



**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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86<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 10<sup>TH</sup> October, 2024

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**PARLIAMENT OFFICE  
HANSARD DIVISION**

*The Assembly convened at 10.29 a.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

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

**Speaker (1)**

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

**MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)**

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

**Prime Minister (1)**

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

**Vice-President (1)**

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Speaker**

## **Senior Ministers (16)**

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

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

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

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

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

[Absent – on leave]

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),*  
*Minister of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
*Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
*DeWinkle Building,*  
*Fort Street,*  
*Kingston,*  
*Georgetown.*

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

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

## **Other Members (15)**

Hon. Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,

*Lot 71 BB Eccles,*

*East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,

*(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),*

*148 Lethem,*

*Central Rupununi,*

*c/o Freedom House,*

*41 Robb Street,*

*Georgetown.*

Hon. Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,

*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),*

*Lot 4 Public Road,*

*No. 66 Village,*

*Corentyne,*

*Berbice.*

Hon. Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,

*Lot 60 Section 'K',*

*John Street,*

*Campbellville,*

*Georgetown.*

Hon. Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,

*Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,*

*Eccles,*

*East Bank Demerara.*

Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,

*Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,*

*Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,*

*c/o Freedom House,*

*41 Robb Street,*

*Georgetown.*

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

*Lot 340 East Street,*

*South Cummingsburg,*

*c/o Freedom House,*

*41 Robb Street,*

*Georgetown.*

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

*55 AA Victoria Avenue,*

*Eccles,*

*East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,

*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),*

*Lot 16-30 New Street,*

*New Amsterdam.*

*c/o Freedom House,*

*Robb Street,*

*Georgetown.*

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

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

[Virtual Participation]

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

[Absent – on leave]

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

[Absent – on leave]

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

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

**MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)**

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

Hon. Mr. Aubrey Norton, M.P., <i>Leader of the Opposition</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P., <i>Lot 10 Delph Street, Campbelville, Georgetown.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P., <i>Lot 410 Caneview Avenue, South Ruimveldt, Georgetown.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P., <i>(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam), Lot 55 Henrietta, Essequibo Coast.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 13 A, New Providence, East Bank Demerara.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P., <i>Lot 48 Atlantic Ville, Georgetown.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P., <i>Lot 590 Good Hope, East Coast Demerara.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P., <i>Lot 7 Freeman Street, Castello Housing Scheme, La-Penitence, Georgetown.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P., <i>Lot 933 Block 1, Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P., <i>Opposition Chief Whip, Lot 609 Conciliation Street, Tucville, Georgetown.</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Mr. Vinceroy H. Jordan, M.P., <i>(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice), Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village, West Coast Berbice. C/o Christopher Jones</i>	[Absent]
Hon. Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P., <i>Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field, East Bank Demerara.</i>	[Absent]



Hon. Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P., <i>Lot 202 N, Fourth Street, Alexander Village, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 40 Block 3 Craig Milne, Cove &amp; John, East Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P., <i>(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo), Shulidnab Village, South Central, Rupununi. (Culvert City Lethem)</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P., <i>Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme, East Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P., <i>Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue, South Ruimveldt Park, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P., <i>Lot 1110 Plot ‘B’, Herstelling, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P., <i>Lot 842 Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P., <i>Lot 1282 Block EE, Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P., <i>Lot 151 Durbana Square, Lamaha Gardens, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P., <i>(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini), Mabaruma Compound.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P., <i>(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice), Lot 136 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, Silvertown, Wismar, Linden.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>

Hon. Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P., <i>Lot 14 Plantain Walk, West Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P., <i>Lot 18 Public Road, Johanna Cecilia, (Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 88 Nelson Street, Mocha Village, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P., <i>Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne), Lot 80 Babu John Road, Haswell, Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 17 Block 1, Section F, Plantation Belfield, East Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica) Lot 169-170 Stanleytown, West Bank Demerara. c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P., <i>(Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni) Church Street Mahdia. Lot 4 Public Road, Stewartville, West Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Hon. Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P., <i>(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice), Lot 90, Section C, Wismar, Linden.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>

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

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

## **Officers (2)**

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

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

## **Hansard Division Officers (14)**

Ms. Allison Connelly,  
*Chief Editor*

Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,  
*Senior Editor*

Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,  
*Senior Editor*

Ms. Shevona Telford,  
*Senior Editor*

Ms. Carol Bess,  
*Editor*

Ms. Indranie Persaud,  
*Editor*

Ms. Lushonn Bess,  
*Editor*

Ms. Roseina Singh,  
*Reporter*

Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,  
*Reporter*

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,  
*Reporter*

Mr. Daniel Allen,  
*Reporter*

Mr. Parmanand Singh,  
*Pre –Press Technician*

Mr. Saeed Umrao,  
*Audio Technician*

Mr. Daison Horsham,  
*Audio Technician*

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86<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 10<sup>TH</sup> October, 2024

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Address by His Excellency the President, - The Hon. Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali ..... 13469-13517  
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**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

**Purpose of the Special Sitting**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, today is a special sitting of the National Assembly. It has been called to accommodate the request of our President to speak to the National Assembly.

### **Welcome**

We want to welcome our distinguished invitees, senior secondary schools' students and special interest groups to this special sitting of this National Assembly.

### **Constitutional Provision for Special Sitzings of the National Assembly**

This is just to clarify, especially for our children and those listening, that our Constitution provides for a Parliament of Guyana consisting of His Excellency the President and the National Assembly. We are, today, holding a special sitting of the National Assembly.

Secondly, the National Assembly goes into recess from the 10<sup>th</sup> August to the 10<sup>th</sup> October. Technically, today is the last day of the recess. However, our Constitution – I think article 65(1) – provides that the President can address the National Assembly at any time. Our Standing Orders provide for special sittings of the National Assembly. I think that is Standing Order 8(5), Mr. Clerk. Special sittings shall be held whenever the President decides that he wants to address the National Assembly or when there is a visiting Head of State. So, there are legal requirements that fulfil today's special sitting of the National Assembly.

### **Expression of Gratitude to Attendees**

I want to thank all those who have made such a great effort to be here today to listen to His Excellency and join us for this special sitting.

### **PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS**

The following Papers and Reports were laid:

- (1) Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of Guyana and on the Accounts of Ministries/Department/Regions for the Fiscal Year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2023
- (2) Report of the Auditor General on a review of the Design and Implementation of the Women's Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN) Programme
- (3) Report of the Auditor General on the Management of Maternal Health Care Services at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation

(4) Annual Report of the Rights of the Child Commission for 2019-2020

*[Speaker of the National Assembly]*

(5) Mid-Year Report for the year 2024.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, the report of the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service – the Mid-Year Report for the year 2024 – was presented in the digital format. I want to encourage more agencies and ministries to present their reports in this format. We ask for one thing – that it be done on a stiff board and signed. That will constitute the records of the reports. Thank you very much for this innovation. Hon. Minister, I noticed that the budget was also presented in a digital format. As we move to a paperless parliament, it does not always require us to have money but to have initiative. Thank you very much.

*10.37 a.m.*

(6) Audited Financial Statements of the Guyana School of Agriculture for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2008 and 2009.

(7) Audited Financial Statements of the Guyana Livestock Development Authority for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2011.

(8) Audited Financial Statements of Hope Coconut Industries Limited for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2008 to 2015.

(9) Audited Financial Statements of the Mahaica, Mahaicony, Abary/Agriculture Development Authority for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2003 to 2009.

*Minister of Agriculture]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, this concludes the formalities prior to our suspension. Special sittings are called for a particular purpose and today's special sitting is to receive His Excellency and his Address to us and the nation. Hon. Members, let us take a suspension so that we can await the  
*13469 Address by His Excellency the President, 10<sup>th</sup> October,*

*Sitting suspended at 10.38 a.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 11.03 a.m.*

Thank you, Hon. Members, and please be seated. Hon. Members, on your behalf and on my own, I extend the heartiest of welcome to our President, His Excellency, Dr. Irfaan Ali. Mr. President, it is an honour to receive you once again. Over the past four years, you have not only demonstrated your capacity to lead this nation forward by leaps and bounds but, as Shakespeare said, still retained the common touch. So, Your Excellency, it is an honour for me to invite you, at this time, to address the National Assembly.

**Address by His Excellency the President, the Hon. Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali**

Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Judiciary, Vice President, Members of Parliament (MP), members of the diplomatic community, members of the media and my fellow Guyanese. Today, I am pleased to exercise the right, indeed the duty, accorded to me under article 67(1) of *the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana*, which states:

“The President may at any time attend and address the National assembly.”

As part of the nation’s democratic covenant, this august Assembly is tasked with the responsibility of passing laws, overseeing and interrogating Government’s actions and policies, and representing and advancing the interests of the people. If the National Assembly is to effectively perform this vital task, then you, its Members, must be apprised of the present and future plans and policies of our Government. Today, I am here before you to unveil a comprehensive, brief understanding of the development trajectory for Guyana for the remaining years of this decade, a decade that is the most transformative and decisive in our nation’s history. It is this decade that will irreversibly reshape the contours of Guyana’s future.

However, Mr. Speaker, allow me to thank those among us who had the responsibility of leading this nation during turbulent times, restoring democracy, building back from a heavily-indebted country to a country with viability and expanding our economy, and positioning this country on the global scene without the resources of oil and gas. I think we need to applaud our leaders of the past. Responsible governance and national development require forward thinking and planning. As such, my Government has deployed a blueprint for the strategic direction of the country for the remainder of this decade and beyond, one that benefits all Guyanese, regardless of the ethnicity, class or political beliefs.

It is most worthwhile that we cast our minds back briefly to the circumstances under which this Twelfth Parliament came into being. The year was 2020, and the world was facing the worst public health crisis in living memory. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had already taken more than 1.8 million lives worldwide, of which more than 840,000 were in the Americas, including 164 deaths recorded right here at home. The world was almost entirely in lockdown, and so was Guyana, with every aspect of productive activity and daily life either ground to a complete halt or disrupted into an unrecognisable shadow of what we have long come to assume that normalcy would look like. The global economy was in recession and the Guyanese non-oil economy was similarly in freefall. Those in salaried employment feared for their jobs, and those in unsalaried occupations, such as the self-employed, found themselves without any income at all. Public markets were closed, public transportation ground to a halt, public gatherings were prohibited, and public spaces were empty. Where city and town centres had bustled for decades and centuries, ghost towns now loomed in ominous and morbid silence.

The world was in a crisis of unknown and frightening proportion, and the Guyanese public healthcare system was unprepared and unequipped to deal with the public health dimensions of this crisis. To make matters worse, Guyana was reeling, at the time, from five years of the A Partner for National Unity/Alliance For Change’s (APNU/AFC) broken promises, bad economic policies, two years of defiance of a no-confidence motion lawfully passed in this very House, and five months of defiance of the will of the people in the March, 2020 Elections. After five years of broken promises by the then Government, the people of Guyana had voted resoundingly for credibility and competence to replace broken promises and trust, and for economic oppression to be replaced by people-centred economic growth and development, and the creation of economic opportunities for all Guyanese. By the time August, 2020 finally arrived, severe damage had already been done to our credibility as a nation, to our economy across all productive sectors, and to the wellbeing of our Guyanese brothers and sisters who bore the brunt of these domestic political realities, which served to immensely amplify the toll of the pandemic. This was the world and the Guyana in which this Twelfth Parliament was convened in September, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned five years of broken promises. The following are but a few examples that put into perspective the APNU/AFC’s apparently studied refusal, throughout 2015 to 2020, to deliver anything they had promised the people of Guyana in the run up to the 2015 elections. They

promised to increase the personal income tax threshold to \$100,000. Instead, five years later, when they demitted office, the threshold was still at \$65,000. They promised to immediately double the level of old age pension and public assistance and develop a plan to incrementally increase the old age pension to the level of minimum wage. They not only failed to double the old age pension immediately, but even after five years in office, this was still not achieved.

Further, they removed the electricity and water subsidy to pensioners, imposing further hardships on the elderly. They promised to immediately implement a phased reduction of value-added tax (VAT) and the removal of VAT from food and other essentials. Instead, they imposed over 200 taxes and fees, including VAT on water and electricity, basic food items and household necessities. They promised the liberalisation of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector within the first 100 days. They failed to do this five years later. They promised to restore agriculture to its former vibrant self. Instead, in an act of unprecedented callousness, the agriculture sector was neglected and deliberately targeted for destruction. Approximately 7000 sugar workers were shoved onto the bread line. The rice industry was described as private business to deny it support, and drainage and irrigation infrastructure was all but totally abandoned. They promised to prioritise the rehabilitation of the Linden Highway. They failed to do this, and this critical project did not *see the light of day* until they left office.

