



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
(2020-2025) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION
OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR
CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN*

97TH Sitting

Friday 31ST January, 2025

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

Assembly convened at 10.16 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

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Hon. Dr. Asha Kissoon, M.P., Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Virtual Participation]

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Mr. Saeed Umrao,
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Mr. Daison Horsham,
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PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Paper was laid:

- 1) The Value Added Tax Amendment of Schedule Order 2025 – No. 2/2025

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

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT’S BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2025 – MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2025

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

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2025 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 17, 2025, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

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

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73.02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for

each Constitutional Agency be included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2025 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2025 of a total sum of one trillion, two hundred and ninety-eight billion, three hundred and forty-six million, nine hundred and eighty thousand, and one hundred and eighty-one dollars (\$1,298,346,980,181), excluding eighty three billion, eight hundred and three million, five hundred and fifteen thousand, six hundred and seventy-six dollars (\$83,803,515,676) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2025 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of eighteen billion, nine hundred and forty six million, five hundred and sixty-two thousand, and one hundred and seventy-three dollars (\$18,946,562,173) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2025.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$512,436,702,092 equivalent to US\$2,463,889,710 to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2025 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply to begin Consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial year 2025.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: We are now in Committee of Supply. We will proceed in accordance with the Subcommittee's schedule. Before we take the first Ministry, let me invite the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha and his team to come in place while I go through some housekeeping matters.

CIRCULATION OF DOCUMENTS

Circulated this morning are a few pages of parts of the estimates which had some errors and I would like you to substitute. I think everyone has them. It is from Director of Budget Ms. Sonya Roopnauth. We have no impact on the revenue side, however, there are some errors because of how some of the computations were done. There were some done outside of the Integrated Financial Management and Accounting System (IFMAS) and then plugged in. I was saying to Director of Budget that we did those *handomatically*. For page 683, you can substitute what was circulated because the substituted 683 reflects the correct numbers with no impact on the revenue side. It is the same for page 705, page 706 and page 710. These are all in the appendices with no impact on the overall expenditure. Is that correct, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service?

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service [Dr. Singh]: Yes, Mr. Chairman. They are purely presentational and do not have any impact on the overall expenditure or overall revenue.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. I know we do have several Members who are very meticulous, because when they would add back, they may feel like something went wrong. These pages now Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul will give you or reflect what should have been.

Dr. Singh: Might I add, Sir, with your permission, that they are all from appendix T and a simple comparison between what has now been circulated and what was in the Estimates would illustrate the inconsequentiality of the corrections that have been there. Thank you, very much.

10.34 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Dr. Singh. Our first agency today is the Ministry of Agriculture. Bear with me so we can all be on the same page, digitally and hard copy. Hon. Members, I invite you to turn to pages 138 and 139. We are beginning at 10.35 a.m., according to my time.

Agency: 21 Ministry of Agriculture

Current Expenditure

Programme: 211 – Ministry Administration – \$1,018,849,000

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

Mr. Jordan: Good morning, Mr. Chairman. The first question I would like to pose this morning to the Minister is – when will the position for the Permanent Secretary (PS) in the Ministry of Agriculture be filled? [**Hon. Members:** What line item is it?] It is the line item 6111, Administrative.

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

It is line item 6111, Administrative.

Mr. Chairman: It is line item 6111.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Mr. Chairman, we have an acting Permanent Secretary; she is doing a good job; and we will continue until we find one.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman. I noticed under the same line item 6111, Administrative, three positions are now different from those of 2024. I am asking the Minister – could he say what has caused the difference in those three administrative positions?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, the decrease in this line item is due to the promotion of two officers – a Chief Accountant and an Accountant to another Ministry. We have a Legal Officer who was transferred. Those are the three positions – promotion and transfer – which is why three are less.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I am moving on. I would like to ask the Minister what the salary and other benefits of the Director General at the Ministry of Agriculture is.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I will lay that over. I do not have that information with me here directly. I will lay that over at a later date.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, further, I would like to ask the Minister – I do not know if he has this here with him – why is the position of the Director General not listed as an approved position under the Ministry in Appendix Q on page 588 and what is the job description of the Director General?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, that position is not only in the Ministry of Agriculture other ministries also have Director Generals. The Director General plays a very important role in supporting the Minister and the administration in executing his duties. The Appendix will be updated shortly. The Director's position will be published with his designation in that Appendix.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I am aware that the Director General's position exists at other ministries. The Director General has been functioning in this position for almost five years and the Appendix has not been updated. Is the Minister saying that it has been a mistake, for five years that the appendix was not updated, and he does not have the salary or the job description of the Director General at hand?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, it is not the Ministry of Agriculture's duty to update that. The Ministry of the Public Service is responsible and it is working on it. The Ministry will update that appendix and that will reflect the Director General's position. However, it is no secret that we have a Director General at the Ministry of Agriculture who is performing well and doing a wonderful job.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, in line item 6322, Subsidies and Contributions to International Organisations, in 2025, there is a budgetary allocation of \$155 million. When I looked on page 475, under the Ministry of Agriculture, I recognised that the International Coconut Community in 2024 had a budget allocation of almost \$13 million. This was revised to \$4 million. Now, in 2025, it is at \$4.1 million. Could the Minister say what caused the decline? What are the operations or usage of the funds to the international organisation?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, this line item caters to a number of international organisations. For example, for the International Coconut Community (ICC), we had \$4 million in arrears last year and that is reflected. Last year, we hosted the 38th Session of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (LARC). I want to say that contributions are made according to the country's ranking for these organisations. From 2020 to 2024, Guyana's ranking has improved tremendously by the FAO and its fees have increased. That is why you have seen for example – I can provide a breakdown for the Hon. Member – to the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) we are paying \$80 million; to FAO, \$4.392 million; the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), \$9.643 million; the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), \$50 million; and the International Coconut Community, \$4.155 million. This is a total of \$155.324 million. These are the organisations which we are contributing to.

I want to also say that these organisations look to Guyana for the role it plays. Last year, because IICA recognised the role Guyana plays, our President was awarded the organisation's first award. We are getting a lot of cooperation from these organisations. The IICA has been helping us also to resuscitate our cocoa and coffee industries. The FAO has been working with us. When many persons were talking about the oil and gas causing low catches, the FAO conducted a study and gave the reasons we have had low catches. Now, we are seeing an improvement in those catches. These organisations are helping us. We are also working very closely to develop the agriculture sector. That is why we are ranked almost number one in the Caribbean in terms of agricultural development and leadership in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I have one other question on this line item about the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) for which I see \$15 million. The question I want to ask,

Sir – to the Minister, when will the agreement between Guyana and the Republic of Suriname be inked, allowing fishermen to have the promised fishing licences to really venture out?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, that falls under another Programme 213. I do not know if the Hon. Member is not looking at his programme. It is not in this Programme but, as he raised the question, I want to answer. As a country, we must take pride in supporting our people. We must take pride in supporting our people. Now, no other Government – the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) are guilty of this – never raised the issue of licences to the Guyanese fisher folks. We had the courage; we went; and we raised it. We had an undertaking from the Government – not less a person than the President. It is now only left to us because they made the Commitment. We had it in writing. They do not have to give us and we cannot bind them to. They reneged on the commitment. We had it in writing. No less a person than the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries for the Republic of Suriname wrote to me. He stated they would form a government company to get the licences for the Guyanese fisher folks. This was so our fisher folks would not be harassed when they go out to fish. Let us work together as a team. One hundred and fifty licences were promised to Guyana by the authorities of the Republic of Suriname. They reneged on it. We continue to represent the issue. We have raised it at different forum in the Caribbean. We have also raised it with the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM). It is their prerogative to give the licences or not. We will continue to make that representation. We will continue to represent the fisher folks of Guyana.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, from the Minister I would like to ask – what is the final analysis of all you said? It is four years in and we are still waiting. What is it that the fisher folks must be told – they will get it in a few months, or they will not get it because there are ongoing discussions? What is the final analysis? This is neither going nor coming. Is it dead or is it still on the table? You talked about a new company.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, the Government of Guyana – our Government – is continuing to make representation for the licences for fisher folks. It is not in our hands to give them the licences. The Hon. Member must comprehend this. We are continuing to make the representation. We had the commitment – I said it – and they reneged on it. We are continuing to represent that issue and that will be on the agenda as long as the PPP/C is in Government.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, this is not to be back and forth, but the Minister said they will continue to represent. Yes, but the Minister need to tell the Guyanese public what the current state of the discussion is. What is the current state? Is it promising or is it not? Will we have it or not?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, is it promising?

Mr. Mustapha: Let me be very slow and then ask the Hon. Member if he understands. I just said that the authorities in the Republic of Suriname promised us 150 licences. We had a commitment from no less a person than the President. I had an electronic mail (e-mail) from the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries for the Republic of Suriname. He stated that the modus operandi on how they will go about issuing the licences. These people have no ideas on what international relations are. They want us to go and force the officials in the Republic of Suriname to give the fisher folks licences. These people do not know how international relations work. They do not know diplomacy. That is why Guana lost its status when they were in Government. They never had Guyana's interest at heart. They do not know international relations. They feel that this is a bottom house and cake shop business that we are running. We are not running the Government like that. We work through the diplomatic channels; we work through the international channels; and we will continue to represent the fisher folks. That is why this year, we budgeted \$1.7 billion to continue development in the fishing industry.

