a bank loan of \$30,000 a month, when they have to pay rent, light bill and water bill?

It is our recognition of the stark economic challenges that have even led the Ministry of Education to scandalously ask Grade Six learners to write about their hunger, reflecting on the usefulness or lack, thereof, of the snacks that were provided to them by the Ministry. How low can you go? What a shameless and a shameful way to scandalise poverty. This is the most offensive...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I do not want to break your stride so if you stay away from the unparliamentary words, then you will continue without interruption from me.

**Mr. Figueira:** Mr. Speaker, again I say, what a disappointing and unbelievable way to scandalise poverty. It is most offensive to children's dignity and their parents. It is even more sad that it is happening in an oil rich country with a trillion-dollar budget. This country is the fastest growing economy, not in the Caribbean, not in South America, but the world. It begs the question, could these thousands of Guyanese parents with the Government's 10 days per month job afford any level of house lots at the present price by the Ministry of Housing and Water? The Minister boasted and said to this House that over 2,000 applicants benefited from loans from the New Building Society (NBS). It is very commendable, but the reality is that there are far more than 2,000 residents in this country, in every region, awaiting house lots. The long lines right here at the central Ministry of Housing and Water is a testament to that reality.

No matter how much noise and banging, it will not dilute the facts that are being presented here today by the Members on that side of the House. In the principal core of this proposal put forward by my esteemed Colleague, lies a commitment to social justice and the principles of inclusivity. The issue of house lots and the desire for house lots in this country... I am happy. One of my favourite debaters on that side, the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, is getting worked up. That is what the truth does, Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh. The desire for house lots in this country, do you know what it has done? It has birthed a number of squatting communities all across this country. The Minister said to this House that he is aware of this situation, a situation that emanated under the PPP/C's tenure in Government because these squatting communities did not pop up like magic. The Hon. Minister said that, in the 21 squatting communities, under his guidance with the capable assistance of his other Minister, Ms. Susan Rodrigues – and very capable I must say – he was able to rectify 13 of the 21 squatting communities. [Mr.

**Hamilton:** Regularise.] Regularise. Thank you, Sir. We are very happy about that. I want to say to the Hon. Minister that I firmly believe the 21 squatting communities he identified is not the true reflection of the number of squatting communities that have been birthed because of the need for house lots in this country.

*10.46 a.m.*

In Linden itself, there are a number of squatting communities such as Andyville, Prosville, Rasville, Blueberry Hill back road, West Watooka Hilltop, parts of Kamaka, parts of Ituni and Kwakwani Communities birthed out of squatting – I am happy that efforts have been made. The President said he is committed to correcting this, and we welcome that. The reality is the dire need for house lots in this country has not even tipped the iceberg of the demand in this country.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is even sadder, people who are squatting understand the risks they are taking, the risks to go and build a house after accumulating this \$40,000, this miniscule \$40,000 a month, to buy materials and put up a little structure to call their home. Why? It is because they cannot afford to pay the astronomical rent prices and electrical charges. What do they do? They put up a structure on a land that is not their own and it is understandable. That is why we have seen a spike in squatting communities. They take the risk of knowing that the caring Government may come and bulldoze their houses, as we have seen happening in Amelia's Ward and in Mocha. They still take the risk to go out and squat. Housing for us is not merely a commodity. It is the foundation upon which stable communities are built, the cornerstone of individual dignity and security. Yet, with the current state of affairs, the dream of home ownership has become increasingly unattainable for many Guyanese despite the Government's effort, trapped in a cycle of poverty and economic disenfranchisement.

Do you know what is even equally sad? We have some homeowners who own the property on which they live. Do you know what they say? Development comes at a price. That is true. We welcome development. But in executing developmental activities, we must be mindful of people. If we are going to ask people to move, ample time should be given and, most importantly, satisfactory compensation must be equally given.

I speak of this situation in particular because I was devastated having seen that the Minister of Public Works went to a senior citizen to issue her with a letter and to tell her she has to vacate her premises. The woman is unaware of what compensation will be afforded to her. This is

inhumane. Mr. Speaker, I say to you, the Government, in its pursuit to bring much needed development to this country, must take into consideration satisfactory compensation. I want to pause here for a moment because I want the Government to understand – Mr. Todd, pay attention, you were sleeping heavily yesterday – and pay rapid attention to when I speak of satisfactory compensation. When I speak of compensation, I do not want the Government to accept the Government’s evaluator coming and assessing the property and putting a value on it alone. Mr. Speaker, I said to you that the Government failed in this regard, and they failed with distinction. I will tell you why they failed. I will tell you why they failed in their offerings of compensation to these people. They have factored in a value on the material aspect of these individuals’ properties. Mr. Speaker, I want you and the Government, in particular the Hon. Bishop Edghill and the Hon. Minister, Mr. Croal, with regards to compensation, take into consideration the time spent in those homes, the memories that were birthed in the walls that surround those houses, the footsteps of a child, the child’s first footsteps in those homes on every square foot in that building.

The best value a senior citizen has is not material value, it is memories. Every room in that home has valuable memories. It is not a value on the tangible. It is also a value on the intangible that the Government has failed to compute in offering a satisfactory, a conscionable, compensation to those residents. I am saying to the Government that they must take into account the value, the irreplaceable value, of those individuals who were asked to move, after living in those homes and in the community. You are displacing them from a community where their families, their friends and their businesses are. This is what you have to consider when you are offering a compensation to people you are uprooting. Where is the humanity and where is the heart? The Government has a duty to do that which is right.

One remembers the trumping up of value-added Tax (VAT) removal on building materials in 2020. Personally, I welcome that. Anything that benefits the Guyanese people, I will support. Today, that measure has zero positive effect. I am not just throwing that out there wildly. I am saying that because all building materials, even those right here in Guyana – sand, stone are nearly doubled in prices, affecting gravely the majority of poor in this country. We, in this House, have a duty to make a difference, to help change this dire situation. The rising cost of building materials, exacerbated by global economic trends and by local factors, have placed immense strain on aspiring homeowners, pushing the dream of home ownership further and further out of reach. Coupled with the high levels of poverty, the situation has reached a critical juncture where urgent intervention is required. Mr. Speaker, I put it to you, and I put it to the



Members on the other side of the House, that a special select committee, dedicated to reviewing charges for housing lots, holds the promise of transformative change.

By engaging stakeholders across the political spectrum, you do not have to invite the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, or myself. You could invite Dr. Kissoon. Invite people across the political spectrum; invite people from civil society, academia and the private sector. With such a committee we can leverage diverse perspectives and expertise to develop a holistic and sustainable solution, to address this housing crisis. What is wrong with that, Dr. Ashni Singh? What is wrong with that proposal, Hon. Minister Croal? What is wrong with that?

This is not an attempt by me or any other Member on this side of the House to bash the Government. That is not our intention. The Government has tried a number of policy interventions such as selective home repairs and building material grants, to name a few. The issue is, what percentage of the population has those interventions positively affected? For example, why a public servant – inclusive of Members of Parliament, excluding the Ministers and the Advisors – who takes home \$300,000 or less has to pay \$1million or more at times for a 50 square feet x 90 square feet middle income house lot? Why such a large figure has to be ascribed in a country with 83,000 square miles? I can hear the arguments of rebuttal coming, where infrastructure is a cost and all of these things. I agree, but I am saying to you, match the pricing with the reality of the times we are living in. Public servants are getting meagre salaries, and they cannot afford a house lot for more than \$1million, when we have a budget of over a trillion dollars. The Government has to be more considerate to the needs of the average Guyanese citizen.

We are persuaded, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of Guyanese will accept that a comprehensive review of housing lot charges is not merely an exercise of economic policy, but it is a moral imperative. It speaks to our collective commitment to social justice and our obligation to ensuring that every Guyanese has the opportunity to build a better future for themselves and their families. History is replete with examples of successful policy interventions, aimed at addressing housing affordability and promoting social equity. From the establishment of public housing programmes in post-war Europe, to the implementation of innovative land reform initiatives in countries such as Singapore, the lessons are clear. Proactive government interventions can make a tangible difference in the lives of its citizens.

*11.01 a.m.*

Furthermore, a special select committee offers a platform for dialogue and consideration, transcending partisan divides and fostering consensus-driven decision-making. In a time of political polarization and discord, it is imperative that we look to come together as a nation to tackle the pressing challenges that confront us. We believe that such a committee will offer a solution to the issues that we ask the Government, and we ask the Government to see the wisdom in this regard and lend its support. In concluding, the establishment of a special select committee to review these charges on house lots is not merely a policy proposal. Again, I say to us, it is a moral imperative and a testament to our collective commitment to social justice and equity. By taking decisive actions to address the housing crisis, we can pave the way for a brighter, more inclusive future for all Guyanese. The time for action is now, the stakes could not be higher. Let us seize this opportunity. Dr. Singh, let us seize this opportunity. This opportunity is before us.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay, before you seize that opportunity, you will need an extension because you have already gone over. As you said you were closing, I did not want to interrupt, but it seems that you are going.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have up to 15 minutes to conclude according to the Standing Orders.

**Mr. Figueira:** Mr. Speaker, I am most gracious for your extension of time, but I believe I have made the point. Let me reiterate for emphasis. Dr. Singh, you are listening and Hon. Minister Croal you pay rapid attention. Do not bother with the *rabble-rousers* on your side. I say to us in this House, let us seize the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our fellow Guyanese citizens and build a more just and prosperous society for generations to come. We are duty-bound as elected officials in this House. The people have entrusted in us as their elected servants, let that register, their elected servants, to serve their best interests. I put it to us, once again, that this committee provides all of us the opportunity to serve our people as elected servants. I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I see the Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, on his feet.

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 40 (b). I would like to ensure that...

**Mr. Speaker:** What does 40(b) says?

**Bishop Edghill:** I rise to elucidate on some matters raised by the Hon. Member in the course of his speech. It is a matter of factual correction...

**Mr. Speaker:** Let me get back to that particular Standing Order and then I will... Standing Order 40(b), let us be on the same page, lest we argue without the black-and-white in front...

**Bishop Edghill:** I did not want to interrupt the Hon. Member while he was speaking.

**Mr. Speaker:** Well, you should have then. Standing Order 40(b) says,

“Subject to these Standing Orders, no Member shall interrupt another Member except:-  
(a) by rising on a Point of Order, when the Member...”

Was speaking and (b) says,

“(b) to elucidate some matter raised by that Member in the course of his or her speech provided that the Member speaking is willing to give way and resumes his or her seat and that the Member wishing to interrupt is called by the Chair.”

I have used this, over and over again, over the past four years to say I will have to ask the Hon. Member speaking if they are prepared to give way for the person interrupting to elucidate. So far, it has always been no. At this point, you would be out of order to interrupt. I will have to ask you, as I have done before, to pass your notes on to who is speaking next or subsequently, and they can elucidate for at least 45 minutes because that is the time allocated in the Standing Orders. Sorry, Hon. Minister.

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, I do not mean to interrupt your ruling, I am prepared to abide by it. It is just a matter of factual correction. It is on the record of the House.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, and I know you have never been disrespectful personally to the Chair. Thank you. As he is on that, yesterday was the birthday of the Hon. Member, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, and I forgot to wish her a happy birthday and the Hon. Member, Mr. Anand Persaud also a happy birthday. Then today is the birthday of the Hon. Vickram Bharrat. Happy birthday Ministers and Hon. Member. Thank you. Hon. Member and Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Water, the Hon. Ms. Rodriques, you have the floor.

**Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water [Ms. Rodrigues]:** Mr. Speaker, last evening, when I left this House, I had a completely different presentation in mind. But, after having to endure the presentations from the two Members of the Opposition, the abhorrent presentations, it is clear that the gloves have to come off. Wherever the Opposition wishes to take the fight, we will go there. Just an advisory that if you attack one of us on this side, you attack all of us on this side.

Mr. Speaker, this is Private Members' Day. Private Members' Day started yesterday. We were here for 12 hours yesterday and, today, we continue Private Members' Day. For those who are watching at home, Private Members' Day, also known as Opposition Day, is a day when the Opposition can bring any number of issues of public importance, any number of motions that are social in nature, matters of education, health, social services and all of the things that they come here and elucidate about sometimes or they cry about when they are on *Facebook* and whenever the cameras are rolling. These are issues they claim to be champions of: champions of the poor; champions of women; and all number of social issues that they raise. When they have an opportunity to make a difference, to really make a change and to create an impact, they use their Private Members' Day to bring three motions on the Local Government Commission. They came to gripe about what constitutes a quorum for the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), and then the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, came to talk about charges for house lots, but then delivered a presentation entirely or mostly about the Vice President and what other members of the now Government have received in the past.

I made this point to say that the ideology of the Opposition is never to bring about positive change. It is never to champion for poor people, and it is never champion for the sick or the vulnerable because when they have an opportunity to do so, they squander it. They wasted 12 hours of our time yesterday, this nation's time, this Parliament's time, the time of the people who are listening to hear real change and action – to hear the Opposition advocate for them, for their supporters. They have successively failed their supporters and the people of this country.     **[Mr. Ramson: In Government too.]**     In Government and in Opposition.

Let me come now to the motion itself, but before I do, I was reminded by the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, yesterday, when he referenced some motions that were brought during a Private Members' Day, when the PPP/C was in Opposition, and through his mouth came three motions. Do you know what those motions were about, what the PPP/C brought when they were in opposition? The removal of VAT on items that were previously zero-rated. We raised the

resolution to rescind Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) fees and land charges, advocating for poor farmers. We came in defence of Amerindian titling. That is what we brought. That is the difference. That is the PPP/C ideology to always advocate for the poor, for the vulnerable, for farmers, for sugar workers and for every vulnerable section of our society.

**Mr. Holder:** Point of Order.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. Holder.

**Mr. Holder:** I am standing on Standing Order 41(1), relevance of speech.

**Mr. Speaker:** Okay hold on a second, let me just get to 41(1). Go ahead.

**Mr. Holder:** Cde. Speaker, the direction that the Minister is going in is definitely not relevant to the motion at hand.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member, that is your opinion. The Chair shares a different opinion. Thank you.

**Mr. Holder:** Thank you.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These were things raised during presentations yesterday that I am using my time to rebut. I am using this to show that regardless of whether the People's Progressive Party/Civic is in government or whether we are in opposition, we will always be champions for the people. It is reflected in our work. It is reflected in our track record and people can check this. You heard it from the Hon. Member Mahipaul himself. Compare and contrast those three motions that he mentioned we brought while in opposition to what they brought to this House on this Private Members' Day. Let me go to the motion now that was brought in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson. The title of the motion references charges for house lots for Guyanese. We were all here and we all witnessed her presentation, which was all about attacking individuals who are members of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, personal attacks. She spoke nothing about any hardship that people are facing in relation to affordability. Looking at the text of the motion itself, she raised the issue of financial constraints and spoke to a 20% down payment that is required to access loans and I will come to that in a minute. That is why my Colleague said that the motion is most confusing because, in examining the motion, I tried to think about what ill this motion is trying to cure. What prevailing set of circumstances exist that requires a motion of this type?

*11.16 a.m.*

What hardships exist that would require any relief? I am still to hear it from their presentations. Let us go straight to what the Member actually spoke about in the text of the motion. She spoke about a 20% equity down payment. Let us examine our interest rates. Guyana has one of the lowest interest rates in the world. Interest rates declined in Guyana over the last three years, under the leadership of this Government, in a global environment that saw interest rates rise as a result of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and as a result of inflation. Guyana is one of the few countries, or perhaps the only country, which saw a decrease in interest rates. That is a direct result of the policy of this Government. The interest rate at the New Building Society (NBS) in 2020, when the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was in Office, was an average of 5.4% for low, middle and high income. Today, that low-income rate is as low as 3.5%. That is with NBS. At the Guyana Bank For Trade and Industry (GBTI), in 2020, interest rates were 6.9% up to \$10 million for a low-income earner. Today, it is 3.8% up to \$9 million. Above the low-income bracket, it is 6.9% with no ceiling, regardless of how much a person borrows. At Demerara Bank, the interest rate in 2020 was 8.4%. Today, it is the same as NBS, which is under 4%. Again, it is a direct result of the intervention of this Government and our policies in the housing and financial sectors.

The mover of this motion included in the motion, as I mentioned, that a financial constraint of house lot beneficiaries exist in the form of a 20% equity payment. Let us examine the reality at the banks today for someone who is looking to access a mortgage. Before 2020, in the period that the APNU/AFC was in Office, the equity payment required at NBS was 20% to 25%. That was the equity payment when they were in office. Last night, you all heard my colleague say that the equity payment today at NBS is zero per cent, making it accessible for low-income earners, middle income earners, or anyone who wants to access a mortgage without any financial constraint. At GBTI, the equity in 2020 was 10%. It is now 5% on mortgages. At Demerara Bank, equity in 2020 ranged from 15% to 20%. It is now a standard 10% across the board. When one reads the annual reports of these banks, they credit the policies of the Government for making this possible and making it easy for people to access housing loans. Then, if one looks at the total value of the mortgage portfolios at the banks, in 2020, the mortgage portfolios valued \$42 billion at NBS. Today, it is \$65.9 billion. From 2020 to now, there has been an increase of 55% in value at just that one institution. In July, 2020, the mortgage loan at GBTI was valued at \$6.2 billion. In December, 2023, it had risen to \$15.7 billion. There was a news article just a few days ago, this week, that the GBTI's loan portfolio

grew by 18%. This is evidence of confidence in the economy, evidence of a stable economy, and evidence of more and more Guyanese accessing loans for mortgages and businesses. This is the story. These are the facts. These are the numbers. You cannot come here and cry, make emotional speeches and grandstand without referencing the facts.

The numbers do not lie. The numbers tell the story of the policies of our Government, which are to ensure equitable access and to ensure people have access to cheaper education, healthcare, housing, clean water and cheaper electricity. That is what we have always been about, and we have never changed. We have always been the same, whether we are in the Government or the Opposition. Their spots are showing. It showed when they were in Government, and it continues to show now that they are in the Opposition. They have not learnt anything from their tenure in office. They have not learnt from the people of the country who have now banished them to the Opposition for infinity. The point noted in the motion about a 20% equity as a qualifying factor is totally inaccurate. There are no such circumstances or constraints that exist for people who are trying to access mortgages. What did the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, do when she and her government were in office? If we are going to debate, we have to examine the records. We have to bring the records. I am going to go slowly because there are lots of things that we can talk about. Let us start, firstly, with the most recent letter that was written in the *Kaieteur News* by the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, herself. On Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 2023, the Hon. Member wrote a letter titled:

“Govt. needs to address the problems in housing”

She sought to highlight the issues in housing. The Hon. Member said that when she was the Minister of Housing, she did an analysis. I think she referenced that analysis yesterday. She read extensively from it. She said this:

“...an analysis of the chronological waiting list of applicants revealed that housing solutions for low and middle- income citizens had to be urgently addressed.”

That is what she said. That is a direct quote. It had to be urgently addressed. I go on:

“Since that category of citizens had no access to loans from commercial banks...”

The Hon. Member was referencing a study that her government did. She was a sitting Minister. She recognised that there was an urgent need for housing and that people needed access to loans from commercial banks. Then, she went on:

“Allocating lots was not an option since capital would have been unavailable.”

They were in the government. When they allocated only 7,000 house lots in 5 years, I thought it was laziness coupled with incompetence, but now I know, and I want the people to know, that this was deliberate. The absence of the housing programme, the absence of a ministry, and the absence of a policy to effectively address adequate housing were deliberate. The Minister herself has admitted that they decided against allocating house lots. She went on. There is more in the letter. Hold on. I am quoting again:

“Models of low-income rent- to- own and other solutions were discussed.”

[**Dr. Singh:** And it was referred to a committee.] It probably went to a committee, one like they are asking for now. I go on again. They discussed rent-to-own. When the Leader of the Opposition sits at his press conferences now and talks about rent-to-own solutions, it is not a new idea. They had it since then, but they did not do anything about it. They discussed it. I do not know if they are still discussing it or whether it is now on a white paper, green paper or blue paper. I do not know which paper it is on now, but we have been delivering it. We are already delivering it. Let us go on. I am quoting again:

“Mechanisms for payment to Central Housing & Planning Authority or some approved government agency were also being explored when the Coalition demitted office.”

They discussed, explored and then they demitted office. There goes five years of the APNU/AFC Administration in the housing sector and the Government. That is the end of the story about its housing policy. [**Mr. Ramson:** Meanwhile, they all got house lots and built their houses.]

We are coming to that. They did some things, and we are going to talk about that now. The Hon. Member said, just a few months ago in a letter in the newspaper – you can check it out – that they decided against allocating house lots because people could not access loans. So, instead of fixing the solution, if they thought there was a problem in the first place, they just decided that they were not going to allocate any house lots. But the Hon. Member was careful to ensure that she got her house lot. She spent an excessive amount of time yesterday talking about the Vice- President, who, by the way, got his land after 12 years of being President and many more years of being a Minister. When she became a minister, after two years, she got her house lot in Eccles, which is twice the size of an ordinary house lot. In EE Eccles, the price per square foot in that area...and the regular size is about 5,000 square feet for a house lot, 50x100. The regular cost per square foot there is \$274. The Hon. Annette Ferguson’s lot



measures 10,999 square feet. It was priced at \$109 per square foot when everybody else was paying \$274. [**Hon. Members:** Shame.] [Interruption]

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

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel*]

We have been admonishing persons with respect to unparliamentary language. Now, we have gotten a chorus of a particular word. Please.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I did not want to go here, but you pushed me, so we are going to go. She should have paid just over \$3 million, if she was charged at the regular price per square foot for that area. Instead, her lot was valued at \$1.198 million. It is about half of what she should have paid. It did not end there. The ultimate price attached to the house lot, which they rounded off at \$1.2 million... They like to round off things.

*11.31 a.m.*

So, when they rounded it off at \$1.2 million, you would think that she paid the \$1.2 million. Is that right? You were supposed to pay the cost for the house lot; it was already reduced. You would think that... [**Dr. Singh:** John Public had to pay.] Everybody else had to pay. I have been in this Ministry for over three years, and I did not even know I could do this. We do not do that. We never do that. Instead of the \$1.2 million, she paid \$900,000. They come here in costumes to talk about championing the cause of the poor; to talk about tackling poverty; to talk about people in Linden – I am coming to Linden just now – [**Dr. Singh:** ... and their love for poor people.] ...and their love for poor people when they benefitted, through her own admission in a letter, from the house lots. By the way, they did not create these house lots. It was the former Minister of Housing, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, who developed this scheme in Eccles. They did not even develop the scheme. They all got house lots in these areas. Mr. Darren Wade applied in 2017 and got his allocation in 2018.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you can mention another applicant, but let us stay away from naming people.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** She called names yesterday.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, if you would recall, the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, called a lot of names yesterday, including people who are not in this House.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, that one went past me. I have recognised this one at this time.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member made it a point yesterday to say that Cabinet members, during our tenure in Government, received house lots. The point I am making is that she was a beneficiary while being a sitting Minister of the Government. Similarly, other Ministers and their children during that time too. I am not saying that they are not entitled to house lots. I am not saying at all that they are unentitled to house lots.

We came into Government and inherited a 70,000 backlog of applications, applications which they did nothing about. They had no housing policy and did not give house lots to poor people, but they took for themselves, their children, and families. Then, they come to this House and want to accuse our Government of taking house lots. I must expose this; this is how we have to come here. She, along with other Members of the Cabinet, during their time, received these within a month. We are asking people to hold on a little bit; we will get to their years because we have this huge backlog, and we are trying to address it chronologically so those who have been waiting long can receive their house lots. While we are trying to do that, they rewarded themselves – applied in May and got house lots in June; and applied in 2017 and got house lots in 2018. A very famous mathematician with the elections applied on 4<sup>th</sup> February.... [Dr. Singh: Is this the half or the quarter bottle?] No, it is with the elections. He is a very famous man who was calculating in Region 4. He applied on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2020. He was playing Bingo. This gentleman was playing Bingo during the elections. He applied for his house lot on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 and got it on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2020. These are things that must be exposed. These are things that must come to light.

Not to mention those that are in the public's domain. We have Mr. Lowenfield who received the 200 acres of land in Linden. There is Ms. Walton-Desir and Mr. Figueira – the Hon. Member who preceded me. There is Mr. Mahipaul, who went on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2020, after President Dr. Ali was sworn in. There are so many. There are a lot of page turners here that we have. The problem is, you cannot come to this House and be sanctimonious. We are not going to allow that. The public must know. The public has to know that if your policy was that you were not allocating house lots, then you could not possibly have taken for yourself, leave the poor people without, and then come to this House and champion a cause on behalf of poor people. We will not allow that. So, the listening and viewing public have to understand what it is dealing with. These people are never to be trusted and must never occupy the seats of power again.

The only initiative that the former Government undertook during its tenure in Office was a 50% discount on this jubilee promotion. She said it was a 50% discount, but it was actually a 50% discount on the remaining 50%. I want to clear that up. It was essentially a 25% discount. It was a 50% discount on the remaining 50%. People who paid for their house lots prior to 2015 and during that period benefitted from a 50% discount on the remaining balance. My colleague, the Hon. Croal, said that we honoured that promotion. All of those people who were initially awarded those discounts were able to claim them after we came into Government, even though they attempted to spread rumours that we would not have honoured it and that we would have taken back their house lots and all of that. We did no such thing. All of these people in their Cabinet and their friends and so on who received their house lots, they still have them. We did not take them because we are not obsessed with what took place in the past.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I am a bit obsessed with timing. So, you would need an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to conclude her very good speech. Thank you.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. You have up to 15 minutes to conclude.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** We were not obsessed with chasing down what they did in Office. People elected us to do a job and when we came into Government, that is what we did. We came into Government with a manifesto that clearly gave us direction on our first term in Office. It set the benchmarks and objectives of what we needed to achieve in the first five years that we would spend in Office, and we got to work. We went to do the people's business. We were not obsessed with what took place in the past. It was this obsession that they have with the Members on this side of the House that rendered them impotent when they were in Office. Instead of championing for the people and working on behalf of the people, they wanted to put people in chains, send them to the lockups and embarrass them in court. That is what they spent the bulk of their time doing in Office – being vengeful. We did not do that. We came into Government and got to work. We started working immediately for the people, so the people will understand. The people can look at our track record and see who works on their behalf and who works for a brighter future for them and their children. It is no other party but the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

I am moving on. Imagine a promotion of 50% discount on a house lot that is already subsidised. It is already 90% subsidised. A 50% discount is not a policy; it is not a housing policy. It is not to generate more access for people in the housing sector. People need you to create house lots, allocate those house lots, and help them to access financing so that they can build their homes and live in a sustainable community – a community that is well ordered and a community that, once developed, will have value for lands, not a squatting area. People want access to ownership, which will give them financial freedom. That brings me to home ownership, which is something that we have focused on since we have been in Government. We promised to deliver 10,000 house lots annually, which we have been doing. I have the PPP/C 2020 manifesto here. Under providing affordable housing, we stated that we will create 10,000 house lots annually. We have done it. We have done it, and we are doing it every day.

“Invest in support infrastructure in existing and new housing schemes.”