The hardships imposed by the APNU/AFC on the people of Guyana were not confined to their broken promises. They also deliberately set out implementing a raft of measures whose sole impact was hardship on the Guyanese people. Some of these included stopping the 'Because We Care' cash grant, halting the one-month Disciplined Services bonus, forcing contracted employees to be transferred to the fixed establishment, banning the importation of motor vehicles over eight years old, slashing the ceiling for mortgage interest relief from \$30 million to \$15 million, and increasing drainage and irrigation charges and land rent by as much as 300%. Against the backdrop of five years of broken promises and callous hardships imposed on the Guyanese people, my Government assumed office. Our immediate priorities were to keep the people safe from COVID-19, to rebuild trust in the political system, to equip an unprepared healthcare system to respond to the pandemic, to reopen our economy in a phased manner that would not jeopardise the safety of our people, and to reverse the hardships imposed on the Guyanese people during the previous five years.

Mr. Speaker, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, my government spent, immediately, more than \$35 billion on correcting and outfitting the Liliendaal facility, purchase and importation of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and testing kits, purchase and dissemination of COVID-19 vaccines and providing support to families. We did this because we care about the people. We did this to save lives. We did this because this is what we are about as a Government. Let me be clear. This people-centred, policymaking matrix of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government is one that always puts the welfare of our people first.

*11.17 a.m.*

On assuming office, some of the measures we implemented to alleviate the impact of imported pressure on the cost of living and on the population, included the removal of 200 taxes imposed by the then Government, removal of VAT on water and electricity, restoring the VAT zero-rate on basic food items and household necessities, implementing the freight-cost adjustment for the calculation of import taxes, rolling back freight costs to pre-pandemic level, saving Guyanese consumers a total of \$22.8 billion since its implementation, removing the Excise Tax on fuel, saving the Guyanese consumer more than \$90 billion annually. If we did not implement this measure, that would have been more than \$90 billion of additional expenditure transferred to the consumer. We saved this transfer and preserved disposable income. That is what we did with these measures. We ensured that higher fuel prices did not translate into higher electricity and water bills. We allocated \$5 billion in 2022 to measures which include support to farmers, the one-off cash grant to households totalling \$1.2 billion and the \$1.2 billion support to our fisher folks. We allocated a further \$5 billion in 2023 for additional cost of living support, the one-off cash grant to public servants that benefitted 67,000 workers, the one-off cash grant to old-age pensioners that benefitted 72,000 pensioners and a one-off \$35,000 cash grant for persons with disability, benefitting 19,000 persons. We allocated \$850 million to support farmers through the procurement of fertilizer. This is what a caring government does. This is what a responsive government does.

In 2024, we allocated a further \$7 billion for similar measures, reduced the cost of construction and home ownership, VAT zero rating on certain construction material, removed VAT on building cement, sheetrock and concrete board, increased the low income mortgage loan ceiling to \$20 million, increased the New Building Society's (NBS) ceiling to \$20 million, restored the ceiling on mortgage

interest relief for housing loan to \$30 million in 2020. This is how we are promoting prosperity, home ownership and distribution of wealth. This is how the resources and revenues of this country are being spent every single day to uplift the lives of people, to expand national wealth, to expand personal wealth and to expand community wealth. This is what the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is all about.

In order to further support productivity and increase the productive assets of our country, we reduced the cost of connectivity by removing VAT on data for residential and individual use. We removed VAT on cellular phones and essential cell phone accessories. We reduced the cost of transportation in the hinterland by removing duty on all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and removing VAT on hinterland travel. These are real policies. These are real actions taken by a government that believes in service to the people. At the same time, some of the measures my Government have implemented to increase disposable income to the Guyanese household since assuming office include increasing the income tax threshold from \$65,000 to \$100,000, removing 39,000 persons from the income tax net and increasing disposable income by \$9.4 billion annually. The payment of the cumulative salary increase granted over the period is in excess of 23%. We restored the 'Because We Care' cash grant and increased it to \$40,000 this year. Over 200,000 school children are now benefitting from this investment of \$23.1 billion. We implemented a series of salary adjustments for teachers, employees in the public healthcare system and members of the Disciplined Services. These measures benefitted over 18,000 public sector employees.

Additionally, we concluded a historic agreement in August, 2024 with the Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU), under which teachers will receive salary increases over the next three years, as follows: 10% in 2024, 8% in 2025 and 9% in 2026. Additionally, adjustments were agreed to several other allowances paid to teachers, including the remote area incentive and allowances paid to teachers with post graduate qualification. We restored the one-month tax free year-end bonus to the Disciplined Services, placing over \$6 billion in the hands of the members of our Disciplined Services for the period 2020 to 2024.

We do not demonstrate our love and commitment to people by noise. We demonstrate our commitment and love to people by real action, real policy and real intervention. We have granted an accumulated 75% increase in the monthly old-age pension. We have more than doubled public assistance payments from \$9,000 monthly in 2020 to

\$19,000 monthly in 2024. We have increased the minimum pension at the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). All of these we have done so that our people can have a better and more prosperous life. I take the time to provide these examples – and they are really just a subset of the measures my Government has implemented since it assumed office – to make the point that whereas the APNU/AFC's term in office was characterised by promises, again, we are seeing this era of promises from the very people who made these promises that remain unfulfilled and imposed hardship on the people of this country.

My Government's term in office has been characterised by tireless efforts to bring relief to the Guyanese people and to improve every aspect of the lives of the Guyanese people. Mr. Speaker, I pause to remind you, this honourable House and the people of Guyana that we did all of this in just four years, recalling that we lost almost two of those four years to COVID-19, two floods, a drought and a global supply chain crisis. We managed and delivered all of this under those circumstances. This is a government of efficiency and delivery. Trust and commitment mean something to us. In response to the global cost of living crisis, the Government has implemented a series of measures aimed at cushioning the financial burden on citizens and safeguarding the quality of life. The measures include – a few of them – restoration of zero-rated status on food items, reversal of the 220% increase in drainage and irrigation fees and 600% increase in land rental, saving \$1.4 billion annually to the farmers, removal of VAT on fertilizers, agrochemical pesticide and key poultry industry input. Yes, not so long ago, VAT was imposed on all of these inputs. We invested in shade houses, modernising the ecosystem for agriculture, negotiated low mortgage interest rates for homeowners, moving down by more than three percentage point, waived taxes on building material, increased the mortgage interest ceiling, as I said before, and reintroduced measures that safeguarded the disposable income of our people.

Today, I wish to announce the following additional measures in safeguarding quality of life and securing disposable income. On top of all the measures we have already announced, I also wish to announce, now, a one-off cash grant of \$200,000 to every household in Guyana. This will see an injection of \$60 billion of disposable income into Guyanese households countrywide. We will begin, instantaneously, this one-off cash grant payment to households. Further, in securing purchasing power and disposable income of our people, I wish to make this additional announcement. In addition to the various increases awarded to public sector employees over the years



since we assumed office, including the special adjustments made to the salaries of certain categories of teachers, public healthcare workers and members of the Disciplined Forces, I now wish to announce that by the end of 2025, no public sector employee will be working for less than \$100,000 monthly. This will see the disposable income of these employees increasing by more than \$1 billion. This is how we build prosperity; this is how we reduce disparity; and this is how we build equity in the system. Real action, real work and real policies, all in the interest of our people.

*Vision 2030* is not just a policy framework. It embodies the dreams of generations of Guyanese who have long envisioned a nation where progress is a lived reality. This vision pays tribute to past struggles, while laying a foundation for a future where every citizen can thrive amidst the challenge of a rapidly changing world. It addresses urgent needs like food security, climate resilience, environmental sustainability and energy independence, through an integrated approach that leverages our natural resources responsibly. *Vision 2030* is about securing our future, making Guyana a leader in climate smart solution and ensuring our food systems withstand global disruptions. At the heart of *Vision 2030* is a commitment to transparency and accountability and governance, with institutions delivering high quality services in healthcare, education, infrastructure and security. The roadmap prioritises sustainable job creation that uplifts the economy, while providing people with dignity and purpose. We see the private sector as an engine of wealth creation, driving transformation in agriculture, energy, services, alongside government efforts.

On the global stage, *Vision 2030* positions Guyana as a leader, not a follower and positions Guyana as a partner with the rest of the world, not as a challenger. Our vision is to create friendship and partnership. It is to deploy our human asset in a tangible way so that we will be part of the solution for global problems and not add to the environment of hostility and the environment of decay that is existing globally. Since assuming office, my Government has restarted the agenda to strengthen the institutions that are critical to ensuring transparency and accountability in government operations, as well as safeguarding the integrity of our financial systems.

*11.32 a.m.*

In relation to parliamentary oversight and public accountability, we have successfully moved amendments to strengthen the bipartisan nature of the deliberations of the

Public Accounts Committee (PAC). We have strengthened systems to ensure compliance with our public financial management laws and regulations and to minimise the instances of queries by the Auditor General of Guyana through corrective actions. The most recent Report of the Auditor General showed substantial reduction and severity of queries, which reflects greater compliance with the financial laws.

Open competitive tendering is essential to ensuring transparency, in public procurement as well as to promote greater competition and the maximisation of value for money in government's expenditure. Amongst the initiatives implemented to strengthen public procurement since returning to Office, the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) has conducted extensive review of all standard bidding documents and finalised a new set of bidding documents. Let me say, we are the first to recognise that the tender system requires further modernisation and reform. We are committed to this modernisation and reform.

Let us be the first to acknowledge that we must build a paperless system; a system that is less reliant on human interference and a system in which public accountability continues to be opened and transparent. That is the system we believe in and that is the system we are committed to build. We are not about hiding our heads away from challenges and problems. We are about confronting issues; confronting problems; but, more importantly, finding the solution and building the institution to support the development trajectory of our country.

Additionally, since our assumption of Office, a new Public Procurement Commission (PPC) has been appointed. That entity has been discharging its important constitutional functions in a rigorous and thorough manner. At the same time, a new Bid Protest Committee has also been appointed as an additional layer of protection to safeguard the integrity of the public procurement system. As we look ahead, let me say, our commitment to expanding the procurement opportunities for every segment of the Guyanese population is second to none. Our commitment to encourage the incubation of new firms, new businesses and new service providers is second to none. Why do I say this? It is because it is a matter of fact. Already, since we came into Government in 2020, more than 3,000 new businesses have started supplying works and services to the Government in a wide range of areas.

Whilst we are on the matter of reforming the procurement system, we also recognise that the system must support small contractors, regional contractors and national contractors. The system must be skewed in such a way that these segments of service deliverers, in the public procurement system, are not locked out but the system presents, institutionally and systemically, opportunities through which they can also evolve and be successful. That is how the system has to be built. That is how we will build regional capacity. That is how we will build national capacities. That is how we are going to expand national capacity. We must not be in a position where the competition is within our borders. We must be able to build contractors and contracting capability that must also compete for regional and international opportunities, just as international and regional contractors are competing for opportunities here. Nothing stops us from achieving this. We must use this opportunity, in building our own capacity locally, to enable us to build the best standards or the highest standards so that we will be competitors in the regional and international sphere of opportunities. Additionally, we intend to deploy digital solutions in pursuit of a more transparent and efficient procurement system. These will include the use of digital e-procurement platforms to publicise government's procurement opportunities and facilitate electronic submission of bids. All are a part of the move towards a more paperless system.

Recognising the growing significance of the oil and gas sector in our economy and in the interest of ensuring the sector is managed in the national interest and the revenues earned by Government from the sector are managed in the most transparent manner possible, we have taken a number of actions to ensure compliance with the highest standard of transparency in the sector. I want to assure you that we will never be in a position of conflict of interest. We have overhauled the legal framework governing the sector, including the enactment of a new Natural Resource Fund (NRF) Act, which came into operation on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2022. The new enhanced NRF Act introduces a vastly strengthened governance architecture that lays the foundation for transparent management of the NRF. One of its most important features is the establishment of a board of directors, in whom are now vested the powers. These powers were previously overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of the Minister of Finance. We removed the power from the hands of the Minister of Finance and rested them in an independent board of directors. That is transparency. That is accountability. We have a system that now requires all petroleum revenues to be deposited in the NRF, to prevent

the previous perversity whereby a signing bonus was siphoned off under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) and hidden in a secret bank account that bypassed all parliamentary processes for scrutiny of public money.