10.49 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Member of Parliament (MP) Holder, you have the floor.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Minister seems to be the expert at international relations (IR) and all that concerns it. It is three to four years. This Hon. Minister...

Mr. Chairman: MP Holder, are you going back to the same question?

Mr. Jordan: I am moving on. It is four years and Guyanese have not yet received... The other question to complete that... The ban on catfish in Guyana has been another sore issue and the Minister seems to be the expert at International Relations. We had a state visit from no less of a person than the then Secretary of State of the United States of America (USA), Mr. Mike Pompeo. This Government promised that the ban on catfish would be lifted, and we would return to that

state of having imports and exports and all of that. To date, we have zero fishing licenses from the Republic of Suriname (Suriname) and the ban is still in place. Could the Hon. Minister say, when would that ban be lifted?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, let me say something. If I was in that Member's shoe, I would be ashamed to ask that question. The APNU/AFC caused us to lose the catfish market in America. The APNU/AFC, in 2018, received a warning from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States to get their act together, but they failed, and we lost the market. I can say that the United States Embassy and our Government are working very closely to restore Guyana's market in the catfish industry. They are the persons who caused the loss. These are the people who come here to accuse us of their crime. That is why yesterday the...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have two imputations: one, in terms of their crime, and two, look at the words. We had crime and shame. You may continue.

Mr. Mustapha: All right. It was their fault, Mr. Chairman. They caused Guyana to lose the catfish market in the United States in 2018. We are working very closely with the FDA and the United States Embassy to restore that operation, and we are very close to getting it done because we are continuing to submit the documents that the people wanted in relation to the fishing licences.

[**Mr. Duncan:** (*Inaudible*)] No, no. I have to make a point that... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Comrade, the point I want to make is that we are continuing to represent this issue. Certain words you cannot use in this Assembly, but, Mr. Speaker, when you have people who embezzle funds, come in here and talk about things... [**Mr. Holder:** Not all bad.] No. We have to be careful and talk about these things. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I am not imputing. I did not call any names. The point is, we are very close to restoring that market for Guyana.

Mr. Jordan: We all know that even when we reach to the end of the PPP/C's term in Office, in a few months, we will still hear that 'Burnham' is to be blamed and 'Granger' is to be blamed. With the blame being placed at the feet of the Coalition, and four years in, I am happy that the Minister could say that we are close. However, many things went just close as the minister said, and they never came true. Could the Hon. Minister say, how close are we? Is it one month, six months, or three months? Tell us how close the discussions are heading.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I will not be taking setup here this morning. We are dealing with a foreign country. Probably, the Hon. Member can say when we *gunn* meet that period. The point I am trying to make is that we are continuing to make representations, we are advanced in the process, and I am very optimistic that will be restored, that the APNU lost for us.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I will move on. I have one other question. At line item 6116, I see a significant reduction in the amount of employees here on contract. Could the Hon. Minister say, what could have caused that? Probably, they were on the pensionable status. I would just like to get an update. I think they are about 20-something.

Mr. Mustapha: Again, we do not put people out of employment. These persons that were moved, they term them the bonded scholars – people who were trained, came to the Ministry, had experience, worked for a year or two and they were transferred to different agencies such the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA), the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) and the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB). So, their employment records would be shown in those semi-autonomous agencies.

Mr. Jordan: At line item 6294, I recognise an increase in the budgetary allocation for 2025, and it is \$64 million. Could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to disaggregate that sum? Thank you.

Mr. Mustapha: Yes. We have here a \$30 million increase and these are the activities: Monitoring Evaluation Planning and Statistic Unit – \$17.3 million; we now have a Rice Assessment Committee that functions and looks at issues in the various regions, and we have a budget of \$11.274 million for that; we have the National Cane Farming Committee – \$6 million; we have the hinterland development support – \$4.7 million; we have the Agriculture Disaster Risk Management Plan – \$3 million; we have the Food and Nutrition Security Strategy Implementation, CARICOM Agri-Food Systems – \$3 million; we have the binding constraint in agriculture or the Jagdeo's Initiative – \$1.8 million; the review of Veterinary Board development of regulations and operating expenses – \$8 million; Evaluator's stipend – \$2 million; stipends for work – \$1 million; regional farmers meeting and outreaches – \$4 million; and support to the Agriculture Sector Development Unit (ASDU) Engineers – \$2 million, giving us a total of \$64,250,000.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. The MP Jordan, you have the floor. Hon. Members I now put the question that the sum...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, if I may?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A pleasant morning to you and the entire Committee. Under that very line item 6294, Other, last year we had a budgetary allocation of some \$62 million, but you expended \$33 million based on the revised column. Could you explain the reason for the reduction? I know you just gave an explanation for the \$64 million that is now being requested. Could you explain the reduction between the budgetary sum and that of the revised sum? Thank you.

Mr. Mustapha: Last year, we did not have a Veterinary Board, we did not have the Rice Assessment Committee functioning and the Planning Unit; they were given support by the ASDU staff to do all of those units and agencies that have now been budgeted for in this year's budget.

Programme: 211 – Ministry Administration – \$1,018,849,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 211 – Ministry Administration – \$30,000,000

Mr. Jordan: I have just one question here. I would just like the Hon. Minister to disaggregate the \$30 million that is allocated for the provision of furniture and equipment, and to be specific, where would the furniture and equipment be procured for?

Mr. Mustapha: The \$30 million is disaggregated as follows: information technology (IT) equipment – \$22 million – off-site backup server, firewall upgrade, firewall backup, upgrade to wireless network, rack-mountable uninterruptible power supply (UPS) backup for server room, stabiliser, heavy duty surveillance system upgrade and reconfiguration, registry record, centre document digitisation project, scanner and handheld heavy-duty scanner. That gives us a total of \$22,110,000. Then there is a number of other small equipment here such as an air condition (AC) unit, UPS backup, stabiliser, office chair, computer desk, laptop, monitor, printer and microphone which would give us the rest to make up the \$30 million.

Programme: 211 – Ministry Administration – \$30,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 212 – Agriculture Development and Support Services – \$31,491,490,000

Mr. Jordan: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: I see \$31 billion. When I look at pages 4, 6 and 9 – and I will move to the other one in a little bit – I recognise that the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) received \$450 million. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, what are the findings and recommendations out of the audit launched by the General Manager of GMC involving the Special Projects Manager and the Accountant, and what were the actions taken? Mr. Chairman, you would recall that in 2024 when we had a budgetary allocation, I think it was the same \$405 million, we had a number of misappropriations at this agency, the New GMC, and the General Manager...

Mr. Chairman: MP, you said there were misappropriations. Do you have that fact?

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, it is...

Mr. Chairman: If there is an allegation, that is one thing, but if you are stating it positively, I will need some evidence.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, those were the allegations according to the news, but I want the Hon. Minister to say to me, out of the probe, what were the recommendations and the actions taken?

Mr. Mustapha: First of all, all of the documents were looked at by the Internal Auditors and they are now with the Auditor General's (AG) office. We are awaiting the report from the AG's office.

Mr. Jordan: This matter is still an internal matter. We spent millions of dollars on that agency last year and the Minister has come to this House for another \$450 million. Could the Hon. Minister say whether the two persons allegedly involved are still on the job?

11.04 a.m.

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, Mr. Chairman. One is on the job and one went to another agency to work.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, coming back to the findings, the Hon. Minister made it very clear that there were findings, and it was sent to the AG's office.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, just a correction, please. I did not make any remarks about the findings. I said all the documents were compiled and sent to the AG's office.

Mr. Chairman: You did, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Jordan.

Mr. Jordan: I am so guided, Mr. Chairman. However, the documents, something is written in those documents. What documents, and what were the initial contents of the documents regarding the probe?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, all of the documents that were required by the AG's office, we sent them across.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member, before you continue, I did speak with the Chief Whips with respect to asking the same questions three and four times, and we have started that way. I have no problems if that is the way the House wants to utilise the time allocated. You have the floor again, Hon. Member Mr. Jordan.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, respectfully, Sir, it is not the way you might say we want to go, but we are spending millions and billions of dollars on a yearly basis here. We, as a nation and legislators, are responsible for the passage, and the Minister, the ministry, and those who operate have to ensure that they manage and give account for these moneys in a proper manner. When we come here, we have the responsibility of the nation upon our backs to ask questions that will bring clarity. I am asking of the Minister, with all that was said in the probe, what were the initial findings?

Mr. Chairman: Before I ask the Hon. Minister to take the floor, I agree with you that we are here to scrutinise expenditure, but, for me, the answer from the Minister is quite clear and, more particularly, on point, because an internal investigation was done, all documents were forwarded to the AG's chambers, the competent authority to pronounce on expenditure for this nation. There is no result as yet, and it would be premature, if I were the Minister, to proffer an answer – especially an answer that people want to hear – before I find a report given to me. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I already answered that question. I said all the documents that were required by the AG's office were sent over and we do not have anything to hide. We are awaiting the findings of the AG's office, and whatever recommendations are recommended, we will implement those recommendations.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I will move on. The Mahaica Mahaicony Abary Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) was given, or is asking rather, Sir, for some... [Ms.