We have been doing that. All the schemes fell into disrepair under their Administration because for three years they had no capital budget. No capital budget was passed in this House under the APNU/AFC for 2016, 2017 and 2018. It was only after the passage of the no-confidence motion that they ran to the National Assembly in 2019 to pass a capital budget. That was what left all of the streets in the existing housing schemes in disrepair.

“Reverse VAT on building materials.”

We have done it.

“Facilitate affordable financing for home ownership.”

That is what we did with our collaboration with the banks so as to reduce interest rates; reduce equity payments or render them non-existent so people will have no constraints to accessing financing. We started the construction of houses, even though that is not something that we promised in our manifesto. The steel and cement subsidy is another policy and initiative of the Government to help people start constructing their homes. Then, there is the Mortgage Interest Relief.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Mr. Speaker?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, you have the floor.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you, Sir. I am standing on Standing Order 40(a). The Hon. Member said that no capital budget was passed in this House for 2016, 2017 and 2018.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** That was in relation to housing.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** I do not think that is true. She did not specify that was in reference to housing. Sir, she said that no capital budget was passed in 2016...

**Mr. Speaker:** I heard a bit differently than you. Continue, Hon. Minister.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** There was no capital budget for the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA). Do you feel better now? Let us talk now about the Mortgage Interest Relief. I feel sometimes that we do not talk about this initiative enough. It has had a tremendous impact. My colleague mentioned that in 2023 – just last year – 5432 Guyanese were able to access refunds to the tune of \$812.9 million. That is money that went back directly into people’s pockets from this one initiative of increasing the Mortgage Interest Relief ceiling to \$30 million. We must recall what the Opposition did when it was in Government. They cut the Mortgage Interest Relief ceiling. They reduced it to \$15 million and denied those people who were benefitting from the mortgage interest ceiling that we had at the time – prior to 2015. We came back into Government in 2020 and they had the opportunity to show how much they care for Guyanese. You can reference a *News Room* article for 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

“PPP votes alone to pass Bills reversing APNU+AFC policy on taxation, licensing and mortgage relief”

They boycotted the National Assembly when they were given the opportunity to vote to increase the Mortgage Interest Relief ceiling so that more Guyanese could have benefitted. The Hon. Member who spoke before me talked about access, inclusivity and equality for the people of Linden. We have already allocated more house lots in Linden than the Opposition did when it was in Government. Some 487 lots have already been allocated in Linden. In the squatting portion of Amelia’s Ward, we have allocated 167 informal settlers, previously squatters, now homeowners. So, add the 167 on top of that.

*11.46 a.m.*

Then, we have new areas, such as Fitz Hope, which will yield 559 lots for Lindeners. Other areas, like Plantation York, for example, will come on board soon, where we are doing the infrastructure work and making more house lots available for the people of Linden. The Hon.

Member, Mr. Figueira, was at the event with me. He was present at the event in Amelia's Ward when we were there to regularise these squatters in this area. I recall, very vividly, that he was one of the Members of the Opposition who was encouraging squatting.

**Mr. Figueira:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order No. 40 (a). The Member is saying to this House that I encouraged squatting. I never encouraged squatting. I brought it to the...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, just like I said to the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, you will get a chance to have someone, who is to come after you, make your point.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** Mr. Speaker, he was on a *live* preventing us from removing people who were squatting in the road alignment, and this was to do infrastructural work to make house lots available for those same people. Those people had to be removed but they were given house lots, they were given compensation, they were given lands for farming, and they were treated with kindness and compassion. It is the same way for every community. We do not want people to squat. We want people to live in regularised housing areas, in areas that have proper infrastructure, in areas which will see the land value increase so that when they go to the bank they are already millionaires because they own plots of lands that are worth millions of dollars as opposed to what they would have paid for them and to benefit from all of the interventions that we have done, the steel and cement and the Mortgage Interest Relief.

Mr. Speaker, again, I want to go back to how I started. I used my presentation to speak about an ideology, to speak about a philosophy and the fundamental difference between the APNU/AFC Administration, now in Opposition, and the People's Progressive Party Civic to show you how all of the interventions, all the policies, works, projects and programmes that we have been doing in Government have been to the benefit of our people. They have been for improving their lives, adding value to their lives and increasing their net worth. All their policies have done is bring destruction, bring neglect, made people poorer, made people of this country depressed and antagonised the private sector. They did nothing for poor people when they had the opportunity to do it. Even now in Opposition, when they come here and pretend to champion poor people, it is a farce. It is all a farce. They come here to model. They come here with the spunks to talk about how they care about poor people.

This reduction in the Mortgage Interest Relief, in 2015...and I will conclude now, Mr. Speaker. In 2015, when we left office, the total amount of refunds that was benefitting ordinary Guyanese by way of the Mortgage Interest Relief, just one intervention, was \$198.8 million.

We said that last year it was \$812 million. Do you know what it was in 2016 when they reduced the Mortgage Interest Relief ceiling? It was \$57 million only. In 2016, that was the amount of refund only. They took away hundreds of millions of dollars from the pockets of ordinary people who were struggling to pay their loans and who were benefitting from this intervention. This is a stark example of the destructive nature of the policies of the APNU/AFC Administration. We cannot go back there, Mr. Speaker. That is why the people at home, the people who are watching, the people who matter... because it is their business that we are here to do. When we come to this House, we come here to ensure that we champion their cause. We do not come here to perform for the cameras, but wherever the fight goes, we will go. So, whether they go high or go low, we will go with them. Based on the reasons elaborated in my presentation and those of my colleagues on this side of the House, I cannot support this motion. [Applause]

**Mr. Holder:** Thank you, Cde. Speaker. Cde. Speaker, it is a privilege to speak on this motion, a very important one in that regard. Before I get there, there were so many things that were said by the Minister, which I want to address. The Minister's last few words were:

“We do not come here to perform for the cameras...”

I believe that is exactly what she was doing with all of the theatrics. I want to set something very straight. Firstly, the Minister said that the Opposition squandered the opportunity to bring various social issues here, but I must put to the House that this is exactly what we are doing here. Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what we are doing here through this motion. It is an issue in society, it is a grave issue, and it is an issue which concerns thousands of Guyanese. So, it is our duty and our right, as the representatives of the people, to bring it to this floor so we can have those issues rectified. The Minister went on to say a whole *bunch of garbage* about interest rates being declined and the value of the mortgage portfolio. The Minister tried to put it as though this is a direct result of the Government's Policy. But if you look carefully at the facts, Cde. Speaker, if we were to look at the facts, the reality is that the growth of the economy and other factors, resulting directly from the oil bonanza, is what has afforded every bank in this country.... That is the reality. We have to be truthful. That reality is what actually affords these banks, through their increased growth, their increased profits and their competitive nature of the market. That is what resulted in these changes. So, do not come here to take benefits from what is happening in society as a direct result of the oil and gas industry. You cannot take benefit for that. Whether you are in government or whether the APNU/AFC was in government,

the reality of oil would have been the same or even greater because we would not have squandered the opportunities presented through the oil. We would have managed the oil sector much better, and we are proposing managing the oil sector in a more transparent and more competent way. Do not come to the House to spread propaganda.

Mr. Speaker, these guys like to talk about ‘sanctimonious. I cannot say gangsters, but they love to talk about being sanctimonious. The Minister said she was taking off her gloves and she wanted to get into the mud. I did not come here prepared to go into any mud and have back and forth. We are dealing with an issue which affects society, but because the Minister talked and attempted to say certain things about the previous Minister, Cde. Annette Ferguson... [Hon.

**Member:** Do not go there.] I have to go there. She spoke about paying \$100 or \$109 per square foot, but if you look at the record...and it is well publicised in the *Kaieteur News* and *Stabroek News*. When you look at the Vice-President’s (VP’S) plot and what he paid, it is recorded that he paid \$114 per square foot. That is three times less than what the ordinary person would have paid for a seaside plot like that. Cde. Speaker, they do not get to bring their own facts to this House. It was reported in the daily media that re-migrants paid over and above \$1000 per square foot. So, do not come to talk to us about being sanctimonious. We have to be truthful. We have to bring facts. Do not talk about that. The average house lot is 50x100. That is 5000 square feet. You would be surprised to know how many hundred thousand square feet the VP’s lot is. You can put an entire scheme in there. I would rather not discuss that here.

[**Mr. McCoy:** He paid for it.] Yes, he did but he paid before market value and that was the argument for years. So, do not come here and pretend. Do not come here and pretend.

[**Mr. McCoy:** *Kaieteur News (inaudible).*] It was not only *Kaieteur News*. It was all of the media outfits. Do not come here and talk to us about that. On top of that, he sold one of them. Do you know how much money he sold it for? As reported by the daily media, it was over US\$600,000, not Guyana dollars, over US\$600,000. I did not come here for that Cde. Speaker. I just have to set certain records straight.

They talked about being vengeful and putting people in chains before the courts. They are doing exactly that as we speak. Over the course of actually four years, dozens of people still cannot... Well, they are having their day in court, but it is going nowhere. Only last week or a few days ago, the courts put off a very famous case, again. So, they cannot come here to talk to us about that man. You are embarrassing yourselves; you are embarrassing yourselves when you come here to speak about that.



Mr. Speaker, let me get into my presentation, proper. I should echo the sentiments of Cde. Figueira, who emphatically said that he was not encouraging squatting. I want to put that on the record for the sake of Cde. Figueira. Cde. Speaker, the issue of housing and ownership is of grave importance to the citizens of this country. That importance was recognised many years ago to the extent that the framers of our Constitution, under article 26, established that every citizen, regardless of race, colour, political affiliation and regardless of their economic standing has the right to proper housing accommodation. For many people, owning a home represents stability and independence. It represents freedom of reaching adulthood. A great majority of ambitious young people have three goals to achieve on their checklists. The first is to acquire a good-paying job; the second is to buy a nice car; and the third and most important, I believe, is to own their own home. It is a major milestone in all of our lives. Mr. Speaker, while the Government side will boast about many house lots that they would have disbursed...and trust me, those numbers are yet to be independently verified.

*12.01 p.m.*

Verify them we will, when we take government. The fact remains that with all the resources now available to this Government, the ability for any ordinary Guyanese to acquire a house lot is still a major problem. Over the last six months, I have spoken with more than a dozen young people who complained about the slothfulness of the system. Some said they applied for over five years and are still on the waiting list. Others complained that people with links to the Government, who applied way after them, have gotten through while they are still in the line. I heard the Minister speak about who applied in February and got in March, and who applied in 2017 and got in 2018. You cannot come with half facts. Come with the whole facts; come with your record. And you have a tainted record.

I was personally told of a popular businessman – and this is in Region 2 – close to the Government, who was given... [Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Coonjah is who?] Persons... I will not call names... were given house lots, and this specific one, if we were to check the records in the Central Housing and Planning Authority, I am certain that we will see it there. It was someone who was given a house lot and not days later, but instantaneously – applied the same day and got the house lot the very day. [Mr. McCoy: Bring the list.] We will find it. We will embarrass you when we take government. On the spot that person was given a house lot, a popular businessman from Region 2. I have no issue with the businessman, but the fact remains that there are persons there for maybe ten years, five years and 20 years, who

cannot get a house lot, but someone can apply the same day and get it. Do not come here and talk nonsense to this House and play that you are saints. You are not.

Then there are those thousands of Guyanese who are called up. Listen to this, Mr. Speaker. There are those thousands who were called up for their lots, forced to find hundreds of thousands of dollars as down payment and given a lot while posing for photo opportunities (ops), then nothing happens thereafter. Two years, three years and four years later, they are no closer to having their lots identified. Let me give a practical example. Since early 2021, the Government claimed they distributed about 700 house lots in Region 2 – 350 at Onderneeming and 350 at Charity. Three years later, we are now in 2024, many of the allottees who completed full payment for their lots are yet to even see where those lots are. At Onderneeming, not one single home. I believe at Phase Four not one, single home has been constructed. This situation has replicated itself across the country. When the Minister comes to the House to speak about house lots, they must bring the full package and not half of it. Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, let us stop at full package, because the exigences demand that I take a suspension at the moment. We will resume at the full package. You started at 11.52 a.m. and we are ending you at 12.05 p.m. Thank you.

**Mr. Holder:** All right, Cde. Speaker. It is fair enough.

*Sitting suspended at 12.06 a.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 1.53 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Hon. Members. Please be seated. Let us welcome back to the podium the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder.

**Mr. Holder:** Thank you, Cde. Speaker. I should let the House and the viewing audience know that we are debating the motion to Establish a Special Select Committee to Review Charges for House Lots. Before the break, I was making the specific point on Region 2, where many persons were given house lots but after three years, and after making full payments, they are yet to see where the lots are located. That is where I left off before the break. This Government is now telling this nation that they have disbursed over 30,000 house lots. The reality is that thousands of these so-called house lot recipients are not truly recipients of house lots, but rather they are recipients of promissory notes for house lots. That is how I would coin it. They basically give you a piece of paper and three years later you still cannot see the lot. You cannot

go to the bank, and you certainly cannot build your own home. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] You can argue all you like, but that is the case I know personally in Region 2 and many other schemes across this country. That is the fact. [Mr. McCoy: You bring ten persons.] I can bring more than ten. They do not know where those lots are. If you check Phase Four, I believe, in Onderneeming, there are no houses because people never saw their lots. They were never carried there and they do not know where the lots are located. One has a lot number, but that is all on a piece of paper. Do not try to kerfuffle me, Hon. Member.

If we were to ignore the promissory notes, the never-ending waits, the lengthy lines, finding the money to pay for the house lot is certainly the next stumbling block. There exists an extraordinary number of citizens in this oil rich or high-income country that earn below the minimum wage. If we widen that range, we might find a very high percentage of the population, 30% to 40% or more, earning less than \$100,000 or US\$500 per month. Most in this category are living from pay cheque to pay cheque. That is not the worst. The Government likes to say, when they have these reports on the state of affairs and the state of the population, it was the APNU/AFC that made those reports. I want to point you in the direction of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and not the APNU. In its report on Guyana on January, 2023, just a year ago, 5% of the population is undernourished and a whopping 43% cannot afford a healthy diet. That is almost half of the population. Here is another report. According to the World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook for Guyana, published in April, 2023, it stated that 16.4% of the population is unemployed. That is easily over 120,000 persons. That is probably greater than the individual population of all the regions other than Region 4.

We believe it is these very statistics that will expose and embarrass this PPP/C Government. That is why they refuse and continue to make excuses for not releasing the report of the national census. They do not provide these studies but then turn around and tell this nation that they created 50,000 jobs. That is the kind of reports we get from the Government, without them bringing the facts to the people of this country. To ask these very poor countries... Since I have established through these independent reports that there are lots of poor people and working poor in this country, I say to you in this House, to ask these very poor people to make down payments for a piece of land that is less than ten times the plot where the Hon. Vice-President's (VP) mansion is, frankly speaking, it is cruel and uncaring, Minister of Labour, and a denial of their constitutional rights. Additionally, it is not only the amount to be paid that is problematic but also the short time span to pay as well. A young man named Orin said to me, just a few months back, that when he applied for a house lot he had no clue when that lot would become

available. Then, out of the blue, he received a call from the Ministry instructing that he come to this very building and pay \$500,000 within three days. I dare say the working poor will have to bend over backwards to get that kind of cash in such a short time.

The PNC Government – and I heard the Minister make mention of it – under the visionary leadership of Guyana’s first Executive President, Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, had set out an ambitious national development plan, since 1972, in which feeding... [An Hon.

**Member:** (*Inaudible*)] That is right. ...clothing and housing the nation were critical elements. I need not mention the massive progress the country made in the area of housing.

[Hon. Members: (*Inaudible*)] You can make all the noise you want, but the facts are there – Amelia’s Ward, that the Hon. VP attempted to lay claim to; South Georgetown; Guyhoc, *et cetera*. This was achieved at a time when we had just become an independent nation, in fact just after we became a republic and resources were extremely limited. There was not an oil bonanza to benefit from as they are benefiting from now.

As the government in waiting, we believe we can utilise some of the bountiful resources that are only now available to provide better housing solutions for the people of this country. For example, we recognise the fact that many Guyanese cannot afford huge sums for house lots even before they get to the stage of building their own homes. As such, when we get into government, after the next elections, we intend to advance our vision of providing housing for all Guyanese, especially the working poor, through the construction of low income, rent to own housing schemes, where rent payment of dwellers will go towards the purchase and eventual ownership of those, of their own homes. The Leader of the Opposition has over the last two years explained to the press and to the public that a critical aspect of this scheme is that eligible persons will not be asked to make large down payments. The current requirement of several hundreds of thousands of dollars has only served to deny many low-income families access to housing. Under the next coalition government, this compulsory down payment for certain categories of citizens will be scrapped.

2.03 p.m.

In our housing policy, we recognise that rent constitutes a majority portion of low-income family budgets, as much as 40% to 50% of their income on average. In many households, rent severely cuts into the cash remaining to purchase food, pay utility bills and other necessities. We fully understand that there are those people in society who are renting that will prefer to stay in the very community because they grew up there; they have family connections there,

school or work-related connections, *et cetera*. Again, while we encourage all Guyanese to own their own homes, the Leader of the Opposition has publicly stated that the next coalition government will provide support through its rent-assistance scheme, to ensure that rent payments do not trap families in poverty. Both schemes address our citizens constitutional rights to shelter and allow them to have access to affordable, secure housing. There are many designs of these schemes in developed countries like England, Switzerland, New Zealand, and other places around the world. These ideas put forward by the coalition are certainly workable and certainly achievable.

Ultimately, the Coalition's objective is to make housing absolutely free; and we will work towards achieving that goal. This Government has tons of cash at its disposal. We are serious about free housing. We are serious about it. It is a serious policy. This Government has tons of cash at its disposal. For the first quarter – I am sorry I do not have the Paper laid in this House yesterday – of 2024, the Government received \$126.3 billion. That figure represents more than half of the entire Coalition's 2015 Budget. So do not let the Jagdeo and the honourable comrades, the Hon. Member Jagdeo and the Honourable Comrades over there, fool the people by telling them is *lil bit* money. It is plenty money, Cde. Speaker, plenty, plenty money. If this Government...

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I think there is a ruling here about...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Hon. Member, there is not someone called "Jagdeo" in here. It is disrespectful. Which "Jagdeo" are you talking about? He is the Vice-President and Hon. Member of this House.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thanks for the observation, Hon. Minister. *More than one dog name Pampey*, so "Jagdeo" could be any Jagdeo. I do not know who he is talking about.

**Mr. Holder:** Let me clarify, Cde. Speaker. I did say the 'the Hon. Jagdeo' in the end. [Mr. McCoy: You never did.] Yes, I did. [Ms. Teixeira: In the end?] I said the 'Hon. Jagdeo' and the other persons, but I am guided, Cde. Speaker. I was saying, it is not *lil bit* money, it is plenty money that these... I do not want to use the adjective to describe them. If this Government was competent and had the peoples' best interests at heart, they would have used those moneys to truly develop the livelihoods of all Guyanese, rather than only focussing on friends, families and favourites. Our oil money is not reaching the ordinary people. Friends,

families and favourites of the People's Progressive Party/Civic are getting richer, while the ordinary people are denied their rightful benefits from the oil and are suffering.

We have a golden opportunity in our hands. We finally have the resources to make a difference. Every Guyanese, and I mean every, single one of us, deserves to possess our own home. Let us establish, and I am pleading to this Government, this special select committee to review these high charges for house lots, so that together, as Government and as Opposition, we can bring the much-needed relief for the people of this country. Let me warn this PPP/C Government, should it fail, yes Comrades, should you fail to honour this request, the entire nation is watching and listening. If you do not heed to this request, you will certainly pay the price at the next General and Regional Elections. I thank you, Cde. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Henry:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Guyana Action Party and member of the Coalition, I rise to support the motion calling for the Establishment of a Special Select Committee to Review Charges for House Lots for Guyanese. Before I delve into my justifications, please allow me to appeal to the organisers of the ExxonMobil Under 14 Schools Football Competition, to revisit their programme and allow for the female and male youths of Regions 8 and 9, to participate in the upcoming competition. I make this appeal because it is noticeable in the social media that these two remote regions, consisting of mainly Indigenous youths, have been excluded from the competition. Thank you very much.

On listening to the Hon. Mr. Collin Croal yesterday, one wonders if he believes that the moneys available in the budget comes from the pockets of the PPP/C. In the first instance, there was little development in the long 23 years of the PPP/C. The housing development in the hinterland that he spoke of was provided by an international agency. When the APNU/AFC assumed Government, we continued the programme. We did not stop the programme nor did we do a 'One Guyana' of only building houses for our Party supporters, we allowed the village councils and people to choose the beneficiaries. Houses were built in Sand Creek, Potarinau, Katoka and other villages. The villages were well known for supporting the People's Progressive Party/Civic. We noticed that the trend of one set of the population receiving benefits from the largesse of Guyana, and they are the People's Progressive Party/Civic supporters. We saw in the recent distribution of cash grants in the Rupununi that the whole affair of the distribution was managed...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, relevance. Please come back to the point.

**Mr. Henry:** Hon. Speaker, everyone else before me was given the chance.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, this is not a chance. We are speaking to a particular motion. Yours truly judges relevance or not.

**Mr. Henry:** Thank you. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Croal, also said that the 10-day workers who get \$40,000 a month can afford to spend \$25,00 of that on the building or getting homes. Where does he live? Has he ever gone to the shop with \$40,000? A \$40,000 cannot even feed a family of two for a month. Things are very rough for them to be spending \$25,000 a month on housing. Further, I want to continue that the APNU/AFC continues its policy of supporting the Indigenous peoples of Guyana towards them being granted extension to their titled lands, because lands are important in the building of houses. This is unlike the current PPP/C, that, through the Minister of Amerindian Affairs, recently stated, that she, and by extension the People's Progressive Party/Civic, could not help the people of St. Ignatius to get their extension because, in her own words, land do not grow. This, coming from a Minister of the PPP/C speaks volumes of the total disrespect, misunderstanding of the rights and needs of the Indigenous peoples. The APNU/AFC, during its last term in Office, did far more development for the people of Guyana, without proceeds from the oil industry, than what the PPP/C did in its 23 years.

A major and most beneficial decision made and done was to put in place our petroleum industry by signing and preparing Guyana to get financial proceeds from the industry. That is what we did. Today, moneys are available for development. Thanks to the APNU/AFC. However, the smallest child in Guyana knows that the PPP/C is mismanaging these funds and leaving out the majority of the Guyanese from enjoying the patrimony of this country. However, in supporting this motion, it would be remiss of me not to qualify my arguments by taking a look at the situation in a holistic way, while at the same time showing that it will be unacceptable to use the measuring rod and qualifying criteria for allocation of house lots in all geographical locations in Guyana. It is my understanding that the size of land allocated for a normal house lot is 100 x 50 feet. On researching, I found that this may be a formula that came from out of Guyana, but to my mind, and the considered opinion of many who live in the hinterland towns such as Lethem, the size of land now being allocated is not adequate and does not take into consideration the vision of an exemplary hinterland town that reflects the needs, culture, geography and history of the people who live there.

Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of a wholesome examination of this motion, please allow me to use the Rupununi border town of Lethem to paint a vision of a unique example. Firstly, there has to be a vision agreed upon by the stakeholders. It would not be applicable in all respects to areas already parcelled out, but new schemes in the future could be opened to innovations par excellence.

Secondly, a house lot size in the hinterland should have adequate space and should be called a living residential lot instead of a residential lot. This is an apt description because lands allocated should not be just for a house. It should cater for a four-bedroom bungalow, a benab with the size of a living room, a swimming pool, a garden and shade trees, parking space for vehicles, *et cetera*. Further extensions can then be done vertically. A garden space is very important because of food security that we normally need to enhance in the hinterland. We need to fight the high cost of living that we are experiencing by producing our own vegetables, *et cetera*. We also need to get healthy and nutritious foods. We need to go back to the days of producing. Of course, all of that will help us to keep fit because we will be busy in our gardens when we return from our work, *et cetera*. We, in the Hinterland, have large nuclear and extended families in comparison to the coastal people. Space is not a deterrent and should not be a deterring factor, especially when designing new housing areas in the hinterland. For an average middle-aged couple with three kids, the living space lot should be at least 100 x 100 feet.

*2.18 p.m.*

The cost of this living space must be subsidised by the Government. We have to think in a futuristic manner. Further, our laws of Guyana must reflect that each Guyanese youth is entitled to get a housing grant upon reaching 18 years of age, and that will back up the point made by my colleague. This grant should be automatically redeemable as payments for housing lands and materials. What else can we do for our people if we do not give them the basic things they need in life? Food, shelter, the air they breathe and water. Here is where we can be able to do it in a very good way by giving them a chance to own their homes.

Mr. Speaker, to deliberately transfer all housing policies and practises from the coast of Guyana to the hinterland would be the nadir of being non-visionary and our future generations will wonder why we slept at the wheel. This will be brought to the fore every night when one hears loud snores coming from over the neighbour's fence because of the limited distance from one bedroom to another, and in the case of the Hon. Mr. McCoy, it will be other noises. Further, the



vision must not end here. In terms of Lethem and other hinterland towns, it has to encompass the creation of a unique border town reflecting the history, geography, and culture of the people and must include the people's love and respect for the environment. These principles, I repeat, must be used in visioning and in the creation of new housing schemes and towns in the hinterland especially, and even on the coast of Guyana. For example, the town that is being built up the highway.

Mr. Speaker, a common strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, or SWOT, analysis would help to actuate the vision. For example, Lethem and the Rupununi have been involved in tourism, rodeo, Indigenous heritage, *et cetera*. As such, new and appropriate supporting entrepreneurial activities and infrastructures must be put in place to cater for hosting these activities. Recently we saw our hinterland sisters and brothers coming to Georgetown and were forced to experience refugee status in their own country while attending a certain congress. One suggestion could have been the hosting of families in the guest rooms and suitable and safe-furnished yard spaces had former generations been allowed residential living lots. The vision of this concept paper would also allow us, in the hinterland, to be ready for eventualities, including natural disasters, where those in the highlands may provide space for affected communities and family members. I do not want to say this is true, but I heard that right now Region 9 is experiencing a very – impending – high flood and, who knows, we may need to bring this vision on hand right now. Apart from these, the ambience of the towns and villages must reflect a healthy environment. Sidewalks must have well-placed and appropriate trees and decorative plants. Prominent people-friendly parks must be functioning in new schemes or wards. We boast of leading in the field of safeguarding the environment, but how many of our towns exemplify this?

Mr. Speaker, apart from the committee overseeing house lots or living spaces, its mandate should also include proposing the renaming of streets and public buildings to reflect the history and culture of the people in which a town is located. Already we have the Arapaima Primary School. More of such names would serve the vision well. In closing, I do support that the National Assembly approves of a special select committee to be headed by the Minister of Housing and Water to examine the grave issue of unaffordability by engaging civil society, financiers and other stakeholders, to submit proposals and make recommendations that may be adopted by the Government to assist Guyanese; and that the special select committee on completion of its work submits to the National Assembly a detailed report with its recommendations and ask that the House approves the Ministry of Housing and Water to

incorporate them in its policy. Let common sense prevail; let us do what is right and good for the people of Guyana. I thank you. [Applause]

**Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service [Dr. Singh]:** Mr. Speaker, I really would have wished not to have had to speak on this motion; but having been afforded the opportunity to do so by the distinguished Chief Whip on this side of the House, and more so, having listened to the contributions made by our colleagues on that side of the House, I feel constrained now to offer a few relatively brief remarks.