Under the new NRF Act, not only must all petroleum revenue be paid into the NRF but they must also be reported by publication in the official gazette and the associated notification must be tabled in this honourable House; failing which the Minister of Finance is liable to 10 years imprisonment. Stipulating that no withdrawals can be made from the Fund and no expenditure can be made from the Fund except – except – with prior parliamentary approval. No payment or expenditure can be made from this fund without parliamentary approval. You will all be in the know. There is no hidden agenda in this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. We have introduced a simple transparent formula for determining the ceiling on annual withdrawals from the NRF stipulating that the amount to be withdrawn annually within the ceiling be determined and approved as part of the annual budgetary process. Commentators, conveniently, lose sight of this, the reality. It is because that reality does not fit into their narrative. Additionally, in keeping with our commitment to transparency in the natural resource sector, we have taken steps to ensure that Guyana is in good standing with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). In this regard, Guyana's fifth EITI report for the fiscal year 2021 was published on the Guyana Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative's (GYEITI) website on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2023. The timely publication of this report is indicative of Guyana's continued commitment to the EITI.

On the very important issue of preserving the integrity of our financial systems, Guyana has a long history of proactively putting measures in place to ensure we build a robust Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AMLCFT) regime in line with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations and international standards. It is therefore a high priority of my Government to ensure all necessary legislations and measures are in place to effectively play our part in the international fight against financial crimes. Guyana continues to strengthen its AMLCFT framework. Guyana underwent its fourth-round mutual evaluation by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force. In June of this year, the evaluation report was adopted. Through this evaluation, Guyana demonstrated that we have mechanisms for effective supervision and preventative measures to enable authorities to combat money laundering and terrorist financing, which

ensure that financial institutions and designated non-financial business professions are effective gatekeepers to minimise the risk of abuse for AMLCFT purposes. These efforts to safeguard the integrity of our financial system are even more essential now than ever before given our country's growing stature and visibility in the global economy and global financial system.

We are also pursuing reforms at the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), as we seek to build an institution that is fit for purpose. Over the last four years, we have seen marked improvement in efficiency. We have commenced the building of a simplified policy and procedures framework in administering the country's tax, trade, and border laws. We have invested in an information technology (IT) infrastructure whereby taxpayers are able to utilise online payment methods. During the period 2020–2024, more than \$189 billion in taxes were paid through this online platform. The Authority's intention is to become paperless by 2030. The electronic single window is being tested for implementation by the year end. This will remove many of the existing bottlenecks and bureaucratic delays. Investment in new and updated scanners, drones, and artificial intelligence (AI), use of body cameras to reduce leakages and aid accountability and transparency, the decentralisation of services, digitalisation of records, electronic filing, and search systems are all part of the modernisation of the tax authority. To ensure that we can effectively deliver a tax system and Authority that are state-of-the-art and modern, we are also investing in the capacity building of our human resource assets, especially as they must now administer the oil and gas sector. Our focus is to ensure that our taxation architecture is system-based; – and this is important – not a system that is driven by human interference but an architecture that is system-based. One that will reduce human discretion, the deployment of AI and digitisation to improve efficiency, reduce bureaucracy, and improve transparency.

Mr. Speaker, you are well aware of the robust and aggressive legislative agenda of this Government. It is important that the population and the world at large understand the context of this legislative agenda because it is this legislative agenda that would lay the bedrock for the implementation of Vision 2030, ensuring that the laws are relevant, ensuring that the system is relevant and ensuring that regulations are created to effect a system that would allow us to achieve the aspirations we sell ourselves.

*11.47 a.m.*

The efforts are aimed at modernising Guyana's legal and regulatory framework to support the country's development trajectory and achieve Vision 2030. I can go through series of legislation that we have already enacted to aid transparency, accountability and to ensure that benefits in the development trajectory of our country are continuously transferred to the Guyanese people. Take, for example, the Local Content legislation that we passed; that legislation has allowed more than 65% of the workforce in the oil and gas sector to be Guyanese; almost 70% of whom are women. We now have 18,000 Guyanese working on the offshore oil rig. We have created more than US\$2 billion of business, for local enterprises who are small and medium sized.

The legislation was carefully thought out because we understood how important the legislative framework was in creating these opportunities for Guyanese. Today, as a result of the Local Content law, we can celebrate these successes. Let me say that the law is currently ready for review, so that we will be able to evaluate what additional services can be added to the list for local content providers and how we can expand existing services. The law was not built without an understanding of the future, which is why that feature was an important part of this law. In order to ensure that we build an oil and gas sector that is resilient and one that is in keeping with our Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) trajectory, we are also enacting new laws and passed new laws to deal with oil spill prevention. The Oil Spill Prevention and Management Bill that is soon to be introduced will have the highest international standards.

Public health legislations have also advanced, including a Human Organ and Tissue Transplant Act and a Mental Health Protection and Promotion Act but these Acts were not just passed in vacuum. Today, right here in Guyana, we are performing organ transplant in our healthcare system. This would not have been possible if the legislative architecture was not there to support this. We are now encouraging Researchers, Investors and Developers to come here to establish the Centre of Excellence for stem cell research and stem cell application in the global healthcare system. We are clear on the direction we want this country to go. In that clarity, we have defined the framework, the structural changes, the institutional changes and the mechanics that are essential in fostering and developing this framework in the interest of the Guyanese people. Further, laws such as the Data Protection Act and Digital Identity Card Act support the transition to digital economy. Mr. Speaker, Friends and fellow Guyanese, we cannot afford to be left behind in this vastly changing digital world. We have to apply and adopt the best practices and best technology now so that we will be

competitive. Thus, we will be part of a changing dynamic global system.

The Government has also focused on food security and safety with agricultural legislation. It has modernised commercial laws, including the Higher Purchase Act, the Real Estate Agent and Broker Act to support economic growth. Financial reforms will enable easier borrowing and international banking presence in Guyana, while improvement in business registration, insolvency and stock exchange aim to create a modern corporate environment. We have to admit that the present structure and system cannot meet the growth trajectory of our country. They lack sophistication. They lack bandwidth. We recognised this and that is why we are not only committing to changing them, but we are also taking firm action to change them in the interest of our economy, our nation and our people.

The Government has strengthened national security and the justice system with new laws and reforms such as enhancing the anti-money laundering measures, road safety and the upcoming Bills addressing cyber space, firearms and violent offenses. A Constitutional Reform Commission is reviewing the nation's fundamental document to enhance governance, democracy and citizens' rights. Significant changes to the electoral laws have been implemented to protect the integrity of elections. The laws will now hold everyone accountable for their actions in electoral processes. We cannot afford another 2020. We cannot risk once again the incredibility of this country. We cannot risk again the integrity of this country, by a few who would like to see our credibility and integrity damaged by their selfish desires.

Despite these achievements, further efforts are needed such as developing a modern regulatory framework for port facilities to support expanding maritime trade and tourism. Yes! We know that Vision 2030 includes the building out of a maritime economy; one that must focus on the dredging of the Demerara River, one that will focus on the deepwater port and all the additional developments that are associated with such an investment. We are aware of this and we are continuously working on implementing and ensuring the planning process to the achievement of these outcomes are in place. These legislative efforts are laying the groundwork for the robust inclusive developments that Guyana envision will be enacted by 2030. For example, we have constructed a new, comprehensive and modern regulatory network, in respect to our port facilities, to accommodate the massive expansion in commercial maritime activity. Port security and integrity are also key to this, which is why we are working with our international partners – the United States of

America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) – in ensuring that we build a maritime sector that secures our port, that ensures the integrity and safety of our port, that ensures our port facilities are operating at the highest international standards.

Maintenance of the rule of law and access to justice are fundamental prerequisites in modern Guyana, which is in the making. As a result, from August, 2020, to present, we have made billions of dollars of investment in the justice sector. We have built courthouses, appointed Judges and Magistrates, invested in technology, invested in research, development and training to ensure that we have a judicial system that is functional, fair and just. A functional, fair and just judicial system must be one that is efficient, one that is reliable, one that is consistent and one in which the population can repose great confidence in a manner in which it administers justice and delivers justice. These are important prerequisites for a modern economy. In securing investment and sending the right international signals, over the last year alone, we have appointed 12 Magistrates, three Land Court Judges and 10 High Court Judges. This is the most judicial appointments that has ever been made in our country's history – most of whom are females.

Mr. Speaker, I wish now to turn our attention to an important part of the future. This is addressing the digital economy. We have already started the important foundational work in creating a digital economy. Today, I stand before you, with a vision of an era where we will harness the power of digital technology and innovation to continue the upliftment of our citizens, our services and government institutions. No longer constrained by geography or the limitations of the past, our Government is ready to lead the charge into this digital future. Digital Guyana envisions a thriving, citizen-centric digital ecosystem that will enhance education, foster innovation, embrace digitisation and advance equity. Led by a robust infrastructure, we want to lead efforts in the delivery of effective, accountable, secure and inclusive digital services across every sector, mitigate the risk of being left behind globally and advance sustainable economic and social development in Guyana. My Government's vision for digital Guyana encompasses advancement and innovation in digital education, digital incubation, digital transformation, digital leadership, data sovereignty and citizenship. Bringing digital education to our population has already commenced under our Government, with the launch of several programmes, including the One Guyana Digital Initiative, where more than 2,000 Guyanese are focused on front end and back end technology and with job placement opportunities on completion of training. This training is done

free of cost. The 150,000 Guyana Coders Initiative; the Guyana Coursera platform, which was launched in March, 2024, now gives 400,000 of our citizens free access to 6,000 courses at the annual cost of US\$1.4 million; and the grant of more than 29,000 scholarships online through the Guyana Online Learning Academy (GOAL) programme valued to \$2.9 billion in the last three years. Importantly, 21,000 of those who received scholarships of the 29,000 are women.

The Government is moving to establish the Guyana Digital School to create a new and innovative learning environment for our students across the country, which would give every child the same access and the same quality of teaching and material. The Digital School will be resourced such as any brick-and-mortar facility, with the added benefit of using artificial intelligence (AI) to support the learning process. It will be equipped with an entire Guyana curriculum from nursery to grade 12, all textbooks and teaching materials online, tutors from country and AI to review assessments and generate development reports, online Parent Teachers Association (PTA) meetings, and online extracurricular activity. It will cater for teaching entrepreneurial, real-life skills and cultural classes; electronic nursing and accounting school; remedial education in the evenings for adults and, most importantly, all the current assessments such as the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) and Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

More importantly, in fulfilling our promise of ensuring our prosperity must rebound to the prosperity of this Caribbean Community (CARICOM) region, this Guyana Digital School will also be available for CARICOM citizens. Our get safe online partnership and programmes to teach fundamental digital skills, even to those who did not complete formal education, will ensure that no one is left behind in the digital transition.

*12.02 p.m.*

We will continue the GOAL scholarship programme; invest in research and innovation; and establish centres of excellence for digital research, promoting innovation and collaboration between academia, industry and Government. Already, we have interventions where all teachers are trained to use various information and communications technology (ICT) tools and strategies; providing schools with appropriate equipment and software; reforming the school curricula for the development of ICT proficiency; providing incentives for training in ICT and providing community-based training for the use of computers. Digital incubation is also an important part of the strategy. We are nurturing a

culture of innovation through digital incubation with expertise from industry experts such as John Chambers, the former CEO of Cisco Systems and the Haas School of Business of the University of California. Our Government will create an environment to help small and medium-sized entrepreneurs (SME) use technology to build their startups and thrive domestically and beyond.

We want to create the framework and provide support for young people, women and persons of determination to access funding, robust training and global markets for the local products and services; establish smart villages to grow in our natural habitats, levelling digital infrastructure and business model approaches and engage the local banking system on how to further support this initiative. It should be noted that the local banking sector has been working with Government to help SMEs and young entrepreneurs in many ways. As a matter of fact, we have seen a drastic reduction in interest rate for agribusinesses – four per cent and 3.5% in some cases. This is not accidental. This is as a result of our policy intervention, our policy direction and our policy matrix, which are encouraging investment but, more importantly, giving confidence in every sector of our economy.

Through technology, our Government is in the process of modernising our industries to create more jobs, improve efficiency and ensure sustainable growth. We are currently working with Educational Credential Assessment (ECA) to rehabilitate and restructure the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA) to create the first real time Data Analysis Centre of Excellence in agriculture within the region. We are working with our healthcare system to be powered by eHealth Technologies. We are also creating an agriculture innovation hub with emphasis on research and development, digital agriculture, precision farming and the use of advanced technology. It will have an agribusiness component to facilitate entrepreneurship. All of this will be done with a focus on youth and women. We started using drones to help in the fields to disperse seeds and fertilizers. We are transforming and modernising the poultry sector with innovative solutions such as tunnel houses. We are building out high value crop potential with hydroponics. We will continue to integrate more smart farming technologies and digital tools to increase productivity, optimise resource use and ensure food security.

In Forestry, we are already examining the application of digital solutions to manage natural resource sustainability. We are utilising data-driven approaches for conservation and resource allocation. We already have one of the most reliable

and sophisticated methods of ensuring our forest harvesting rate is one of the lowest globally. I am giving these examples, Mr. Speaker, so you, all Members of this House and all of Guyana would understand the magnitude of work that have already commenced in the transformation of this economy. Many times, we do not get the time to discuss these ideas, policies and programmes that we are pursuing to ensure we have a modern state-of-the-art economy.