Parag: Line item.] It is the same line item all of the time. The sum of \$623 million, Mr. Chairman. At this very agency – and Mr. Chairman, permit me – it has been months, and these things are ongoing continuously. We have no clarity from a Government that preaches about transparency, accountability and integrity. Mr. Chairman, at the MMA/ADA, there were allegations of a misappropriation of funds again, and the board of MMA/ADA, in response to one of my articles in the press, responded and said that they know of the misappropriation and that they had dealt with it at that time. I would like for the Hon. Minister to say to this House, what were the actions taken by the board.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, could the Member repeat the question, please?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. I am finding it difficult to listen to him also because of the amount of noise in the Chamber. Go ahead, again.

Mr. Jordan: Yes, sorry, Mr. Chairman. Summarised – the alleged misappropriation at MMA/ADA, and the board responding to my press release and saying that they acknowledge the misappropriation, and that they have taken action immediately. I am asking of the Minister, what were the actions taken and whether the staff is still in the employ of MMA/ADA?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, before I answer that question, I have to clear an issue that the Hon. Member had asked earlier. That is in relation to the GMC. Now, the Hon. Member said that the GMC has been provided with large sums of money, and had these issues happening there, but I want to talk about the role the new GMC is playing in our country. You, yourself, Mr. Speaker, would have had experiences attending these expositions (expos) and these exhibitions. Over the last four years, hundreds of new agro-processors have come on stream. Over the last four years, we have brought into the agro-processing market over 809 new products. Yesterday, I heard the Leader of the Opposition say that we are doing good things building all of these agro-processing

facilities around the country in different parts of the region. He wants to know what are the items being processed there. I will just, for the National Assembly's benefit, list a few items. For example: the agro-processing facility at White Water – we are doing cassava bread, cassareep, tuma water and cassava meal; the Kumaka packaging facility – we are preparing fresh produce such as cassava, plantains, eddoes, ginger, yams and turmeric.

I am enlightening the Opposition. These are the places that we build. We *nah* build around the urban areas alone. We built it in different parts, far, in the deep south – Bartica, Region 1, White Water, Orealla, Siparuta – all these agro-processing facilities. Charity agro-processing facility – green seasoning, pepper sauce, cassareep, mango achar, carambola fruits, wine for preservatives, miracle sauce; Parika agro-processing facility – plantains, cassava, eddoes, sweet potatoes, and chips. These things are being exported to Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, the Eastern Caribbean countries, and North America. If you go to Florida now, you will see the Guyana brand. The Guyana brand is in the stores in Miami, Florida. That is the kind of level we took agro-processing to. The Hope dehydrating facility – we are doing green seasoning, pepper sauce, flour, soap, cassareep – imagine we are now producing our own soap through agro-processing; our own soap is being produced right here in Guyana, locally – cassava bread, dehydrated fruits, and vegetable powders. Fort Wellington agro-processing facility – green seasoning and pepper sauce. I invite the Hon. Member living in West Coast Berbice to visit the agro-processing facility at Fort Wellington. Crabwood Creek agro-processing facility – we have flour, green seasoning, pepper sauce, and juices. Only this morning I was showing my colleague, Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, that the Guyana School of Agriculture agro-processing facility is now making bread with sweet potato flour. We have the Orealla agro-processing facility – we have fruit juices, jam, and jelly.

The Mururanau agro-processing facility in Region 9 – we have fruit juices, baked goods, cassava bread, plantain chips, eddo chips, minced meat, icicles, mithai, and pepper sauce. Imagine that in the deep south, in Region 9. St. Ignatius agro-processing facility – we have peanut butter, cashew nut butter, farine, dehydrated fruits, grind pepper, and cookies. We have the Watooka agro-processing facility. My good friend there, Hon. Member Mr. Jermaine Figueira, I am inviting you to visit the Watooka agro-processing facility. We have green seasoning, pepper sauce, garlic sauce, prepackaged fresh cut fruits, vegetables, coconut water, packaged peas, dehydrated seasoning, fruits and vegetables. Those are the produce. Those are the produce being produced. Then we have

a number of new products being produced – wine. We had close to about 900 new agro-processors come into the system, mostly women. That is the impact. When we appropriate funds here, when we appropriate \$450 million for the New GMC, we are bringing in thousands of people into agro-processing. We are producing our own goods to export overseas. We are creating the niche market in Guyana. That is what we are doing. We have 15 agro-processing facilities. We are building a new one this year again at Highbury – imagine that – East Bank Berbice. We are building one in Bartica. We are improving the packaging plant at Sophia. We are now doing a large scale – What do you call it? – blast freeze at Sophia. This, in a nutshell – I can go on and on with agro-processing – this here, what we are doing now, we have taken agro-processing to a different level in this country.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, he did ask a question.

Mr. Mustapha: So, the last question, Mr. Chairman, yes, indeed the person who was involved was fired. He was dismissed, and I believe they recouped the money. How much money? The amount was \$500,000 and it was recouped and the person was dismissed.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I sat, and I listened to the Minister going on and on. While all of it sounds good, all of that with the continued unscrupulous behaviour, or unscrupulous operations at the Ministry, will not benefit Guyanese. One other issue, there was another probe. This probe was at the GLDA. The Hon. Minister is being asked now, what are the findings of the probe that was launched into the sabotage of duck eggs at GLDA?

Mr. Chairman: There are two issues here. Be careful with the language again imputing that there is a lot of inconsistencies at the Ministry of Agriculture, and then sabotage, I do not think [*Inaudible*]. Okay, go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mustapha: So, Mr. Chairman, we know that the GLDA is an important agency. As a matter of fact, we have distributed thousands of black giant birds across this country – over 500,000 in Region 1, Region 2, all over, and Region 10. Right now, I will be going next week to Region 10 again, with a number of persons who have requested. We have started new single parent... We have a programme there where we are now looking – we have started it already – and we are now expanding that programme where we will put them into businesses, give them broilers, and help them to start a small business. I am working very closely with my colleague, Ms. Oneidge Walrond.

We have been working very closely to enhance this part of it. The other issue is – I did not get to mention it in my budget debate – I want to say, for the first time in the history of this country we have started to produce our own hatching eggs. We produced 196,000 hatching eggs for the first time.

11.19 a.m.

We know that this organisation, the GLDA, is very important, and whatever they do will have an impact on the country's livestock development. We want to ensure that we have open transparency and accountability. When that issue happened, we called in the Police. There was a big investigation, a number of persons were interviewed, and the matter is right now with the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) Chambers. We are awaiting the DPP to institute whatever they have to do.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I will move on. Guyanese will be able to judge from all that is being said. At the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), we see \$5.9 billion being allocated. I want to ask the Hon, Minister what has it cost GuySuCo or the national coffers to pay salaries and benefits to the technical teams that are currently working at the Corporation, that is the Cuban and Indian engineers.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, these people came in here and we recognised that the technical persons that came from Cuba and India are making a valuable impact and they are working along very closely with the local people. I am not too bothered when people who were not performing and they were relieved of their duties make all kinds of remarks. I want to say, for example, what we have been doing at the GuySuCo... I said it but I did not get to elaborate on it. I said already 40% of the cultivation have been mechanised. These people are also helping us with the factories. We know that the factories were neglected. All the carriers under the factories, rollers, have to be changed; punt dumpers are not functioning properly. All those things we are working on. What we have been doing is, we have a management contract with both sets of people and it is costing approximately \$150 million annually to pay these people. They are bringing good expertise to us, and we are very optimistic that with their kind of expertise, and with our people, we will turn around GuySuCo.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I would ask of the Hon. Minister if he is kind enough to provide a report on the improvement or changes made by the engineering team since they are here. What have they done to enact or cause improved operations and production within GuySuCo? That could be laid over too, Sir. That is no problem.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I can provide the report now if the Hon. Members wants it. I can talk and he could write. Do you want me to do that, about what they have been doing?

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Mustapha: The Indians... [An Hon. Member: Lay over [inaudible]] All right. I will.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. The Minister will lay over those performance reports, Hon. MP. Is that it? Hon. Members, I now put the question that the...

[Hon. Members: (Inaudible)]

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to take the Minister to Volume II, page 116, his Strategies under this Programme 211. Hon. Minister, your last strategy speaks of “energy audits, and the conversion from the use of fossil fuel to green energy technologies in farms”. Could you kindly tell the House how many farms in 2024 have benefitted from these strategies? If you had any audits, where were these audits done and in what [inaudible]?

Mr. Mustapha: Which page are you referring to?

Ms. Lawrence: Volume II, page 116, where you have your Objectives and Strategies for this Programme.

Mr. Mustapha: Yes. We have been working very closely with a number of farmers across this country. I can invite the Opposition to visit these farms. We have these greenhouses right across... As a matter of fact, let me be very frank with you all here this morning. We have the largest hydroponic farms in the Caribbean at Mon Repos with 100,000 plantlets. We are working with a

lot of solar power and solar energy. We have partnered with Victoria Green to build that there. The same thing we are replicating in Regions 2, 5 and 10. It was only two days ago that I was speaking with the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira, about involving young people in Linden, bringing them on stream. He was telling me that he has some young people. We have a number of farms on the East Bank Demerara. We have a number of farms in the Parika area. We have been working overtime to ensure that we modernise the system. What we have now is a lot of requests coming to Guyana from the Caribbean for produce, for example, St. Lucia. If you go to Mon Repos now or to a number of other farms, they are producing the hot peppers for export to St. Lucia. There are a number of things like pumpkin, leafy vegetables, being exported to Barbados. Only a few days ago, I saw on social media a number of produces being packaged at the Sophia Packaging Centre. What we are doing is modernising these farms. We are moving, as the Hon. Member rightly said, from that type of technology to the new one that we are right now installing.