A number of the Members of Parliament (MPs) on that side of the House who spoke are relatively young MPs. Most of whom may have worked in government while their party was in Government for the one term that they served, which was cut short by their loss of credibility. I listened to these young MPs being trotted out one after the other with concern, consternation, and I must admit, a little bit of sympathy. A fair measure of sympathy I should say, because I thought to myself, here are these young MPs, Hon. Mr. Figueira, Hon. Mr. Holder and others, coming and repeating this... [An Hon. Member: Parroting.] ...parroting these fanciful and imagined arguments. I thought to myself that they must surely wonder how it is that they and their party ended up on that side of the House so quickly.

I want to spend a few minutes engaging in a very brief recollection of some very simple and stylized facts about the political history of this country. The PNC and its successors the APNU/AFC *et cetera*, demitted office in 1992 and spent 23 years in opposition preparing, presumably, at some point in time, to return to office. They had 23 years in opposition to reflect on why they lost in 1992, where they went wrong, what they needed to do to rectify and correct themselves whenever they would eventually return to office, and what they would do when they returned to office – twenty-three years to prepare to return to office. Then, in 2015, eventually, they were able to persuade some people in Guyana to give them a chance. Admittedly it was an extremely slender majority, and I am not going to get into whether that majority itself was questionable. Let us accept, for the moment, that they won a slender majority, and they returned to government in 2015, after 23 years.

It took them three short years to lose the support, not yet of the people of Guyana, to lose the support of just their own 33 Members of Parliament, their own MPs. Within three short years, having waited 23 years in opposition, they were unable to marshal the support of their own MPs. They lost in 2018, as is well known, a no-confidence motion right here in this House, in

three years. Their supporters, having waited for 23 years to put the PNC in government, in three years they lost a no-confidence motion. They clung on, and I am not going to repeat that speech; I have given it before on many occasions. They eventually, reluctantly, and terrifyingly, if I might add so, faced the electorate on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020. Having faced the electorate on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020, they were returned to the opposition benches. For 23 years, the supporters of the PNC were waiting for their party to get into government. For 23 years, their seniors – I am not speaking to Hon. Mr. Figueira and Hon. Mr. Mahipaul; they were boys, school children for much of that period – the PNC supporters were waiting; the party that Hon. Mr. Holder today chairs. For 23 years, the supporters of the PNC were waiting for their party to go back into government. And in a short five years, short... For 23 years, they were preparing for government, when we get into government... Imagine having 23 years to reflect on what you are going to do when you go into government. For 23 years one could have been born and become an adult. You had 23 years to cogitate and reflect on what you are going to do when you get into government; and you get into government, and in five years your own supporters say, ‘we have had enough of this’.

Surely you must ask yourself, how did this happen? What is tragic is that having been returned to opposition in 2020, they have now spent since 2020 to now in opposition, and you would have thought that, having returned to opposition, they would now examine themselves and ask themselves once again, where did we go wrong? What did we do that lost favour with people? What should we have done differently? Surely, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, under the leadership of the now Vice President, then General Secretary, did exactly that. When we demitted office in 2015, we said, you know what, what is it that we need to do differently? What do we need to do more of? What do we need to do better? That is what we used 2015 to 2020 to do. They have been in opposition since 2020, and you would think that that is what they would have used the period to do. Alas, they come with a motion that would cause any reasonable person to conclude that they still have not learnt their lesson. Setting aside for the moment the questionable acceptability of this motion – and of course, I would defer always to your superior judgment in this regard – the Hon. Member comes with a motion whose title is designed to excite – Establishment of a Special Select Committee to review Charges for House Lots for Guyanese. That has a lot of appeal.

*2.33 p.m.*

A special select committee to review charges for house lots has a lot of appeals. Sir, when you read through this motion, the Hon. Member who once held this portfolio does not proffer... First of all, none of the be it resolved clauses deal with the title of the motion. There is no resolve clause that has anything to do with reviewing charges for house lots. For the be it resolved clauses – I am seeing only two of them – instead of addressing what the motion purports to address in its title, it calls on the National Assembly to approve a special select committee to examine this matter, to engage with civil society, financiers and other stakeholders to submit proposals and recommendations; and that the special select committee should submit its work to this House. A single day does not pass that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) is not consulting with the citizens of this country – a single day does not pass. Our President, right now, is consulting with citizens on an outreach. A single week does not pass that we do not engage with stakeholders such as the private sector, other organised groups and other citizen groups – a single week does not pass.

Having spent 23 years in Opposition, having spent five years in Government – at least two of which were illegal – and having spent the years since returning to Opposition, the Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson’s grand suggestion is the appointment of a committee. Though it might appear small, it is reflective of one of the very fundamental reasons the Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson and her party were sent back to the Opposition benches with such short shrift so quickly. It is because they continue to display, up today, that they are completely and totally intellectually bankrupt. They do not have a clue on what they are doing. One of the many fundamental reasons, apart from everything else, these young Members of Parliament (MPs) from the People’s National Congress (PNC) are sitting in the Opposition benches is because of the incompetence of the leadership of the party with which they are associated with. [An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*)] The Hon. Member could not even be bothered to be here to listen to his own Members. Let us not underestimate... Mr. Speaker, if you look at every single pronouncement... Sir, if you look at the APNU/AFC 2015 Manifesto, what they promised? After 23 years, they had to come up with some ideas about what they are going to do on housing when they get into the government. They proposed:

“Innovative financing for housing, including the development of mortgages as financial instruments; ...”

In 2015, that was their grand idea and the top bullet in the housing section.

It states:

“Innovative financing for housing, including the development of mortgages as financial instruments; ...”

A long time ago, several decades ago, my parents bought their first home using a mortgage as a financial instrument. That was nearly 50 years ago. I am advised by the learned and distinguished Attorney General that the concept of a mortgage was introduced into Guyana’s legal framework in 1916. Was it in 1916, Attorney General (AG)? [Mr. Nandlall: Yes.] It was 1916 – one, six. That was 99 years before 2015. In 1916, mortgages were introduced into the legal framework in Guyana. All of us here have parents; everybody in this house has parents who bought their first home or first property with a mortgage as a financial... Hear the lofty language, we will introduce, mind you:

“Innovative financing for housing, including the development of mortgages as financial instruments;”

That was their grand idea. Mind you, this is after waiting for 23 years to go into the government. Their second grand idea was:

“Mortgage interest support for low and middle income groups...”

It appears as if it escaped their notice that we had introduced Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR) as a specific measure to make mortgages for first-time homeowners more affordable. We had introduced that. They did not indicate how they were going to improve on what we had introduced. It appears, they did not know that it was in place. They said their second innovation was:

“Mortgage interest support for low and middle income groups...”

Their third big idea in housing was:

“Incentives for aided self help...”

Chief, I do not know what that mean. I am not as smart as you, Sir – not by a million miles. You might be able, Mr. Speaker, to help me. You are vastly more experienced than I am. I do not know what this means really but their third grand idea was:

“Incentives for aided self help...”

It did have in brackets to entice some people:

“... (for public sector employees, etc.)”

I do not know, having promised these incentives in their Manifesto – maybe the Hon. Member will tell us when she got into the government – what were the incentives. They promised the people that they would give them incentives for self-help as their third big idea. What were these incentives when you came into the Government? They had another one, which is:

“House Rental Initiative.”

I do not know, there are a lot of text here. It states:

“This is an initiative to provide modern safe rental accommodation by offering incentives to the private sector...”

I would be interested in hearing what were these incentives and when were they implemented from 2015 to 2020. They promised, additionally, to create... Mind you, this is housing. They are people who are the same poor people who they claim to love wants to hear when they will get their house lots, when they can go to the bank and get loans and when they can start to build their homes. That is what people are concerned about. After 23 years, hear what they promised the people. They promised to:

“Create an oversight and regulatory, licensing and standards framework...”

It sounds very select *committee-ish*. It sounds very select *committee-ish*. It reads:

“Create an oversight and regulatory, licensing and standards framework...”

[**Mr. Nandall:** (*Inaudible*)] No. It does not end there. I continue:

“...(dealing with training and certification and quality of service, legal and other related matters) to superintend activities in the real-estate and land markets.”

They spent 23 years in the Opposition to come up with these grand ideas to solve the country’s housing problem. All the people want is a house lot. Then, having promised the people that, they came into government and presented their first budget – *Budget 2015* – on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2015. The Budget is themed: *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*. The scholars and wise men and women of the APNU/AFC had 23 years to write this budget speech. They were waiting for 23 years to go into government. They promised the people all of these lofty things. They then presented their first budget speech. Here it is. I have combed through

this speech. I am trying to find a single reference to housing. [Ms. Manickchand: In the select committee (*inaudible*)] Oh, the select committee had not been appointed as yet. I have read the entire contents page. I have gone through the whole document. I do not know if I have a tampered copy. I do not know if the page fell out. I do not know if the page is missing as the Statements of Poll (SoPs), but I cannot find a single reference. There is not a paragraph on housing. It is nowhere there. It is not there. Even the regulatory and standards framework did not make it in a Budget Speech.

As I go on, budget speech after budget speech... Their 2017 Budget Speech... They spent two years in Government. They spent 23 years waiting to get into Government. They have now spent two years in Government and their big announcement here was... [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] Well apart... I would not have dealt with all of these things. I was sitting, resting, happily here, snoozing in and out, having a little nap and trying to remain quiet as I napped. I was happy in my corner. ...:

“The Housing Profile study is in progress and will be the basis for the preparation of the National Housing Policy which is expected to inform the revitalisation of the sector so that it can fulfil its catalytic role within the economy.”

It is there on page 51 of the Budget Speech 2017. It states:

“The Housing Profile study is in progress and will be the basis for the preparation of the National Housing Policy which is expected to inform the revitalisation of the sector so that it can fulfil its catalytic role within the economy.”

After spending two years in Government... The Hon. Members, Mr. Figueira and Mr. Mahipaul, are struggling to understand why they are sitting on that side of the House. [Ms. Manickchand: Do you know what was finished though? The Ram report on Mr. Jagdeo was.] That is all they were preoccupied with. One year later, if that was not enough, in their 2018 Budget themed: *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. Hear how the journey continues.

2.48 p.m.

One year later, they promised some strategy paper. This was one year later; this was now their 2018 Budget. Hear what the grand announcement was one year later:

“...a joint technical working group was established and tasked with examining the challenges that the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) must overcome, in order to deliver on its mandate and realise Government’s vision.”

Sir, this was after three years in Government. It goes on to state:

“A position paper that addresses the challenges facing the housing programme has been completed and is currently drawing the attention of the Cabinet.”

[**Ms. Manickchand:** It is like tea. It is like tea. It is like teabag in there drawing the (*inaudible*)]  
It is like a good Tetley Tea Bag. [Ms. Manickchand: Do not take your eyes and pass Tetley.] I should not endorse any particular brand. It is like a good Caribbean Dreams Tea Bag. It is like a good Fever Grass Tea Bag drawing. These people are laughing. Mr. Speaker, these people are jokes – laugh; laugh. The position paper was resting in Cabinet – as a tea bag rests in a cup of hot water – drawing the attention of Cabinet after they spent three years in Government.

Finally, when they were about to lose the no confidence motion, they presented their last budget – their 2019 Budget. They presented it in November, 2018, because they achieved this remarkable feat of bringing an early budget of which they were immensely proud. In November, 2018, days before the no confidence motion, they came with their... They knew this thing was brewing. The no confidence motion was probably before the House already. The no confidence motion was before the House. [Mr. Nandlall: It was drawing their attention.] It was drawing like that Fever Grass Tea Bag. Faced with the prospect of this no confidence motion for which they boldly said to bring on, they came with this last budget having been in Government for nearly four years then. Their bold pronouncement now was:

“...the housing sector continues to expand and has contributed to the growth in the construction... The Government has adopted a multi-faceted approach to the provision of decent homes, with a focus on delivering a ‘community experience’.”

I want to know where my Guyanese brothers and sisters are who enjoyed this community experience. I have all their mid-year reports and the story continues. All their mid-year reports are all of plans, strategies, polies, committees, and working groups. In the First Session of 2018, Mid-year Report states the:



“(CHPA) made progress in the development of a housing strategy. The Authority has benefitted from technical assistance to support the development and implementation of a housing and urban strategy which, in addition to incorporating the recommendations of the position paper...”

I have every mid-year report and that is all. It is a whole set of strategy, committee paper, position paper, green paper, white paper and technical working group. They are all here; they are all here. Now, with all that work having been done – the position paper, the white paper, the green paper, the committee, the working group, the commission and the strategy – the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, comes and her grand idea to benefit the people of Guyana is another committee. What happened; did the paper not give you any idea? What will the committee tell you that the paper, strategy or study did not already? The bottom line is that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) ... This story is not only repeated in the housing sector; it is in every sector.

**Mr. Speaker:** All right, Hon. Minister. You would need another 15 minutes to conclude.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I ask that my Hon. Cde. be able to have 15 more minutes to continue his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, the Standing Order states that you will have 15 minutes to conclude, not continue.

**Dr. Singh:** Thank you very much. The APNU/AFC sat in Government for five years. They now profess to be so concerned about the circumstances of the poor people of Guyana. They want to address the affordability of housing. You would remember, Mr. Speaker, that I referred to Mortgage Interest Relief which they met when they came into Government. In their 2017 Budget, having met Mortgage Interest Relief... This means they came into Government in a situation where every single first-time homeowner who pays interest on a mortgage up to \$30 million was able to deduct the interest that they paid on that mortgage from their taxable income and get a refund. Hon. Minister Ms. Rodrigues read out how dramatically Mortgage Interest Relief has helped Guyanese families to get liquidity by way of tax refunds to make home ownership more affordable; how the number dramatically declined from 2015 to 2016; and how it has risen since our return to Government.

Sir, do you know what the vindictive APNU/AFC did? They met this thing and, in 2017, they cut the Mortgage Interest Relief in half. They said, the ceiling for Mortgage Interest Relief will not be \$30 million; it will now be \$15 million. They cut it in half. Sir, do you know what they did? They were so concerned about affordability that they slapped value-added tax (VAT) onto building materials. To every single input in the construction of homes, where there was no VAT, they slapped the VAT on. In fact, Sir, they had long tables at the back of their budget speeches moving items from the zero-rated list to the exempt list without understanding – such was their abject incompetence. They moved items from the zero-rated... Zero-rated in the world of VAT means that one does not charge VAT when he/she sells the item and the person is able to reclaim the input VAT that he/she incurred when the item is produce. This means that the cost of production is brought down by being able to reclaim the input VAT. The word ‘exempt’ means that one does not charge VAT when the items are being sold, but one cannot reclaim all the input VAT that he/she incurred so he/she has to carry that cost. It means that the person has to pass it on to his/her customers.

In one year, they took the whole list of zero-rated items and moved it to exempt, which meant that by a deliberate policy action, they systematically made the cost of production for all those items more expensive. Now, either they did that deliberately knowing its consequence or they did it unbeknownst and unacquainted with the fatal consequences such a move would have. Right now, in this House, the reality is that we have a problem. On that side of the House, you continue to have a display of the most tragic intellectual bankruptcy in the entire political life of this country. There has never been a time that the People’s National Congress (PNC) and the APNU/AFC have been so bereft of any intellectual content and ability – not a single idea. There was no single constructive idea. The grand idea was the bringing of a special select committee. The Hon. Member, in introducing her Motion, spoke of a holistic approach. Surely, when one is speaking about affordability of house lots, one must speak about the entirety of what is taking place. Following her counsel, a holistic approach – the environment within which jobs are being created; the environment within which incomes are being generated; the environment in which people are able to actually access house lots; and the question of availability is addressed. The record will reflect... The Hon. Minister, Ms. Rodrigues, read the reference to the letter. ...where the APNU/AFC took the conscious decision not to invest in house lots. They said people could not access financing, so they took the conscious decision not to invest in house lots.

Instead, if I was to give yet another example of their abject incompetence, they said they were going to build – what did they call them? – duplex. Was it duplex? [Hon. Members (Government): Duplex.] They said they were going to build these duplex units. They built a few of them. When they completed them, they then discovered that they could neither pass title or allocate these units for these people to go and get a loan because there was no legislation. Their great idea was... [Ms. Teixeira: Had they built them already?] They had built them already. They built these duplexes. They had constructed all these so-called duplexes without even checking if they could give these people an allocation letter and pass title. Beyond these questions of competence and the abject incompetence... I am speaking here as much to the young Members of Parliament (MPs) on the PNC's side as I am to the nation at large, those in whose living rooms we are being broadcasted right now. A large part of the story of why the APNU/AFC is sitting over there is because of their abject incompetence. Let me go further, they come here wringing their hands and presenting themselves as being morally upright. To use Mr. Holder's preferred pronunciation – morally upright. They come here and present themselves with a feigned moral righteousness. The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, claimed to be concerned about poor people and their access to housing and descended into a most regrettable – and in my humble opinion – and a most distasteful assault on the dignity of this House, disparaging Members and their families in a most disgusting and distasteful manner.

3.03 p.m.

Sir, you would think that they were coming to this debate with their hands clean but the nation recalls this mansion being emblazoned on the front pages of our newspapers and being built on multiple house lots in Eccles, when thousands... Have a look at it, Mr. Figueira? Have you never been a guest of this residence? The Hon. Member, on the margins of the sitting, said to me that he thought it was a stadium.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, is he quoting you correctly?

**Mr. Figueira:** [*Inaudible*]

**Dr. Singh:** It is okay, Sir. The *Reader's Digest* says, "*laughter is the best medicine*". He knows what he said. I would be happy to withdraw. I do not want to get him in more trouble; the Hon. Member is already in a lot of trouble with the Leader. The Hon. Member who comes ringing her hands in anguish out of concern for the working people of Guyana, within two years of her

rapid ascent in Government, I believe prior to entering Government, I am told that the Hon. Member was an employee of the Guyana Post Office Corporation (GPO) and the Corporation has a lot of fine people working there. [Mr. Nandlall: She lives opposite Bakewell in a

wooden house.] Yes, perhaps. Within two years of her entry into Government, she was able to construct this mansion. Furthermore, there were lots of invectives being cast about contracts. Let me start with a picture of the former President Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger beaming rather proudly, beaming rather proudly... I do not know if the cameras are close enough. ...and it is a very proud beam. It is a wedding picture, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2019, and the photograph carries Minister Patterson-Yearwood; with her husband, Mr. Godfrey Yearwood; and President Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger on their wedding day. You could see that President Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger was evidently beaming with a lot of pride.

[The Hon. Member displayed an image.]

Sir, in that same week, we were regaled: 'contract awarded to Housing Minister'; 'contract awarded to Housing Minister'. What is worse is that the Minister of Housing... [Mr. Ramson: She picked up the cheque herself, signed it and received it herself.] Sir, I do not know. Rumor has it that this APNU/AFC Minister signed and collected the cheque.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, we cannot go on rumors.

**Dr. Singh:** Very well, I was simply reporting what I heard the rumor had but...

**Mr. Speaker:** I think you could tell that on the sidelines to Hon. Member Mr. Figueira.

**Dr. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, the very Minister, the very Minister is quoted in a news article... turning around, the APNU/AFC likes to claim that they champion public servants. Sir, when caught with both of her hands in the cookie jar, this PNC Minister went on... This is not a rumor, Sir; this is a headline.

“Housing Minister blames CHPA for Contract Award to Husband...”

The Hon. Minister turned around and blamed the Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA), public servants who are working at the CH&PA for the contract award that was granted to her husband which brings me to another reason. It is very important that young Members of Parliament (MPs) and the young people of this country understand why the APNU/AFC is back where they are. I want to conclude. They are back where they are, not only because of their incompetence, their abject incompetence, their cluelessness and incompetence.

They are also back where they are because of a particular characteristic that they all display. In that regard, I want to refer to a distinguished former *Barbadian* Ambassador to the United States of America (USA) and the Organization of American States (OAS). I pride myself, as a student of the language, so it is interesting how language and popular expressions get embedded and entrenched into common usage. This particular *Barbadian* Ambassador to the United States of America issued a press release in June, 2020. The Ambassador referred to the behaviour of the APNU/AFC. Mind you, he is not Guyanese; he is not contaminated by involvement; and local politics, *et cetera*. He said:

“Numerous opportunities have been given to the President of Guyana, David Granger, to come clean and while he gives the impression that he supports free and fair elections his actions do not. Indeed, he is being described in Caribbean political circles as a “Sanctimonious Gangster”.”

Presenting yourself, Sir. They come here and present themselves as champions of accountability and transparency. We heard them presenting themselves in the debate on the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) motion as champions of accountability and transparency. We are hearing them on this motion as, champions of the working people and the poor people of Guyana, champions of the housing programme. The people of Guyana know this, the reality is that the APNU/AFC have no concern about anyone in Guyana other than themselves. As a matter of fact, the front bench of the APNU/AFC have no concern about the backbenchers of their own party. As I said, some have mansions, while others have had to settle for couple barbershop chairs and a couple of pigs. They are being trotted out now to repeat the same sanctimonious arguments to present a pretense that the APNU/AFC is concerned about the people of Guyana.

I will conclude on this note, someone said it earlier, your slip is showing, the reason the APNU/AFC is sitting on the Opposition benches, is because of the abject incompetence and cluelessness of the leadership of your party. It is because of this continuous display of sanctimonious behaviour and pretending to be concerned when in fact, you are not in the least with concerns. They tragically continue to display all of those and all the other adverse characteristics that kept them in Opposition for 23 years; that threw them out of Government after three years, after an extended five years; and that will keep them in Opposition for decades to come. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. Now for the Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson.

**Ms. Ferguson (replying):** Mr. Speaker, thank you, very much, for acknowledging me. As I stand to give my rebuttal to the motion standing in my name, allow me to firstly acknowledge my Colleagues on this side of the House, Cde. Jermaine Figueira, Mr. Shurwayne Holder and Mr. Vincent Henry for their positive contributions and the remarks they have given. They understand the essence of what this simple motion is seeking to address. On the Opposite side of the House, there were three speakers. I will deal with them individually and bring the facts as they ought to be. When we come into this House, it is not to attack people's reputation. I stand before this podium here and I can represent my tenure as a Minister of Government on what I have achieved and achieved honestly. I will deal with that, Mr. Speaker.

This motion is a simple motion. It is a motion that is actually asking this National Assembly to establish a special select committee with a timeframe given of two months where we all can pool our ideas together to address the high price in cost for house lot. It is not asking for us to look at mortgage, interest rate or what the Coalition Government budgets spoke to when it comes to housing. Basically, this is asking for us to come to wrap together and get the experts around so we can find common solution to bring the high cost of house lots for ordinary Guyanese at a minimum cost. This is what this particular motion is seeking to address. I will now turn my attention to the contributors from the opposite side of the House. I will start with the first speaker, which happens to be the Hon. Member, Mr. Collin Croal, who currently sits as the Minister of Housing and Water. I must say how disappointed I am in you, Sir. Your presentation lacked substance and it lacked merit, but it simply attacked. I heard the Hon. Member described this simple motion as 'confusing'. Yet, in the Hon. Member's presentation, what is confusing about this motion has not been addressed.

*3.18 p.m.*

The second description that the Hon. Member gave is that the motion in its present form is fundamentally flawed but, yet again, the Hon. Member, he of himself, appears to be confused in his presentation since he failed to propose any suggestion for a possible amendment to the motion. The other description... [Dr. Singh: *(Inaudible)*.] I am coming to you shortly. The other description is that the motion is vague with speculation. Again, he failed to identify the vagueness within this motion. He further stated that the motion crashes to an illogical conclusion that is mind boggling. Again, the Hon. Member failed to address what in the motion caused his mind to be boggled. He also expressed that words sprung together – no basis for the conclusion that was drawn. The motion made several claims on the Ministry of Housing's

Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) without providing evidence on any policy put. I recall, in my presentation, I did identify some of the issues that our people are facing, more so, ordinary Guyanese, when it comes to the housing sector. These points did not surprise me since it is the nature of the People's Progressive Party/Civic to come here, to have cheap politics, to lie and to propagandise. That is the People's Progressive Party/Civic. My only...

**Dr. Singh:** Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon Minister, you have the floor.

**Dr. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, the last time I checked, I believe the word 'lie' was explicitly listed as an unparliamentary expression.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you have the floor.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Sir. I withdraw. To 'misinform' the House. The Hon. Member, Mr. Colin Coral, in his presentation, also identified key elements. He spoke to the issue of the allocation process being an equitable, socioeconomic development. Equitable? Does the People's Progressive Party/Civic understand the word 'equitable'? Well, I can invite you, Mr. Speaker and Members of this National Assembly – the lands running parallel to the Heroes Highway – see what is happening there and whether there is equitable distribution of lands. See what is happening in other areas where vast lands at end lots are now being debused and huge structures are now being erected. Is that equitable distribution? I have done my research and I have found that many of the lands distributed along the Heroes Highway are of one ethnicity. I wish for the Minister of Housing and Water to challenge me differently. The Hon. Colin Croal boasted of over 33,000 allocations made, but the Hon. Member failed to provide the total number of applications on file from August 2020 to 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2024. He also failed to provide the number of titles and transports issued. He also failed to say to this House how many persons from the 33,000 allocations were able to commence building their dream homes.

We were reminded in this House yesterday that many young professional homes are being constructed in several new housing schemes across this nation. I recall standing at this very podium in February, when I brought to the attention of this House that there was a disparity in the La Bonne Intention (LBI) area, where the young professional houses are being constructed, that area is totally outfitted with water and electricity and the ordinary Guyanese who were provided allocations on the eastern side of that land, are still to this date awaiting electricity

and water to be installed so they too could commence building their homes. What the Hon. Member failed to say to this House is, despite the show of many houses being constructed, he did not provide to this House how many of the thousands of houses built are currently unoccupied. You did not provide how many units have major defects. You did not provide how many of those defects your Ministry was able to address. Just yesterday, I shared in this National Assembly letters I received of complaints. Mr. Lachman Persaud, who was given a home, paid \$7 million and, to date, he cannot access his house because of the major defects.

We heard about banks lending 100% in loans but what the Hon. Minister Croal failed to say was which are the banks that are lending loans at 100% because I do not know. I know you either surrender your transport or your title as equity before any moneys can be released and the moneys are usually released in tranches. We were told that about 7,540 lots were allocated by the Coalition Government. I stand proudly to say here this afternoon that, what we distributed we had not any oil money. What I am saying is that, with the oil money now, we should be charging 0% to our Guyanese people for house lots in this country. He spoke about squatting in the country. He should be ashamed because he made the House to believe that squatting became a thing under the Coalition Government. Our research, done in 2017, proved that there were 8,000 squatters in this country, but the Coalition was able to start regularising. I know time will be against me so I would not want to get into that. We regularised squatting in this country. Do not let it sound as though squatting became a thing under the Coalition Government.

The Hon. Member, just before he left the podium, had this question to ask, whether I could provide a response about a \$1.2 million land for \$3 million. It was something to that effect. I want to say to the Hon. Member, my profession is not a magician or a fortune teller. I do not and never did set prices for lands under CH&PA. The very Hon. Colin Croal is fully cognisant of the competent authority that is responsible for setting cost for lands under the CH&PA since he has been the Minister for over three years.