The banking sector, also, is benefiting from tremendous transformation in terms of digitisation, as we seek to create modern financial services by promoting digital banking, Fintech innovations and financial inclusion for all citizens. We are also working on the digitisation of logistics and e-commerce; strengthening digital logistics network and creating infrastructure to connect businesses and consumers more efficiently. Government services are also undergoing tremendous transformation as we pursue this new digital platform. We are transforming our public service by digitalising processes and improving accessibility, transparency and efficiency for all citizens. We have the national support service platform, which will be launched soon. This would be an internal mechanism to test the level of service, to hold people accountable and to ensure that the investment we are making in the public service is delivering the type of quality and care that we intend for it to deliver.

We must ensure that salaries increase, conditions improve and all of us – without exception – who are tasked with public service, understand that we have a responsibility to deliver quality public service, regardless of the mood we are in, regardless of our thought process at the time or regardless of how we feel about the situation. Our duties are to deliver quality public service and quality service to the people of this country. The digital economy and digital system that we are building will hold people accountable to ensure that there is traceability for all our actions and there is traceability in the way in which we carry out public services. This is an important part of the service delivery we are building.

Within the first weeks of Government, we liberalised the telecommunication sector and removed value-added tax (VAT) on data, resulting in the cost of dedicated bandwidth decreasing by 95%. More fibre optic cables have terminated in Guyana. Guyana is one of the first Caribbean countries to deploy fifth generation (5G) technology. These are accomplishments that we should be proud of. These are accomplishments that we earned through hard work and sound policy making. I congratulate all involved. We have built and operationalised 121 ICT hubs in the hinterland, with an additional 26 in progress. We have one of the most

aggressive and transformative digital economy in the world today. The level of aggression in which we are pursuing the digital opportunity is second to none. We have introduced the use of satellite connection to our digital broadband infrastructure throughout Guyana to ensure that all Guyanese, especially those in rural and remote areas, have access to reliable, high-speed internet and other digital services.

In healthcare, we have introduced eHealth services to improve healthcare delivery, data management and patient care across the country, using technology. Our vision is to make Guyana the epicentre of regional healthcare with advanced medical infrastructure, specialised treatment, research and innovation, referral hubs, access to education and training, emergency and critical care. We are also building the electronic health record, which will go live in 2025 and fully deploy nationally long before 2030. For telemedicine sites, we have 50 telemedicine sites to date. By next year, it will be expanded to at least 250 sites. These are not only telemedicine sites to support healthcare in the region, but these are also used as continuous education platforms for health service providers.

By 2025, all medical imaging will be entirely digital. The days of walking around with stacks of electromagnetic radiation (x-rays) will come to an end because all medical imaging will be entirely digital by the end of 2025. We will have the expansion of telehealth applications, telepathology and teleradiology. There will be the expansion of the disease surveillance system and the digitisation of the system. We will implement a programme to train people in health informatics and manage electronic health records. We will also be utilising AI in medicine to help read results and tests. We are building digital leadership that will put us at the forefront of global innovation. We will develop an artificial intelligence ecosystem that powers the industry – from agriculture to public safety – positioning Guyana as a leader in AI innovation. These are the investments that are needed as we build a modern and robust economy; one that will be able to compete with any globally.

Guyana has commenced the mineral mapping project and our model will be one of the first of its kind in the world, where artificial intelligence and traditional techniques will be used to create a highly detailed map for mineral exploration. It is the first in the world. This will allow miners to continue their businesses sustainably and open possibilities for the exploration of critical minerals, including new areas of opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, today, I want to talk to you also about the potential of data centres. With the reduction in the cost of energy and the availability of energy, this now becomes an opportunity for us. The creation of data centres – will help us to advance high skill and high paying jobs. I propose we leverage our abundant energy resources to establish an AI data centre. The global demand for AI and data processing is surging, as is the demand for electricity to power them. Guyana will benefit tremendously, by using the electricity generated from our natural gas to power a world class AI data centre. I want to share the immense benefits that this development will bring to our country – economic growth and job creation; strategic, global and regional positioning; sustainable development and environmental benefits. The energy from powering our data centre will be from natural gas, which is less polluting than the conventional forms of energy which power data centres. We will have greener data centres established here. That is the competitive advantage that we will have. Important in this era of digitisation is the issue of digital sovereignty. To strengthen the nation's digital identity infrastructure, the Data Protection Act was passed to regulate the collecting, keeping, processing, using, protecting and disseminating of personal data. We have created the architecture for Guyana's National Digital Identification (ID) Card, which is currently being implemented and card distribution is expected to begin by December, 2024.

For those who are naysayers, in relation to the digital ID card and the electronic passport, how wrong were you? If we never took those proactive steps, today, we would be finding ourselves in a position where travelling would have been difficult and accessing other borders would have been difficult. Data sovereignty is an established framework to protect Guyana's data and ensure it is stored, processed and managed within the nation borders to keep for the future. As a government, we have engaged many providers. We will continue to engage providers and receive proposals so that our data sovereignty and our data space can be protected and safeguarded.

*12.17 p.m.*

Cyber security is another area that we must concentrate on. So, we are investing in a robust cybersecurity strategy to protect critical national infrastructure and citizen data from cyber threats. Our digitisation, artificial intelligence (AI) and modernisation, must also support our defence and security. We will also continue to promote digital citizenship and expand digital literacy throughout the country. My fellow Guyanese, this is not just a plan, this is our future; a future

where every Guyanese benefit from the opportunities that digital transformation brings; a future where Guyana stands tall as a leader, not just in the Caribbean but on the world stage. We have already taken the first steps on this journey, but there is still much to do. The road ahead will not be without challenges, but if we work together. if we commit ourselves to this vision, there is nothing that can stop us. Let us build this digital Guyana, a nation of innovation, prosperity, and unity. Together, we will create a future where every Guyanese can thrive in this digital world.

Mr. Speaker, I am far from done. In building out this new economy, climate and biodiversity are key aspects of the future. I want to take this opportunity to laud our then President, and the team, for the creation and insightful thinking in the establishment of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). Today, this expanded LCDS 2030 is our Government's commitment for integrated economic growth and environmental preservation, executed on a policy-based approach to fossil fuel use and climate finance. In particular, it focuses on Guyana's vision to create a global model for recognising the essential role of tropical forests in the fight against climate change and biodiversity conservation. Since its finalisation in July, 2022, after a seven-month national consultation, notable progress has been made with our LCDS 2030 priorities.

Guyana's potential earning value from its forest asset is estimated to be between United States (US) \$45 and US\$55 billion annually. That is the earning potential of this resource. Building from the 2019 Guyana/Norway Agreement saw Guyana earning US\$227 million for the period 2009 to 2025. We have achieved the world's first jurisdictional scale carbon credit under the Architecture for REDD+ Transactions (ART) The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard (TREES), enabling credit to access voluntary and compliance market, which is the world's first. We have secured the largest forest carbon credit sale to ever take place in the world amounting to US\$750 million. We have received as of September, 2024, US\$237 million, and 100% is being invested back in the people, back in our communities. A guaranteed 15% is self-managed by our Indigenous communities that chose to be in the programme. Every single Indigenous community would benefit from this 15% direct transfer. Between 2023 and 2024, the Indigenous communities received almost \$10 billion of payable proceeds. In 2024, they received not 15% but 26.5% of the proceeds, ensuring that they did not receive less money than they did last year. A further global milestone was reached in mid-2024 when Guyana's credit became the first in the world to be eligible for a phase one of the United Nations

emissions reduction programme for the aviation sector. This is now paving the way for new sales.

Mr. Speaker, if you are to now take a look at our sustainable forestry practices, timber and timber products from Guyana will soon bear the prestigious Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) international label and trademark. Following our successes in the PEFC certification, Guyana was the first country in the Amazon region to sign a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) under the European Union (EU) initiative. This Agreement is expected to enhance market access to Guyanese timber and timber products in Europe and beyond. Cumulatively, these investments from the LCDS are the largest spent on climate resilience in Guyana's history. At the same time, foundational work for other key sectors and priorities are ongoing, in particular in the LCDS areas of sustainable cities, towns, water management and biodiversity conservation.

We are also focusing heavily on environmental enhancement and natural beautification, projects that would enhance rural and urban life, such as the building out of parks, the creation of a centre of wellness and safe and open spaces for family, the elderly and children. We are launching now, led by the Vice-President and the Office of the President, a programme that will see the rebuilding of our zoo to international standards and the enhancement of our Botanical Gardens. Outside of this, in partnership with the King's Foundation, we are now rebuilding a model that will retrace, recreate and enhance the cultural heritage of our city, Georgetown, by building out a new green walk path, cycling lane, areas of heritage and culture, and areas of history. These are all part of building a beautiful Guyana, a new Guyana, in which we must take pride, in which ownership, pride, must be an important part of what makes us Guyanese. We can do all of this but if each of us do not have pride in who we are, do not have pride in the environment, do not have pride in the way we treat each other, then none of it will mean anything to us. In building out this new city, not only are we looking at the beautification, we are also working on a new drainage plan, enhancing the drainage capacity of our city, a smart code to guide sustainable urban development, two demonstration neighbourhood plans, a comprehensive heritage and conservation plan, a greenway strategy and modernised urban maps. Right in Region 3, as you cross the new Demerara Harbour Bridge, you will see the Guyana/China Friendship Park – modern, green, innovative, safe, friendly and family oriented.

The Government has engaged the Harvard University and the University of Oxford on the establishment of an international centre for biodiversity. The focus of such a centre will be to support Guyana's effort in the protection and restoration of a critical ecosystem, the expansion of Guyana's offering for natural-based solutions beyond carbon, and the advancing of Guyana's progress towards a global target of conserving at least 30% of the planet's lands and oceans by 2030. The next phase of technical work on sustainable urban development, water management and biodiversity conservation, will be completed in early 2025 and will pave the way for further stakeholder engagement and consultation.

Guyana has called for a global coalition focused on advancing biodiversity conservation, supported by the launch of the Global Biodiversity Alliance (GBA) Summit in the first quarter of 2025. The areas of focus of the alliance would be creating a market for biodiversity credits, scaling biodiversity conservation debt swaps, accelerating biodiversity bonds, blueprint for biodiversity taxonomies and promoting nature positive action. The Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford will be working with the GBA to help develop the financing models and mechanisms envisioned above. The vision of the Global Biodiversity Alliance is to unite large stakeholders worldwide in a concerted effort to preserve and restore biodiversity for future generation by fostering collaboration across sectors and regions. I am pleased to advise you, Mr. Speaker, that Guyana is taking the lead in the Global Biodiversity Alliance. Once again, the LCDS is powering our international diplomacy as a holistic, comprehensive, sustainable, resilient model for development and growth.

Our food ecosystem – note - beyond the agriculture sector, has benefited from tremendous investment. Our investment over the past four years to build a food ecosystem that is resilient and sustainable has been unmatched. The food ecosystem must be able to deal with climate, trade, transparent obligation, transparent processes, transport and logistics, storage, markets, yield, productivity, research and development, human resources and agriculture practices. As you see, agriculture is one component of the food ecosystem we are developing. The food ecosystem is a much wider, complex undertaking that includes financing for agriculture, that includes insurance for agriculture and issues of climate change. It is about bringing together all the factors to ensure a viable food production and ecosystem. To achieve this, we must focus on standards and certification, infrastructure, subsidies, support, technology, and research and



development. Our focus has led to investment and policies that is increasing production and confidence in this sector.

Over the last three and a half years, we have seen a 94% increase in private capital from local banks to the agricultural sector. In addition to this, we have seen almost \$7 billion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the agricultural sector. Self-sufficiency in corn, soya beans, and hatching eggs, will save us more than US\$80 million of import. We are building a food ecosystem that is focused on entrepreneurship and innovation, ensuring women and youths are in the forefront of this endeavour. We are focusing on crop diversification, linkages, seeding and planting material, creating the largest seed and planting bank in the region, moving from 15 plantlets to one million plantlets, building a soil and tissue culture lab, genetic improvements and embryo transplant whilst, at the same time, we have created opportunity for the expansion and opening up of 50,000 acres of new agricultural lands and 30,000 acres of new pastures.

*12.32 p.m.*

We are also expanding the aquaculture sector, targeting 2,000 tonnes of prawns by 2030 and 2.4 million kilograms of brackish-water shrimp by 2030. We are also targeting the increase of rice production from 700,000 tonnes to one million tons by 2030. Investment in the honey industry... By the way, we are also looking to increase yield from 5.9 tonnes per hectare to eight tons per hectare by 2030. Already, you have seen an improvement from 5.9 tons per hectare to 6.6 tons per hectare, now. Mr. Speaker, you and this House must be comforted by the level of accountability that we are demonstrating to the people of Guyana, you must be comforted to know that the resources passed in this National Assembly and invested in the different sectors, are bearing such results. You must be comforted to know that our beautiful country is on a trajectory of growth and development. If you are not comforted, Mr. Speaker, or any Member of this House is not comforted, I can come and deliver some personal lessons.