Ms. Lawrence: I wish the Minister would have just answered my question specifically. I am asking how many energy audits he did last year. There are several agencies here that are receiving funds under this Programme. How many energy audits did you do? I am also asking how many farms did you remove from fossil fuel to green energy? That is all I am asking. If you do not have it here, you could lay it over.

Mr. Mustapha: We did. We have the figure. I can lay that over to the Hon. Member.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Hon. Minister. On the same page, I am going now to your Indicators. At Indicator 5, you indicated that you published three “research and development papers” in 2024, and you are planning to do seven in 2025. Could you kindly tell the House which areas you are focusing on and under which one of these agencies we will see this research being done. Thank you.

Mr. Mustapha: We have been working with NAREI to deal with these issues. Those papers were published by NAREI. The other seven that we plan to publish are Growth in Medial Development for Various Crop Seedling, things like coconut, tomatoes and new crops. We are talking about comparative analysis of yields potential for various crops cultivated. If you realise, we are having a lot of high yield in certain crops. We are trying to look at other crops and how we can increase those yields. We have been having good results. As you rightly said, with the modernisation taking

place now and what we have been doing in terms of research that our officers are doing, we are having better yields. We will also be doing fertiliser trials, and things like ginger and black pepper. You know for a fact that we are doing large scale spice production in Region 1 – things such as ginger, turmeric, nutmeg and black pepper. We are looking at those areas. In those areas we have to build up the potential of hydrogen (PH) level of the soil and things like that. We are looking at that. We are looking at the evaluation of various seeds under varying conditions of storage and a number of other things. We have those papers and we can share it with all of you.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Minister, I would just like to propose that these studies could be laid in the National Assembly or at the National Library, so that we do not have to come here. Some of us do research. Could I turn the Minister to number “8” of the Indicators? At number “8”, the Hon. Minister has here the number of occurrences of animal disease outbreaks. In 2024, you listed one. I am thinking that had to do with the poultry industry. My concern is that you do not have anything for 2025. What is the thought behind that, that we are incubated for many diseases or so?

Mr. Mustapha: This is a work-in-progress. We have had a number of those last year. As you rightly mentioned, we did not have only the poultry, but we had the Bird Flu issue, we had the...

[**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes. Those are on-going so that is why it is not indicated here. Guyana is not in an area where there is Foot and Mouth diseases and things like that. We are clear and clean, but last year we had the Inclusion Body Hepatitis (IBH) problem in the poultry industry. We have started to produce our own vaccine, and we will continue to do that. According to the GLDA person in charge, Dr. Walrond, he is telling me that we have it under control so far and will continue to look at it. That is the main issue or the main focus that we are focusing on now.

Programme: 212 – Agriculture Development and Support Services – \$31,491,490,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 212 – Agriculture Development and Support Services – \$29,578,777,000

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Minister, on National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (ND&IA), give us an update on the pump stations at Meten-Meer-Zorg, Belle Vue, Pouderoyen and Jimbo/Grove?

Mr. Mustapha: Those pump stations are still under the contracted period. You talked about Belle Vue, you talked about Meten-Meer-Zorg and you talked about Jimbo and Pouderoyen. The works are in progress. These contract periods will end by July. I have met with the contractors, with the consultant and the engineers. I told them that we are not extending any time for pump stations there. Works are on-going at those pump stations.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Minister say what are the percentages, by pump stations, being completed thus far?

Mr. Mustapha: I do not think I have all but what I have I will give. For example, Jimbo at the East Bank Demerara, 37% is completed; Black Bush Polder front lands, you did not ask for, but we have 37% too; and 37% at Jimbo on the East Bank Demerara. There was some issue because there was an old cemetery there. The contractor had to remove some graves there and put them in other areas. There was a delay because he had to get on to the Board at the Ministry of Health and they had to work together to get it done. Mr. Chairman, could I lay over these documents? I have them.

11.34 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you could lay them over. Member of Parliament (MP) Holder, you have the floor.

Mr. Jordan: It is Mr. Jordan, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, Mr. Jordan.

Mr. Jordan: That is why I was looking aside. Let me just ask at the same time, if by chance he has with him the information for Chesney on the Corentyne.

Mr. Mustapha: We changed the scope there. We will be putting in mobile pumps there. We are purchasing 40 mobile pumps. They have already been awarded and we are waiting for the [inaudible].

Mr. Jordan: What percentage was completed? That is what I was asking. Are you going to put them all together and lay them over?

Mr. Mustapha: We are not doing fixed pumps. I said we are putting in mobile pumps: the 80 cusecs, 40 cusecs and 120 cusecs. We will put two 80 cusec mobile pumps or two 120 cusec mobile pumps at Chesney to help drain there.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will move on to Cottage/Mahaicony.

Mr. Mustapha: I have been advised that it is more than 80%. The discharge backs have to be done with the pipe, and the pump has to be installed.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, last year in this very Committee, the Minister said 80% was completed, then he said 75% was completed later in the year. He also said by the end of the year it will be completed. However, we are in January, 2025 and we are back at 80% as the *Hansard* would have it in January, 2024 What really is happening at Cottage? This pump station seems to be going backwards rather than forward every time we speak about it. When would it be completed?

Mr. Mustapha: This pump station has not been going backwards. The Hon. Member is a Member of Parliament for Region five, did he not know there was a big breach there? There was a failure of the two sluice doors. The contractor was given a six weeks extension to complete his work. That is the reason why it has gone over January. There was a serious breach there. As a matter of fact, right now we are looking to replace the sluice door like what we did in Abary and put in metal doors. The engineer told me that the metal doors for the two sluices at Cottage were recently finished.

Mr. Jordan: Last year the Hon. Minister said the completion date was the 30th March, 2024. It was at 80%. I have the *Hansard*, Sir. Later in the year, when the Ministry came for additional sums, the Hon. Minister said again... As a matter of fact, then he said it was 75% completed. I am having a problem with the percentage of completion. That rate keeps going back and forth. Hon. Minister, apart from the other calamities you had with the pump station, what is needed for it to be completed and when will it be completed?

Mr. Mustapha: I already said that there are some issues there and the contractor was given a six weeks extension. I did not move from the 80% that the Hon. Member said. The last time we came for a supplementary appropriation here, that matter was raised, and I remembered telling the Opposition that it was about 80% completed and we are looking forward for it to be completed by the end of December. I said that. I am not reneging what I said or is saying I did not say that. However, since there were the breaches there, we have installed the metal doors. The contractor has been given six weeks to complete. He has to put on the discharge pipes, the discharge backs and the pump house, and install the pump. He asked for six weeks and was granted it.

Mr. Jordan: Permit me to ask the Hon. Minister to tell us about the Charity Pump Station and the Andrews Pump Station. Hon. Minister, you could lay it over. It is Charity and Andrews pump stations on the Essequibo Coast.

Mr. Mustapha: We have commissioned the Andrews Pump Station. It is operable and has been running for the last month. For the one at Charity, the scope of work has to be changed – the design – because we are having serious erosion on the dam there. We are also looking to see if we could stop the fixed pump. Although the revetment was done, there were people from the Sea Defence Authority working with the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) doing a lot of testing. The soil there has a lot of movements from the dam and because of that, there was flooding there and things like that. We are looking at the integrity of the dam and hoping to change the scope of work. We asked the contractor to put all operations on hold until we have the technical people to come up with a proper specification so that we could implement that there.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister, for that update with regard to the Charity Pump Station. Could I ask you to provide a similar update for us on the Belle Vue Pump Station, noting that nothing is really happening there? I know that it is still within the contract period, but is there any update you could provide us with in terms of what is the new completion date and so on?

Mr. Mustapha: The completion date did not change. It is still under the contract period and about 10% of the work has already been completed there.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister to please tell us what is the date that it is supposed to be completed, as per the contract period?

Mr. Mustapha: I could lay that over. I do not have it in my possession here, but I think between July/August is the completion date.

Mr. Mahipaul: All right. Thank you very much. May I further ask the Hon. Minister, if the Charity Pump Station that we have to now go and change the specifications for because of all the problems that have arisen and the other pump stations that are giving us some difficulties because maybe of soil and what is not, what was the amount of money given to this contractor – Adamantium Holding – for the Charity Pump Station? Is that a loss that the State would incur or will the contractor be asked to repay the amount of money expended on this project so far, that now has to go and be redesigned and basically reconstructed from the start? How do we deal with that amount of money that was already paid in the millions to that contractor?

Mr. Mustapha: Extensive work was done in terms of proprietary work, meaning those works are its permanent work; things like ensuring that it reinforces the embankment. It moved the process. The sum of \$273 million was expended. It purchased the pumps already. We will have to use that pump for another pump station. I am talking about fixed pumps. It did a lot of revetments with rods, *et cetera*. According to the engineer, we will have value there with the money we have expended, including the pumps and sheet piles. It purchased the sheet piles and things like that. It did revetment also for a large area with the sheet piling at Charity, but because there are slippages all the time, it is put on hold. That is the reason. We will install two hydro-flow pumps in the meantime and see what the design... That area is also a flood prone area. There is a need for a lot of drainage there, so there are hydro-flow pumps. We have been working there. We will continue to see what we can do. However, I want to assure the Hon. Member that we will have value for the money that was expended.