I now turn my attention to Mdm. Susan Rodrigues. In her response, she started off by saying that the motion is out of order. She said that there was a positive change for the poor and vulnerable and that the motion was also a waste of time. As I said before, this motion is not a 'waste of time' motion. If we really have the care and concern for the people of this nation, we will do the honourable thing. We are now an oil producing country and all that the motion is seeking to do is for us to reduce the high cost of house lots in this country. The Hon. Member



went on to talk about my land and the land that I got in Eccles. What the Hon. Member failed to say, which I will say, was that I applied for my house lot under the People's Progressive Party/Civic. When I paid for my land, it was a 50% promotion of which I happen to benefit from like every other Guyanese and, whatever cost the CH&PA asked me to pay, I paid that cost in full. So, for the Hon. Member to come to this National Assembly to say to this House and to the people of Guyana that I had some corrupt practice, I just want to make it clear. I also wish to remind this House that I...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, a couple of things. I do not think she imputed anything. I have allowed ashamed and corrupt and also a bit of digression because we heard now, instead of talking about house lot, discrimination in house lots and the failure of Ministers to address certain things, I think we could come back on track. Thank you.

**Ms. Ferguson:** All right, Sir. I also want to say to this honourable House that this very matter is before the court and the entire nation is aware of what happened. The same matter involving my lot because that seems to be a thing for some of you. It seems as though only the People's Progressive Party/Civic must build mansions. Only the People's Progressive Party/Civic must have lands and ordinary Guyanese, including us across here, must not have anything. The Leader of the Opposition is on record asking Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo to put his assets to the salaries he achieved as President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. Do not come here playing as though you all are good boys and good girls over there. You all are corrupt. With regard to the 50%...

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, I stand on the Point of Order 40 (a).

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

**Bishop Edghill:** The Hon. Member just said:

“You all are corrupt.”

I am sitting here, and I will not accept that, Sir. Apart from the word ‘corrupt’ being unparliamentary, it is also ascribing a derogatory term to the Members sitting on this side.  
[*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister Edghill. Hon. Member, you have been going really well. Could you please withdraw and continue?

**Ms. Ferguson:** At your request, Sir. I withdraw. I need to make this clear with regard to the 50% promotion that the Coalition Government held in two years. When we became Government, we recognised that many lands were unoccupied. We recognised that many of the allottees were unable to pay the cost for the house lots in full.

3.33 p.m.

What we did as a caring Government was, for the 50<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary in 2016, we decided to roll off this 50% where we allowed persons to come in and pay. They could have paid in two instalments. At that, we were able to generate a lot of moneys using that. As I stand here, I happened to benefit from that 50% promotion, like every other Guyanese did. I was not the sitting Minister of Housing. I was at the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. What we also did was, in 2020, we rolled off another 50%, this time for the Republican status of our nation. Again, what we did was encourage persons to come and make their payments because we recognised that persons were finding it difficult because of the hardship of the system the PPP/C created. When the PPP/C Government went back into Government, I have reports of persons who reached out to me to say that they were forced to pay the 100% cost of the house lot. They disbanded that 50% promotion. I recall having a conversation with Minister Colin Croal and Minister Susan Rodrigues, of which I sent persons to them. For the Hon. Member to stand here yesterday and say that I never engaged him, again that is misinformation that I have to *diss*.

They also claimed that we did nothing for the Ministry of Housing. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible.)] No, we did not come to the Parliament for expenditure. [Mr. Mahipaul: Capital Expenditure.] Capital Expenditure. What we did was, we utilised the Housing Fund. Many of the 1,000 houses in Perseverance, we had to spend in excess of \$2 billion to rectify the defects that many persons are experiencing here today. That is what they inherited from us, the Adequate Housing and Urban Accessibility Programme (AHUAP) of which we were able to source US\$34.5 million so that ordinary people, in certain areas could have benefitted from a government grant to help them repair their homes and all manner of things. I do not know how to describe the people across there, this 'don't care Government, it is not their idea, they do not care about poor people'. This is what they did. They actually pulled aside

this programme, had it revised where they were able to bring on their people and many of the people we engaged have been disenfranchised.

Allow me to turn my attention to the last speaker on the opposite side of the House, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. For 30 minutes into his presentation, we got a historical review or a literature review of the Coalition Government budget. A man who I have great respect for his brilliance, stood there this afternoon and was unable to speak anything of substance where this particular motion is concerned. He talked about us not having accountability. Let me remind the Hon. Member that he ran from accountability from this country. When he was to give evidence and whatever to clarify, he ran from this country.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I have to offer some protection here because I think you are phrasing that wrongly.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Yes. He did not run, he flew.

**Ms. Ferguson:** He flew away like a bird, like an eagle. You know the eagle. *[Interruption]* It was sad to see that the very Hon. Member went down into the gutters, where me and a former Colleague of Government are concerned. I think I have touched enough on my situation. As I said before, this matter is engaging the attention of the Court, and I will continue to win. The Hon. Member, and I am challenging him this afternoon to go on the outside and claim that I have multiple house lots. **[An Hon. Member: Four.]** You heard four, you heard two and now it has gone to multiple. I dare you, Sir, to go out there and say what you said in here. I dare you. *[Interruption]* When I referred to the Pradoville Project, the forensic report that was done on the Pradoville Project, I was basically highlighting what the report found. This is not a Ferguson's opinion. This is what the report found - Bharrat Jagdeo had one house lot in Pradoville 2, which he never lived in and sold it for \$120 million. He went back to the Ministry of Housing, got whatever done, got a second house lot which he was not entitled to. This time it was not a second house lot; it was a double lot and he paid below market price. That is one.

Secondly, he was able to acquire three. You are talking about us being 'sanctimonious gangsters'. I will tell you now what are 'sanctimonious gangsters'. Mr. Jagdeo took three transformers, which he never paid GPL Inc. for. It is not Ferguson saying this. That is what you call 'sanctimonious gangsters'.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, are you saying that the former President took three GPL Inc. transformers? How are you presenting that is that he literally went and... Please, you have to withdraw that. The GPL Inc has a responsibility to provide ...

**Ms. Ferguson:** I will withdraw.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes.

**Ms. Ferguson:** But hear what I am going to do. I am going to quote word for word from the Forensic Report. It was laid in the National Assembly.

**Mr. Speaker:** That Report was read before. This is not the second time. Go ahead.

**Ms. Ferguson:** I will read it again.

**Mr. Speaker:** Go ahead. Let me hear what the Forensic Report says.

**Ms. Ferguson:** On page 20 of that report, Sir, this is what the Forensic Report is reporting:

“Our investigation revealed ...”

[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, allow me to hear what the report says, please.

**Ms. Ferguson:**

“Our investigation revealed that he ...”

Who He? Mr. Jagdeo.

“...also caused to be provided three transformers for which he paid the GPL Inc. nothing.”

**Mr. Speaker:** I am just trying to equate “caused to be provided’ with ‘taking’. My comprehension is limited.

**Ms. Ferguson:** I withdraw.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you.

**Ms. Ferguson:** I am continuing, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hold on. Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira, you have the floor.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 41 (4) and (6) state:

Standing Order 41 (4):

“... offensive and insulting language about Members of the National Assembly.”

Standing Order 41 (6):

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

I still am not clear what document the Hon. Member is reading from. I am not clear whether there was a public document, when it was tabled and if it was tabled in this House, and that she has incorrectly again, as usual, presented her accusations of the Member of Parliament on this side, Mr. Jagdeo. I ask her to withdraw.

**Mr. Speaker:** On the last point, Hon. Minister, she did withdraw that. She quoted from a document which she said was laid before the House and we will ask her to re-lay it.

**Ms. Teixeira:** I would like to hear that document and when was it laid in this House? What is the title and when was it laid in this House?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister.

**Ms. Teixeira:** She also made accusations about the house lots that referred to Mr. Jagdeo. She is absolutely incorrect on what she said. She knows that because it was publicly stated in the press years ago. Mr. Duncan, please be quiet. You are not the Speaker of the House. Maybe, one day you will be Speaker but not now. Be quiet.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I would uphold two of the three points that the Hon. Member made, but you have already withdrawn. The only thing left for you to do is to quote the title of that forensic report and to just lay again a copy to the House.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Mr. Speaker, how much time have I lost? I will have to regain my time.

**Mr. Speaker:** I love listening to you and I would return the time lost.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, hear what is going to happen. I am going to re-lay to the Clerk the forensic report – *Sparendaam Housing Project - Special investigation*

*of the Central Housing and Planning Authority 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2016, done by Ram & McRae* which was laid in this National Assembly.

**Ms. Teixeira:** When was it laid in the House?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you are on the floor. If you want to crosstalk I would not give you back that time.

**Ms. Ferguson:** I just do not want to lose my time, so I am not cross-talking. Mr. Speaker, may I continue? I have before me here, Sir an extract of the Report. What I have just quoted is actually on page 20 of that *Forensic Report of the Sparendaam Housing Project* which was done between 2016 and 2017, by *Ram and McRae*. May I continue? The cost of the three transformers, according to the utility company was \$8,137,979. This is a damning report that we all should familiarise ourselves with. When you are coming to talk and tell people about ‘sanctimonious gangsters’, look into the mirror, Ms. Teixeira. You should look into the mirror. You all are playing nice guys and nice girls over there, but I can deal with you all. As I prepare to wrap up, as I said before, this particular motion, Sir, is a very damning report. I also heard from the last speaker on that side of the House that I disparaged Members on that side of the House. I never did, Sir. I actually quoted from what the Forensic Report said about the gentleman who was President then and a few Cabinet Ministers. I did not name the names. Ms. Manickchand who was not in this House was also one of the beneficiaries from a house lot there in Pradoville, Sparendaam. She also resold her property. It is all in the Report. So, do not come here... [*Interruption.*]

3.48. p.m.

Earlier today, my friend spoke about the ring... [*Interruption*]. Mr. Speaker, since the goodly gentleman walked in graciously, perhaps, I can repeat what I said earlier.

**Mr. Speaker:** Except there is a Standing Order on repetition.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Mr. Speaker, I really wanted to go into the ring with this gentleman, you know. I want to go into the ring with this gentleman.

**Mr. Speaker:** To get into the ring, I will have to ask the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan. So, please continue.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Imagine I brought out Mr. Jagdeo from his hiding position. That is to show how special I am to you, Sir. I am really special. [Mr. Jagdeo: I had to come to the circus.] This is not the circus. You had a circus last week – you had yours last week. [An Hon. Member (Opposition): The chief clown.] Yes, the chief clown now arrived.

Mr. Speaker, serious business. I believe, as I said before, if we establish this committee, it will be able to devoid many things that are currently happening. You have people who are sitting in this very House, whose families were given contracts through the Central Housing and Planning Authority to build houses and many Guyanese out there are suffering because of the mess-ups in the projects. Once we have this committee established, we will be able to make recommendations that we need better quality assurance so that, when the Government is building houses, our people must have a sound and quality house to live in. This is because it is not easy, Sir, taking a loan and having to repay a loan. The other thing I heard about is the cement and steel project, which is a very good initiative. They are trying to help people and I commend the Government for that. But, if you are to tell me more can be done, I believe so, Sir. One sling of cement cannot complete an entire foundation; 90 lengths of steel cannot, Sir. Do you know what is the sad thing, Mr. Speaker? When they give out the \$250,000 cement and steel subsidies, the people are given a list to go to specific suppliers and, on that list, Sir, one set of ethnic people. [Mr. Mahipaul: Friends, families and favourites.] Friends, families and favourites, these people the moneys are going towards.

They talk about Value Added Tax not being on building materials. You know, I am a girl with my facts, and I do not come here to tell untruths. When you look at the bills that I have here for the procured construction materials, people are still paying 14% VAT. Dr. Singh, you know the man with the long portfolio, what you need to do, Hon. Member, is to do more due diligence out there. Please, I am asking you to send out your inspectors from the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to see all the suppliers who are fleecing poor people in this land. We cannot pass laws to say that we are zero-rating building materials, but it is something different out there. You see, Mr. Speaker, again, this Special Select Committee would be able to identify all those shortcomings.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing the Special Select Committee would be able to identify, the other concern, Sir, has to do with the double payments for house lots. Many Guyanese are paying double for house lots. Yesterday, I shared a complaint by an allottee. The other thing that this Committee would be able to find out is how many house lots were actually given to friends,

families and favourites without following the process. Cde. Speaker, I believe that the time has come for us to show the Guyanese citizens that we mean business and we should not be using the housing sector to play with the lives of our people. Look how many people are living on dams; look how many people are living in unregularised areas, while my friend, Bharrat, is living in his ocean view mansion there. [Mr. Mahipaul: In Pradoville.] In Pradoville 2. Do you not think, Mr. Jagdeo, that the man who is living in Albouystown would like to enjoy an edifice like yours? I believe Sir...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I know your friend 'Bharrat' and I also know your friend 'Jagdeo', but if you put them together, you have to refer to the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Yes. I stand corrected, the Hon. Gentleman. Mr. Speaker... [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Well he got to pay me *by the hook or by the crook*. You got to pay me - you got to pay me, Sir. As I said, with the established... [Mr. McCoy: *(Inaudible)* as a Junior Minister.] Boy, I can account for every cent. It is whether Jagdeo can account, the Hon. Member, Sir. As I prepare to bring the curtains down on this motion before us, I am so unhappy to hear from the Hon. Members on that side of the House saying that they cannot support a motion to this effect. How sad. Hon. Jagdeo, I would like to say to you, Sir, since you are the main man in everything, that what this motion is seeking from the Government is to have this Committee established where we can look at the high cost in pricing where house lots are concerned. How a man 50... [*interruption*]. How in this oil economy, where Guyana is generating billions, why can we not allow our people to not pay for a 40x80 house lot? Why can we not allow Guyanese, more so poor people, not to pay for a land 50x100? It is hard, especially when people are earning below the minimum wage and in this high-cost-of-living society, which you and your Regime have failed to address.

I implore on this Assembly, to the Hon. Members on that side of the House, to rethink and let us pass this motion successfully. If it is one thing that can unite us, let this motion unite us. Let the Guyanese citizens see that we can work together as *One People, One Nation, One Destiny* to address their plight. It is hardship out there; it is hard for our people out there. So, I am asking, let goodness prevail. Let God touch your heart, Mr. Jagdeo, Hon. Member, and let us pass this motion successfully. With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much and I look forward for the resounding support to have this motion passed. Praise you, thank you, Lord. [*Applause*]



**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Let us also give recognition to the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo for energising the debate. Hon. Member, Minister Ashni Singh.

**Dr. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 39 to exercise the... 39(2) specifically to exercise the “Right of Reply”.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, go ahead.

**Dr. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, we were treated, just a few minutes ago, to a continued display of precisely what I spoke of when I spoke earlier in this debate. Intellectual bankruptcy, farming out intellectual work, descent into vulgarity invectives and insults because they know nothing else. The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, spoke about mansions and whether all of the people of Guyana do not deserve to live in a mansion. For the benefit of the people of Guyana, this is the mansion that the Hon. Member constructed for herself after two years of serving as a Junior Minister.

*[The Hon. Member displayed a document]*

Hon. Member, you would be well acquainted with this edifice. Proceeds, Sir, to regale us with this pretence at integrity... That continues to regale the nation with this pretence at integrity. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member goes on to say that she can account for every cent. It is a matter of public notoriety that that Hon. Member, by parliamentary convention, and all of the other Members on that side of the House have continued to violate the Integrity Commission Act of this country by refusing to file Integrity Commission annual filings. We have laws in this country, Mr. Speaker. They like to profess themselves as law-abiding citizens. We have laws in this country. We have an Integrity Commission Act. Every single Member of this House, on the People's Progressive Party/ Civic side, has complied with the Integrity Commission Act and has filed their Integrity Commission returns. Indeed, for all of the last 24 years since the Act has come into law. Instead, and in contrast, Mr. Speaker, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Members of Parliament have defiantly refused to file their returns, whether in Government or Opposition, and on that basis alone have refused to comply with the stipulations in relation to integrity in public office. Yet, they come here, stand up and present themselves as champions of accountability, transparency and beacons of personal integrity, when, in fact, Sir, quite the opposite is the case.

*4.03 p.m.*

They speak of the distribution of land. What is it they say? Is it friends or favourites or something like that? There is a long list of lands that were shared out, some of which were distributed to win illegal and illicit electoral favours. There were lands distributed at Millie's Hideout; lands distributed at Mocha; lands distributed in Bohemia; and lands distributed at Liliendaal. There is a long list of lands – this is a matter of public record – that they distributed, including in the twilight hours of their illegal reign of terror in this country. By their own admission, a Member of their parliamentary complement, Mr. Mahipal, went into the Ministry of Housing on 3<sup>rd</sup> August, after they had lost government, and the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, facilitated the expedited granting of a house lot to him. Yet, they come here and feign integrity when, in fact... Mr. Speaker, I could spend the whole day...

I could read headlines and stories that would churn the stomachs of the people of Guyana. Public funds were used to buy jewellery. The former APNU/AFC Minister, Ms. Annette Ferguson, was gifted pricey, gold jewellery for her birthday from taxpayers' money. Yet, she will come here and stand up and present herself... Was it King's Jewellery World? It was not only King's Jewellery World. I gather it was also Steve's Jewellery World. Was that not where the leafy, [Mr. Nandlall: The leafy earrings and the bracelets.] Leafy earrings and bracelets were bought from our country's most exclusive jewellers; expensive gold jewellery with taxpayers' money. She willingly and happily accepted it, and then turned around and pretended. We all recall the Hon. David Patterson saying he neither wore rings nor bracelets, and the next day, social media was flooded with pictures of him wearing all manner of bracelets dangling on his wrists, bangles and bracelets. How can you forget whether you wear rings and bracelets? How can you forget? Every morning, you awakened and put on the bracelet and the ring on your hands. He stood up and said he neither wore bangles, bracelets nor rings. I am reading from the newspaper:

“Junior Minister of Public Infrastructure, Annette Ferguson was not left out, as she received items valued at \$1.4 million from agencies under her ministry; however, these were classified as “donations”.

A spreadsheet – it was yet another one of those. It was a spreadsheet and not a bedsheet in this instance.

“A spreadsheet from the DHBC showed that in excess of \$6 million in donations....”

These were the birthday gifts that were distributed to the ministers.

“...were given to the Public Infrastructure Ministry between June 2015 and July 2016.”

I am reading here from another headline:

“Christopher Jones gifted state lands twice; Trevor Benn waived land fees”

This is the *Kaieteur News* on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2020. The list goes on. It would take us days and weeks if we were to go through every single instance in which they gifted lands to themselves, waived fees for themselves, received other gifts and engaged in other inappropriate behaviours.

Mr. Speaker, I took particular note. In championing herself as a beacon of accountability, the Hon. Member said that I – this is me – ran from accountability in this country. Mr. Speaker, through you, I wish, for a moment, to remind the Hon. Member of how democratic societies operate. In democratic societies, you contest elections periodically. At the end of those elections, results are declared. Those who were victorious in those elections assume office, and those who were not demit office. In 2015, when we lost government, we demitted office. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic demitted office in May, 2015 when we lost the elections. We proceeded to prepare for the transition and our return to the opposition benches. I vividly recall that I spoke with three senior members of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic – former President, Bharrat Jagdeo, who was returning as Leader of the Opposition, now Vice President; former president, Donald Ramotar, who was the immediate past president; and Dr. Roger Luncheon, who, as everybody knows, was one of the most senior members of our party. I indicated to all three of them that I would like to exercise my option not to return to Parliament. All three of them engaged me in a conversation. I explained to them why I would like to exercise the option not to return to Parliament. The now Vice President, and former President, Dr. Jagdeo, very graciously accommodated my request. I said to him that I would like to do something else professionally, that I would like to exit frontline politics and do something else professionally, which I did. Demitting office and exiting politics is everybody’s right. Former President, Dr. Jagdeo, himself had said that once he demitted the presidency, he was going to play a lower key role in politics, as was evidenced during the 2011 to 2015 period.

When, eventually, the APNU/AFC started to display its dictatorial tendencies by engaging in the most vulgar and distasteful acts of political persecution in the history of this country, by marching no less a person than Dr. Roger Luncheon out of the Office of the Leader of the Opposition in his walking frame and arresting him, and by indicating its intention to charge yours truly, myself, I returned, like the honourable person that I am, voluntarily. I proudly

walked into the courtroom. I faced the trumped-up charges that they placed against me because I knew that I had nothing to fear. I knew that my integrity was unchallengeable and unassailable. I knew that they were engaging in nothing other than political persecution. My circumstances were no different from many others in the People's Progressive Party/Civic, including in our party's leadership. We saw multiple persons marched up court steps on trumped-up charges. In every instance that they did that, each one of us resolved, as I did, to devote the rest of our respective lives to putting them out of office and keeping them out of office. That was my vow then and that remains my vow today. This is because I might be the victim of their persecution today, but it could be anybody else tomorrow. We saw them do this with random persons in society. Directors of commercial banks were marched up steps and were treated like common criminals, and they wonder why they were sent back to the Opposition benches. The people of Guyana looked on and decided that this was not the behaviour they expected of a responsible government. The people of Guyana also saw their failure to deliver on anything they promised.

I have often spoken about the distinguished Vice President's statement in this House, as Leader of the Opposition in the first budget debate, when he said he would support, and our party would support any measure that they brought that would have been of benefit to the people of Guyana or would have delivered their manifesto promises. Guess what? They brought none. They spent five years and brought nothing. Instead of reducing taxes, they increased taxes, and where there were no taxes, they imposed taxes. Instead of reducing or removing fees and fines, they increased those. In my earlier presentation on this debate, I gave a number of examples. They spoke about their concern for the cost of housing. They put Value-added tax (VAT) on construction materials. We have taken it off. They cut the Mortgage Interest Relief. We have restored it. They abandoned the annual appropriations of capital budgets for the Ministry of Housing. We have restored them, and we are increasing them.

They spoke disparagingly about the housing assistance programme that we are implementing, under which we are providing low-income homeowners with steel and cement. The Hon. Member can speak disrespectfully about the one sling of cement, but Mr. Speaker, I will have you know that the one sling of cement we are giving those homeowners...Do you know how much more they got under APNU/AFC? The one sling of cement that we are giving to homeowners is one sling more than they got under the APNU/AFC, because they got nothing at all. They, by their own admission, abandoned the programme of developing house lots. Minister Rodrigues read where Hon. Ferguson admitted that they abandoned the house lot

programme. We have said that we will deliver 10,000 house lots every year, and we are well on our way to achieving that, long before we go back to the electorate in 2025.

The Hon. Ferguson correctly said this has to be approached from a holistic perspective. When one speaks of homeownership and the affordability of homeownership, this is not only a debate about house lots and some magic wand to reduce the cost of house lots, as the Hon. Member appears to think. This is not a question of waving a magic wand to appoint some committee who will come up with some magical ideas. When one speaks of the affordability of house lots, one has to have a conversation about the cost of living and disposable income as a whole. One cannot avoid it. We have spoken on numerous occasions in the past about the punitive measures that Ms. Ferguson's party, while in government, imposed which caused devastating hardship to the people of Guyana. There was the imposition of taxes. I have their budget speeches. There was a big annexe at the back with all of the taxes that they increased. Fees were increased from \$50 to \$50,000 and fees were increased from \$100 to \$10,000. Popular legend has it that every single fee and fine, whether it was the horse cart or the snow cone man, faced thousands of per cent of increase.

*4.18 p.m.*

All of those increases were passed on to the people of the country. They come now as champions of cost of living and of the working people of this country when they increased land rent by several multiples, in many cases, hundreds of percent, which, inevitably, put farmers out of business and impacted the cost of food. We came back into Government, removed those punitive increases in land rent and restored more than \$2 billion annually to the farmers. The Hon. Ms. Ferguson comes now as a champion of affordability and homeownership. Yet, in the same breath, she said that they are talking about interest rate; and they are talking about VAT. Mr. Speaker, you cannot have a conversation about the affordability of home ownership if you do not have a conversation about the affordability of construction materials. The record speaks for itself. They put VAT on construction materials. The People's Progressive Party/Civic took VAT off construction materials. The record speaks for itself. They cut the ceiling on Mortgage Interest Relief, and we carried it back up. There is a long list of initiatives, which I could list, that will articulate fully the several measures that they imposed.

They also like to present themselves as champions of public officers. Consider for a moment the taking away, from the Disciplined Services, the one-month tax free bonus that we introduced under the presidency of the now Vice President, Dr. Jagdeo. Do you know why they

took it away, Sir? They said that it was a PPP/C gimmick. They took it away and punished every family that had a soldier, police... They said we were bribing the people. They said that the PPP/C, by giving a one-month bonus to the members of the Disciplined Services, was bribing the members of the Disciplined Services. They took it away. Do you know what that did, Sir? Every family that had a soldier, a fireman, a prison officer or a policeman/policewoman lost one month of their salary – it used to be a one-month bonus – for five years. Billions of dollars – it probably would have amounted to \$5 billion – were taken away from those families. It was not from the country at large. It was from the families that had Disciplined Services officers amongst them – a mother, father, brother, and son. Once you were a policeman, they took it away. They literally went into the pocket of every policeman and woman and took out one month of their salary. And they come here now to pretend to be champions of working people.

Every family that had a child going to school was in receipt of a cash grant to help them meet the cost of going to school. They came into government and took that away. It was not from one or two families; they took it away from every family that had a child going to school. It was nearly 200,000 school children. They took away the cash grant from those families. Does that not affect disposable income and affordability? The money that would have gone to pay the mortgage had to be diverted to pay what would have been bought with the cash grant for the children to go to school. The Hon. Ms. Ferguson, when she spoke yesterday, advocated how concerned they are about people. They did not have that concern when they took 7,000 sugar workers and put them out of work. They took away their incomes. Many of them had saved up and had gotten low-income house lots and loans. They were paying on their low-income loans for their house lots under the low-income programme that we had introduced in partnership with the banks. When they lost their jobs, they could no longer service their low-income loans. They lost their homes. That did not happen by accident. It happened as a deliberate policy measure. Putting 7,000 sugar workers out of work; taking away the cash grant from school children; and taking away the one-month bonus for members of the Disciplined Services were not accidental occurrences. They were deliberate actions taken by APNU/AFC to punish the people of Guyana to impose hardship on them.

It is no wonder, therefore, that by 2018, the people of Guyana decided that enough was enough; send them back to the Opposition's benches. It is no wonder that in 2020, the people of Guyana said that they will show them where they belonged – back in the Opposition's benches. When young Members, such as the Hon. Mr. Figueira, Hon. Mr. Holder, the Hon. Mr. Sears and the

others who spoke, wonder why they are consigned to the Opposition's benches, they must not wonder. They must study and analyse the behaviours of their party when it was in Government. When they had the opportunity to assist people and improve their lives, they chose to do exactly the opposite. Where they could have helped, they harmed and hurt people. Where they could have increased incomes, they took away incomes.