In sugar, we have re-employed more than 1,500 workers. We have mechanised more than 5,000 hectares of land. We have built packaging plants at Albion and Blairmont. We are investing in the right skill set to ensure that we have the right human resource complement to match the investment we are making in this industry. Let me be clear, we are acutely aware of the challenges, of the hard decisions that are required to make this industry viable, but we are committed to ensuring this industry, as we are committed, and we have

showed that commitment in bauxite, to make these industries viable, because they are too structurally integrated in our local economies and our communities for us to allow them to fail or allow closure.

To support the food ecosystem, we have increased investment in Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) by 760%. We have built almost 400 kilometres of farm-to-market access roads. Now, in order to further boost production and investment, I wish to make the following announcement. My Government has restored agriculture and food production as a major centrepiece of our non-oil economy. Already we have witnessed the returns to the investment we are making. Given the importance of the poultry meat sector in agriculture – let me ensure, Mr. Speaker, that I do not short-change you – in order to support the poultry sector and to realise the aspirations we have for this sector, it is important that we make some further adjustments. We will be introducing in the next fiscal year, new rules that will allow for accelerated depreciation of capital investment by poultry farmers. This will reduce the effective cost of investment in the sector and incentivise ramped up investment and increased production. We intend for Guyana to be a poultry meat producing capital of the Caribbean. Additionally, we are examining the regions and sectors in the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act as eligible for tax holiday, with a view to possibly expanding these to include a number of specific geographic areas earmarked to be special economic development zones.

I now wish to turn our attention to health care. I have already outlined a series of measures that we have implemented to deliver quality health care to the people of our country. We are investing in the development of a healthcare system that ranks among the best globally, delivering affordable and accessible healthcare. In the last four years, we have invested close to \$500 billion. Citizens across all regions will benefit from level four health care delivery. Twelve state-of-the-art hospitals, 1,326 new beds, covering every region, will be delivered to our people. By 2030, we would have the new Georgetown Hospital also completed. We have removed VAT on medical supplies and corporate tax from private health facilities, resulting in over \$15 billion in private investment in healthcare, investment in recapitalising modern equipment, cutting edge technology and state of the art facilities, dialysis treatment centres, and a specialty eye hospital. These investments are already positioning Guyana as a leader in the region in eye care, organ transplant, knee and hip replacement, brain surgeries, and \$12 billion in community health facilities.

The volume of surgeries performed by the public healthcare system has increased by 100% over 2019. More than 22,000 surgeries are now completed in the public healthcare system. In addition to that, we have done more than 100 knee replacement, over 250 brain surgeries annually, and more than 1,000 CT scans at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) every month. More than 8,500 persons benefited from medical treatment such as heart bypass, radiotherapy, prosthesis, burn therapy care and, more importantly, 85% to 90% of drugs and medical supplies are now available in our public healthcare system. More than 800 patients benefit annually from angiogram and stent. Over 17,000 children were screened at schools – seven hundred and sixty-five were screened for hearing loss and assisted with hearing aid. We have decentralised dental services, with 57 dental clinics across the country.

A new pathology laboratory, through partnership with Mount Sinai and advanced technology, has allowed us to reduce the waiting time for results from three months to three days – from three months to three days. Note carefully, Mr. Speaker, how we are choosing our partners. We are looking for the best in every area, because we want to deliver the best to our people. We have expanded cervical screening and treatment, expanded breast and prostate cancer programmes, employed 3,000 registered nurses, 2,000 nursing assistants, and 1,000 more doctors. That is what we have delivered to ensure that we have improved access to health care. Our training capacity for nurses has increased from 150 to 1,500 annually. By 2028, the University of the West Indies School of Medicine campus will be part of the new state-of-the-art teaching hospital in New Amsterdam. We are focusing heavily on primary health care to ensure early detection, early care, public health education and preventative care. This is part of the public health system to promote a healthier population.

In order to ensure our healthcare system, which by 2030 will also see us manufacturing and producing our own vaccines at home and for the region, in order to further promote a healthier population, I wish now to make the following announcement. As previously elaborated, we are already investing heavily in improving the public healthcare system and incentivising private investment in health care. Earlier this year, we announced the distribution of vouchers to support eye test for school children, as well as for pensioners and to support the purchase of spectacles where needed. We also announced the distribution of vouchers to support women of the age of 21, in obtaining a screening test for cervical cancer.

I now wish to announce that we will be introducing, in 2025, a universal healthcare voucher of \$10,000 per child to help finance the cost of basic menu of tests, to establish baseline health data and to identify early warning signals so preventative action can be taken to avert the onset of the main non-communicable disease. We anticipate that this measure will benefit as many as 500,000 persons countrywide and will therefore constitute an investment of \$5 billion in the health and well-being of our population – \$10,000 per person. This universal healthcare voucher will help us as we work to build a healthy, strong and resilient population.

I now wish to turn your attention to education. In the last three and a half to four years, we have built 42 new nursery schools, 16 primary schools and 23 secondary schools. We have maintained and rehabilitated more than 355 nursery schools, 400 primary schools and 117 secondary schools. We are focused on special needs education, with the first 49 graduate teachers in this field now in the school system, and a further 102 under the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship program. We are also focusing on electronic education (e-education) – smart classroom – and the Learning Channel.

*12.47 p.m.*

All of these have allowed us to take quality education to 91% of the hinterland and riverine communities. We are on track to achieve universal secondary education by the end of next year. We are also focusing on investment in sports, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), arts, digitisation, innovation, artificial intelligence, entrepreneurship, wellness and mental health, teachers' training and welfare, facilities improvement and management. Between 2020 and 2023, 446 teachers from the hinterland graduated from the Teachers Training College, while a further 598 are currently enrolled – almost six times the number trained between 2015 and 2020. We want our schools to be inclusive and safe, fostering an environment of mentorship, delivering quality citizens and focusing also on civic education. To further expand education and enable access for all, I now wish to make the following announcement. We have already announced the write-off of outstanding student loans, which is expected to total \$5 billion before the end of this year. We could ultimately see as much as \$18 billion written off by the end of its existence. Meanwhile, we have already introduced the GOAL scholarship programme, which has benefited 29,000 students and has brought university education into the homes of every single Guyanese family with internet connectivity.

I now wish to announce that we will be proceeding with the delivery of our Manifesto commitment to provide free university education at the University of Guyana (UG). Mr. Speaker, in the interest of the children of Guyana, I pause for greater recognition from this House. This House should understand the importance of education and the transformative nature of education, and we must send that signal loudly to every corner of this country. Accordingly, starting from the January, 2025 semester, tuition fees will be completely abolished at the University of Guyana. This will continue the advancement of our human capital for a more prosperous future for our country and for all of the young people and their families who will benefit from this initiative. This measure will benefit in excess of 11,000 current students at UG immediately, and of course, all the new entrants in the future. The future belongs to all of these young people. That initiative would cost us in excess of \$18 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I now wish to turn our attention to housing. Housing is an important cornerstone of our national development thrust. We have invested heavily in housing over the last four years. Housing is not only about delivering house lots, or delivering houses, it is about empowerment, ownership, value creation, stability, families, community. It is about responsibility, building responsibility and enhancing livelihood. Today, I am pleased that, with our investment over the last four years, we have achieved 76% of the 50,000 targeted house lots. I recall when we first announced this target, many doubted us. The naysayers were there, but with hard work, dedication, commitment, and staying true to our promise, we have been able to deliver on this, a difficult and ambitious task. The investment in housing has created a wealth transfer of well over \$100 billion. We have regularised 15 squatter settlements and built almost 2,100 new houses, with 1,500 additional houses under construction. We are now undertaking the ambitious task of developing the new city, Silica City, a city of innovation, green infrastructure, and future planning; a city in which modern technology and innovation will form part of everyday living. We have re-established the mortgage interest relief, which would have benefited more than 6,000 persons.

We are investing in new water treatment plants to ensure that, by the end of 2025, close to 90% of our population will have access to good quality water and ensure, also, a good level of service. Sixty new communities are now benefiting for the first time from water supply. By 2030, we will realise the full economic potential of our vast freshwater reserve.

That is the ambition, to ensure by 2030 we can realise the full ambition of our freshwater reserve.

I wish now to turn our attention to infrastructure. Our investment in infrastructure is focused on connecting communities – people, industry and services; investing in infrastructure to stimulate growth, grow national connectivity and individual wealth, whilst reducing the cost of doing business, bringing comfort and modernising our physical environment. Hundreds of billions of dollars have already been invested in public infrastructure. More than 4,000 community roads have been completed, hundreds of kilometres of urban roads, hundreds of kilometres of hinterland roads; new highways are under construction, bridges, and hinterland airstrips. The aviation sector is undergoing a major transformation also. We have invested in infrastructure to ensure regional connectivity. These investments will see the connection, by road, of Region 8 and Region 9, Mabaruma, Port Kaituma, Matthews Ridge, Kwakwani, Orealla, Linden to Kwakwani, and Lethem to villages in the deep south. In every corner of our country, in every region, we are bridging the divide and building the future.

We are also investing in an efficient river transport system. Not only the bridging of the Demerara River and the new four-lane bridge across the Berbice River, the new Wismar Bridge, and the hundreds of bridges we have constructed all across the country, including between Linden and Lethem, but we are also thinking long into the future – the Kurupukari Bridge, the Corentyne River Bridge, the establishment of a pontoon service to service Fall Mouth to Bartica, in support of the Timehri to Sand Hill road link, the Parika to Goshen road link, and the continuation of the highway from Schoonord to Parika, examining the viability of a light passenger rail system and a cargo rail connecting to the deep port facility. These are all plans being examined and underway in fulfilling ambition 2030 and vision 2030.

Mr. Speaker, public infrastructure would also see massive transformation and investment in waterfront development at Charity, Parika, Vreed-en-Hoop, Stabroek, Wismar, and the Berbice River. We are rehabilitating all landing facilities along the Demerara and Berbice Rivers, linking them to expanded production and opening up opportunities for tourism, and we will be investing in boat transport to support the productivity and production of produce from the Berbice and Demerara Rivers, so they have easier access to markets. Before the first quarter of 2025, we will be delivering to farmers, in these two rivers, river transport that will allow them transport of their produce and access to the markets.

We are investing to support a transport system to connect people and production to markets.

We are upgrading aerodromes, and it is important for me to highlight that at the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), we are building a modern, functional and A-class authority. We have upgraded the legislation and successfully completed the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) audit. We are number one in safety and oversight capability in the 34 states of the Americas; we have invested in a new instrument landing system (ILS), an automatic dependent surveillance system, an automated weather observing system, giving real-time data. All of these are foundational work as we aspire, by 2030, to have a civil aviation authority that is fully automated and one in which you have 100% electronic filing and is above class by international standards.

In order to further enhance and build out our transport system and in order to allow commuters and our population to benefit from reduced cost of transportation, I now wish to make the following announcement. There are many more announcements that will come as the Minister presents his budget. As I have already elaborated, my Government has been investing heavily in transport infrastructure, including to improve ease and convenience to commuters. The new highways that we have built on the East Bank of Demerara, for example, have already saved us millions of man-hours, which translate to direct monetary benefit as well as a substantial quality of life improvement. Every day we receive text messages thanking the Government for the investment in these highways. We are, of course, at an advanced stage of building a new bridge across the Demerara River and in the early stages of developing a new bridge across the Berbice River.

*1.02 p.m.*

With the aim of further reducing the cost of commute, especially for the thousands who cross the Berbice and Demerara Rivers daily, when the new Demerara River Bridge is completed and brought into operation, we will abolish the bridge tolls on both of those rivers. We will abolish the bridge tolls on both the Berbice and Demerara Rivers and the Wismar River. This will save commuters in excess of \$3.5 billion annually and that is taking today's use. With these announcements, the use of these facilities will obviously increase and expand rapidly.

In August, 2020, my Administration inherited the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Incorporated that was starved – yes, I know, the room has become anxious – of adequate

resources and had a dire need for investment to effectively deliver service to a customer base that increased by 10% and peak demand that expanded by 12% from 2015 to 2019. During the period 2015 to 2019, GPL struggled with insufficient inventory to effectively execute its planned network expansion and maintenance programme. With respect to the operation of the grid, this challenge was further exacerbated by the insufficient investment in generating capacity and the maintenance of existing generator units. This resulted in significant system disturbances and frustrations for customers. Since 2020, the Government has invested a sum of \$28.1 billion in expanding Guyana's generation, transmission and distribution system, adding 127.7 megawatts of generating capacity to the GPL grid, to keep pace with a 64% increase in peak demand and a 19% increase in customer base since 2019. Our investment in the sector is 173% higher than the \$10.3 billion made by the previous Government, of which only \$4.1 billion was invested in 17.4 megawatts of additional power, which, by the way, we brought into operation.