Mr. Mahipaul: , The Minister said \$273 million is for the Charity Pump Station. In a similar light, would he be kind enough to also tell us the total sum that was associated to the disbursement towards the Belle Vue Pump Station so far, from that allotted total sum for the pump stations?

Mr. Mustapha: I do not have that figure here, but I could lay it over. The contractor was paid a mobilisation advance: material and ground, sheet piles, and I believe timber. He was paid \$182 million.

Mr. Mahipaul: How much was he paid?

Mr. Mustapha: He was paid \$182 million.

Mr. Mahipaul: My final question is, for all the pump stations that are incomplete, would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to lay over the sum of money that was already expended on them, the percentage of completion and the date of completion for each one of them?

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, I could do that.

Mr. Chairman: I have the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings and then, the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence. Go ahead, Mr. Jordan.

Mr. Jordan: The Hon. Minister mentioned last year that the Ministry will be building three Hope-like canals under NDIA in Regions 3, 5 and 6. I know works started in Region 6 but there were some disputes with regard to land and other similar things. Could the Hon. Minister say to the Committee, what percentage of those works were since completed for all three regions and then I will take it from there.

Mr. Mustapha: Those fundings for the Hope-like canal are not in any of these programmes here for appropriation, but I would give the Hon. Member some information. The entire project for Region 6 has been awarded. The embankment from Number 66 Village to Vrede-en-Vriendschap at Canje has already been completed. We are now looking at the Hope-like canal itself. We have two Hope-like canals that will be built; one at Number 51 Village, Number 52 Village, and one in the Whim/Manchester area. The entire work has been awarded and contracted out already. The design for Region 3 has been completed. The work for Region 5 is now at the procurement level.

Mr. Jordan: I have a follow up on Region 3 and 5. Could you give me the specific locations please?

Mr. Mustapha: Like what we did in Region 6, building an embankment to keep away the water from at the back from coming into the housing area and the cultivation area from Number 66 Village to Vrede-en-Vriendschap, we have a 90 kilometre embankment from Mahaica right onto the back of Blairmont/Ithaca, so it will keep away those water coming into the front lands. There are a number of locations there, places such as: Cottage – right next to Cottage, where we are building the pump station also, Dantzig, where there was a flooding when there was the breach,

and the left Bank at the Abary. Those are earmarked for the Hope-like canals. Then, there is the A Line in Region 3.

Dr. Cummings: I wanted to follow up on MP Ganesh Mahipaul's question on the pumps. Hon. Member, you did say that you will provide a list of those to be overhauled or whatever is the appropriate term. I am specifically asking about Victoria. I do not know if it is on the list. However, last year we had overtopping. Two of the doors had been broken, so I do not know if you have it in your budget this year to repair those either at the national level or the regional level, or if you are going to make moneys available to the region or you are going to do it from the national level.

Mr. Mustapha: I want to inform the Hon. Member that at Victoria we have already repaired the sluice doors there. We have to put in a discharge pipe on one of the pumps there and that will be installed shortly. The NDIA is now working to get that fixed. There will be operations there back again with those pumps in Victoria. For the Member and this Committee's sake, we had almost 10 pump stations. There are pump stations at Cozier, Andrews, Greenwich Park, Lilliendal, Ogle, Montrose, Adventure and the Corentyne. All of those pump stations have been completed already. We have another one at Canal No. 1, which should be completed in a week's time. We have close to eight pump stations.

11.49 p.m.

We have completed eight fixed pump stations already for the last three years. We are now in the process of building another seven pump stations. We still have the issue with the Indian Line of Credit – the 13 undersized pumps that were purchased by the former Government. We are still working to get back our money because although the pumps were undersized, the former Government still purchased them and they cannot be used. We are getting serious problems. Those are the pumps that we have to replace.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, I want you to turn to page 118 of *Volume 2*. Under:

“Strategies:”

That is the third bullet. The Minister speaks of:

“... value added processing.”

You are:

“Promoting cost effective value added processing.”

Could you kindly say to the Committee, for last year, which of the products that you mentioned earlier are a part of the value added processing? What input had caused it to be able to meet the other market products out there – similar products like that – so that we could be able to have a high standing in terms of our exports? In Guyana, everything we make is good but on the export market, it is a different situation. What is it that you have been able to input into those products to give us that advantage? That is my first question.

Mr. Mustapha: We conducted a lot of training last year, as I mentioned, with these agro-processing facilities around the country. For example, if you look at the company Umami, it now has three agro-processing facilities across the country. It is adding value to a number of products. Our products have now been sold not only in the Caribbean but even in Europe. Things like ochro have been value-added. We are talking about proper packaging. We have had a number of symposiums and training by the officers at the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC). We have specialised officers there. We have improved the kind of packaging we used to do. I showed you some this morning, Mr. Chairman. You saw it. You saw the standard that we have. We have improved tremendously. We have encompassed a number of new products that we have in the market over the last year. We have done a lot of training with agro-processors. We have a steady link with them, not only a one-off training. We have workshops. Our officers are doing visits. The extension services are very robust now. The officers go in, meet these people, have extensive dialogue and extensive training, and encourage them to do best practices – things like those.

Ms. Lawrence: Follow-up, Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, having done all of the training, especially focusing on packaging and so on, I want to ask you what are the new value-added products within the fisheries industry that we are working on to add to the market?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I just mentioned some earlier. I have a list here which could be laid over to you.

Ms. Lawrence: I do not want the whole thing.

Mr. Mustapha: I have a list of those value-added that you talked about. There are things like dehydrated fruits, smoked fish coming out...

Ms. Lawrence: That is an old thing, give me a new one.

Mr. Mustapha: Pardon me?

Ms. Lawrence: Give me a new thing. It has fish paste and fish jam.

Mr. Mustapha: There are chicken ham, bacon, the Guyana School of Agriculture... There are a number of things. I could lay this over.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, may I follow up with the Minister? Is there any investment, training, or otherwise, into things like fish jam, fish paste, fish powder, *et cetera*, since we are doing all this hydrating and so on? Those are big products on the market.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, we are moving towards meeting there. As I mentioned earlier, we have a number of other products, but we are moving there. It is not only in one industry but in the aquaculture industry now, too. We are trying to use what we are producing in aquaculture to add value to it to make it more attractive. For example, the prawns that we are producing now – as the Hon. Member would know, we had at the Christmas Village – we are packaging them. We are making the package very attractive and they are very much in demand right here in Guyana. Also, we will export these things. We are working with fishing processing plants – to what you say there – to add value to those products. I want to be very honest and state that we have not reached those products that you mentioned, but we are working towards meeting them. We will meet there.

Mr. Chairman: Before I take the next question, I just want to let Hon. Minister, Ms. Walrond know that we will take her agency after the lunch break so she could advise her staff. Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. May I turn the Minister to the same page 118, to Ministry's last strategy, which speaks of:

“Strengthening the data collection, analysis and information sharing systems.”

On the internet, there are various Artificial Intelligence (AI) programmes being used in farms around the world. I would like to know from you, Hon. Minister, in terms of our large production, that is, the shrimp and the prawns, what are we using in terms of data collection? Are we collecting data from the farms? Is there a connection between the farmers and the Ministry? What is happening? Is there data flowing *to and fro*?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, only last year, the Ministry launched the Agriculture Information System (AIS) that the Hon. Member talked about. We have had a number of trainings for extension officers. We have enlarged the pool of extension officers. They are collecting the information, and we are working to have that information made available to members of the public. Right across the country in various regions now, we have these information systems that are sending information directly to the central headquarters so we could compile that information, not only what farmers have been producing, but other agricultural products, so we could have an entire comprehensive system. As I said, only last year in November, the Ministry launched the Agriculture Information System. We have worked very closely with the Sustainable Agricultural Development Programme (SATP). It has helped us to fund this Programme. We had a consultant right here in Guyana who helped us craft the Programme and we launched it. We have an entire comprehensive system and that will be made available on our website shortly.

Ms. Lawrence: Under the indicators, I noticed that the first indicator puts together the:

“Production (kg) of aquaculture and inland fisheries.”

Hon. Minister, could you disaggregate what you got last year and what you are anticipating to achieve this year?

Mr. Mustapha: I have those figures. For example, for aquaculture – if you look at the brackish water shrimp – we were able to move production from 10,000 kilograms monthly to about 120,000 kilograms. According to the document here, the fish hatchery has been expanded to breed additional fish species to meet the growing demand for fingerlings by farmers. The expected production is for the 50 cages that we are installing now. We have the production of marine fisheries. From 49,513 metric tonnes, we want to move it to our indicator this year, which is 50,220 metric tonnes. The 2024 achievements and the targets are right here. For example, we are putting

these tambaqui fingerlings in the fingerling cages. We are now breeding those tambaqui fingerlings right here in Guyana rather than bringing the fingerlings from Brazil.

We are building our own feed mill. We have already built our own hatchery for the vannamei prawns. We have our own broodstocks now. They are now reproducing these fingerlings. Although we are still importing some, very shortly, we will be self-sufficient in producing not only fingerlings and larvae for the Government or the Ministry of Agriculture ponds but also for other private investors across the country. We are also breeding tilapia fingerlings right at the Satydeow Sawh Aquaculture Station. The tambaqui fingerlings, tilapia fingerlings and vannamei larvae are all being produced at the Satydeow Sawh Aquaculture Station at Mon Repos. Also, we are building a feed mill there so that we could produce our own feed for those productions.