Guess what? In 2020, the people of Guyana said that enough was enough. Eventually, when democracy was protected from being snatched and the People's Progressive Party/Civic was returned to Government, in our first budget which presented in this House, under the leadership of the now Vice-President, within 40 days of us assuming Office, we immediately rolled back all of those hardship measures. Where they had introduced VAT, we repealed it. Where they had increased a fee or a fine, we reduced it. Where they had carried up the land rental, we brought it back down. In that one budget, we put back more than \$40 billion into the hands of the Guyanese people. This was done in that one budget. We have come back to the National Assembly with successive budgets. We have increased our expenditure and our investment in all of the key sectors. We have already delivered close to 40,000 house lots. Every week, we are seeing activities where Ministers Croal and Rodrigues and others are rolling out, aggressively, our house lot programme. We have not carried up a single fee, a single fine or a single tax. We have not introduced a single new tax and we have continued to manage our economy with the responsibility and prudence for which the People's Progressive Party/Civic is so well known.

As I said earlier, after 23 years in Opposition and after five years in Government, it is very telling that the Hon. Ms. Ferguson comes to this House and her great idea – amongst all the things that she can speak about – is that we must have a committee. What does she want this committee to do? She wants this committee to engage civil society, financiers, and other stakeholders to submit proposals and make recommendations. She might not have noticed, and I do know how much attention she pays to the news, but we do not need a committee to engage with stakeholders in this society. Every day, we are speaking to different stakeholder groups; we are listening to citizens; we are responding to their concerns; and we are resolving those concerns. We do not need a committee to do that, Sir. It is no surprise that is the only solution with which she can come up. You heard what she said – bring a committee and bring the experts. They had all the experts in the world to do white paper, blue paper, green paper, position paper and housing strategy. Up to today, the Hon. Member came to this debate with not a single, concrete idea about what she wanted to propose. The only idea she had is that she

wanted to propose a committee to bring experts to make recommendations. And they want to know why they are back on the Opposition's benches.

As I said earlier, they brought nothing to Government. They brought no integrity; they brought no competence; they brought no capability; and they did not even bring any sincerity. They violated all of their promises. Tragically, they have learnt nothing because they are now back in the Opposition, and they still bring no integrity, no competency, and no capability.

Mr. Speaker, we would not stop the Hon. Member if she and her party want to engage. We would not and we cannot stop the Hon. Member if she wants to engage with civil society and stakeholders for ideas. She should have done that before this debate and come with a few ideas. We would not stop or discourage her from engaging with stakeholders. We are doing so, and she is free to do so too. Of course, we also know that they do not have a great tradition of listening to people or respecting people's views. [Ms. Manickchand: The people do not want to listen to them.] There is that too. I am not sure how many people would even waste their time to speak to them. The Hon. Member on that side of the House can set up any committee. The APNU/AFC can set up a committee if it wants, Sir. They can engage with stakeholders and get ideas if they want. That is not a problem. They can do their committee and they can consult with whomsoever they wish. I will tell you, Sir, that this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government – while they set up their committee, yet another committee, another commission or write another paper – will continue to open and develop new lands. We will continue to build out infrastructure and allocate house lots.

**Mr. Speaker:** In order for me to continue to listen to you, you will have to get an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member is able to have his extension to conclude his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Minister, Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Member, the Standing Orders allow you 15 more minutes to conclude.

**Dr. Singh:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not think that I will need all 15 minutes, but now that you have challenged me...Mr. Speaker, while they are convening yet another committee and consulting with whichever stakeholders they want to consult, as I was saying, we will continue to build out and open new housing areas. We will continue to allocate house



lots. We will continue to put the infrastructure in – electricity, water, and drainage. We will continue to build out social infrastructure – schools, hospitals, and fire stations. We will continue to build out the infrastructure that will attract private investments – shops, *et cetera*. We will continue to build out our turnkey homes and allocate them. We will continue to work with the banks to reduce interest rates. In fact, on that note, it was slightly amusing to hear the Hon. Member say – because all of our speakers addressed the matter – they came over there and spoke about interest rates. We do not want to hear about interest rates. We want to hear about the affordability of house lots. Sir, the people who buy these house lots and build these homes all go to the banks. They are all concerned about the interest rates that they must pay at the bank.

4.33 p.m.

The programme that we have put in place to exempt the banks from corporate tax on their low-income housing window has enabled them to reduce the interest rate from almost 7% to just over 3% for low-income housing loans and has enabled the increasing of the NBS ceiling from more than 6% to just over 3% for low-income housing loans. Every borrower is concerned about the interest rates. Just to illustrate the cluelessness and incompetence of the APNU/AFC, they want to have a conversation about affordability of home ownership, but they do not want to hear about interest rates. This is just to illustrate the cluelessness. The track record of the APNU/AFC, in every sector, I would not say it is zero, because it is so dismal and damaging and devastating. It was not neutral like zero. One might say that zero would have zero impact. The track record of the APNU/AFC had a negative impact on this country, devastating and destructive. It was not zero or neutral. You were being gentle on them, Hon. Member, Mr. Hugh Todd.

They like to talk about cronies – friends and families. If you look at land distribution, if you look at the lands that they gave out in Wales alone, one company got 5,000 acres, knowing fully well the developmental potential and what was planned for West Demerara. It was the equivalent of 15,000 house lots which we have had to take action to take back so as to distribute to ordinary Guyanese. The land at Millie's Hideout that was given to Mr. Lowenfield, perhaps, as a sweetener for the conduct that was to come, was 216 acres. It was more than 1400 house lots, and they did not have lands to give ordinary Lindeners a single house lot. We now have to buy lands to give ordinary Guyanese people house lots. Yet, they found 216 acres to give a single individual. The Lindeners are there, and they are watching. Do you know how many

Lindeniers were waiting for house lots and could not have gotten one? They love to profess that they love the people of Linden. Every now and then, they walk around, and they do a little jig. I see Mr. Norton was doing a little dance somewhere in Linden the other day. They pretend to be champions of the cause of the people of Linden. Do you know how many thousands of Lindeniers were waiting for house lots and could not get one? In one fell swoop, with the indecent motive of stealing the election, they found 216 acres of land to give one man that could have given 1400 families house lots, and the list goes on.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude, as I said in my previous presentation. I feel sorry for the young MPs who come out and repeat the same diatribe that they hear from their frontbenchers. They may wonder, in their quiet moments, how they lost the support of their own parliamentarians after three years, and how they lost Government after five years and are back in the Opposition. The young MPs who are at the back – and I am glad that there are still a few of them in the House listening – may wonder how they have ended up back there. They may not be able to say this publicly, but I urge them in their quiet moments to study the dismal track record of the APNU/AFC when they were in Government. What is more tragic is that this is not the first time they have had a shot at this. They spent 28 years in Government and did nothing but destroy this country. They had 23 years to reflect and process and come back with renewed vigour and commitment to serve the people of Guyana, and all they did was destroy. All they did was counterproductive and destructive. Mr. Speaker, small wonder, therefore, that the people of Guyana consigned them back to the Opposition benches and will keep them there.

Sir, I want to use the opportunity of this motion to say to the people of Guyana that this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government will continue our aggressive housing programme because our ultimate objective is that every single Guyanese family must be able to own their own home. We will work to ensure that every single Guyanese family owns their own home. Guess what? Almost 40,000 of them already have their house lots and more than 50,000 will have by 2025. We will continue to work with the banks to ensure that every single Guyanese family is able to access their loans. We will continue to work to make sure jobs are created, not close industries and take away jobs. We will continue to work to create jobs. I spoke of the sugar jobs; I did not speak about the bauxite jobs. They sat down and instigated the Berbice River bauxite operations, the international investors there. They sat down and allowed that investor to be provoked and chased out of this country, putting nearly 1400 bauxite workers out of work. Those persons came from Kwakwani, Ituni, Linden and New Amsterdam. It was not only sugar workers. And they come back here and pretend to care.

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to say, on behalf of this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, that we will not contribute to this smokescreen that the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, wants to spin to pretend to care about people by setting up some committee. We will not add any credibility to this smokescreen of pretending to be concerned about affordability of house lots. Instead, we will continue to roll out our aggressive housing programme and we will not stop until every single Guyanese family has a house lot that they can afford to buy within their reach, a job generating incomes that they can finance that house lot with and that they can live comfortably and decently in Guyana. It is something that they failed abjectly to deliver, but which this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government will deliver to the people of Guyana. That is our commitment to the people of Guyana and not any smokescreen about motion to set up committee to call expert to come up with ideas. Mr. Speaker, once again, the APNU/AFC has demonstrated to the people of Guyana how incompetent and how intellectually bankrupt they are, their inability to come up with any ideas themselves and their proclivity, their inclination, and their habit of misrepresenting facts to mislead the people of this country. The people of this country will not be fooled again. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** I will now put the motion. Those in favour say 'aye'.

**Members of the Opposition:** Aye.

**Mr. Speaker:** Those against say 'no'.

**Members of the Government:** No.

**Mr. Speaker:** The 'noes' have it. The motion is defeated.

*The motion was defeated.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we will now go to the next item on our Order Paper and that is the ICC Cricket World Cup West Indies Bill 2024 – Bill No. 4/2024, published on 2024-04-29.

## **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

### **BILLS – Second Readings**

#### **ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP WEST INDIES BILL 2024 – Bill No. 4/2024**

A BILL intituled:

“AN ACT to make provision for the efficient and effective staging of ICC Cricket World Cup West Indies 2024 and for related purposes.”

*[Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport]*

**Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure to rise for the second reading of this very important Bill, the ICC Cricket World Cup West Indies 2024.

First of all, I want to say that it is a great accomplishment for the country to host this world event. The International Cricket Council (ICC) World Cup is coming to the West Indies and Guyana is a host. I also want to take the opportunity to announce to the nation too that Guyana was just able to secure the hosting of the test match with South Africa. This will be the first time in 13 years that we have hosted a test match in Guyana; 13 years. This is in keeping with the vision that President Ali has for this country, which is about creating Guyana as a worldclass and premier destination for international events. This is an ambitious programme and an ambitious objective. For this piece of legislation – this Bill – that we are presenting to this House, on our side of the House, we expect to have unanimous support because we are all patriots in this country and we want to see what is best for Guyana, always.

What I also want to guard, the Members of the Opposition who will be speaking in relation to this Bill, is that the country’s ability to host and the region’s ability to host is now under different circumstances and different challenges. One which is very unique and which we have not faced before is that we now have the United States of America (USA) entering the market as a player to host international matches. This is the first time this is happening where they are hosting international matches as part of the World Cup, jointly with the West Indies. Of course, this is a big challenge for us small countries where such a huge part of its history and its culture have been defined by this sport and our success in this sport. In fact, this particular point was emphasised at the recent Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Symposium in Trinidad and Tobago a few weeks ago, which was a recognition by all the members and all of the stakeholders who were there of the importance of cricket and West Indies Cricket to the entire region. We have to guard zealously the protection of Guyana’s image, the West Indies as a host and as a team, and the brand of West Indies. How we speak about what is contained in this Bill and what happens leading into those matches and during those matches is something about which, as national leaders, we have to be very careful, very deliberate, and very responsible.

4.48 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I intend to take the House through the important paragraphs or provisions in the Bill, but what you should know is that this Bill seeks to harmonise the provisions as part of our international commitment to host these matches. As you know, sport is a big business and, also, being able to host these international tournaments comes with particular obligations, obligations that all of the hosting nations have to fulfil. Those commitments have to work seamlessly so that when they move from territory to territory, the various persons and stakeholders who are involved in the successful delivery of these matches, they can do so with the protection of the law. It also gives our international partners, sporting partners in particular, the assurance that the country is serious about this commitment that we have made, and sends the signal about what we intend to do moving forward. Obviously placing these protections that form part of the provisions and the commitments as part of our national legislation, which is a sunset type of legislation, will conclude and will come to an end, these protections that are contained here, on the 30<sup>th</sup> June. The point is, beyond just the hosting of this fantastic world event of which billions of people from around the world would be looking at all of the countries, Guyana, amongst all of the other hosts of this tournament, is passing this legislation to signal its intention for this tournament. Beyond that too, it also sends a very important signal to the world about putting into place that developmental pathway of achieving that vision for President Ali, which is, we want to see Guyana become this premier destination for world class events.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to take this House through all of the relevant provisions that would be of importance and what some of the customary types of changes are, but still included, so everyone is aware of what are the types of concessions we are providing to facilitate the tournament. First of all, when Cricket West Indies (CWI), as the host, takes over the stadium and the practice facilities which have to be designated, with the exception of the important agencies, they take over the facility exclusively. They are also responsible for all of the selling of the tickets, and it also allows for us, the Government of Guyana, to provide the relevant work permits where required, and the efficacious and expeditious processing of those work permits.

It also allows, in clause 8, for the exemption of any duties and taxes for the movement of goods into the country for the purposes of conducting the tournament. For example, players would be moving with all of their goods and their equipment. Media houses would be moving with all

of their equipment, and for the scale of this event it will be lots and lots of equipment. All of that equipment is exempt from duties and taxes. That is contained here at clause 8. In addition, the country would be giving the tax waiver on any tickets that are being sold for the hosting of this event.

Clause 17 gives the Cricket World Cup (CWC) the power to restrict any items that are coming into any of those designated areas, which includes the stadium. We all know how important it is that security checks take place, itemising those restrictions and then seizing any items that are being sought to be brought into the stadium. It also gives the police the supporting power by the Cricket World Cup Committee, that if persons are misbehaving, it allows the police to remove persons from the stadium.

Clause 22 and clause 23 speaks about the prohibition against ambush-type of marketing and advertisements that are not permitted, which is an important commercial aspect that we are required to protect.

Clause 24 prohibits unauthorized broadcasting of any of the matches and anything that would be going on within those areas.

Clause 26 going all the way to clause 32 provides for the protection of intellectual property. So, any of the trademarks, any of the copywriting and any of the images that are used to be monetised as part of its commercial protections, all of that is contained as part of the Bill from clause 26 all the way to clause 32. That is an important part of how sport makes money too.

Clause 34 all the way to clause 36 empowers the Commissioner General of the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to work with the Cricket Committee so that any goods being brought into the country and identified, that do not have the authorisation for the use of any of that intellectual property, they are empowered to seize, then notify, and then allowed to take a particular course of action.

Clause 40 also allows for damages. If persons, despite knowing that when there are these intellectual property protections, look to infringe on that, the Act gives the power to seek a redress, to seek damages. If persons want to go and extract profits in that situation, it allows the Committee to go and take back from them the damages. It also gives me, as Minister, who has responsibility to make any additional regulations that are required. We can do so by order and make any amendments to the schedules that are attached hereto.

Those are the provisions and those are the important bits of powers that are contained in the legislation for the public to know. What is important – and I want to reiterate – these provisions that are contained in this Bill, they are part of a regional harmonisation of a legal framework to protect, to enshrine the commitments that we, as a Government, made in order to host this international event which would be viewed by billions of people. I cannot state this point more important than what I have said before, I want to just remind the Members on the other side, when you get an opportunity to speak – and we are happy for the contribution you are going to make – be mindful that our opportunity here to host international events is a privilege. It is a privilege to host the Cricket World Cup here. We are the hosts of the Cricket World Cup in Guyana, and it will benefit hundreds of thousands of people in many different direct and indirect ways. When we get to put Guyana on show, everything that you say here and outside of the House, not only jeopardises or can affect the hosting of the tournament, but it can also affect future tournaments too.

It is a privilege to have the Cricket World Cup come to the West Indies once again. It is a fantastic opportunity for both the country and the region in these challenging times. We are looking forward to the successful games. We are also looking forward to a successful hosting of the tournament and the display of Guyana to the billions of people who are going to be watching around the world. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Ms. Flue-Bess:** Mr. Speaker, let me start by first saying an early Happy Mother’s day to our mothers, as we will be celebrating Mother’s Day this weekend. At least I am looking forward for the weekend and I am sure mothers are too. As you know, that is the time when we can be pampered and enjoy a good weekend.

I have listened to the Minister, and I want him to know *right off the bat* that we are in full support of the Bill. My presentation will be a little different from yours, but we are in support of the Bill. When I received this Bill, I did some background checks because I know we had a debate earlier in this year. I went back to check and see what was said about this particular, upcoming event. Also, I went into the media search to see what I could pull up, and a *News Room* article dated 5<sup>th</sup> January stated:

“Guyana to host World T20 semi-final and five group games.”

In this article I found the dates for the event, the time and so forth.

5.03 p.m.

Then on 30<sup>th</sup> April, I came across another article from *News Room* that spoke to:

“Government ensures world-class facilities ahead of the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup.”

Within this article, and I am going to read exactly what it says:

“The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, Director of Sport... has confirmed that the pitches at the National Stadium and practice venues are in prime condition, meeting the...”

...expected standards. There is another paragraph in this article that drew my attention when it stated:

“He further emphasised the ongoing efforts to ensure the completion of any remaining works... Tickets for the tournament will become available on Thursday, May 2...”

...and the handing over and so forth of the venue. When I went to work, I think it was the day before yesterday, I was pleasantly surprised at this view, where the men were out there with the World Cup ballons. The balloons were aired up. It was all excitement to see the children, parents, and even myself, taking photos at the balloons that were there. It gave me great pride and joy to see that. Hon. Minister, I cannot understand why only now we are passing the legislation, this particular Bill is being brought, because I saw our sister CARICOM nations passed theirs already. That is something I would like to know. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Alright. Those that I checked, Trinidad, Barbados and so forth. So, I would like to know why only now for us. I must begin by extending heartfelt congratulations to our fellow Guyanese cricketers – Mr. Shemar Joseph, fast bowler; Mr. Romario Shepherd and Mr. Sherfane Rutherford, all-rounders; Mr. Gudakesh Motie, left arm spinner; and Mr. Shimron Hetmyer, batsman – on their selection to the West Indies T20 Cricket team 2024. To the entire West Indies team, we extend congratulations to you, and we eagerly anticipate thrilling matches and, ultimately, victory at the conclusion of this tournament.

The hosting of international competitions demands meticulous planning, as outlined by the ICC and its requirement for delivering worldclass venue matches, training, immigration, customs, medical and security support, among other logistical necessities. Selected countries stand to benefit immensely from global exposure and significant economic injection. That is why we are here today; so that we can pass this Bill which makes all of this possible. I listened to the Hon. Minister as he presented before me, and he highlighted a few clauses in the Bill. As I look



at the Bill, I want to look at it in the context of my fellow Guyanese. Cricket is coming to Guyana. We are all excited. At least, I am looking forward to get a ticket from the Hon. Minister to go to the game. Hon. Minister, I look forward to a ticket to go to the games with my students. It is very good that we can see the actual games on play when you have the children there.

I looked at clause 5, which makes mention of the regulation of goods and deliveries and so forth. However, on this particular clause, I would like to know what plans are really in place to deal with the traffic and all that is happening on the East Bank Demerara. I note that the Ministry of Housing and Water recently posted a traffic advisory on its page. I think that is commendable because sometimes you would drive to a particular area and when you show up, it is blocked. Coming to the sitting of the National Assembly here yesterday, I did not know that the road was blocked so I had to go all the way around. These are things you would see. I would like to know, or to have an idea, if we would have traffic advisories for the public because, as you know, the East Bank Demerara traffic, even though you have the four-laned highway, how tedious it can be and the long hours of wait commuters can have when it comes to the games. These are the things I will look forward to having some information on. I hope that we will see the necessary advisory out on that particular area and, of course, timely advisory.

I believe this cricket offers the opportunity for us to emphasise the promotion of our national identity. The Hon. Minister made mention of being a patriotic Guyanese. Are there any plans in place at our airports? Because I know this Bill speaks to specific areas, and so forth, that the CWC will be having control over, are there any specific plans at the airport, for example, where visitors coming into the country could be given a pamphlet or a hand bill stating welcome to Guyana, some brief information about the country and all of that? We are promoting our national identity. We know that we cannot go to the venues to do this. I would like to know what plans we have to promote our national identity as people come to the country. We know the benefits of hosting this tournament; it provides an opportunity for us to promote our country.

I recall reading a particular article that says that billions of people will be viewing the tournament. That is wonderful. The question I am going to ask is, what experience will we provide as a nation that the persons who will visit our country can go back and say that they had a really good time in Guyana with the food or the exposure or the places that they visited. Are there plans in place for that? I was hoping that when the Hon. Minister spoke, he would

have shed some light on that particular issue, on that particular area. An opportunity presents itself, yes. I heard the Hon. Minister mention about making profits and making money. At the end of the tournament, or at the end of the time in Guyana, what will we as Guyanese be able to say that we enjoyed or gained from the tournament? Are there opportunities provided for Guyanese to really showcase what we have. Only this morning as I drove pass Castellani House I noted, and I actually took a photograph, that there is an exhibition on old times that is running for a particular period. Things like these provide an opportunity as we have persons visiting during a particular time and can be afforded the opportunity to view and take part in such exhibits. Many people will come for cricket, many people will be watching the cricket online and on the live, but the experience they will gain on the ground will be more promotion for Guyana. I would like to know what plans are in place for that.

I note the venues where the games will be played and the practice sessions. The question I have is, what is being done to enhance our historical sites that are located close to these venues because, as the players come, I am quite sure there will be added supporters coming along and will want to go somewhere to view something or read something. That is the information I would like to know or to have. The Guyanese people need to know what they can find. Even as the event will be hosted on the East Bank Demerara, the games will be played at the Guyana National Stadium, Providence, the question I have is – I know the clause in the Bill caters for the Minister securing a particular area – were the persons in these particular areas informed/notified prior, of the restrictions that will be taking place during these games, so that they would not feel left out of the process. As a patriotic Guyanese, it is important that we show respect for all. If I am doing business all year in a particular area and then I have to remove, at least the simple courtesy of someone coming early to say to me that I will have to cease business here for the time or close my shop or something during a particular... I would like to know if such engagement was done. I hope it was because this is very important even as we portray our image.

With the very thought of us highlighting and showcasing what it really means to be Guyanese, I got up this morning and I actually went about creating a little brochure ‘Welcome to Guyana’ and I put our national motto on it. Inside of it, what I did was promotion. I picked out past cricketers from Guyana who played on the West Indies team. Remember, we have an opportunity to showcase our country; even though one cannot do it at the stadium or at the venues it is something that can be done. Could the Hon. Minister inform this House, as we proceed, what plans do we have to really showcase? It is a perfect opportunity for us to

showcase that Guyana is known for producing a lot of players on the West Indies team. Better yet, we have five players on the team this time around. We should have, as a nation, prepared our own brochures on our players. It is our national pride. It is an opportunity to celebrate, it is an opportunity to really showcase who we are as Guyanese. With this opportunity to showcase sports tourism, I trust that we, as a nation, will ensure that we are really felt and seen on the global stage – our culture. As I prepared for this Bill, I reflected on how cricket brings people alive and brings people together. We know that when people are watching cricket next door and someone scores six runs, we hear the echo of voices throughout the neighbourhood, the screams and shouts. When Mr. Shemar Joseph bowled and got the wickets, you heard the voices. While all of this is going on, an advertisement about Guyana might pop up somewhere, but the people do not remember seeing the advertisement because they were so excited, so jubilant, that they missed it.

*5.18 p.m.*

But we have a perfect opportunity on the ground in our country to ensure that as visitors come in to view these matches, they can really take back pieces of Guyana with them and share. That, I believe, will encourage more people, and more persons from around the world would want to come and experience our country. I use sports specifically because I know persons will say, this *gah* go over to tourism, but sports in itself is tourism. An opportunity to view grounds where our players would play or villages that our players grew up in is part of tourism. It is a perfect opportunity. So even as we stand, support, fully support, this Bill with all the clauses that give permission, I trust that as the tournament objective seeks to connect with the world, entertain the world, inspire the world, and bring excellence to the world, Guyana will be able to connect with the world in and out of Guyana, entertain the world with our arts, our craft, our cultural heritage, inspire the world from our diversity and, most importantly, provide an excellent hosting of the games. I thank you as we continue to work. [*Applause*]

**Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]:** Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, I want to join with all Members, particularly on the introduction of this Bill in respect of the International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket World Cup (CWC) and, perhaps, for this session of the Parliament, speaking about something which we can all agree on. I want to be part of the sentiments just expressed by Ms. Nima Flue-Bess in respect of the opportunity that the Cricket World Cup presents us, and particularly the fact that we are rising again in respect of Guyanese players coming in to, in larger numbers, being selected into the West Indies team, into the squad, that

it signals that in all areas, perhaps, we are on the rise again in this era. I remember particularly from my younger days when ‘Kanhai’ and ‘Butcher’ were blasting for runs and ‘Lloyd’ and ‘Gibbs’ and all the others were making us feel so proud in respect of a new, independent nation.

Mr. Speaker, we have done this before; we did have a Cricket World Cup in 2007. I was then the Minister of Works, and we spent a lot of effort preparing for that event, which was conducted successfully. In spite of some delays and a great deal of work to get things on time, it was run successfully. In saying so, I want to remember Engineer Walter Willis, with whom I worked a lot in respect to getting that facility completed, and also with the other agencies then, in respect of getting things to hang together, so that we have had a very successful event, and one that we are proud of, at the then new Providence Stadium. I have no doubt that given the experience we have had, the fact that we too have a capable young Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, and the fact that we have been working at this for quite some time, that this event will not simply match but exceed our successes in the past in respect of this type of events. As was said, it presents an opportunity for us to look at the total resource package in terms of culture, tourism, economic opportunity, bringing exposure to Guyanese, Guyana as a multicultural people and country, and it also does give us the opportunity to do and to behave better with each other.

As was said, this provides us with an opportunity not only to let our diaspora come back at the particular time but also to get persons from countries which perhaps were never involved at this level in respect of Cricket World Cup – Afghanistan and Ireland and other places – to come to Guyana and to experience our culture and perhaps to rekindle some awareness, some understanding, amongst ourselves and countries, at a time when this type of understanding, this type of international committee, is indeed at risk in terms of what is going on at the moment in certain countries. Cricket is still at the heart of every Guyanese. Cricket provides an opportunity not only for our young men to develop their skills at the game and to develop issues of tolerance and working together, but also it brings great opportunity now for women coming into the game, into the field and rising, and coming up to their own in respect of sports, and particularly for women’s involvement in sports, women and young girls. This is a critical issue in respect of how communities and countries move forward together in respect of sports.

I want to assure the Hon. Members that the work has been going on and is still going on as we speak to bring the event to a point where it could be brought off very successfully. The Minister himself has been leading and is leading the Local Organising Committee; the Commissioner

of Police and other senior persons in the Government and in the State are very much involved in making sure that the event is well run. There are indeed a number of positions or understanding we need to have from the security side in relation to the matter. We need to have an understanding of who and what is and are involved. Of course, the “Commissioner” means the “Commissioner of Police”. The “Committee” means the:

“Guyana Local Organising Committee appointed by the said Minister.”

The issue of bringing into any venue dangerous weapons:

““dangerous weapons” mean any-

- (a) explosive;
- (b) incendiary devices or material;
- (c) firearm;
- (d) gas;
- (e) material;
- (f) weapon;
- (g) glass of any description;
- (h) article, object or instrument;
- (i) object that may be used as a missile;
- (j) such other object as may be prescribed as a dangerous object and set out in regulations made under this Act which may be used to-
  - (i) maim, disfigure, disable or cause bodily harm or death to a person;
  - (ii) render a person temporarily paralyzed or unconscious; or
  - (iii) cause damage to property;”

Of course, we should understand that “designated person” means persons relating to the ICC Business Corporation FZ LLC (IBC), ICC and the CWI. Continuing, of course we know and understand what a “police officer” means:

“a member of the Guyana Police Force”

The “Security Directorate” which means:

“...the body convened by CWI in collaboration with the Committee to be responsible for safety and security in relation to CWC 2024.”