The investment in the electricity sector by my Administration included expansion and upgrade of the distribution network and substations; installation and replacement of more than 100,000 metres, as well as close to 4,000 transformers; and laying almost 2,800 kilometres of distribution network and expansion and upgrade of three substations. Since 2020, we have provided electricity to 27 communities that were not previously served and upgraded. Since taking office in 2020, the Government has maintained the same electricity tariff despite substantial increases in fuel prices. In 2019, the weighted average fuel price was US\$64 per barrel compared to the current average price of US\$104 per barrel. As a result of the rise in fuel prices, fuel, which previously accounted for 53% of the power's company revenue, now represents 84%. Notwithstanding this, we have not increased the rates for electricity in this country.

As we work on modernising this sector, we are preparing additional tenders that will deliver more substations, transmission lines, and feeders to further improve the power system's reliability and resilience. These tenders will deliver 230 kilovolt (kV) transmission lines and substations to transfer bulk power to West and East Berbice as well as Linden. Each new substation that GPL will construct will be completed with new distribution feeders, fully equipped with all relevant equipment, ready for a smart grid. Additionally, the development of five solar photovoltaic (PV) farms, including 18 megawatts, is underway with plans for three more, adding another 15 megawatts. These investments aim

to enhance the reliability of the power grid and improve access to electricity for new customers. Our investment in renewable energy has been ramped up, resulting in a 224% increase in electricity generation from solar, hydropower and other renewable source since 2020. Key projects include solar farms in Mahdia, Wakenaam and Leguan along with the distribution of 30,000 solar PV systems to the hinterland and riverine communities.

By 2030, Guyana's power demand is expected to triple, with plans to meet the surge primarily through natural gas and the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, alongside expansions in wind, solar and other hydropower plants. The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated plans to achieve a full-fledged smart grid by 2030 which will comprise the distribution management system, smart distribution equipment, and complete advanced metering infrastructure. With a smart grid, GPL will achieve a significant reduction in the spread and number of outages, and we shall hold them accountable. These investments we are making, the management of GPL will and must be held accountable to deliver the results from these investments. By 2030, more than 50% of the country's electricity needs will also be met by renewable sources and natural gas, looking ahead to 2040 with a peak load forecasted at 1,326 megawatts. In the next decade, we intend also to collaborate with Suriname, Brazil and French Guiana on a 3,000-megawatt power interconnection system underscoring the country's commitment to energy security and a shift towards renewable energy.

In keeping with our commitment to reduce the cost of electricity, I wish now to make the following announcements and commitments. We will be reducing by half – by 50% – the cost of electricity for every consumer in Guyana. This will be done long before the end of 2025. This investment will see savings in excess of US\$250 million. This is an injection of US\$250 million by the Government of Guyana that will positively impact disposable income by the reduction in the cost of electricity. That is more than \$50 billion back in the pockets of the Guyanese people. This is where the revenue is going. This is where the investment is being made: in the life of people, in the comfort of people, and in the disposable income. This is how prosperity is built by enhancing livelihood; improving infrastructure; giving better access to housing, healthcare, education; delivering higher quality services; and empowering people and families. I am about 50% through. Our short-term strategy to use gas as a transition fuel to generate electricity with the Government of Guyana commissioning the 300 megawatts combined cycle plant in 2025, which will deliver generating costs at less than US five cents per kilowatt hour, is a major

part of the energy transformation. The construction of the pipeline integrated power Natural Gas Liquid (NGL) plan transmission line and substation is progressing as expected to be commissioned in 2025. We have advertised Phase Two of gas, utilising an additional 75 million units to fill the pipeline. By 2025, we project 300 megawatts of combined cycle power delivering 2,600 gigawatts hour into the grid, sufficient to meet demand until augmented by Phase Two of gas.

The Wales development hub is an integral part in the energy equation and consumption as this will create opportunities for industry, agro-processing, and manufacturing, open up new opportunities for jobs, create new industries and expand the economic base of our country. Our gas strategy is based on providing electricity at a low price for onshore development while seeking to monetise gas for export in the medium term. Between 2020 and 2024, the Petroleum Management Programme in Guyana achieved significant milestones. A remarkable 25 discoveries were made in this period, with 22 of these occurring at the Stabroek Block alone.

Looking ahead, the projections for the medium and long-term plan from 2025 and beyond are ambitious. The sector is on track to exceed one million barrels per day by 2027 and reach 1.5 million barrels per day by 2030, supported by 10 production facilities, three active developments and a recent definition of a seven project, alongside several others in development. Of course, we have made our thinking very clear and public in relation to the seven and future projects. There is no second guessing of our policy and thinking on these matters. Additionally, two gas-to-energy facilities are expected to be operational by 2030 along with the establishment of associated industry, both upstream and downstream. To prepare our workforce for the growing oil and gas sector, my Government announced last year the construction of the Guyana Technical Training College (GTTTCI) at Port Mourant, Berbice, an investment worth US\$120 million. Since its announcement, construction has commenced and is projected to be completed by 2025. In the interim period, GTTTCI has completed the commissioning of an on-land model Floating Production Storage And Offloading (FPSO), called the factor simulator, which is a part of the upskilling efforts. The simulator results in annual savings of costs associated with training personnel in Canada. It pleases me to announce that the Stabroek Block operator, ExxonMobil, has communicated to the Government its intention to make GTTTCI a hub for FPSO skills training for operations across the globe. This news is a

realisation of our vision of making Guyana an education hub for the world.

I wish now to turn our attention to the mining sector. We inherited a mining sector that had virtually collapsed under the previous Administration. From 2020 to 2024, the mining sector in Guyana underwent transformative changes that not only revitalised the industry but also significantly benefitted miners and the broader economy.

*1.17 p.m.*

We have seen between 2015 and 2019, production in the bauxite sector, contracting by 61.9% resulting in 50% reduction in the labour force. Yes, there was a 50% reduction in the labour force for bauxite in Region 10, between 2015 and 2019. Today, with sound policies, we have seen expanded investment in the bauxite industry of more than US\$120 million, resulting in the creation of 500 jobs since we assumed Office – in Region 10.

The quarrying and other mining sectors, which struggled under the previous Administration, also registered significant growth over the last four years. These sectors experienced a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 255.3% between 2020 and 2023. Since 2020, there has been 21 new quarry licences issued, reflecting the Government's foresight, the growing interest in quarry operations and the demand for construction material.

Looking beyond quarrying, the gold mining sector is also poised for a major uptake in production. Pre large scale gold mining companies have announced plans and currently have development that will propel gold production to a million ounces by 2030. Significant investment has been made in exploration by these companies.

Looking ahead, the medium and long-term plan for 2025 and beyond outlines an ambitious vision for sustainable growth in the mining sector, closely aligned with the Low Carbon Development Strategies (LCDS) 2030. A key priority is the completion of a multiyear mineral mapping initiative aimed at supporting low impact mining and improving planning in mineral rich areas. The Government seeks to attract at least three large scale mining companies by 2030, with a goal of reaching gold declaration – as I said – of more than a million ounces. Additionally, the Bosai Minerals Group Company Limited's bauxite production is set for progressive expansion starting in 2024, alongside an anticipated growth in stone quarry operations, which is expected to produce 4.3 million tonnes of materials annually.

The manufacturing sector also saw a steady growth from 2020 to 2023. By 2030 we envision a fully operational network of industrial estates across the country with the Government prioritising the development of new estates in various regions based on needs assessment. Further, the manufacturing sector is poised for significant growth, particularly with the completion and operationalisation of the Wales Development Authority (WDA) and the implementation of the gas-to-energy project. The anticipated reduction in electricity costs will enhance the feasibility and attractiveness of manufacturing activities in Guyana. Additionally, Guyana envisions a manufacturing sector that not only embraces technological innovation, but also thrives through strategic investment in research and development. The services industry is another industry that grew rapidly between 2020 and 2023. The cumulative growth in this industry over the last three and a half years is more than 30%. The expansion can be attributed to several Government initiatives aimed at fostering broad based access and innovation within the information and communication technology (ICT) sector. Key measures included the liberalisation of the telecommunication sector and the removal of Value Added Tax (VAT) on data and cell phone services. Since the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector, there has been a significant reduction in bandwidth costs, improved efficiency and access.

Our vision for 2030 is to fully operationalise all call centres and maximise their potential, creating thousands of jobs. These initiatives will not only strengthen our services sector, but also contribute to long-term economic growth and job creation across various regions of our country. Our ambition is to foster a new era of wealth creation. Guyana's economy is not just growing, it is being transformed and restructured at its core. We are moving beyond the days of merely extracting resources and exporting them. Vision 2030 will be focused on value creation right here at home. It is about adding layers of opportunity to every resource we pull from the ground – every drop of oil we pump; every grain of paddy we harvest; every tonne of bauxite ore we extract; every ounce of gold that is mined and every tree that is fell. We are not just talking about economic growth; we are talking about embedding value creation at the heart of our economic model. This means that every sector, every worker and every business must see pathways. The elevation and improvement are about ensuring that the fruits of our development are not just measured in GDP, but in human

We want our workers to aspire to higher stations and levels of competence. A graduate teacher should see a clear path to

becoming an expert teacher tomorrow. A nurse has opportunities to specialise and advance, contributing to the better healthcare outcomes for all. This is about building an economy where every citizen, regardless of their starting point, can continuously grow, learn and achieve their fullest potential. It is about making sure that our progress as a nation is reflected in the individual progress of our people. The new model of economic development goes to the heart of our understanding of economic prosperity. For us, economic prosperity extends beyond mere financial wealth. It is about creating an environment where every citizen has the opportunity to thrive, not just in material terms, but in quality of life. True prosperity means access to quality education, health care and decent work where individuals can develop their skills, achieve their potential, and lead fulfilling lives.

Important to the existence of every nation, is the culture, youth and sports. We are building an ecosystem to support cultural development, youth development and sport development, in which tens of billions of dollars is being invested and will be invested to create world class facilities in every region, support coaching, the building out of community facilities – community grounds and utilising sports as a means of wellness and an important tool in the improvement of health. We are investing in building out a sporting infrastructure that is second to none. New stadiums, athletic and recreational facilities and wellness centres are pivotal to enhancing quality of life, building capacity and giving equitable opportunities to our sports, men and women. Our Government has made significant investment and we have also seen significant results. An important part of what we are doing is to give our athletes – our sportsmen and women – the best exposure, both locally, regionally and internationally. We are in partnership with some of the finest sporting institutions globally, including the University of Florida. Our Government has commenced the building out and rehabilitating of sporting facilities in every corner of our country, touching every single sport type. Whether it is badminton, squash, cricket, football, volleyball, car racing, motor racing, horse racing, we have invested in every single sphere of sports because we believe that sports have that imaginative capacity and capability in building positive citizens and creating positive outcomes.

We are also investing heavily in youth training. More than 50,000 youths were trained in soft and technical skills. Over 8670 youths have been engaged in 14 programmes – robotics, engineering, carpentry, masonry – all of these are investment to empower young people. This is to give our young people better opportunities. Important to this is our

heritage. There has not been a better time for culture and creativity in Guyana than at present. We can start with a cultural policy. A revised draft framework for a national cultural policy will be put to public consultation in the new year. This will be one that not only focuses on the fundamental issues of integrating culture into development, heritage preservation and the growth of the creative industry, but one that anticipates more recent concerns, such as the impact of the digital ecosystem on culture and the dangers and opportunities posed by generative artificial intelligence (AI). We have not waited, however, for the implementation of the policy to act expeditiously on areas that are actionable in the short term. The reinstating and upgrading of the Guyana Prize for Literature, making it an annual event and expanding the categories for submissions, have resulted in recognition and reward of homegrown literary talent across all areas.

The creative and cultural industries' grant, which will see its fourth reiteration next year, remains unrivalled in the Caribbean in terms of both the level of the individual grants offered and the total grant money available. So far, over US\$450,000 has been awarded to eligible creative artists and entrepreneurs providing critical financial support across a broad spectrum of creative goods and services. Moreover, the meaningful involvement of local performing arts practitioners has become a staple of state events, providing both income and exposure to some of our brightest talents. Looking to the very near future, my Administration has begun laying the groundwork to establish, in Guyana, a world class film production environment, one that draws upon a tremendous working talent available in the industry, across the diaspora and also locally, in the creative talent area. Our Government through the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, is currently negotiating a co-production agreement with one key international partner, an agreement that will precipitate the establishment of a National Film Commission.