Ms. Lawrence: Just one last question, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, could I, as an ordinary citizen, go to the Satydeow Sawh Aquaculture Station in Mon Repos and ask for a tour?

Mr. Mustapha: It could be organised.

Ms. Lawrence: Would I have to call your office? I am just asking.

Mr. Mustapha: You could speak to the person in charge and he/she will instruct you on what to do.

Ms. Lawrence: All right. I just wanted you to say it nationally so those people could hear it.

Mr. Mustapha: Also, Mr. Chairman, remember we have to look at the biosecurity of those places too. In some areas, like the fingerling areas that we are now producing in, there are a lot of what you call... The technical people will tell you those areas cannot be contaminated.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, am I getting you correct, though? You were not asking for Member of Parliament (MP) Ms. Volda Lawrence; you were asking for ordinary Ms. Jane Volda Lawrence?

Ms. Lawrence: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Jordan: Project code 1301900 – Mangrove Management: Sir, Dantzig, Fairfield, and Content foreshores had a sum of \$275 million last year and works were ongoing. As a matter of fact, it was rolled over. That project had an outstanding balance of \$21,\$278,000,000. There were some geotextile tube groins at Paradise, which were supposed to be completed, and that had an outstanding balance of \$13 million. I would just like an update on these projects by completion percentage.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, if we remember this project caused a heated argument in the House. In 2019, we had a serious breach where almost 2,000 acres of farmland were destroyed, up to date. Saltwater encroached there and the farmers lost their crops. When we resumed Government in 2020, we went to the farmers and started back a process there of consultation. We started to rebuild the entire sea defence there not only last year but the year before the last. Last year, we did massive work. We constructed a 200 metre timber breakwater leaving out all the other areas. Under the Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill, sea defence had done a lot of work there also. To date, there is \$10.8 million that has been rolled over, and that is to facilitate the retention payment and completion of the 200 metre timber breakwater at Dantzig. The completed groins are expected to support the restoration of 2.4 hectares of mangrove, strengthening production. That is the retention that is payable.

Mr. Jordan: I specifically asked for the completion percentage. However, let us move on to Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA) because it will all fall in the same line.

12.04 p.m.

With regard to GLDA, under poultry, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, what percentage has the Ministry estimated the Inclusion Body Hepatitis (IBH) pandemic destroyed poultry across the country?

Mr. Mustapha: First of all, it is not a pandemic. We have to establish that. When it started, approximately 55% of the entire poultry population was affected. We were able to work with the

farmer's associations and other normal farmers. We reduced that to 14% at the end of 2024. It is an endemic and not a pandemic.

Mr. Jordan: Coming out of the reduction from 55% to 14% at the end of the year, could the Hon. Minister say now... You said earlier that provisions were made to produce our own vaccines and have the work here. What sum is allocated to that project?

Mr. Mustapha: When we had this serious problem with it, we gave \$29 million to the industry to procure vaccines and then, we brought in specialists to produce the vaccines in Guyana. This year, \$27 million is budgeted to help in that area.

Mr. Jordan: A follow up: could the Hon. Minister say to the Committee, for those farmers and the areas affected that were listed within the 55% which came down to 14%, what assistance was given to those poultry farmers?

Mr. Mustapha: First of all, we tried to avoid this problem again, so we did a lot of training in biosecurity. We helped the farmers. We had a symposium right here at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) and the President himself was there with the bank. For some of the farmers, we were able to have the interest rate reduced for those who wanted a loan to fund their small operation. We helped a number of farmers across the country to restock and get them back in production. We also helped farmers with chemicals.

Mr. Jordan: What was it that you gave to the farmers directly to help them restart? In some cases, some farmers were completely wiped out.

Mr. Mustapha: Physically, we gave them the broiler birds. We also gave them the chemicals so they could avoid the disease reoccurring on their farms.

Mr. Jordan: My reason for asking if birds were given... Hon. Minister, in a case where a citizen having lost 1,500 birds to the disease, what would you give to him/her as a start-up?

Mr. Mustapha: You cannot bring a hypothetical question like that. We have to assess the situation case by case. If a farmer loses 1,500 birds, we will provide him/her substantially. We will put him/her back on his/her feet. However, this does not mean this is an open invitation for people to come and make claims of losing 500 or 1,000 birds. We would have to assess the case. Our

extension officers are working. They would have to go and visit the environment, see the hygienic standards of the poultry farmer, see what they have been doing and try to eradicate further to prevent the disease from coming back on the farm. We have to get all those systems in place before we give them birds again.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, the Minister said that the disease and its impact on poultry farmers reduced from 55% to 14% by the end of 2024. However, from my survey, I recognise that at the end of 2024, there were a number of farmers who were still affected, both in Regions 2, 3, 5 and a small portion in Region 6, that I know of, but they were not given any form of assistance. Could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to present to this Committee or lay over a list of farmers who were assisted during 2024?

Mr. Mustapha: I mentioned it earlier that if a farmer had a loss or lost birds, first of all, there are a number of measures he/she would have to satisfy. He/she would have to come into the programme. We have to train them. We have to eradicate the disease to ensure that the pens and environments are all right. As long as him/her is in the programme... If the Hon. Member is aware of members of the public or farmers whose farms had suffered and never made contact with us or never came around us and expect us to know about the situation... How could we have intervened and dealt with it? The Hon. Member of Parliament, who is based in Region 5, whenever there are these issues, you would normally call and speak to me. You should have said Minister, look, we have 10 persons here, could you send your extension officer to these 10 people, but you waited and did nothing, and the people lost their birds and after a year, you are coming to this Committee telling me that there were a number of persons who had lost their birds, and I never gave them anything. However, you as an Hon. Member of Parliament, have to go and do your work in the field, to ensure that these people get those things.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, respectfully, the Hon. Minister, did not ask me whether those persons that I am referring to report to the authorities or not. These are persons who had reported to GLDA and never got any assistance from the extension officers. I am willing to provide names to the Hon. Minister once I know that actions will be taken because there is one farmer...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, please, let us exchange the names. We are honourable people here, serving the people. Let us try and work it out.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, if I could just say a last word on this issue, as I said, there were certain protocols and if those farmers or those persons who had lost did not subject themselves to the criteria that we have – the training. We have to eradicate, as I said, we have to look at the entire situation.

Mr. Chairman: Exactly. I heard you the first time when you said [*inaudible*]

Mr. Mustapha: Right.

Mr. Chairman: If one's farm does not meet some minimum standards of sanitation, it does not make sense for me to give you the birds – the same thing will happen. Let us move on, exchange the information and work to benefit the people.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You serve as a great mediator today. I am moving on to the famous black belly sheep. The first question is, could the Hon. Minister, say whether he received the 293 black belly sheep as was mentioned in the *Hansard* of last year? He mentioned that there were some that had to come from the Hon. Mia Mottley – the remainder. Could you say whether you received them?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, before you answer, Hon. Member, I just heard a little aside you made. There is a difference between black sheep and black belly sheep. Go ahead.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, this was a question put to me in the National Assembly which I responded to the Hon. Member and said that 163 farmers were given help and we are continuing that. I mentioned in my budget speech that we received a 1,000 black belly sheep from Barbados, and we have since reproduced almost 800 sheep. We have almost 1,800 black belly sheep now in the system, leaving out what the farmers are producing around the country. We are building that brand that the President talked about – the black belly sheep brand – to replace things like the New Zealand lamb coming to this part of the world. That brand has been built for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) right here in Guyana. That is the thing that we are talking about – the vision that we have as a Government.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I am only referencing what the Hon. Minister said to me last year. He said that the Ministry received 707 black belly sheep, and that was from the first tranche, or will

another tranche be coming from Barbados, according to the Minister? He told me that, Mr. Chairman. He also said:

“The Minister, again, told me that we will receive the 293 sheep remaining before the first half, and when one look at the budget ...”

I am only referencing what the Minister said. So, probably, if I was misunderstood, I am referencing what you said last year. I just wanted to know if you got the 293 black belly sheep, and then we could move on with the conversation.

Mr. Mustapha: No. I said that was a question posted to me last year which I answered. I said in my budget speech that we received 1,000 sheep from Barbados and since then, we have managed to produce almost 800 sheep. The Guyana Livestock Development Authority has in its possession almost 800 black belly sheep – the 1,000 from Barbados and 800 almost that we have produced in Guyana. I was referring to the question that the Hon. Member asked me last year. Indeed, I submitted that answer, but I clarified it when I spoke during the budget debate.

Mr. Jordan: Again, like last year, I asked the Hon. Minister, and I did not receive. I would like the Hon. Minister to kindly provide a list of these farmers that received the black belly sheep.

[**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] No, I did not get that.

Mr. Mustapha: That was a question I answered and provided the list. Hon. Members, who is honest enough could say it. However, I could reproduce the list and give him, but I am just saying when the Hon. Members get these answers, they could keep it for themselves. I cannot produce lists all the time. We now have 163 persons who have been involved in this Programme and most are from Region 5. I even brought some of those persons, physically, when I spoke here during the budget debates. They were sitting at the top there. [**Mr. Jordan:** Did you bring the sheep?]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Members. Let me put the question because we are now a bit over time.