In respect of “stadium”:

“...means the whole premises of any stadium, ground or place at which any match, the opening ceremony or the closing ceremony of CWC 2024 is scheduled to take place;”

For ease of reference and noting some of the issues which are related to the security perspective for CWC: The important thing is the designation in relation to any match, who regulates how the places are identified or appointed for the conduct of the games, and that function falls under the Commissioner of Police, and that deals with where deliveries may be made. The fact is that he has the power to:

“(a) regulate or prohibit the making of deliveries within any CWC 2024 venue;

(b) regulate or prohibit the loading or unloading of vehicles...”

The questions of imposing restrictions on standing, stopping or parking of vehicles and other directions there to. There is and there are, for other contraventions of regulations under this Act, fines, and for this particular one,

“(3) A person who contravenes a direction under this section commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of two million dollars.”

On the question of the sale of tickets, we are aware, and of course Bourda is not there anymore, a few trees are there where people used to climb up the trees and look over, and then some people used to ‘pope’. Some people were skilled at *popeing*, and there are some persons who have been skilled or have the intention to obtain tickets and then resell them to do touting. It is important that for this event there is a great deal, a great adherence to law, order and proper public behaviour. You cannot:

“...without the written authorisation of CWI, sell any CWC ticket or an article that is represented to be such a ticket for admission to a CWC 2024 activity.”

You cannot without written authorisation.

“...“sell” includes-

- (a) ...wholesale, retail, auction or tender;
- (b) hire;
- (c) barter...
- (d) supply for profit;
- (e) offer for sale or hire...
- (f) conduct negotiations for sale or hire;”

And so on.

“(i) donate, transfer or in any way dispose of a ticket for gain or profit;”

[*Mr. Speaker left the Chair.*]

[*Mdm. Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.*]

I am not unhappy that Ms. Nima Flue-Bess asked for a free ticket from the Minister. It would be a good gesture, but they could not be transferred for any gain on the part of the Minister or any other person; but any violation of this section would carry a fine of \$5 million. I am sure you have read the document; we have all been issued it. I am only reading it perhaps for purposes of the record and for our fair understanding of what it says. The issue of work permits if persons are coming to Guyana in relation to CWC:

“...any approval or documentation...”

...for that person

“...by any designated person shall be provided by the Chief Immigration Officer...”

...who is also the Commissioner of Police:

“...within seven days...”

It has to be requested and approved and:

“...remain valid ... until the conclusion of CWC 2024.”

5.33 p.m.

The issues in respect of import and export duties relating to personal effects and so on. The one that we should pay some attention to is Section 12:

“Entry into and exit from a stadium in a CWC 2024 venue.”

Pay attention to:

“(1) No person shall enter a stadium during a match period unless he is a permitted entrant.”

One has to be permitted.

“(2) No person shall enter or leave a stadium during a match period except through an entrance or exit designated by CWI or as otherwise permitted by CWI.”

This is for our control. This is for orderly handling of what is a mass public sporting event. This is for the promotion of safety and security. We do not want to have situations where stampedes or any disorderly behaviour may erupt which will result in injuries and loss of personal security or safety as a result of the event. One has to enter and exit through the designated approved entrances and exits. In respect of this, he/she could be:

“...liable to summary conviction to a fine of two million dollars.”

I do not remember which one, but we had a particularly significant cricket event happening at Bourda. It was one of our last where people ran on to the field which resulted in us losing the match. [Mr. Datadin: It was declared a tie.] It was declared a tie. [Mr. Ramson: We would have won.] We would have won but we did not win; we do not want a repeat of that type of happenstance. For the avoidance of doubt, it is laid out in the proposed legislation at section 13:

“(1) ... no person shall, during a match period, enter or be present in or on-

(a) any part of a playing field;



- (b) any other part of a stadium if it is indicated that entry into that part is not permitted: or
- (c) any part of any other CWC 2024 venue if it is indicated that entry into that part is not permitted.”

One of the things, too, we have to appreciate is the fact that, of course, this is an international event. There is a great deal of hype, even with respect to the starting of matches at those venues. Many people who we may not ordinarily recognise would be very important persons (VIPs), would be persons who otherwise would come to our country, and whose safety and security may be compromised one way or the other if we do not put these measures in place. Those are the reasons for those things. Of course, there will be advertisements; pamphlets; information; the direction of a police officer, in relation to going into particular areas or events; and fence; chains; or barriers. One could be:

“(a) ordered by a police officer or an authorised person to leave a CWC 2024 venue, or part thereof;”

One could also be removed if he/she enters wandering into... However, if he/she does not allow himself/herself to be removed, he/she could be:

“... liable on a summary conviction to a fine of five hundred thousand dollars.”

At Section 14, it states:

“(1) CWI may for the duration of a match period, set aside- ...”

...specific areas for events. One cannot go into those areas for those events. He/she cannot encroach or wander into. He/she will not be permitted to enter unless he/she is the holder of a ticket conferring any entitlement or if he/she... Well, he/she cannot basically go in. Again:

“(3) A police officer or an authorised person who has reasonable grounds to suspect a person who is in a reserved area or reserve seat is not entitled to ... seat...”

One might go into the place in his/her seat, then he/she sees a friend across the way, he/she leaves his/her seat, go to join up with the friend and it makes things uncomfortable or it creates disruption and disorder in the area. He/she could be removed or told to move. If he/she:

“(4) ...fails to comply with a request... by a police officer or an authorised person...”

He/she may be summarily convicted and be exposed to a fine of \$500,000 again. Then, of course, there are organisations, associations, clubs, or similar bodies of persons who had maybe previous entitlement; some overarching, overriding normal entitlement, in respect of that stadium or stadia. Those entitlements are set aside for the purposes of the Cricket World Cup (CWC). Any privilege that one thinks he/she could exercise as a member, as a person associated with that association, club, or similar bodies of persons, those things are set aside at the places and times prescribed for Cricket World Cup events. In such cases, if he/she thinks he/she wants to exercise that right, he/she may be:

“(3)(a) ordered by a police officer or an authorised person to leave the stadium; or”

He/she could be removed if he/she is not complying. There may be questions of reimbursement or pay compensation to a member or whatever in respect of the matter, but he/she simply cannot be there. Now, at Section 16, there is a question on the maintenance and protection of the facilities and the proper use thereof by other persons at the event. If one:

“(1)(a) misuse, deface, damage or tamper with any building, vomitory, seat, chair, table, structure, vehicle, craft, truck...”

*Et cetera.* If he/she:

“(b) excavate or cause to be excavated any part of a CWC ...venue unless authorised...”

If he/she:

“(c) erect any structure, erect or display any sign, banner or other things, in contravention of this Act unless authorised by CWI;”

If he/she:

“(d) block any stair, aisle, gangway, overpass, underpass, pontoon, bridge, entry, exit or other thoroughfare unless authorised... “

If he/she:

“(e) throw any stone, bottle or missile...”

Well, sometimes we might get vex. Sometimes people throw bottles; some might throw their roti or tennis ball or throw their cups when they get vex. It is not allowed. If he/she:

“(f) disrupt, interrupt, or behave in a manner that may disrupt or interrupt, any CWC ... activity ... or interfere with, the comfort of persons at a CWC 2024 activity;”

A long time ago, some of those things seemed to be fun, but they are no longer fun at an international event of this nature, so we cannot throw bottles and then let them boys come to pick them up and carry on and so on. If they fall on someone’s head and injure a person; a big-time cricketer, even one of our own, it creates a big problem and their liabilities are in respect of that. If he/she:

“(g) interfere with the equipment of a person taking part in a ... 2024 activity:

If he/she:

“(h) operate or use a loud hailer, public address system or other broadcast device or any other device that may interfere with electronic or radio communications unless authorised by CWI;”

If he/she:

“(i) conduct public surveys or opinion polls, or solicit money, donations or subscriptions from members of the public unless authorised by CWI;

If he/she:

“(j) act or conduct himself in such a way as to-

(i) adversely affect the safety of the public within the stadium or other CWC 2024 venue;

(ii) interfere with any person ...

(iii) adversely affect the efficient operation and staging of a CWC 2024 activity; ...”

If he/she does any of these things, there are some resorts.

“(2) A police officer may dismantle or remove any structure erected or any sign, banner or other things displayed in contravention of this section.”

He/she can:

“(3) (a) may be-

- (i) ordered by the authorised person or police officer to leave the... venue; ...
- (ii) removed from the CWC venue by a police officer if that person refuses to comply with an order under paragraph (a); and”

If he/she commits an offence, he/she would be:

“(b) ... liable on summary conviction to a fine of five million dollars.”

And:

“(4) A police officer may take possession of anything used or capable of being used to contravene this section.”

This is a very critical section in respect of the whole activity. There are questions of lodge. If one is charged, he/she may be notified within 48 hours after possession as such as a place, so he/she may be notified to where and from whom it was taken. The other critical one is in respect of weapons. At Section 17, again:

“(1) no person shall, bring into or have in his possession at a CWC 2024 venue, during a match period-

- (a) any weapon or dangerous object or article capable of being used as a weapon;
- (b) any animal other than a guide dog if the person is blind; or
- (c) any articles specified in Part 1 of the First Schedule.”

(2) No person shall, bring into or have in his possession at a CWC ... venue during a match ..., any article-

- (a) which may be used to-
  - (i) erect a structure;
  - (ii) deface or damage any structure within that venue;

Of course, the public messaging has to go out in respect of these prescriptions.

- (iii) Adversely affect the safety of the public within that venue;
- (iv) disrupt or interrupt a CWC ... activity;
- (v) interfere with the comfort of persons...;
- (vi) distract, hinder or interfere with the person taking part...;
- (vii) engage in conduct prohibited under section 24;

He/she can be ordered to leave. He/she can be removed. If he/she contravenes the section, he/she could be summarily convicted to a of fine of \$5 million. These resorts are necessary for an event of this time. This, as I said, is a time which gives us the possibility and the opportunity to be on our best, if not, better behaviour. I think it bodes well in terms of the regulations with respect to the issues we are clearly identifying, which would not be good for the good order and safety in securing an event. This gives us the opportunity to inhale and to examine ourselves totally. It is not only in the security environment but with respect to how we react and relate to each other, since we are inviting people to our home and not simply at the airport where sometimes we complain that our Immigration Officers do not smile enough. We have to be in such a position, as suggested, to put our best foot forward or best face forward. The fact is still that Guyana and the Guyanese, particularly, are welcoming people; and this gives us the opportunity to get the synergies to develop the opportunities to do the networking, whether it is at the cultural level, tourism level, the level of business, the level of rekindling personal relationships amongst families and friends who would come in from the diaspora or even if we call him on the phone and say, do know what is happening here boy/girl, you should come and see this.

*5.48 p.m.*

It gives us a great opportunity to get together again and recognise that, despite some of the things we say to each other on the floor of this House, somehow, we still love each other as Guyanese. We have to work at this. There will be challenges. The Bill points out some issues which we must pay attention to. Of course, some people will want to come and make a small or big hustle. Some people may want to come out and take the opportunity to do things of a criminal nature and matter. The police will be there – both uniformed and mufti. There will be other persons who have an interest generally in making sure that the event runs as intended.

There are some of the issues which we must pay attention to such as those at clause 19, Sale of goods or services. It states:

“19. (1) No person shall, without the written authorisation of CWI –

(a) hawk, sell, offer, display for sale or distribute to members of the public, any goods, services, flyers or pamphlets;”

If you want to do these things, you have to contact Cricket West Indies (CWI). No person may:

(b) collect money or orders from member of the public for goods or services,  
...”

Any person who contravenes, of course, could be ordered by an authorised person to leave the CWC venue or be removed. If you contravene, of course, there is the sanction at the court up to \$500,000. Since there are a number of events which will be ongoing at practice and at Providence, in respect of identification, persons who are doing things or are suspected to be doing things... Of course, there will be a big security area where they will be monitoring information coming in from the field. Persons may be photographed.

**Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Dr. Kissoon]:** Hon. Minister, in order to conclude your presentation, you would need an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be allowed to conclude his presentation. He has 15 minutes.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Go ahead, Minister.

**Mr. Benn:** Thank you, Chief Whip and Mdm. Deputy Speaker. This is just to say that there is a necessity for photographs. This is to track and be certain of any action which has to be taken if persons contravene the security and safety requirements with regard to the proper and safe conduct of the activities there. A photograph:

“(a) may only be used for the purpose of identification; and

(b) except where the person is charged, shall be destroyed by CWI within seven days of the completion or termination of CWC 2024.”

This is, except where the person is being charged. It would not be held against you and will not have material on file if you are not charged. There is, of course, a requirement to state name and address. If there is suspicion on reasonable grounds that a person has committed or has been involved in the commission of, or a contravention of this part, that person may be required to state his/her full name and address. If he/she fails without reasonable cause to comply with that requirement, he/she may be ordered to leave or be removed if he/she refuses to comply.

Of course, at Part IV, clause 22, subject to existing contractual rights, there is a question of, Control of Advertising. One cannot do advertising and certain broadcasting without the permission and authorisation of the CWC. It states:

“23 (1) No person shall, other than for personal use, broadcast, narrowcast, telecast, transmit, record, publish, disseminate, reproduce or circulate by any means, including without limitation...

- (a) television;
- (b) radio;
- (c) satellite;
- (d) the internet; or
- (e) any wireless service,”

One may not do these things unless he/she has the proper application and approval in respect of these. One must have the permissions and, perhaps, there may some difficulty with this in respect of social media and the power of the little cell phone these days. These are the requirements. One cannot do it without authorisation and cannot wilfully:

“24. (1) ....display, make, publish or televise any advertisement, communication...mark or image or cause or authorise any advertisement...”

...at the venue without sanctions in respect of this matter because it impinges on the rights. It puts, in a precarious position, the investments and so on made by the organisation – developing, creating and hosting the event.

(4) A person who contravenes this section commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of seven million dollars.”

Part V continues on the Protection of CWC 2024 Marks, Indicia and Images, which are normal for these events.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker and Hon. Members, at the first reading, the way in which this Bill is set out and the proposals that are in here with respect to restricting, constraining, and identifying what must be dealt with, may seem a bit heavy, a bit too extensive. Perhaps, it is not what we have been accustomed to. I want us to remind ourselves that we have done this before. We have done it successfully. This is the way it must be done in the modern era for big international events of this time. I am sure every Guyanese, including each Member of this House, would like to see us get through this successfully. I would like to suggest, again, that we would want to see this as a big opportunity, in relation to not simply sports – which is the core activity of the event – but, particularly, on the issues of developing synergies, comity and reawakening knowledge, interest and love for our country. At this particular time, we need to continue, given the sovereignty challenges that we have. We welcome people from other countries who would understand the country; who would appreciate its diversity, multiculturalism, multireligious hiatus and what makes us strong and great in Guyana. They will join and support us when they view how we conduct this event, even while we work the hardest to develop the optimal amount of synergies – coming together – for Cricket World Cup.

In closing, I want to commend the Bill to you for your proper consideration. I want to thank the Minister for his presentation, his interest and the hard work that he continues to do in respect of bringing us to this point and piloting it through the House. I want to wish you all together that we meet at events related to the Cricket World Cup. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. I believe now is a good time to take the break. We will reconvene in one hour.

*Sitting suspended at 6.00 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 7.18 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Members for giving me an extended break. I think we are still challenged to return on time with a quorum. Before I call on the next Speaker, Members of Parliament have seen a Paperless Parliament booth on this floor with us. We have established that booth for those who want some assistance with reactivating their electronic mails (e-mails) and for navigating some of the digital documents that could come. We want to get our *paperlessness* ready before we conclude this Session – with a capital S – Attorney General



(AG). If the AG consults with the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, the Minister would tell you that we had a distinction between capital S, as the Session between elections and a lower-case s, as in the session between our annual recesses. Now let us call the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, to make his presentation.

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having read and understood this Bill and listened to the presenters before me, particularly, Mr. Benn who dissected the clauses, for which I think he did a very good job. I know he would equally get the abled assistance from the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, and most definitely, the learned Attorney General, in bringing much clarity to the listening audience. I trust that this exercise will not end here but, moreover, the Ministry will take the opportunity to broadcast this Bill on its page and even do some advertisements to educate the wider public, so that they too can have a greater appreciation for this Bill and the responsibilities every Guyanese will have in ensuring that we host these games with par excellence. It is in that regard, that this Bill will receive our unreserved support. It is not only because we believe that much more should be done for the development of sports and culture in this country, but equally since it represents a pivotal opportunity for Guyana, our country.

*7.21 p.m.*

This is not only to showcase its beautiful people, our vibrant culture and breath-taking landscape to the world, but also because it provides an opportunity to bluster our economy and foster national unity. As a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse nation, Guyana stands to benefit immensely from hosting such a prestigious event. It is important to note that the sports industry serves as a powerful vehicle for promoting tourism. The ICC Cricket World Cup is a globally renowned event which attracts millions of viewers and visitors from around the world. We believe it is time that the world recognises, come here and experience what this beautiful country and its people have to offer of which hosting this cricket will provide such an opportunity. By hosting these matches, Guyana will attract cricket enthusiast and tourist whereby stimulating economic growth through increased spending on accommodation, dining, transportation and the sales of souvenirs to name a few. This influx of revenue will not only benefit the tourism sector, but it will also have a ripple effect across various industries, contributing significantly to our country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Moreover, the hosting of this cricket could serve as a catalyst – a catalyst – for promoting patriotism and

fostering unity amongst our country's diverse population and boast our tapestry of traditions waiting to be shared with the rest of the world.

It is our hope – it is our hope – and desire that the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports would seize this opportunity to host cultural events alongside the cricket matches, providing Guyana with a unique platform to highlight its unique identity and draw attention to its attractions, exciting visitors to explore beyond the stadiums and experience the warmth and hospitality that Guyanese are known for as a people. The Minister made a profound statement in his presentation, where he made reference to the importance of the protection of intellectual property and the moneys that can be generated. Therefore, in support of this Bill, it would be remiss of me not to beseech the Hon. Minister to bring to this House copyright legislation to not only protect the intellectual property of all Guyanese involved in music and the arts but, more importantly, provide them with the protected space where they can benefit financially from their talents and crafts. Such a Bill, equally, will have our unwavering support.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to make a request of the Ministry to exercise some authority to add pressure on the contractors to complete the synthetic track at Linden and the building of the facility at the Mackenzie Sports Club. The non-access to these facilities has and continues to greatly affect the country's best athletes. The region needs these facilities to be completed and to be furnished with all the resources necessary for our athletes to succeed. I can assure this House of athletes who will provide Guyana with much Olympic medals and world record settings. Additionally, we will produce more professional cricketers and footballers for this country. Therefore, it beseechs the Minister to act more proactive in ensuring that this facility comes to its conclusion. We support this Bill, for the opportunity that Guyana will have to elevate its global profile, reap economic benefits, and foster a sense of pride and togetherness amongst our citizens. It is not just a cricket tournament for us; it is a platform for Guyana to shine on the world stage. I firmly believe that is what we will do.

As I conclude, I am confident that our side of the House will give our unanimous support. I trust that these games will be hosted in Guyana where everyone will have the opportunity to enjoy those games. I trust that the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports who will play a pivotal role in the hosting of the events in some regard extend its courtesy in offering the students of Guyana free tickets to attend those games. With that said, Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend and support of this Bill. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much Mr. Figueira and now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan.

**Mr. Ramjattan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Bill's quality, contents and purpose allows me to be reminded of what happened in 2007, when we hosted the World Cup in the West Indies and when Guyana was a host for several matches. I think it was six. It was required then as it is required now, that there be 'one domestic space', where we, in the Caribbean, have for the purposes of having more or less harmony and one standard in relation to matters concerning exemptions, the customs section, security section, immigration section and harmony in relation to what is to be expected in all of the territories in the West Indies where these set of matches will be hosted.

I understand that the number one official, Mr. Shallow, did indicate support for that sort of arrangement. I think 'Shallow' is his name. He supported this sort of scheme and framework, with these exact purposes as explicitly stated in this Bill, that yes, it should be supported. I agree with him. I am a cricket lover, as most of you would know. Indeed, such a Bill must be given complete support. We have to do a number of things for that one month period up until 29<sup>th</sup> June to ensure that those who would be visiting us, as cricket lovers across the world, following their teams, whether it be New Zealand or Afghanistan, that they be given some sort of Very Important Person (VIP) treatment when they arrive at our airport, right up to the time when they would be hoteled in the various hotels, right up to the time when they go to watch the match and come back, and even when they want to go to the Kaieteur Falls or any other beautiful site in Guyana. They must be entitled to eliminating the need for persons to be processed as we would normally have been doing and not to wait on the immigration section, free movement and much less hassle as it were.

Also, for the tightening up of the monopoly for that one-month period, which is to ensure the greatest good for CWC in relation to so many things such as patents, copy right, marks and insignia, and so many other things. If they did not get that, they would not have wanted to come to Guyana. One must understand the give and take, the dealing and connection with all these matters that happen in an occasion and an event as big as this. That is what this Bill is; it has been passed in some of the other Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nations. I think it was mentioned earlier. Barbados, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and a few others are still yet to pass it and I am certain they will. Now that the legislative framework has been brought by the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson, it is important that we do like Mr. Robeson Benn

has requested of us and be counted for our good behaviour and give commitment to good behaviour. [An Hon. Member: (inaudible)] I believe so. This is like a family event and we have to be seen, even though we might have disagreements internally, when friends and visitors come we laugh and we smile as if nothing is wrong. I believe that we should indeed do that. That is how we can be the best of host.

I want to also indicate that sort of culture is required because, indeed, there is a \$US300 million income from the activities all across the Caribbean that will be brought in as a result off this event. That showpiece event, just for a month, which would bring in so many hundreds of millions in USD, I mean here, all the territories will be redound to the benefit of the West Indies. We must make it a showpiece that is of quality, one where there will be discipline, one where there will be tremendous hospitality and so many other positives about our West Indian people. People that will come would also see our cultures first hand and they will see what a great love we have for the game. I think the greatest book every written on cricket was by Cyril Lionel Robert James, *Beyond the Boundary*. He had a very short pithy tremendous statement.

“What do they know of cricket who only cricket know.”

Dr. Anthony could remember that. It is to praise us to the fact that we know cricket. I must tell you this, as I am certain that all of you know, cricket is the greatest unifying force in the West Indies. It is almost with the force of gravity. It keeps us united and that is largely what Cyril Lionel Robert James wrote about when he said:

“What do they know of cricket who only cricket know”.

Being that unifying force, at our individual levels; as Parliamentarians; as cricket lovers; as fans; as people who might want to sell curried chicken or chicken curry, we all must use this showpiece to show what we are.

7.36 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, one can do nothing better but to ensure that we pass this Bill unanimously. I notice Mr. Speaker that your club, the Everest Cricket Club, was given mention as a venue. Since you became president there, I want to commend you for the massive transformation that has taken place at that club to make it a venue. I do not know if they are going to play any matches. I think there would be practice sessions. I am an honorary member there and I am so proud of the fact that the Everest Cricket Club has been named in one of the back pages as a venue. We

do have other clubs like the Guyana National Stadium, of course, the Bourda Cricket Ground and the Guyana Police Force Cricket Ground. We must take it as something to be proud of that, indeed, all of those are named as cricket venues for this International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket World Cup, West Indies.

We need solidarity on the issue, but we also need to understand... and I put this to the Hon. Minister, Mr. Ramson, we need to also indicate that our children and so many other people in and around these grounds, who will be having practice matches, we and our children, and other people who might want to be present to watch these heroes, be allowed. I have gotten an indication that they are so much extremists in their security arrangements that we may not have, at the Police Ground, the Everest Cricket Ground or the other grounds, at the practice sessions, these things. I remember when I was a small boy, 11 years old, my dad carried me. I think it was India and Mr. Sunil Gavaskar was making his entrance into test match cricket. They were playing the day before at the Bourda Cricket Ground and they wanted... [Mr. Benn: *(Inaudible)*.] Sunil Gavaskar... [Mr. Benn: *(Inaudible)*] It was 1971 and I was there not at the match but when they were practicing. He made a century, and you could have gone and seen them.

I understand now for this World Cup, there would be plenty like my kids and my grandkids who would want to go there to see and shake if it is Mr. Rashid Khan's hand or somebody from New Zealand, like Mr. Vettori or some of the players. They would require at least some measure of arrangement that could allow that. I am indicating at this stage that we must make some arrangements. Even, if after, it is just a couple of school kids or whatever, we should allow that. It would also help to build up the hype. Guyanese touching hands not only with our Shamar Joseph and so on, but other people all across the country. Kids of course will see their heroes. I am asking if there can be special arrangements, notwithstanding, the very tight security arrangements, that this happen. It is going to help our cricket. Cricket of course has its own politics about it. I was listening to a programme by Mr. Fazeer Mohammed recently in which he indicated that we have to know how we handle these things. This Bill gives a lot of powers over that 28-day period and to the Cricket World Cup (CWC). We must at least have a retention of some amount of powers to say, 'If you come in our territory here, let my young people meet you guys'. Please do that, Mr. Minister. I wholeheartedly support this, Bill. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan. Just a little correction, I noticed you said honorary member. When I checked the books, you were a full life member, having paid your dues for 25 years.

### **Paperless Parliament Booth**

Hon. Members, before we get to the Attorney General (AG), I think I did mention, if I have not, our booth with the Paperless Parliament. We want you all to visit the booth, activate your e-mail and get online so that we can do our bit with respect to reducing the use of paper. We will have at the next sitting even more attendance at the booth to help Members with their E-Parliament issues. Attorney General, Hon. Member, Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, you have floor.

**Mr. Nandlall:** From one life member of Everest to another, Sir, and Mr. Ramjattan being a life member, so am I...

**Mr. Speaker:** Sorry, AG. I should mention that the AG also is in that illustrious group, having paid his membership dues for 25 years and is a life member too.

**Mr. Nandlall:** Thank you very much, Sir. Sir, Cricket is our national sport. Cricket is the Caribbean's number one sporting activity. Cricket is an international sport. Cricket is a multi-billion-dollar industry. The 2020 format of the game has now become the most popular of the formats and the pinnacle tournament of that 2020 format is what we, in Guyana and the rest of the Caribbean, have the privilege to host. By any standard, it is a mega event, and we should all feel privileged that it is happening here with us and in our lifetime. The last of such mega events was in 2007 as Mr. Ramjattan, the Hon. Member recalled, when the Cricket World Cup 50 over competition was hosted in the Caribbean.