In the area of heritage, my Administration continues to pay homage to a rich and diverse heritage. The most notable commemoration being the initiatives and events last year to commemorate the 200-year anniversary of the 1823 Demerara Rebellion. This was an uprising of over 10,000 of our enslaved ancestors which helped to trigger emancipation a decade later. My Government has embarked on the creation of an integrated sports economy which will be a diverse ecosystem that thrives on the interplay between sports, entertainment and culture.

Vision 2030 seeks to position Guyana as an attractive venue through public/private investment for Formula E racing, horse racing, athletics, cricket, football, cycling and a score of sporting attractions coupled with entertainment and cultural experiences. The concept builds a multifaceted, year-round destination that leverages the unique attributes of each sport and event to create a symbiotic relationship to drive economic growth through tourism, media and local employment. The opportunities across the sports economy can boost GDP, create jobs, improve infrastructure, foster social unity, promote global recognition and leave a lasting legacy of health, culture and economic resilience. It offers a dynamic intersection between sports, culture, commerce and drives comprehensive regional development.

*1.32 p.m.*

This sports economy we are building would increase sports participation, enhance cultural exchanges, create community identity and pride, expose us to broadcasting and media, bringing more attention to Guyana as a destination, creating sustainability and green sports initiative. We will also be investing heavily in the first regional cultural market at Palmyra, investing in music and entertainment synergy and investing in recording studios so that our local talent can have the infrastructure to support the development of their talent. The sports economy we are building would contribute positively to a healthier population, corporate wellness, technology and innovation, and create a society and population that are more united with a greater sense of pride and focus.

Mr. Speaker, you and I know too well the challenges associated with establishing a new revenue earning sector for a country that is rich in biodiversity, culture, beauty, charisma and vibe. The tourism potential of Guyana is unique and can rival any in the world. The future of our economy is one that transcends traditional industries and harness the power of a transformative and sustainable sector. Our Government has embarked on building a visionary economy where the pillars of ecotourism, sports and entertainment tourism, health tourism and business tourism can foster a dynamic ecosystem that promotes environmental stewardship, cultural enrichment and economic inclusivity, added with positive living and wellness centres.

Through strong leadership and visionary policies, our economy has attracted tourism interest and investment, while providing opportunities for our local private sector. In Region 4 alone, we have added more than 800 new rooms with an additional 1400 rooms expected by the end of 2025.

In Regions 1, 2, 3, 6, 7 and 10, we expect 790 plus new rooms by 2026. Guyana will be the home for 14 new hotels and resorts with nine international brands like the Marriott Hotel, the Four Point by Sheraton Hotel, the Hyatt Place Hotel, the Best Western Hotel, the Blue Ridge Hotel, the AC Marriott, the Hilton Hotel and the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, all driven by the private sector with investments worth more than \$200 billion. These hotels will create thousands of jobs. We are also preparing to have our human resource ready for those jobs with investment in the National Hospitality Training Institution and also with specific executive programmes to fast track the development of our human resource talent to service this sector.

It pleases me to announce that Guyana has been approached by one of the world's leading ecotourism hotel operators, Abercrombie and Kent, to operate in Guyana. While discussions are still ongoing, this potential partnership signals to the world that the Guyana product is worth premium dollars. Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that it will please you to hear that Guyana has been the recipient of the Lata Achievement Awards for best in sustainable tourism, the Pacific Area Travel Writers Association (PATW) for destination of the year in ecological tourism, the PATW Travel Awards for Tourism Minister of the Year, silver place at the Fourth Edition of the World Travel Market (WTM) Latin America Responsible Tourism Awards under the best initiative of indigenous tourism and traditional communities. Mr. Speaker, you were there. The investment we are making in the hinterland is transforming their tourism product. The quality of product, the offering, and all of this has been accelerated because of what the revenues from the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) has been able to do for those communities. Guyana has also received nominations for the Green Destination of the Year at the Caribbean Green Awards, the World Travel Awards, the South America's Responsible Tourism Award, the leading sustainable destination by the World Sustainable Travel and Hospitality Award. Iwokrama River Lodge was nominated as South America's leading Ecolodge at the WTM Responsible Tourism Awards. Visitor arrivals grew by almost 269% between 2020 and 2023. Our tourism vision targets three million persons passing through our economy by 2030. This is critically needed to utilise the services that both the Government and the private sector are investing in.

We have welcomed six new airlines, including British Airways, United Airways and Avianca. Two hundred and thirty-eight tourism businesses and guides have been licensed. These major accomplishments emphasise our need for more infrastructure and human capacity building. We are



bolstering capacity building with training, investment, mentoring, standardisation and regulations. I am pleased also to say we are examining different proposals for the expansion of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) to Terminal Two, the expansion of the aerodrome and the possibility of a new international airport at Lethem.

For our Government, women participation is critical to the development and expansion of our country. We must ensure that women are participating more fully in the economic opportunities of our country. We must be able to add directly to the disposable income of women in our society. This will be a fundamental pillar in the creation of a modern society. My Government not only recognises the invaluable contributions of our women, as well as their potential to be self-sufficient and contribute to the development of the country and become revenue contributors to their families, we are acting on it. We have witnessed female participation in law enforcement increase by 44%. We have seen over 70% of the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarships being awarded to women and 65% students' enrolment at the University of Guyana (UG) being female. We have more than 12,000 women who have seen their lives changed under the Women Innovation and Investment (WIIN) programme. We have introduced the WIIN app which features over 1000 women owned businesses.

Notably this year, we had groundbreaking training of over 500 women in carpentry, masonry, plumbing, welding and electrical insulation, all of whom will achieve a United Kingdom (UK) City And Guilds Certification through the Nations University. For the first time, more than 10,000 women are earning an income under the National Pathway Workers Project. Guess what? Seventy percent of the persons on that programme are women. This has resulted in more than \$8 billion of disposable income in the hands of our women. That is new revenue and new disposable income in the hands of these women. Sixty two percent of the more than 22,000 regional economic transformation grants were awarded to women. Today, as I stand here, you have approximately 33% women farmers and 76% of women constitute the agro-processing industry. Our aim is to have 35% of our women as part of the agro food system and by 2030, at least 50% of the newly established agribusiness ventures should be led by women and youth, making them key contributors to the food economy. Women will continue to play a major role in the development of Guyana.

Our elderly, our reservoir of wisdom and experience, our Government is committed to ensuring that our pensioners, who have given their best years in service to this country,

can retire with the dignity and the respect they deserve. Not only have we increased the old age pension by 75%, but we have also invested in their personal welfare. We have invested in ensuring pensions are delivered in a timely manner with ease. These pensions are now payable through places of worship, post offices, Mobile Money Guyana (MMG), direct bank deposits and with deliveries to the hinterland, remote and rural communities directly in the villages. We have pensioners who are shut in, so we are delivering it at home. This is what quality service must look like and feel like. Fifty percent of our elderly benefit from 30,000 per month electricity and water subsidies which, by the way, was removed by the previous Administration; home-based care for the elders is being provided by the Ministry of Health; our elderly benefit also from the \$17,000 voucher towards eye care. Mr. Speaker, 2030 and beyond for our elderly will require consideration of volunteer and mentorship programmes, senior entrepreneurship support, combating loneliness and social isolation, digital literacy programmes, age friendly communities, robotics and artificial intelligence in elderly care, accessible digital services so they too can be part and feel part of this transformation.

In order to further support our pensioners and the elderly, I wish now to make the following announcement. It would be recalled that we implemented earlier this year an increase in a minimum pension payable to pensions under the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) from \$35,000 to \$43,000 monthly. However, in our interaction with communities across the country, especially pensioners and the elderly, we thought it necessary that we must and should do more. We recognise that a number of persons continue to face challenges accessing their benefits from the NIS. In order to address these, we have earmarked a sum of \$10 billion as a one-off injection into the NIS to help address some of these challenges, the detail of which will be outlined in the 2025 Budget. This would allow contributors who would not have met the requirement, to benefit from a cash injection that will support a better quality of living for them and allow them the opportunity of benefiting from their contributions.

From 2020 to present, we provided more than \$28 billion in assistance to families in need through the Public Assistance programmes and other support programmes. We have spent hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance with persons living with disability and in the construction of new learning and training labs in further support to families and creating a child friendly system.

I wish now to make the following announcement. We have already been using interventions in our tax system to promote a number of policy objectives. In particular, we introduced Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR) to allow first time homeowners who have mortgages on income tax deductible in relation to the interest expenses they incur annually on their mortgages. Similarly, we have introduced an income tax deductible in relation to the premiums paid by taxpayers for life and medical insurance. Those two measures have significantly increased the Income Tax threshold for persons benefiting from these two deductibles.

*1.47 p.m.*

In similar nature, I now wish to announce that, next year, we will be introducing a new Income Tax deductible, under which each child entitled one of their parents to claim an additional deduction of \$10,000 per month, for the purpose of determining their chargeable income that is subject to Income Tax. I see the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Carl Greenidge is looking at me anxiously. Maybe he wants to go back to work. What does this in effect means? In other words, for every child, one of their parents will be entitled to an additional Income Tax threshold of \$120,000, more than they would have previously have. Of course, one of the parents, if they have two children, will take him or her to \$140,000. It is 10,000 per child, so for two children it is \$20,000. If you want to be futuristic, Mr. Datadin, three children would entitle you to \$30,000 per month. This initiative will see the tax deduction on your salary, improving your disposable income and expanding your non-tax income. In effect, that is what it will do for you. Do you see how much interest this subject is generating in the House? Even Bishop Edghill seems agitated.

Indigenous development is also key to our Government and the future. No development in Guyana can exclude our Indigenous community whose presence predates all our communities. Over the last four years, our Government has spent more than \$11 billion in our Indigenous communities. We have allocated billions of dollars on investment in community infrastructure, investment in water, the rehiring of 2,800 Community Development Officers (CSOs), the granting of more than 1,000 scholarships under the Guyana Online Academy of Learning – GOAL programme, having almost 1,000 of our hinterland teachers either trained or in training, and expanded our investment in land titling. All of this would have contributed to the significant improvement in the life and livelihood of our hinterland and riverain populations.

Let me turn our attention now to foreign relations, an area that has received substantial attention in this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration. As you know, we live in a challenging world, one defined by endless opportunities, but also a world in which powerful players wield the instruments of power. While there is no limit to the high faulting rhetoric of peace, equality and justice, the international community has collectively failed to defend the principles, rules, norms, institutions and obligations necessary for a just world order. This is why today leadership is at a premium. The international stage of power – politics, however, has no room for the weak-minded, for naysayers, for the myopic, nor for those who lack the ethical and moral basis to take up the mantle of leadership on the global stage.

The world knows that those who have rigged the elections at home have lost the credibility and their right to speak on behalf of anyone else. In a connected world people know better. The world knows what happened here between March and 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2020. It takes courageous and insightful leadership, built on strong and enduring commitment to democratic values for foreign relations to be successful. Over the past four years, we have carefully reconstructed our global image, and the world is watching. The dreams of past generations for a better country and a better world have now arrived at our doorsteps. My Administration takes this challenge not as a burden, but as a springboard from where the PPP/C will continue to serve you the people of this land. This land is our land. We no doubt live in a world dominated by varied degree and strength and significance of powers. In the realm of international security, we were elected for a two-year term on the Security Council of the United Nations (UN).

On the pressing planetary issue of climate change and food security, we have deepened and broadened our innovation to the point where Guyana is now recognised in a top tier of global leaders. In the area of diplomacy, we have built out a vast network of reciprocal relationships that will bolster not only our national interest, but also that of the Americas and beyond. The global south must not stand by and watch the world spin us around. We need to lead boldly and constructively.

Guyana is charging full force ahead at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. You should know that we have used our seat on the Security Council to rally the call for good global governance and for peace among nations, in keeping with our consistent and principled position in relation to adherence to international rule of law and the UN Charter,

respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, human rights and democratic values.

We have condemned the senseless terrorist attacks on Israel by Hamas. There is no justification for taking innocent lives in pursuit of political ends. We have equally and emphatically condemned the wanton destruction of Gaza, where more than 40,000 souls, most of them women and children, have perished. We have also condemned, and will do so again, the destructive incursions into the West Bank, but words are never enough, and certainly not enough when a mighty military machine is free to do as they want without any recourse or respect for what the world thinks and believes. This is why, in our own small way, we felt obligated to provide some humanitarian support for the suffering people of Gaza. In this context, we feel obligated to acknowledge the decision of President Macron to ban French arms sales to the region. I take this opportunity now, to call on all parties to the regional conflict to show restraint, to engage in dialog and to work towards a lasting peace in the Middle East. On the Russia-Ukraine war, we have been crystal clear that the rule of law must prevail, and that the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Ukraine must be respected. We know what is happening in Sudan, where more than 20,000 people have been killed and thousands wounded – Guyana played its role. Right here in the Caribbean, Guyana played its role in the formation of Haiti's Presidential Transitional Council. We also underlined the importance of the multilateral security support mission. Peace must come to Haiti. We will not leave Haiti behind.