Mr. Jordan: I have one other question.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Jordan: The question is very simple. I am just trying to clear up what is being peddled in the public. Could the Hon. Minister say to this Committee and Guyanese, whether it is true or not that in Region 6, the black belly sheep is now being eaten? I am just asking for clarity. It is being cooked.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, we cannot come with an allegation here and raise it. It is untrue. It is an untruth.

Mr. Jordan: Respectfully, it is not an allegation. I was just asking for clarity. Moving on, Mr. Chairman, permit me to jump right over to project code 4503200, Contribution to Local Corporation - GuySuCo. I want to ask the Hon. Minister, what is his plan to achieve the 101,000 metric tonnes of sugar as set by the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) for 2025? If it is a detailed plan that he wants to lay over, I am willing enough to accept it in a document form.

Mr. Mustapha: As I said, we already have 40% mechanisation. We already look at the amount of cane that is in the field with GuySuCo. It showed me the amount of cane it has in the field. With the Tonnes of Cane to Tonnes of Sugar (TCTS) this year, plant canes improved TCTS – tonnes cane versus tonnes sugar – so it will take fewer canes to make the amount of sugar. The plant canes always improve. The Guyana Sugar Corporation indicated to me that with the amount of cane it has and with the factories now being rehabilitated, it will make the sugar of 101,000 tonnes.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, the answer is accepted by the Hon. Minister with the hope that GuySuCo will produce the 101,000 tonnes. Sugar is being produced by GuySuCo at an average cost of US \$1.31 per pound while it is being sold at US \$0.17 or 17 cents per pound. This results in a loss of US \$1.14 on every pound of sugar sold by GuySuCo to the foreign market. I want to ask the Hon. Minister, how do he intend to fix the loss to production ratio?

12.19 p.m.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, as I said, the Hon. Member has already asked a question. I gave him the amount and we are working to reduce the cost of production tremendously. According to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) – we have been advised – it is looking at 51¢. This is the reduction for this year – to bring it down to 51¢. We also have to look at the impact of the GuySuCo on the economy – the number of people. Sugar is not a thing if you produce more, you

get paid more as long as we produce more sugar, the cost of production will reduce. That is the kind of thing, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. I will take one final question.

Mr. Jordan: All right. I will go with the final one. Mr. Chair, the GuySuCo from 2020 to now lost almost \$30 billion. In 2020, it lost \$6.4 billion; in 2021, it lost \$7.8 billion; in 2022, \$10.2 billion; and in 2023, \$4.7 billion. I want to ask of the Minister – what will you do to fix this problem of continued losses and what is the total loss for 2024?

Mr. Mustapha: I just mentioned one which is that we are working to reduce the cost of production. I mentioned it also and it had been mentioned by a number of persons – the industry was in a state where we had to spend a lot of funds to bring it back to where it is now. As I said, in places such as Rose Hall, cultivation was a forest. We had to clear it back and replant the entire cultivation at the Rose Hall Estate. The Uitvlugt Estate was left at the mercy of nature, and it probably functions by the grace of God. The entire system at Albion Estate had to be fixed. Mr. Chair, we are working to ensure that we have maximum capacity at these estates so that we can crush the cane. We have better cane now. We are planting back canes. There are better varieties of cane, so we are working very aggressively to reduce that cost of production. The losses that the Hon. Member alluded to, that would be reduced tremendously. We must also look at not only the destruction that was done to the GuySuCo, but also the cost in 2021 when the entire cultivation was almost destroyed by floods. We had the most devastating flood that took place in this country in 2021.

Mr. Jordan: What is the last part Minister – the total loss for 2024?

Mr. Mustapha: I do not have that figure, Mr. Chair. When the auditor finishes, I will look at it.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, there are two things: first, before I put the question, this is a reminder to people who are visiting about recordings and cheering from the gallery. I am seeing a red light in my face over the past couple of minutes. Please, if you are visiting and if you are assisting with the answers, do that. No recording and transmitting from the Chamber. I even cautioned Members of Parliament (MPs) about doing that yesterday. Hon. Members, we will have to put all the remaining heads at this time.

Programme: 212 – Agriculture Development and Support Services – \$29,578,777,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 213 – Fisheries – \$587,062,000

Programme: 213 – Fisheries – \$587,062,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 213 – Fisheries – \$80,000,000

Programme: 213 – Fisheries – \$80,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 214 – Hydrometeorological Services – \$860,049,000

Programme: 214 – Hydrometeorological Services – \$860,049,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 214 – Hydrometeorological Services – \$77,868,000

Programme: 214 – Hydrometeorological Services – \$77,868,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will take a suspension for one hour. I am urging MPs – please let us have a quorum on time so that we could continue to examine the Estimates.

Sitting Suspended at 12.25p.m.

Sitting Resumed at 1.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, Ms. Manickchand – this school bell is very popular. We now have a list of MPs who are volunteering to ring this bell so we can get a quorum. This is serious. If you want

to come on the list to ring the bell, please...We are not talking about, *In the Ring*; we are talking about ringing the bell. The House will resolve itself into the Committee of Supply to continue the consideration of the Estimates.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: I would now like to invite the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, Ms. Walrond and her team to take us through Agency 23, the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce. I invite you to turn to pages 150 and 151.

Agency: 23 Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Current Expenditure

Programme: 231 – Policy Development and Administration – \$437,741,000

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

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the Hon. Minister, with regard to line item 6116, Contracted Employees, I see a slight increase here from last year to this year. Could the Hon. Member share if there is an increase in contracted employees and what positions are these?

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: Thank you, Hon. Member for your question. At line item 6116, this increase caters for the additional staff – one Expenditure Planning and Management Analyst (EPMA) for the Policy Planning Unit.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Minister Walrond. Coming down to the bottom there at line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads, could the Hon. Minister share which road is being maintained?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chair, this caters for the repair and maintenance of the internal roads at the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) compound. As you are aware, the NEC compound is where we host the Guyana Exhibition (GuyExpo) and other similar national events.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. With regard to line item 6261, Local Travel and Subsistence, could the Hon. Member share whether these local travels are intended to expand domestic tourism, or does this have to do with some other objective under the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chair, the travel and subsistence caters for an addition to travel in relation to tourism. It is in relation to the other kinds of engagement and mandate of the Ministry which is commerce and industry. So, it is in addition to other tourism-related outreaches.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I would just like to turn our attention to line item 6281, Security Services. For the record, could the Hon. Minister share with us which security firm is contracted through this line item?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chair, it is the Nel Global Security Company Incorporated.

Mr. Sears: If I may, Mr. Chairman, I know I may be jumping it a bit but this is just so I do not have to ask this question again – is this the sole contractor to the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce or do you have other security firms attached?

Ms. Walrond: The Nel Global Security Company Incorporated is for three of our locations. We have approximately nine other locations which includes the industrial parks. The Nel Global Security Company Incorporated is being used for just three out of nine of our locations.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Minister. Let us just turn our attention really quick to line item 6291, National and Other Events. I note an increase from last year's allocation to this year. Could the Hon. Minister share with us what constitutes the increase and what is the largest budgetary allocation per national event?

Ms. Walrond: The increase caters for additional exhibitions and the Regional Food Festival., We are also introducing a Cultural Week during Tourism Awareness Month. It is catering for more of these activities. What we found was – when we had our Regional Food Festivals, these really gained in popularity. We did our Christmas Villages, and more people are coming out. We realised that this has been so popular; people have lauded it. We have given opportunities for small businesses and small vendors to go out when we have these food festivals and other kinds of festival. We want to expand and build on these activities, especially the ones on Main Street.

Mr. Sears: I just have one quick follow-up to this question, Mr. Chairman. Mdm. Minister, with the introduction of the Global Super League (GSL) last year, is there any allocation for that event or during the period?

1.54 p.m.

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, thank you. The Global Super League is not an activity under this line item, National and Other Events. The Hon. Member did ask what the largest allocation under this line item was, and it would be the allocation for the Expo 2025 in Japan. Every four years we have these International Expos and Guyana will be participating this year. If we could recall, four years ago, we participated in the Dubai Expo. The largest allocation is for the participation in the 2025 Expo in Japan.

Mr. Sears: I am happy to hear that. Hon. Minister, with regard to Expo 2025 in Japan, what is the criteria and who are the target participants for this Expo?

Ms. Walrond: Well, it is the world. Over 150 countries will be participating in the Japan Expo. The target audience is putting Guyana on a global stage, as it relates to tourism. We will also use this opportunity to promote Guyana's investment opportunities. We will use our booth for that. The Expo runs for approximately six months, so it will be major exposure for Guyana at this point.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. I think my question was somewhat misinterpreted between the participants and the audience. In terms of the participants or representatives from Guyana heading to the Expo, what is the criteria and who are the target participants or the persons who will be representing Guyana?

Ms. Walrond: We have a very small team that will be headed by the National Exhibition Centre. They are responsible for our events, along with the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) and the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest). I mentioned our investment opportunities. We will be using the booth for that opportunity as well. Two members from GO-Invest will be attending and four members from the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, the Guyana Tourism Authority, our planning committee. It is the same group who plans all our events such as the exhibitions, our food festivals and all of those events that are getting glorious reviews. That group of people are the ones who will be going. We took the opportunity to do a national day in Japan. That will just be for one day where we will have a cultural display and we will be taking a team of local artistes. Japan has indicated how many persons they will allow and how many persons they will be sponsoring. We have a team that will be going there to have a cultural display. They will just be staying for about three to four days.