This tournament, which is about to start, will bring to the shores of the Caribbean hundreds of thousands of visitors. Twenty teams that will be participating. Each team will have its own entourage of officials apart from the players – the medical staff and the technical staff. Then there will be the security personnel that they will be traveling with; the international press numbering in the hundreds will be here; and, of course, there will be tens of thousands of fans who will be following their respective teams from right across the globe, in particular, from countries such as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Australia, England, *et cetera*. There is one difference between this tournament and that of 2007. In this tournament, we will have an added host, the United States of America (USA), where matches will be played in three states, Florida, Texas and New York. So, you have another dimension of arrangements that have to be put in

place. The logistics that is going to be associated with and required of this undertaking will be a massive one.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) Cricket World Cup West Indies Bill is but only one component of the *repertoire* of arrangements that have to be put in place. This Bill sets up the legislative framework under which the teams will operate and that will govern the venues, *et cetera*. Six countries in the Caribbean will be hosting the matches, but almost every Caribbean territory will be engaged in the logistic arrangements and other *ancillary* arrangements that have to be put in place. Jamaica, for example, is not a host country, but Jamaica will be one of the main transit points into the Caribbean because of its geographic location. The Hon. subject Minister and the Minister of Home Affairs have dealt with the Bill adequately so there is no need for me, obviously, to go into it, clause by clause, but just to underscore a couple of important points. This Bill is identical to the Bills that are being passed across the Caribbean, in particular in the six territories. Those six territories are Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. We, maybe, would be one of the last territories passing our legislation.

The legislation obviously is one that would have had to been approved by the ICC legal team because it would have to protect all the proprietary interests of the ICC, in terms of their intellectual property, insignia, signs, *et cetera* and would have to meet the arrangements that the ICC would consider its best practices by now, having hosted tournaments like this all over the world. What you see in this Bill is the standard practice of the ICC wherever they host tournaments. It is important that we publicise the clauses of this Bill so that our population understands what their legal obligations are for this period. As was established already, this is a sunset legislation that would come to an end on the 30<sup>th</sup> June. In that period, we have a host of obligations and a unique regulatory framework that will govern Guyana for the purpose of this tournament. There are some very peculiar rules in relation to the venue itself, and no doubt the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport would do intensive public awareness programmes and campaigns to ensure that we do not offend that which we are passing as law in this Bill.

7.51 p.m.

A lot of the things which we are accustomed to, when we go to see cricket at the stadium, may not be permitted in this piece of legislation. Some of them are absolutely prohibited and some are restricted. For example, on the restricted item list, which can be found at page 47 of the Bill which consists of the First Schedule, “Coolers/lunch boxes larger than 30x30x30 cm.” is a

restricted item. “Fold up chairs not intended for mounds”. So, fold-up chairs intended for the mounds would be permissible. That is the only place where you can take fold-up chairs. “Large banners and flags, flag sticks above 1.6 metre in length”. We have developed a culture of having huge flags and huge banners. The public will have to be apprised that these are restricted items.

Then, you have a list of prohibited items, “Animals...”. I do not think animals are taken into the stadium generally. “Bicycles” are prohibited. “Commercial Video/Photographic/Audio Equipment”. Many of us, perhaps, walk with audio/video equipment, if they are commercial in nature, according to the Schedule they are prohibited. “Dangerous Items/Weapons (including but not limited to firearms, explosives, knives, flares, fireworks and laser pointers).” I have seen what could be considered flares and fireworks at cricket. These are prohibited. I see them at dancehall concerts in the precincts of the stadium – these are prohibited items.

“Drones...” which seem now to be a common thing at sporting events, “...or unmanned aerial vehicles.” are prohibited items; “Glass bottles or metal cans” and, of course, “Narcotics”; “Offensive or Political signage. Do not wear your green shirt, Mr. Mahipaul. It may be considered a political signage.” [An Hon. Member: Wear your red one.] I will wear my red shirt. “Promotional or commercial material.” Remember, we are giving over possession of the stadium, so to speak, to the International Cricket Council. They will control all the signage and all the images. You can only display what they permit you to display. They are prohibiting all promotional or commercial materials. Of course, if you enter into commercial arrangements with them, which the Bill permits, then I suppose you will be able to display your mark, your copyright or your product. That is one regime of rules that we will have to educate our population on.

The purpose of this Bill and the connecting arrangements is to collapse the Caribbean into one common domestic space. That is the terminology that the ICC uses to describe the area where the tournament is going to be held. All barriers that would prevent that holistic domestic space from being created, would obviously be collapsed by the operation of this law and by other administrative arrangements to which I will refer shortly. That is why you have all these visa-free travel and all the arrangements that have to be made for work permits and other permissions, licences, *et cetera* that may be required ordinarily. All of that will be collapsed to ensure that the entire hosting arena, consisting of the six countries, can truly be described as one common domestic space. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, would recall, in 2007, we had a whole sleuth of legislation. This time, we only have one. It is not that those arrangements are



not in place. For the 2007 World Cup, we passed a law – we did not make a Sunset Law throughout the Caribbean – called a Visiting Forces Act of 2007. That Act remains permanently across the Caribbean, and it allows the free movement of our security forces and our Disciplined Forces personnel. We did not have to pass a law to deal with security arrangements. That law and the regulations made under that law will govern that aspect of the operations.

Then, it was decided, at the level of the Legal Affairs Committee and the National Security Ministers of the Caribbean, that is the Attorneys General and the National Security Ministers of the Region, a decision which the CARICOM Heads accepted, that a large bundle of arrangements will be done administratively. A whole host of immigration and other issues are not part of the legislative framework, but we have memoranda of understanding (MoU), signed across the Region, and other administrative mechanisms and devices that capture those aspects of the preparation. Only two days ago, our Commissioner of Police was in Barbados dealing with some of those arrangements. We met in Trinidad and concretised the terms of this Bill and other aspects of the national security sector. This Bill is only part of a larger framework of arrangements that is being put in place for us to host this very important and mega event.

Of course, as the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, said and I believe other Members have alluded to, we have to be good hosts, we have to be gracious, we have to be hospitable, a characteristic for which we are known, and we have to behave. I believe the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, said millions of people will be viewing us on television. It is not millions; it will be billions of people. Once India is playing, right there you will have a billion viewers. If Pakistan is playing, if Australia is playing, if England is playing, Afghanistan or Sri Lanka, billions of eyes are going to be on us in the Caribbean. It is a grand showcase for us. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, quoted a figure at US\$300 million that will flow into the Caribbean from this event. I do not know how accurate that is, but I do not doubt it. As I said at the beginning, it is a multi-billion-dollar industry and this is one of the most premiere events in the cricketing world. No doubt, Guyana will reap economic and financial benefits.

Our hotels are already booked. You cannot get a room now in any of the hotels for the month of June. Try it. Dozens of houses have already been rented out across the country because thousands of Guyanese are returning home from Canada and the United States. [An Hon.

**Member: (Inaudible)]** I am telling you. I know. I know of 60 persons coming from two buildings alone, from New York. Sixty from one street in New York, from two or three buildings. They are friends. They are not living in one building, but the arrangements are being

done in two houses in Richmond Hill. As Guyanese, we might be the smallest group of visitors. When you look at 20 teams that would be coming, I believe 12 of them have already qualified. Then you have a competition for eight more. It is going to be mega event and I want to, on behalf of my Colleague, the subject Minister, to thank the Opposition for their support, we must thank you when you take national positions, when you cut the budget, I must criticise you. I thank you very much, Sir, and I thank you, Hon. Members. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Attorney General, Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, SC, MP. Now, for the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, and another life Member of that illustrious club. He has 25 years paying dues.

**Mr. Ramson (replying):** You have to earn that. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by taking the opportunity to thank the Hon. Members from the other side too, for a very important piece of legislation. We have shown the importance, again, of sport and cricket in particular. I just want to take the point which the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, said about cricket and it being important for its unity – being able to unify the region. It has done more than that. It has been one of the critical ingredients for our evolution as a civilisation in this part of the world, which is very unique. You extract cricket from that. Our society, our civilisation is not the same. It is really not the same.

I am very pleased to have the support from the Members of the Opposition in relation to this Bill. There are a couple of things that I want to address quickly because there was a question why we only brought the Bill now. There was a lot of backroom work and vetting work that had to go into its preparation. That is why it is harmonised. Just to give you a sense of that statement as a fact, just today you would have seen the Bill make its way in St. Vincent. Similarly, just maybe I think Friday past, it was passed in Barbados. I know that for a fact.

*8.06 p.m.*

What I want to be clear about is that there was no undue delay from our side. In fact, the Ministry established our local organising committee and appointed its members since in December. Even in advance of the public announcement, we had established our committee in December and started doing preparation for a number of the renovation-type works that were required at the National Stadium and at the various locations. Just to correct what the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, may be labouring under the impression that the other locations might have practice games. There will be practice facilities, so they will just be practising there. You

do not get an opportunity to see any of the games. The traffic advisories will come out from the Guyana Police Force. They have an important role in relation to the function they play on the local organising committee. Our Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce and the Guyana Tourism Authority, also have a role on the local organising committee and they have a very elaborate marketing framework that is planned and is going to be rolled out shortly.

In relation to copyright, just to inform the House that, in Guyana, we have copyright legislation –all of the protections. It is not just copyright alone. It is all of the areas of intellectual property that are covered by the protections of the law in Guyana. Just to be clear too, this was a conditioned precedent for us to host these proprietary and commercial interests that have to be protected, that are contained in the provisions of the Act or the Bill now becoming an Act. These proprietary interests were a conditioned precedent for which, when you get an opportunity to host this world type of event, you do not forbear that opportunity because you are reluctant to provide the temporary concessions that are essential and common for all types of world sporting events.

Finally, in relation to being able to see the practices, there is a heightened security but with good measure and for good justification. The references that you may have had as an example, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, when in 1971 you would have seen India practising, playing I am sure, against the West Indies because we would have hosted here. That was simply India v West Indies. This is the World Cup. Now, this is as big as the equivalent of football where you host the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup. This is as big as that except that it is cricket. Those measures that are put in place in relation to the security element of it, it is more elaborate but because it is this world event, the additional measures are justified. Having said that, we do have a retention power and, if you examine the provisions, it was something that I was very careful to maintain. We do have a residual retention power in relation to carefully not excluding the Government's role in seeing how the games go and access, *et cetera*.

Those are the comments that I wanted to make in relation to some of the points that the Hon. Members on the other side had made. It is a fantastic opportunity for the country. The fact is, the game is evolving, and it is evolving rapidly which means that... And when I say the game, I do not mean the rules of the game, I mean that the commercial elements of the game are evolving and it means that we also have to see the challenges as opportunities as well. That is something that His Excellency President Irfaan Ali has spoken about when he made his

presentation at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Cricket Symposium just a few weeks ago, which I attended. I also made some important points which were covered in the media, but the point is that those are challenges, those are threats, and the dynamics of the changing nature of the commercial elements of the game. Those are challenges and threats, but we have to evolve and adjust to those challenges and convert them into opportunities. It is not going to be easy.

If you examine the preparation for those matches now, where they can create the stadium all across, they did three in the United States of America. They are actually taking pitches out from another country, shipping them in and inserting them into their ground. That is how much of a, I do not want to say disadvantage, but that is the nimbleness of how the infrastructure is changing and it puts countries like ours which are less resourced, small island territories, small Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) but when we have those types of games, they create big impacts in our economies and it does a lot for the spirit of the society and the soul of the society. For them, it may just be another opportunity to host another international tournament but, for us, it is far bigger. That is why we have to maintain a united kind of approach when dealing with this area and the investment that we are making to pursue that vision so that we maintain Guyana and the region as one of the preferred destinations for international cricket and world-class tournaments. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport. Hon. Members, before I put the vote, I need to ask the Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira, to move the suspension of the Standing Orders. We have actually gone beyond 8.00 p.m.

#### **Suspension of Standing Order No. 10(1)**

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No. 10(2) be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to continue with its business beyond 08.00 p.m.”

*[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and  
Governance and Government Chief Whip]*

**Ms. Teixeira:** I would like to ask that we suspend the Standing Order, I believe it is 10, to allow us to proceed to complete the Order Paper today, not the Order Paper but the items we agreed

to today. So, I ask that the Standing Order be suspended to allowed us to continue to the conclusion of the Sitting.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Standing Order Suspended.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Let us proceed. Hon. Members we have had the debate on the ICC Cricket World Cup West Indies Bill 2024.

*Question put and carried.*

*Bill read a second time.*

*Assembly in Committee.*

*Bill considered and approved.*

*Assembly resumed.*

*Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.*

#### **CIVIL AVIATION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2024**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Civil Aviation Act 2018.”

[*Minister of Public Works*]

**Bishop Edghill:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move that the Civil Aviation (Amendment) Bill 2024, Bill No. 3/2024 published on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024 be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy with the mood that exists in the House at this current time because Members are rising to the occasion and when the national interest needs to be protected and advanced, we are showing to the nation that we are nationalists and patriots, and we could do what is good for Guyana.

*8.21 p.m.*

So, while I commend the Hon. Members who participated, just a few moments ago, when we were dealing with the ICC World Cup West Indies Bill, I believe the Civil Aviation (Amendment) Bill that we are considering will have similar treatment because this is a similar situation. This Amendment Bill that is before us is necessary at this time because Guyana is about to face an International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) audit. The ICAO will be auditing Guyana. The areas in which the audit will be conducted have to do with legal – which has to do with our legislation – organisations, personnel licensing, operations, airworthiness, air navigation, services, aircraft, accident and incident investigations, and aerodromes. There are a number of questions that we will have to answer as an Authority and as regulators. Since Guyana has a rapidly expanding aviation sector – and I believe all of us take very seriously the issue of aviation safety, something that should never ever be compromised – the strongest framework of regulation is required, and the highest standard of compliance is needed.

Guyana is a member of the international family and is required to ensure that while we operate, we meet best practices and satisfy international standards. I think some of the standards that have been set and that are in our framework have surpassed minimum standards. There are what are called minimum standards, but we want to ensure that we have an adequate framework. As a result of this, we have sought the support of and have engaged the expertise of experts in the field to help us as a country and to work with our local team in all of the various areas to ensure that we are in a place that when we are examined, we get the best possible results, and we score very highly. For this, we have engaged support from the ICAO in our regional mechanism and in Latin America. We have had a number of experts come to the country to work with our team at the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA). As a matter of fact, one is in the country, currently, examining our aerodromes. As a result of those expert engagements, our local team, having received those reports and their findings, has done adequate preparation to ensure that we get the best results.

This is a good opportunity as well for me to take the time to salute the men and women at the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority who have worked evening after evening, for a protracted period, and weekend after weekend, to ensure that we get to this stage. Some of them are in the House with us tonight, including our Director General and the two Deputy Director Generals – one is administration, and the other one is operations – and our Legal Officer. I also want to take time to salute the members of the Guyana Civil Aviation Board, its Chairman and the Directors of the Board, who have paid careful attention to this entire process. Many of them have given great service to this process to ensure that we get here. While we have a chairman

who is also an attorney-at-law, many of our directors are people who are management-oriented and financial-oriented, skills that were brought to lift the standard at GCAA. I want to salute them all. My colleague, Minister Indar, who will speak, took a lead position in coordinating with the team to ensure that everything that needed to be done was done. I would like to recognise his work and service as well in getting us here tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to indicate that whenever is our next sitting, I intend to table a number of regulations that will accompany these amendments to strengthen the Act to ensure that we are in full compliance. So, I am signalling my intention to table at the next sitting the necessary regulations that will accompany this Act. I would not be doing justice if, at this time, I do not also recognise the work of the Attorney General and members of his staff. I want to say that the Attorney General himself paid careful attention and was personally involved. It was not just something that was handed to his staff, but he led from the front. For that, we are extremely grateful, and we express our thanks. There are 16 amendments that are being made. These 16 amendments come as a consequence of the review of the Civil Aviation Act 2018. After the review, wherever we found deficiencies, we sought, by way of these amendments, to bring us up to speed. So, I will guide you through the 16 amendments, and I believe that all Members of the House, having heard what we are seeking to do, will lend the necessary support to ensure that we get a regime that is acceptable to our assessors and that we will come out with flying colours.

The first amendment, which will see an amendment to section 2(1) of the principal Act, has to do with definitions. The definition used in the 2018 Act was not consistent with the definition in Annex 14 to the Chicago Convention. This amendment will correct that anomaly and ensure there is a standardisation and consistency in utilising ICAO's definitions of terms within the civil aviation legal framework. So, basically, that is the first thing we are doing in terms of the definition – ensuring that there is standardisation, the terms are all clear, and we will be able to do that.

The second amendment is an amendment to section 17(2)(b) of the principal Act. The 2018 Act used a generic term. That generic term was “aviation document”, which refers to a licence, certificate and other approved documents by the Authority. However, to enhance clarity, it was determined that the names of the documents issued by the Authority, such as personnel licence, air operator certificate, certificate of registration, certificate of airworthiness, *inter alia*, should be included in the definition. While the list is not exhaustive, any new or unspecified document

will fall under subsection (b), which will provide for any such document as may be approved by the Authority. We are basically spelling out, for clarity, what we refer to when we speak about aviation documents.

The third amendment refers to section 39 of the principal Act. The 2018 Act empowered the Director General and Inspectors unrestricted access to any place where aviation operations are conducted. However, a gap was identified when we had the assessment from our technical experts. A gap was identified where the Authority had no legal basis for conducting surveillance activities at an aerodrome. Hence, this provision is being amended accordingly to explicitly include the word aerodrome. So, in this amendment, we are just simply adding the word aerodrome at the necessary place to ensure it is included. Of course, we have always been inspecting aerodromes. I guess everybody felt that it was covered, but when the experts went through it, they saw that was an omission. We are seeking to correct that.

The next amendment is to section 39(2), which has to do with access to premises. Similarly, the 2018 Act made provisions for a number of documents to be assessed by the Authority in exercising its functions. This amendment seeks to include licences, permits and logbooks in the list of accessible documents. So, in spelling out and ensuring that it is clear, we are simply adding – strengthening what was done in 2018 – the words licences, permits and logbooks.

*[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]*

*[Mdm. Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]*

The next amendment refers to section 42(a). The Civil Aviation Act 2018 grants the Director General the exclusive authority to suspend an aviation document for reasons pertaining to safety and security and to ensure compliance with the Act. However, a gap was identified in situations where an Inspector detects a safety or security risk and immediate action is required, but the Director General cannot be reached. In such a case, Inspectors do not have the legal basis to directly prevent an individual from exercising the privileges of the aviation document.

*8.36 p.m.*

Therefore, the 2018 Act is being amended to establish a process, allowing the Inspector, when justified, to take immediate action in directly prohibiting a person from exercising the privilege of an aviation document to mitigate or prevent a safety or security breach. This is to ensure that at all material times, safety and security is our number one priority. It is being done in a manner



to ensure that whenever the Director General cannot be found – and that would be a very rare case – the breach would not continue because of that situation.

The next amendment would be to section 45(a). Guyana has ratified Article 83 bis. The Civil Aviation 2018 Act only made provisions for Guyana, as a state operator, to provide safety oversight for foreign operators. Article 83 bis of the Chicago Convention basically facilitates the transfer of responsibilities between state of registry and state of the operator, particularly regarding the recognition of documents, such as crew licences, certificates of airworthiness and radio station licences. This amendment will incorporate the additional obligations to be undertaken by Guyana as a state of registry, as is envisaged by the Chicago Convention. So, we are basically bringing Guyana’s legislative framework to ensure that we are now in compliance with the Chicago Convention.

Section 50(a) is being amended. It is an amendment, but it is an insertion of a new provision. This new provision is being included in the Civil Aviation Act to comply with Article 34 of the Chicago Convention. This requires that the state mandates an air operator of an aircraft engaged in international navigation to maintain a journey logbook in respect of the aircraft. This was included in the secondary legislation that exists, but our experts felt that we need to elevate it to being in the actual legislation and not just in the regulation. This is what this amendment will facilitate. It will ensure that we come in compliance with Article 34 of the Chicago Convention. This amendment is to ensure that Guyana, as a state party, fulfils its commitment to the obligations under the Chicago Convention.

The next amendment would be to 51(1). The 2018 Act currently confers the right of access solely on the Director General to ensure civil aircraft are airworthy and operated in accordance with the Act. However, this amendment explicitly extends this right to individuals authorised by the Director General. This would include Inspectors and the Authority being granted access to intervene in accordance with a prescribed process to prevent an aircraft from flying, when justified, for safety reasons. By granting Inspectors the direct authority to act, they can promptly address any safety risk, thereby minimising the potential for accidents or incidents during flight operations. The established process for the Safety Inspectors to follow is outlined in this provision. Upon the identification of the safety risk, the Inspector will notify the operator that the aircraft or aircraft components are not in a condition safe for use. The Inspector would prohibit the operators from using the aircraft until the issue is addressed. The operators will be allowed to use the aircraft when it is found to be acceptable and safe by the Inspector.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I have had an unfortunate experience during international travel, having buckled up to depart, of safety Inspectors coming on board international carriers, and we all had to remove ourselves and go to another aircraft because that is how important aviation safety is. You do not take chances in the air; you fix everything on the ground. This is to ensure that we have that, and our Inspectors are so authorised.

The next provision that is being addressed in these amendments is to section 56(a) – aircraft operated over the high seas. The current 2018 Act did not provide for Guyana-registered aircraft to comply with Article 12 of the Chicago Convention with standard adherence to Guyana’s rules and regulations over the high seas. This amendment reaffirms Guyana’s commitment to fulfilling its treaty obligations under the said Convention. Considering the absence of jurisdictional boundaries over the high seas, this amendment emphasises the necessity for Guyana-registered aircraft operating in these areas to strictly comply with the standards outlined in the applicable annex. Those standards will be incorporated into Guyana’s rules of air regulations to ensure that operations of Guyana-registered aircraft over the high seas are conducted in a safe manner. There, again, Mdm. Deputy Speaker and Hon. Members, it is strengthening our safety regime and bringing us into compliance.

The next area that we are examining and asking the support of honourable House with these amendments is section 56(b). This has to do with the interception of aircraft. While section 140(3) provides for the Minister to make regulations in relation to the interception of aircraft, the primary legislation, which is the 2018 Act, is being amended to incorporate provisions of articles 3(d) and 3 bis of the Chicago Convention to ensure that aircraft flying over Guyana’s territory comply with interception orders issued by Guyana. I know some of us may say that we are not there as yet. But we are also looking into the future, and we have to be able to get those in place.

In addition, by virtue of Article 9 of the Chicago Convention, each contracting state reserves the right, for reasons of national security or public safety, to restrict or prohibit aircraft of other states from flying over certain areas of its territory. I am sure all of us know what is called a restricted or no-fly zones. One cannot fly within a certain distance of the White House. One cannot fly within a certain distance of the Pentagon. These are all outlined, and everybody ought to know. So, Guyana would also be in a position to issue those instructions as well.

The 2018 Act is now being amended to include a provision where it would be mandatory for any Guyana registered aircraft or any civil aircraft, operated by an operator in Guyana, to

comply with the interception orders, including those from other states. The new provision establishes that any aircraft when in flight over Guyana shall comply with the interception orders issued by Guyana in accordance with the applicable rules of the regulations. This section also creates an offence, whereby a person who does not comply with the interception orders shall be imprisoned for up to five years or fined up to \$5 million. The amendment also includes the definition for “Guyana operator” to eliminate any ambiguity in the interpretation.

I heard a little earlier in the ICC Cricket World Cup West Indies Bill 2024, which was just concluded, that people are flying recreational drones or unmanned aerial vehicles. We will have to start coming into compliance because safety and security are necessary. People have often approached me, since I am the Minister, and asked why they cannot fly their drones within a certain distance from the aerodrome. The air navigational services must be able to correctly read what is happening and give proper directions. We cannot have a loose situation; we have to be able to address all of those issues.

The next amendment for which we are asking the support of the honourable House is an amendment to the 2018 Act which deals with the providing of a list of minimum documents required to be carried on board an aircraft during international flights. This is the power of functions of the pilot-in-command. We are setting it out clearly. The obligations of the treaty must be fulfilled. The amendment would align the Civil Aviation Act with Article 29 of the Chicago Convention and ensure compliance with international standards. Article 29 of the Chicago Convention requires that there must be, at minimum, a list of documents to be carried on board an aircraft when conducting international flight operations. Parts 1, II and III of Annex 6 also provide guidance on the list of documents required to be on board an aircraft. It is apt to note that the list represents the minimum documents but does not absolve an operator from the responsibility of carriage of any other document as may be required by the Authority. We are adding some sections in the minimum list of what is to be carried and those are clearly spelt out in the amendments.

We are asking for an amendment to 69(1), which has to do with the detention of aircraft in position of prohibition or/and conditions, and seizure of products and goods.

*8.51 p.m.*

The 2018 Act restricts these actions to be taken in accordance with section 69 (1), as it relates to the detention of an aircraft, seizure of an aeronautical product, *inter alia*, solely by the

Director General. This amendment empowers individuals authorised by the Director General to take similar actions. This ensures that aviation safety is maintained if the DG is not immediately available. This section is being amended by the insertion of the words ‘or any person authorised by the Director General’, which will empower Inspectors, in the interest of safety, to detain an aircraft or an aeronautical product, prohibit the operations of an aircraft, seize dangerous goods, *inter alia*, without causing any undue delay.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker and other Members, whom I am asking your support, we are asking for an amendment as well to section 69 (a), Transportation of Dangerous Goods by Air. I am sure we all know that we have to answer the question – are you carrying – when you are doing your check at the various airports, whether here or internationally, and you have to answer that question. The 2018 Act lacks provisions for enforcement against individuals who violate their responsibilities regarding the offering or accepting of dangerous goods for air transport. This new provision serves as a deterrent against such violations.

Section 128 of the Civil Aviation Act currently addresses offences in relation to the carriage of dangerous goods prohibited for air transport, primarily focusing on actions of unruly passengers. However, it was recognised that there is also an obligation on persons who are not passengers as well as operators who caused the carriage of dangerous goods not authorised for air transport on an aircraft. We are strengthening this. It is not just the unruly passenger who is carrying the dangerous goods, but it is the ground handler, the operator or his representatives who is facilitating the carriage of dangerous goods. The carriage of dangerous goods does not put one person at risk, it puts everyone on board at risk. We are broadening the scope to ensure that everyone must fulfil their responsibility to ensure safety. To address this gap, the proposed amendment strengthens Guyana’s legislative framework by creating an offence for any person, not limited to an unruly passenger, who fails to comply with any obligation under Annex 18 to the Chicago Convention on the International Civil Aviation Organisation’s Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air. We ask for the support of the House on this. The amendment also includes new provisions to impose a penalty on an operator or any other person who fails to comply with these obligations under Annex 18 to the Chicago Convention or the ICAO Technical Instruction for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air.

At Part XII, which is a very important one which deals with accident and incident investigations, the current Act was found to be deficient in addressing Article 26 of the Chicago

Convention and Annex 13. This amendment that we are proposing introduces a structured approach to conduct independent accident investigations as is required by ICAO's Annex 13. It establishes functional separation, autonomy, and independence from the Civil Aviation Authority. You cannot investigate yourself. So, if there is an accident or incident, there must be functional separation, independence, and autonomy from the Authority for an impartial investigation to be carried out. Guyana has a responsibility, under Article 26 of the Chicago Convention, to conduct investigations for civil aircraft accidents and serious incidents. However, it is recognised globally that there are practical constraints and unavailability of resources in developing states, such as Guyana, to establish a separate and independent accident investigation unit from the Aviation Authority. The objective of this amendment is to establish a dedicated aircraft accident investigation department of the Authority, separate from the regulatory functions, to ensure effective and impartial accident investigations. By doing so, Guyana should strengthen the institutional framework for conducting investigations into aviation accidents and serious incidents.