Over the past four years, we have signed numerous memoranda agreements that will bring greater benefits to our country and all our people. This august body and citizens all across our 83,000 square miles should know that we have signed agreements spanning financial, economic, industrial, technical and educational with Kuwait, Qatar, France, Ghana, the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, Morocco, India, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Saudi Arabia, Cyprus, Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom (UK). As the nation rises, the ark of international engagement widens and so we are delighted to embrace new partners. Our new campaign of diplomatic engagement also saw us filling posts that have been left vacant, among them were Brazil, Venezuela, Switzerland and Belgium. We also established a new mission in Qatar. New missions to Guyana have been established by Belize, Dominican Republic, UAE, Qatar and France. Over the period, we have hosted more than 25 global and regional leaders. I can assure you that these engagements and

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are substantive and impactful for *Vision 2023*.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela continues to nourish the controversy over the Essequibo, a region that is indivisible to our territorial integrity and fundamental to national sovereignty. We are a peaceful nation and a peaceful people. We are adamant that the UN Charter should undergird all practices of international diplomacy and there is no substitute for international law. We have therefore, time and again, reminded Venezuela of the sanctity of the 1899 Arbitral Award that settled the boundary between Guyana and Venezuela. Venezuela should know that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is a rightful and final arbiter of the ill-begotten controversy it has provoked, and the geopolitical brinkmanship has really yielded rewards desired. Guyana's foreign relations are built on a bedrock of powerful friends and formidable allies. No one should misjudge our resolve to defend these 83,000 square miles.

The economic transformation underway in Guyana has posed the unusual challenge of labour shortages in all sectors of our economy. This is a good challenge, one that is indicative of the fact that the scourge of unemployment has vanished. No longer do our people have to leave these shores in search of a living. I urge that in this phase of national development, we be mindful of the respect and dignity we should offer for migrant labours. We must always remember that there was a time when our citizens sought opportunities in other lands also. In doing this, we are building a framework that will ensure the full prosperity, full involvement of all our people and workers at home, remembering that the definition of employment is all those who are seeking employment and are unemployed. An active labour market, combined with special legislation such as the Local Content Act of 2021, means that our people now have real choices. Even if we acknowledge that we have a far way to go, we must acknowledge that wages have been on a steady upswing. In some sectors such as construction, it is not unusual for a skilled mason, carpenter or electrician, to earn in one day what they made in a week not so long ago. Data from the University of Guyana (UG) indicates that upwards of 85% of our students are either in a job or landed a job by the time of graduation.

2.02 p.m.

This is true for a wide range of majors, including five engineering programmes, multiple medicine programmes, agriculture and forestry, business, law, geology, earth, environmental and climate sciences, education,

communications, statistics, economics, chemistry, biology, physics, computer science, marketing, and accounting. That rate of absorption of our young people in the economy is exactly what the PPP/C has always aimed for. That way, our young people begin early in their journey of building out the professional and financial aspects of their livelihood. The economy we are building is not of the type of past generations. It is one that is diversified. It is one in which opportunities for high-yielding, high-paying jobs will be available. *Vision 2030* and beyond is built on innovative forays into digitalisation, ecotourism, sports, medical tourism, and a range of services in education, healthcare, security, research and development. We are moving in the direction of a smart and agile economy, an economy based more and more on ideas and value creation. To meet the labour shortages, we must be equally innovative. *Vision 2030* and beyond envisages a dynamic society, one in which we must at least have 3,000 persons passing through our economy by 2030 to utilise the service and contribute to economic expansion.

Mr. Speaker, our foreign relations and foreign trade have also seen tremendous results in the expansion of our domestic exports and also in the expansion of trade among and between important trading partners. The top three trading partners of imports for the first quarter of 2024 were the United States of America (USA), Trinidad and Tobago (T&T), and China. Imports from the United States of America totalled US\$451 million, Trinidad and Tobago, US\$237 million, and China, US\$218 million.

Guyana is an integral part of the Caribbean, a family of nations committed to democracy and the rule of law. May I remind you that this same Caribbean is the cradle of the modern world system? It is here where the triangular trade became the fulcrum of the modern world economy and it is also here where, in the long march towards emancipation, black and brown bodies took history into their own hands and created a catalytic rupture from the worst forms of domination of man by man. Today, this same Caribbean, comprised only of small states, is determined to make our voices heard. Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was hatched in a womb of necessity and a promise of uplifting its peoples in a turbulent world. Guyana and I myself have had the immense honour of leading this region. Caribbean nations have been hounded by a range of threats by non-state actors who are emerging in trafficking in narcotics, guns, women, illegal labour supply, money laundering, kidnapping for ransom, and a plethora of criminal enterprises. We must stand strong and repel these threats to national and human security.

In this regard, we are in active cooperation with sister Caribbean countries. Our membership in the Regional Security System (RSS) is a step towards enhancing our regional and national security. Our foreign policy must establish us as a leading light in defence of the core principles of the United Nations (UN) Charter of international law, human rights, human dignity, and of those who, by no fault of their own, face unbearable suffering in the world, where the cries of freedom can still be heard but continue to go unanswered. The country stands resolute in its commitment to international security and global peace based on the rule of law and global governance based on expansive multilateralism and universal principles of equality and equity. Democratic governance at home and abroad and democratic development based on comprehensive environmental and ecological sustainability are all part of our robust foreign policy.

Mr. Speaker, the protection of our people, territory and values remains the solemn duty of any government. As Commander-in-Chief, I am committed to this mission, ensuring our national sovereignty, democratic values and global commitments are upheld. Recognising the diverse threats we face, we have made substantial investments to strengthen our defence capabilities across land, sea, and air. Over the past four years, we have invested a staggering \$235 billion in our security sector, reflecting an increase of 864% in defence spending since 2020, and the highest allocation ever made to national security. This significant investment supports a proactive, intelligence-driven and results-oriented defence strategy focused on human resource development, modern facilities, regional command centres, technological deployment and intelligence gathering.

Our significant investment in law enforcement has yielded tangible successes, transforming the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and enhancing the effectiveness of the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU). The \$96.6 billion allocated to modernising the GPF has enabled advancement in technology, intelligence and response capabilities, contributing to a 16% reduction in serious crimes and a successful seizure of 544 illegal firearms. CANU's strengthened operations have led to the interception of over 15 tons of narcotics, including the landmark 4.4 tons cocaine bust in August, 2024. These achievements underscore the impact of targeted investment in law enforcement and our collaboration and commitment of key international and regional partners. I wish to applaud the cooperation and collaboration with our key partners.

Over the past four years, partnership has played a crucial role in bolstering Guyana's defence. The Shiprider Agreement with the United States of America enabled joint maritime and aerial patrol against narcotics trafficking. Hosting Exercise Tradewinds twice strengthened regional cooperation in humanitarian response and military readiness. Support from the United States of America Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) also included disaster preparedness measures. We also signed defence cooperation agreements with various nations, including the United States of America, the United Kingdom (UK), France, India, Jamaica and Brazil. These agreements have enhanced training, intelligence sharing and resource acquisition, such as the purchase of the state-of-the-art offshore patrol vessel and two Dornier aircraft. Collaborations with the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and the Caribbean Community Intelligence Sharing Network further improve our capacity to address mutual security threats.

Guyana's induction into the South American Strategic Intelligence Alliance and hosting of the third Guyana Shield Strategic Dialogue have strengthened our regional position. Our officers have been actively engaged in international platforms, including the UN Security Council, amplifying Guyana's voice in global security discussions. We have also established key institutions, like the National Defence Institute and the Doctrine Command Centre, focusing on strategic training and updating military tactics. The Guyana Police Force Academy and the Guyana Fire Service (GFS) have also seen modernisation with increasing funding, leading to better-equipped facilities and training programmes. Investments have been directed towards improving our operational capacity across all security agencies.

The Guyana Defence Force, the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit and investment in Guyana Fire Service have not only seen new, modern pieces of equipment but also tremendous investment in human resource assets, expanding our human resource and physical asset base. More importantly, we have invested heavily in technology, artificial intelligence (AI), and other innovative mechanisms to further bolster our defence and security architecture. The Guyana Defence Force is focused on protecting offshore assets and enhancing its domain awareness through radar and satellite systems. A new drone and geographic information system (GIS) department is being developed for better maritime and airspace monitoring. The Guyana Police Force is modernising through a new cybercrime unit, expanded fleet, and upgraded closed circuit television (CCTV) system. These initiatives, coupled with community outreach

programmes, have improved crime detection and prevention capabilities.

Rehabilitation remains a key focus for the Guyana Prison Service, with new training programmes and facilities aimed at reducing crime, enhancing capability, building technology and creating greater efficiency.

The fire service is also adopting an advanced dispatch system and training for aviation-related emergencies and showing readiness across different scenarios. We have invested in the most modern fleet of firefighting equipment available in today's market. To the extent that every Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) will now have basic firefighting capability. We are also training in the creation of volunteer firefighting groups that will be integrated with members of the joint services so that we can have an additional layer of response within every NDC.

Mr. Speaker, it will also please you to know that we have added to our air capacity in the Guyana Defence Force the capability to soon fight fire from the skies and this is key and critical as the architecture changes are evident in our country.

As we look towards 2030, Guyana's vision for security and defence is anchored in a dynamic, adaptive approach that leverages the power of emerging technologies to address evolving threats. We are committed to building an AI-powered framework that revolutionises intelligence gathering and threat detection, enabling faster and more informed decision-making. Our investment in a cyber-resilient infrastructure will ensure robust protection against cyber threats, safeguarding critical national infrastructure and enhancing our ability to respond to digital security challenges. Through the establishment of a regional intelligence school and the expansion of our intelligence network, we aim to provide precise threat assessment and superior strategic planning, keeping Guyana at the forefront of regional security, strengthening our borders through advanced surveillance and cutting-edge technologies and capability, ensuring the integrity of our maritime aerial and terrestrial spaces, particularly as we safeguard our valuable oil and gas asset.

Our vision includes enhancing the capability of the Guyana Police Force through digital transformation, including automated case management and the deployment of a real-time citizen reporting platform. Our plans extend to the modernisation of the Guyana Fire Service and the transformation of the Guyana Prison Service into a correctional facility.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have covered tremendous ground in a short time and I want to assure you that the narrative of development and the vision we are embracing for the remainder of this decade will continue to be elaborated upon in the coming budget and will be distilled further so that the successes of this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government shall and will not be lost in the noise in the wider society. The narrative of holistic, integrated national development must continue to outshine, outperform and out-sound the naysayers every day.

*2.17 p.m.*

We have a commitment to all of Guyana to be a part of the solution and not the problem. I encourage the seats that portray emptiness today to join with us in creating a Guyana in which prosperity for every home must have a meaning, in which development must be accelerated, in which unity, tolerance and togetherness must be the new art form of politics, and in which division, disharmony, disunity and false narrative must be the instrument of the past. The new Guyana, this new era requires thinking, requires constant analysis, but more importantly, requires hard work, commitment, trust and faith in the Government and the people we serve. Mr. Speaker, I assure you that these are characteristics by which we govern. I thank you and God bless all of you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very, very much for that resounding acclamation of what His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, had to deliver to us, the Hon. Members. Hon. Members, I sat there and I listened as he outlined, firstly, from where his Government came four years ago and where he intends to take this nation in the next six years. As 12-year-old, Mandi Sharma said, "The future generations will have it easy." Your Excellency, it was most inspiring. You have not only demonstrated physically and mentally your capacity to lead this emerging 'first world' nation, but you continue with this passion after four years of continuous, hard and dedicated service to our people. On behalf of a grateful National Assembly, Parliament, and all those who listened today, especially our school children, we thank you very, very much for that most inspirational Address today.

Hon. Members, I was so delighted to hear so many things, especially about the digital economy. Please join me in acknowledging 20 years of Ministers of Tourism in Minister Walrond, Minister Maniram Prashad, Speaker Nadir and President Irfaan Ali. [*Applause*]

Hon. Members, I call on the Hon. Prime Minister to move the adjournment of this special Sitting.

## ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

"That the National Assembly be adjourned to a date to be fixed."

**Prime Minister [Brigadier Ret'd Phillips]:** Mr. Speaker, I (*inaudible*)

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. To all our distinguished guests, please join us for some refreshments. The National Assembly now stands adjourned to a date to be fixed.

*Adjourned accordingly at 2.22 p.m.*