The next amendment which we are asking the House to support is to section 89 (1). The 2018 Act does not provide for certification of aerodromes, a requirement outlined in the ICAO's Annex 14. This amendment rectifies this deficiency, enhancing safety measures for the issuance of licences, permits and approvals for various classification of aerodromes. The Authority would have to certify international aerodromes, issue licences or permits for domestic aerodromes and approve the operation of helidecks and helipads in Guyana, which are certified in another state. This becomes very important, especially in our oil and gas sector where we have Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSOs) operating. Some of our Inspectors have had to travel to the place where these FPSOs are being made or the jurisdictions where we have to certify them. The traffic to helidecks and by helicopters it is becoming more and more pronounced, and certification is important.

The Eugene F. Correia International Airport is now one of the busiest aerodromes in the Caribbean in terms of daily landings. We are operating both fixed wing as well as helicopters there. Certainly, at some time, as we grow as a country, we will have to have helidecks and helipads at different places. Maybe companies may want to apply for permission to be able to operate helicopters in their office complex or in the other places where they operate. Those are things that we have to envisage.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker and Hon. Members, the next amendment that we are asking the House to support is 140(1)(o). Resulting from the amendments to section 89 (1), this provision is a consequential amendment to include certification of aerodromes, licencing, permits and approvals. Right now, it reads:

“The Minister may make regulations, in respect of civil aviation for –  
safety and security of aerodromes and other aviation facilities...”

We are saying ‘aerodrome certification, licencing, permits and approvals.’ It is just spelling it out and defining it clearly so that there could be no ambiguity in these matters. The next amendment for which we are asking support tonight requires an amendment of 142 and it has to do with the requirement to be prescribed in respect of regulations. The 2018 Act makes provision for making standards. However, to remove ambiguity from the standards in the ICAO annexes, it is proposed that ‘standards’ be replaced by ‘technical requirements’. Given the frequency of amendments from ICAO, it is proposed that the Authority may make these requirements following a transparent process. Section 142 is being amended to clearly establish that applicable standard rules and recommended practices would be outlined in technical requirements. These technical requirements will provide detailed guidance and specifications to complement the said civil aviation regulations. Under this mechanism, technical requirements will be signed by the Director General and published in the *Official Gazette* before attaining legal validity. The proposed amendment represents a significant step forward in GCAA’s efforts to enhance regulatory oversight and ensure compliance with international standards within the aviation sector in a timely manner.

Everything that I have outlined here is just making what we already have stronger. It is ensuring that we come into compliance and ensuring that wherever a deficiency was discovered....and I say that with the greatest of respect, by no intent that it was as a result of incompetence or anything of that nature. That deficiency might have been based upon our best efforts at that time but now that we have been reviewed and we have received the best technical expert advice, we are now raising the standard to ensure that we have a better regulatory framework and that we are found in full compliance. I will be happy to answer any questions that may arise during the debate, but Mdm. Deputy Speaker and Hon. Members, I do ask this House, on this Friday evening when we all would have preferred to be elsewhere, doing other things, that we do Guyana proud and we ensure that, as a country, when we are assessed as it relates to these

matters, we are found to be in compliance. I thank you very much, and I thank the Hon. Members for supporting the Bill. [*Applause*]

9.06 p.m.

**Ms. Ferguson:** A pleasant evening, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, and to the esteemed Members of this House, this evening I have the privilege from this side of the House to contribute to the debate on the Civil Aviation (Amendment) Bill, Bill No. 3/2024.

From the outset, let me assure the Hon. Member who spoke just before me that the Opposition, we, on this side of the House, have no contentions with the amendments since they are straightforward and will receive our unwavering support. I would like to join with the Hon. Member in expressing sincere gratitude to the Director General (DG) of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), his competent staff, and also the staff of the office of the Attorney General, for their service to the country in ensuring that these amendments come to the House in a timely manner in preparation for the upcoming civil aviation audits.

However, commendation must be given to the Coalition Government for a well-structured Bill passed in 2018, after intense scrutiny at a special select committee where private aircraft operators and other stakeholder bodies were invited to make presentations. The then PPP/C, and if my memory serves me accurately the Hon. Member was also a part of that session and they all participated and gave full support to its passage in 2018. Therefore, with six years since the passage of the 2018 Act, times have evolved, and with the industry growing, as we just heard the Hon. Member allude to, the need for the necessary amendments which, in my view, seeks to insert sections which the 2018 legislation did not factor in. I would not want to use, Hon. Member, the term deficiency. I perhaps would want to replace that with shortcomings... [**Mr. Ramjattan:** Unforeseen.] ...or unforeseen. Thank you, ‘brother Khemraj’.

In my view, to insert sections which the 2018 legislation did not factor in and on recommendations made by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), which is the international oversight for nations, I believe the Hon. Member was crystal in explaining all insertions or replacements to be done in this Bill. I would like to give a little backdrop for the repealing of, I think it was, the 2000 Bill that the 2018 one was able to repeal. I can tell you, that particular bill had major, major shortcomings. I think with the 2018 Bill, after widespread consultations, we had a robust Bill to work with. The ICAO worked along with us, and every other body played its part. During *Budget 2024* and the examination of the estimates for the

Guyana Civil Aviation Authority under the Ministry of Public Works, I recall my honourable colleague, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, questioning the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, as it relates to the number of losses the Authority faced on overflights, which is the heart and soul of its survivability, as a result of the Coronavirus disease (COVID- 19) impact. Rather than proffering a nonpolitical response, he maliciously stated and let me just go to that record quickly...

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Yes, Mdm. Speaker.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** The words “maliciously stated”, please withdraw it.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Could the word ‘malicious’ not be used?

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Let us have a wonderful session. You are going well...

**Ms. Ferguson:** We are having a wonderful session; but I am guided by you Madam.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you so much.

**Ms. Ferguson:** You are most welcome. The Hon. Member stated, and I have a copy of the excerpts here:

“When we left Government in 2015...”

This is what the Hon. Bishop Edghill stated:

“When we left Government in 2015, the GCCA 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 the House for monies to keep the reserve of the GCCA at the legal limit because the expenditure had gone into the reserves. If you check the books of the GCCA, you will see where the moneys went.”

It continued there, but I do not think it is necessary for me to go further. The impression the Hon. Member gave at a time is as though the moneys were spent wildly and wastefully, which was not the fact. I have before me here the achievements of the Coalition Government during our tenure from 2015 to 2020. We were able to utilise the very \$1 billion to improve the performance and to improve the services at the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority.



I will highlight some of our major achievements from 2015. Air operators' licences were issued and renewed. Air services agreements were signed. The GCAA and the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) conducted assessments at Piarco International Airport in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Trinidad) during 2015. This facilitated the establishment of a one-stop security Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority (TTCAA) in August, 2015 that allowed transit passengers to experience hassle free. Sixteen Air Traffic Control Officers (ATCOs) were trained in Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) in Trinidad and Tobago CAA's training and there was an 8.3% increase in the number of aircraft on Guyana's register. One newly approved training organisation was established and there was 100% implementation of air transport surveillance service in Guyana's upper airspace using the advanced technology of automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast. We also sought and obtained a grant from ICAO of \$80,000 for safe funds towards ICAO technical assistance for the strengthening of a robust safety oversight system. The reason for me highlighting these things is just to bring to the attention of the House that without a strengthened legislation, the improvement of staff performance and the training that the technical staff were able to get, we were able to raise our compliance from 44.44% to about 75%.

In 2016, what were some of the Coalition's major achievements? Completion of an audit by ICAO resulting in the upgrade of Guyana's effective implementation compliance level from 44.44% to 64.44%. That is what the Coalition Government did with some of the \$1 billion that we met in the reserve of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority. We also had air services agreements negotiated and initiated, about eleven of them. Then we had about nine air operator's licences issued and renewed. I do not think I would want to detain the House further with the achievements of the Coalition Government because there is so much, and I do not want to take up much of the time. It is a simple, simple Bill. I believe, as I said before, based on the explanations given by the Hon. Member, we have absolutely no problem in supporting this Bill with these amendments. Do you know what Mdm. Speaker? This of itself shows the maturity on this side of the House when it comes to our national issues and also issues that might affect our people. When we can agree in the interest of national development, this in itself will say to the people of Guyana that all 65 Members can work together.

If you do the analysis from 2020 to current, the Opposition has been supporting this Government with bills and with motions, but every time the Coalition brings a bill or a motion to the House that will benefit all Guyana, they always cut it down. We saw it earlier during the

discussion of the motion on the reduction or the review of the housing cost or the cost for land. I will end by saying that I have absolutely no problem and no questions for the Hon. Member. As I said earlier, I think his explanations of the 16 amendments to be made were crystal. He can be assured that we, on this side of the House, will grant him our full support. Once again, Mdm. Speaker, thank you very much for your time and thank you for allowing me to present my presentation. May God richly bless us. Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Datadin:** Good evening, Mdm. Speaker. I rise to support Bill 3/2024, the Civil Aviation (Amendment) Bill 2024. This amendment is essential and critical to the improvement of the aviation sector in Guyana. Our beautiful country is growing, and our economy is growing at a rate so phenomenal that we are classified as the fastest growing economy in the world.

This growth would logically mean there is an increase in travel, especially air travel. The physical improvement at the airport facilities is ongoing and substantial. The economic growth is such that air traffic has improved and increased by staggering proportions. The airport today, in a single day, handles as much traffic as it did in a week a mere decade ago. Let me give you an example, last year we had a total of about 729,450 people who passed through the airport, as compared to 504,032 people in 2015, an increase of approximately 45%. The increase in cargo is even more. We had, in 2015, 6,112,000 kilograms of cargo. This has increased to by a phenomenal 84% to 11,726,000 kilograms.

*9.21 p.m.*

We have had the increase in carriers, and we have had the increase in the number of flights. We know, and it is now public knowledge, that British Airways has returned to flying to Guyana, so we have flights twice weekly to London. Recently, we had the United Airlines doing three flights per week to Houston. This is in addition to us having Jet Blue, American Airlines, Caribbean Airlines, Inter-Caribbean Airlines all using the airport. Our traffic is such that we have two flights daily with American Airlines to two different destinations – Miami and New York. We have Jet Blue daily to New York. We have Caribbean Airlines to Trinidad; Caribbean Airlines do about three, sometimes four daily, to Trinidad, to Toronto, to New York and to Miami. The legislative architecture that we have must improve. It must improve to keep pace with the development and the growth. Initially, we applied the United Kingdom (UK) Civil Aviation Act. As we all know, that would have been in 1949. It came into effect in Guyana in 1952. This was replaced by legislation in 1996 and then again in 2000 and 2018.

Mdm. Speaker, the situation that has been set out in great detail by my Comrade, the Hon. Minister, Bishop Juan Edghill, is that if we want to go further, and if we want to have the development trajectory continue, we have to change our laws. We have to comply with what is known as the Chicago Convention. The International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO as it is commonly known, has made several recommendations to the Government of Guyana. All of the recommendations made are in accordance with the same Convention, the Convention on International Civil Aviation. These amendments, which number 15 in this Bill, provide, as the Hon. Minister Bishop Edghill has set out, for changes in security, changes in documentation that is compulsory, and changes as to the movement of dangerous items. We are now, by these amendments, getting to the standardised process. The Convention to which most countries of the world are signatories, including Guyana, they have standardised the operation and standardised documentation as is required. This can only be good and a positive step in Guyana because if we want our airline or if we want airplanes that are registered here, as would be registered elsewhere, to have the same benefit, then we have to deal with the international community in a manner that is consistent.

I do not want to say minimum standards, but they are in fact the standards which everyone must at least have. We must have those standards implemented, especially as it relates to our documentation, our security and our supervision. Improvements made to the facility itself, the aerodrome documentation, key personnel, access – where they can and cannot go – this is all in keeping with international norms and standards. As I said before, the Chicago Convention which has been agreed to by all, is the source of these amendments. Our compliance with the amendments is critical if we want to have our airport facility to be categorised differently than it is. If we want it to grow as a sector and if we want it to keep up with the development that is astronomical and the traffic that is great... And it is no secret, we would like to attract even more air carriers, allowing more access to other parts of Europe, North America and the Caribbean. For us to be able to do that, and to better equip us to do that, it will serve us well to meet the conditions of the Chicago Convention. Mdm. Speaker, these amendments, which number 15 in total, meet those obligations. It will now be compulsory, it will now be the laws of this land that we will fulfil those obligations. Mdm. Speaker, thank you very much and I, again, repeat that I support and I encourage this House to do the same. [*Applause*]

**Ms. Walton-Desir:** Mdm. Speaker, tonight, I rise to give my unequivocal support to the Bill before us. I am appreciative of the time that the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, took to take us

through the various provisions. With my background in this subject matter, I am fully appreciative of what it is intended to achieve.

I want to point out to us though that, as we continue, we will continue to see these amendments come before us because amendments, generally, are not only passed to remedy deficiencies. For example, when ICAO revises a particular requirement, member states are required to update their laws to continue to be in compliance. We really do look forward to those operating regulations coming on stream. I am proud of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority, an organisation that I joined in 2013, if I can remember accurately. Yes, it was 2013. I am very proud of the men and women that worked in that organisation. When I joined the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority in 2013, as my honourable colleague, Member Ferguson indicated, we had a compliance rate of 44%. It was through sheer hard work and dint of commitment of the men and women in the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority that we were able to raise that level of compliance by 20% and earned Guyana the recognition of ICAO for one of the most improved states in the world. I am very, very proud of that.

One of the other issues we had was that the policy environment, as it were, was very immature and there was not a very clear strategic direction for the sector in Guyana. Again, through the hard work of the men and women of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority, we were able to streamline policy. We were able to accomplish. By the time I left the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority, we had a civil aviation master plan that chartered the course of the development of the sector for the next 25 years. I really want to encourage that we implement that plan because we were able to do this with grant funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and this plan received, as it were, the blessings of the International Civil Aviation Organization. The present Government would have inherited a blueprint that, if they follow, would see aerodromes in every administrative region of this country. Of course, that was in keeping with the trajectory and the goal set by the Coalition Administration of having a regional aerodrome in every administrative region and, particularly, in the hinterland, as it was our aim that the hinterland be connected to the coast.

Mdm. Speaker, the other matter I want to leave with us – I will not be before you for very long – is that I want to encourage the Government of Guyana to champion the cause of the reorganisation and the reinvigoration of what is known as the Caribbean Aviation Safety and Security Oversight System (CASSOS). It is a very, very important organisation that was birthed in 2009. Right here, I think, the MoU was signed at the CARICOM Headquarters in 2009.

What that body, which was the successor body of what was known as the Regional Aviation Safety Oversight System (RASSOS), sought to do was to address the diseconomies of scale faced by small CARICOM member states in terms of being able to have an adequately staffed national CAA, with the competent personnel, and being retained at, of course, competitive salaries. I would really want to urge that we champion the reinvigoration and reorganisation of that entity. It is vitally important for us to do it because a reorganised, reinvigorated CASSOS is important for us to have a vibrant air transport sector in the region, one that is heavily dependent on tourism, for example, as in the case of a small island states of CARICOM. It is important for us to have that in place so that these nation-states could reap the socio-economic benefits of a reliable air transport sector.

Mdm. Speaker, with those few comments, I commend and support all of these amendments to the existing Civil Aviation Act. I also want to take the opportunity to thank the hardworking staff of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority in making this possible, and the Attorney General's Chambers for supporting, for giving the legislative drafting support to the Civil Aviation Authority that they have given. I also want to take the opportunity to wish us the very best at the upcoming ICAO audit. Thank you, Mdm. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Minister within the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]:** Mdm. Speaker, thank you very much. I will be just as brief as my colleague on the other side. We had an unofficial agreement. I want to add my voice to this Bill. It may be a bit late in the night, but this Bill is critical to our reputation in Guyana, our reputation in the 193 ICAO member body. I just want to lend positive commentary towards these 16 amendments – four insertions and 12 amendments.

Mdm. Speaker, behind me is the Director General and the two Deputy Directors General. We also have the Legal Counsel and others from the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority. I want to say that last year, between the period 29<sup>th</sup> August to 11<sup>th</sup> September, there was an expert assessment on the systems, the laws – actually eight different areas – the legislation, the organisation chart, the personal licencing, the operations, the airworthiness, accident and investigation, air navigation services (ANS), aerodromes and ground aids.

*9.36 p.m.*

Those eight thematic areas were assessed and out of that assessment it gave rise to this piece of amendment because what was found was that there were preliminary questions, to the tune of 23, with respect to the legal framework governing civil aviation in Guyana. Out of that my

colleague, Hon. Member Bishop Juan Edghill, detailed the various sections, which I would not go through, that had to be adjusted to keep the law in line with the requirements of the ICAO. In the past, ICAO since 2006, when we had certification, thereafter every year, would come and do what is called a surveillance audit. Those surveillance audits are to ensure that we maintain our systems and our level of compliance, but what those surveillance audits do not do is a reassessment of the entire system. This audit now is a re-certification, it is not the usual run-of-the-mill yearly surveillance audit; so it is a total re-certification. They are looking from the ground up, the entire system of the civil aviation apparatus in Guyana is being audited later in May going into June.

The assessment provided to the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority, a 456-page document with 718 preliminary questions. All of those questions were answered by the professionals working at the GCAA in addition to those from the Attorney General's office. I have lent my support to the team to make sure that the processes and all approvals and whatever they needed were given the speed that was required. In addition to that they had to look at the apparatus on the ground, they had to deal with re-certification procedures, updating of the files, meeting with the operators locally, as well as the fire apparatus that they have at the two airports, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) as well as at Ogle, and a whole slew of different systems, procedures, and standards that they had to have in place to make sure that we passed this re-certification audit.

*[Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair.]*

Mind you, Mr. Speaker, Canada has just been through one of these and the report that came out is that they barely passed this audit. It is literally a Herculean task that is before us and has been before us over the past couple of months. Every day and night, and on holidays, the folks at the GCAA work to make sure that Guyana was successful in this audit. I want to take this opportunity to commend them and to commend the Opposition as well who have lent support to these changes. This is only a small piece of the work. This may be the smallest piece of the work that is being done and was done and is continuously happening. All of the apparatus in the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority, whether it is safety, whether it is operation, whether it is licensing, whether it is licensing the school, whether it is licensing personnel, whether it is bringing them up to speed, whether it is making sure we have enough, whether it is training, whether it is inspectors capabilities, inspector certification, whatever it is that we had to get in place, the team has been working and they have actually gone a far away.

They had help also from some external experts who came to review the system and to offer advice and assistance in terms of assessing to make sure that the gaps are identified and corrective action is put in place. I wanted to bring that to the attention of the House and to say that out of the 718 preliminary questions (PQs) that were raised in the assessment, 524 of them had observations, 137 had no observations and 57 of those PQs were not applicable so they had to deal with all of those. I want to lend full support to this amendment to bring the Civil Aviation Act of 2018 up to speed and in line with ICAO. Also, there are six separate regulations that will come here to cover some annexes that we currently have. They will come here as Minister Bishop Edghill said, six of them that we have to regulate; they no longer can be just annexes. I have had some discussions with my colleague on the other side, Hon. Member Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir as well and she is well aware of what is going on there too. I think all in all, Mr. Speaker, this amendment deserves the full support of the House. Thank you very much, Sir. [Applause]

**Mr. Ramjattan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Dr. Singh: (Inaudible)] You know, Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh feels that I am going to talk for a long time. I have already conveyed that I am pretty crisp about this. Just to use a cricketing analogy, as we were in the cricket bill just now: I was captain of No. 47 Village team, and we were playing Port Mourant, and I was asked what would be my instruction because we were fielding, and I simply said, 'is Port Mourant we playing, *scatta*'. In a case like this, having heard from so many good speakers, and especially the very explicit explanations individually, severally, that was given by the Hon. Minister, I want to do something like a famous Judge who became President Arthur Chung. When he was in the Court of Appeal and the other Judges with him gave their arguments and their judgment, he would simply say, 'I concur'. I wish to concur with every argument made here as to the necessity of this Bill and, therefore, I commend it for the entire House to support. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Bishop Edghill (replying):** Mr. Speaker, let me, first of all, thank all the honourable and distinguished Members of this House who spoke to this Bill, including my colleagues on this side, Mr. Datadin and Minister Indar, as well as the Hon. Ms. Annette Ferguson, the Hon. Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir and the Hon. Mr. Ramjattan, for lending support to this Bill. I will refuse the temptations that were offered because there is a time for everything. There is a time to hug and a time to refrain from hugging; and I believe, as it relates to this Bill, it is a time to hug. I think every media outlet should report on the activities of this discussion that, when it comes to aviation safety and security, the National Assembly is united. I think that statement coming

from us tonight in our collective views is sending a very clear message. We have a growing and expanding industry; we are going to work together.

Three quick things. One, we should not be confused, and that is just for the benefit of the Hon. Members in case we missed it. This audit is not an ICAO Coordinated Validation Mission (ICVM) audit where they are checking on improvements, this is that one is starting from zero. In 2016 and 2020 what we had was ICVM audits. The last time we had an audit of this nature was 2007. So this is one of such serious significance, and I thought, with all of the views that were shared about the improvement from 44% to 65% or whatever, that was an ICVM environment. This is a totally different environment that we are going into, so I thought I would put that and clear that for the record.

Secondly, the Hon. Member Ms. Walton-Desir spoke to the master plan, and I thank her for raising the issue. I can assure you that with the growth in the industry, as the Hon. Member Mr. Datadin spoke about, not just in terms of volume but in the expanding of our geographic space of where we operate and the various things that we have to do, that master plan will certainly see some amount of updating to reflect the thinking, 2030 and beyond; so we will be seeing more of that. I am happy that you raised the issue about 'we will see more and more amendments' and that is exactly why one of the amendments to the Bill showed that we do not always have to come to the house by way of regulations but the Director General, based upon the annexes that are coming from the Chicago Convention, could authorise and lay in the *Gazette* so that we could always be in compliance. That is one of the important amendments that are being made.

Concerning our involvement in CASSOS, you will be happy to know that the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority continues to be engaged to the extent that the expertise of Guyana is being lent to other jurisdictions in the Caribbean. The House may be pleasantly surprised that Guyana was lending support to Barbados, which I thought was a superior jurisdiction. When it comes to what we have in Guyana, it is something that we must be very, very proud of. In my several engagements with the ICAO at the international level as well as at the regional level, the only thing that would have come out from those engagements is how proud they are of Guyana and the work we are doing. As a matter of fact, the Secretary-General and I, the first engagement we ever had, one of the things he spoke about was the excellent service that is being reported from around the world as it relates to our air navigational services. Our navigators, ANS, I



should say, do a fantastic job with all of the people that are engaged with them, and we are very proud of them.

With these words, I want to say thank you for your support. On this night, when we are here, I did say when we received notice of the intended audit, Hon. Members, the first thing I did as Minister was to assemble the board and the senior management and to say this will not be an individual show, we will work this through together; and it was that approach that has taken us through the entire process because the success of Guyana at the end of this is not a success for Bishop Edghill, or it is not a success for the DG, but it is a success for the entire team – the board, management and all those who were involved.

*9.51 p.m.*

It was a team effort. There are some members of my team who are still with us tonight. They have been the leading lights in this. With the anticipated passage of this Bill, in the next few moments, they have asked me after church on Sunday I show up to duty so that on Monday morning, we could send to the Parliament Office under my signature, all of the regulations that will flow from these amendments. That is the nature of their work. If I could just put it on the public record in the National Assembly, I would like to express my thanks to the Director General, Lt. Col. (Retd), Egbert Fields; Deputy Director General, Mr. Saheed Sulaman; Deputy Director General, Ms. Heeralall; and our Legal Officer, Ms. Ayesha Edwards for their work and leading the team. As I did already, at the beginning, Mr. Indar, who interfaced in a more direct way on following through with the steps... With these few words, Sir, I ask that we adopt this. I thank you for the opportunity, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister Bishop Edghill.

*Question put and carried.*

*Bill read a second time.*

*Assembly in Committee.*

*Assembly resumed.*

*Bill reported without amendments, read a third and passed as printed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Let us say thanks to the Director General and his staff who stayed with their ministers through these long sessions to see the passage, finally, of these amendments. Thank

you, very much, Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Fields and staff. Hon. Members, we will now move to the Constitutional Reform Commission (Amendment) Bill 2024. Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs Mohabir Anil Nandlall, Senior Counsel (SC), you have the floor.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM COMMISSION (AMENDMENT) BILL 2024**

A BILL intituled;

“AN ACT to amend the Constitution Reform Commission Act 2022.”

*[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]*

**Mr. Nandlall:** Thank you, very much, Sir. The Bill that is before us is a very simple and short one. The National Assembly will recall that the Constitutional Reform Commission Bill passed unanimously, last year. That Bill is intended, of course, to establish the Constitutional Reform Commission to undertake the nationally important task to reform our Constitution. Members of the Commission have already been sworn in. The President, acting under the provisions of the Act and in the exercise of his deliberate judgment, has already appointed a Chairman for the Commission.

Unfortunately and belatedly, an erratum was discovered. The Act speaks to a commission comprising of 20 members and that was the intention. However, the chairman, not coming from the Commission but being appointed by the President in the exercise of his deliberate judgment and who is a part of the Commission, renders the Commission a 21-member commission. This Bill simply seeks to correct that numerical composition by seeking to amend clause 2 of the Bill, which is Section 3 of the Act, which is amended by substituting the word ‘twenty’ for the words ‘twenty-one’. The other amendments are consequential thereto. The amendment is as simple as that. There were amendments proposed by the Opposition, but I am happy to have been informed, recently, that they have been graciously withdrawn. They were circulated. I want to thank the Opposition for the good sense in that decision. I do not anticipate any further debate on this Bill. I do not think the other side are in opposition of this amendment. They have nominated their members already. I know the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, the only Member of Parliament on that side who sits on the Commission is very anxious to start the work of the Commission. Sir, with those few words, I commend this amendment to the House. Thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, very much, Hon. Attorney General. Now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan.

**Mr. Ramjattan:** Let me make a short remark and indicate that there was obviously more than what the Attorney General said here. They miscounted and came here to correct it. I would like to say in one word, again, I concur with what the Hon. Member had to say and the correction of that miscalculation. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

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

*Question put and carried.*

*Bill read a second time.*

*Assembly in Committee.*

*Bill considered and approved.*

*Assembly resumed.*

*Bill reported without amendments, read a third time and passed as printed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have been informed this will conclude our business for today. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.

### **Mother's Day greetings**

Before we do, let me take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy Mother's Day, including the fathers who are single parents. Happy Mother's Day to everyone; our staff and all who take care of us. Happy Mother's Day. Hon. Member, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, you have the floor.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2024 at 10.00 a.m.”

*[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and  
Governance and Government Chief Whip]*

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just to say that we have had a rough two days and I want to thank all the MPs, including my Colleagues on the Opposition side, for what I think was a very positive afternoon, in terms of moving Bills through that are important to our country. This is the way I think our Parliament should work. I look forward to the next sitting. I would like to propose that the next sitting be held, I am actually setting the next date, sorry, on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> May at 10.00 a.m. here at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC).

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. on 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2024. Members, have a safe trip back home.

*Adjourned accordingly at 10.05 p.m.*