Ms. Hughes: I want to go to Volume 2, and of course, on page 126 under the performance statements, one of your Strategies is to:

“Develop and coordinate the implementation of reforms...”

With regard to:

“...the ease of doing business...”

Of course, you have again under your Impacts:

“...the ease of doing business...”

I am wondering if you can give us an update on the Single Window Programme and how we are in terms of achieving those targets, which I know impacts directly on that.

Ms. Walrond: With regard to the ease of doing the Single Window Project, we have already gone live on 20th. We have two agencies. We are starting off slowly and two agencies are currently on the platform. We will be doing a trial run before we add other agencies, and of course, looking at where the gaps are. The technical team has been working on that with the two agencies. We have begun a gradual deployment of the Single Window, but it has been live since the 20th.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put the question that the sum stated for...

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, I have my mic on.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, MP Fernandes.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. Looking at the same Volume 2 on page 126. I am at Indicator number six. It states:

“Percentage change in the nominal value of domestic credit to the private sector.”

In 2024, it was 18% and the target for 2025 is also 18%. I am asking, could the Hon. Minister say how many individuals and or businesses this percentage represents? That is my first question.

Ms. Walrond: I am being told that this indicator is a national indicator and only the banks will have access to that information.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what informed that number being placed in Volume 2? Once it is placed here, we should have data to back up the percentage.

Ms. Walrond: Just one minute please, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Fernandes...

Ms. Fernandes: It is in Volume 2, on page 126 at Indicator six.

Ms. Walrond: I am advised that the value of the domestic credit to the private sector is indicated in percentage. The annual increase is 18%.

Ms. Fernandes: Yes. That is indicated here, Mr. Chairman. The 18% either represents businesses or private sector individuals that received these credits. It came from various financial institutions. I am asking, what does the 18% represent, in the terms of a number? How many persons or businesses accessed these finances and what institutions were they accessed from?

Ms. Walrond: For the Private Sector, the individuals will be a separate category. The Private Sector means companies. These are all accessed from commercial banks.

Ms. Fernandes: On this same item, could the Minister disaggregate how many small businesses, medium scale or large businesses account for the 18%?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, we will get this information and lay it over.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Programme: 231 – Policy Development and Administration – \$437,741,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 232 – Business Development, Support and Promotion – \$1,215,414,000

Mr. Sears: If you could turn to line item 6284 – Other, could the Hon. Member share what this constitutes?

Ms. Walrond: Line item 6284 – Other, would include industrial development. This is a publication of expression of interest for industrial land, publications of invitation to bid for construction works, publication for security service, rental of skip bins for industrial estate at

Collagen, procurement of consultancy services to implement the export readiness programme and other kinds of procurement of graphic design services for promotional material and the posting of services at the Guyana Trade Helpdesk Portal and the price analysis data database and it caters for uniforms for the scrap metal officers who are conducting monitoring duties.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. If there is no follow up on that, I would just like to go down a little bit to line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships). Could the Hon. Minister share with us if these scholarships only apply to staff?

Ms. Walrond: No. Under this line item, the scholarships would not include staff. This is specifically targeted for the businesses that we will be identifying and working with in the various regions.

Mr. Sears: All right. Where would these trainings be conducted and what training would this be?

Ms. Walrond: For this year, we will continue with our training, and we will be catering for 250 businesses to be trained. Last year, we trained 169. There will be 50 participants in Regions 6 and 10. They will be trained in Supply Chain Management. Then for 40 participants in Regions 7 and 9, they will be trained in Financial Literacy. There will be Customer Service Training for 20 participants in Region 8, Leveraging Technology for 40 participants in Regions 2 and 3, and virtual trainings will be targeting participants across all of the regions, including Systems Management, Communication, Supervisory Management and Marketing.

Mr. Sears: Who will be conducting the trainings?

Ms. Walrond: These trainings will be conducted by different consultants. As we are about to embark on the training, we will send out expressions of interest and invite bids for individuals in the respective capacities and areas.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister.

2.09 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes, you have the floor.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you. Going again to Volume 2, I noticed that – of course your objective is to foster business development – indicator five has the number of small businesses that received loans and grants. It has gone from 123, and your target is 2,182 but when we look at the subsidy, the subsidy has gone from 331 to 335, so I am just trying to understand, how are you going to fund it?

Ms. Walrond: The 331 that you would have mentioned, Mr. Chairman, I thank the Hon. Member for the question. It is from recurrent. I think that you are speaking about the grant programme, and that comes from the Capital.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members?

Mr. Sears: Yes, Mr. Chairman, just a quick follow-up.

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

Mr. Sears: Is the Hon. Minister saying that the funding is sufficient to raise the number from 123 to the target in 2025 to 2,182? Is the fund sufficient?

Ms. Walrond: The short answer is yes, Mr. Chairman. The Ministry, in keeping with the Small Business Act, which provides that the Small Business Development Fund (SBDF) will provide support and access to finance for small businesses, has taken a policy direction to move away from a traditional small grant-based system towards a more strategic community development engagement project. We have identified several small businesses in various communities to get better access to financing and support in a way which encourages growth and their ultimate sustainability.

Mr. Sears: My final follow-up question is...

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, MP.

Mr. Sears: In terms of allocation, you would have mentioned that it is strategic. How much per cent of this targeted amount is geared towards eco-tourism businesses?

Ms. Walrond: Sorry, this is out of our Small Business Development Fund and eco-tourism has not been targeted. This targets our agriculture and agro-processing sectors. Eco-tourism will probably be considered in the next cycle.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Ms. Hughes, you may have the floor.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you. We are looking at your objectives in Volume 2. I was wondering whether you had any plans in promoting our local products overseas and if so, specifically, how would it be funded? I know when you go to a trade fair, you kind of take a couple of samples, but is there anything more substantial than that which might come out of your objective to foster business development?

Ms. Walrond: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. At the Ministry, we have developed the Export Readiness Programme, and this will indeed target, focus, and strengthen the capacity of our local businesses that access international markets. It will be aimed at improving the knowledge and skills of our small and medium-sized enterprises to successfully export their services. This programme is geared on preparing businesses for the export markets by offering practical guidance, market entry strategies, export compliance, product standards, and international marketing just to name a few.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you for your answer. I want to go to line item 6255, and we noticed that it is Maintenance of Other Infrastructure. I am just wondering whether there was a specific new infrastructure that was being covered under that since the cost has increased almost to 100%.

Ms. Walrond: Yes, please. Mr. Chairman. This increase caters for additional weeding and cleaning. Last year, we only had four locations that we were maintaining, this year, we will be maintaining nine locations, hence, the reason for the increase.

Ms. Hughes: Could we ask briefly where those nine locations are or what they are?

Ms. Walrond: You may recall that we built two additional call centres, and one other location like the chip factory.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, MP.

Ms. Hughes: Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: Could you explain again which buildings are maintained under that category? We have seen a large increase too, so, it is just to get an idea of which ones.

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, the increase caters for the maintenance of the five buildings that were not catered for in 2024. These building include the Belvedere Business Incubator Centre, Lethem Business Incubator Centre, the Coldingen Estate office building – which is a new building, and the Tuschen and Enmore call centres.

Programme: 232 – Business Development, Support and Promotion – \$1,215,414 ,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have allocated half of an hour for this head and we are now just two minutes over that time. I will allow another question on another head if you have. If not, I will put the remaining heads. We can go to pages 154-155, or we can go to Capital Estimates. You tell me which one you want.

Mr. Sears: We will take the...

Mr. Chairman: Which one of the capitals, which programme...

Mr. Sears: Mr. Mahipaul, you go first please.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Fernandes?

Ms. Fernandes: Could we do Programme 232, Business Development, Support and Promotion, if that is okay?

Mr. Chairman: Which page are we on? We are on Page 501

Ms. Fernandes: We are looking at Volume 2, page 128.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 232 – Business Development, Support and Promotion – \$5,922,000,000

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. A few minutes ago, the Hon. Minister, responded to indicator number five, the number of small businesses that received loans and grants from the Small Business Bureau (SBB). She referred to the capital expenditure that was going to the Small Business Development Fund. That amount moved in 2024 from \$450 million to \$600 million in 2025 allocation there. In 2024, we had 123 people receiving from that amount, and on average that

will give you \$3.6 million per recipient. Now we are moving to a target in 2025 of 2,182 recipients, with the amount of \$600 million, that will give you an average of \$275,000. I am asking the Hon. Minister what exactly is informing this number – this 2,182? Are you specifically targeting a different type of business, because the allocation there is \$600 million for 2025? Could you give the House a little bit of explanation as to how we are moving from 123 to 2,182 recipients when we are only moving from \$450 million to \$600 million?

Ms. Walrond: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I mentioned, we have changed focus from the dispensing of the small grants and we are moving towards the Strategic Community Development Project. It is providing small businesses to come together in different areas. The small business team went out to different communities and did the research on the ground, and as I have indicated, to foster entrepreneurship, to create jobs in these communities, and to boost the local economies rather than giving out grants, we have identified different projects. In different communities, there might be prawns farming, hydroponics, cashew nut farming, and several shade houses across different communities. This is to ensure that the small businesses are involved in community projects, community entrepreneurship and that they are integral parts of the local community to boost it, and we will be providing the necessary resources to support these initiatives.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Ms. Fernandes, you have the floor.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. Could the Hon. Minister say, based on another explanation you gave, for example prawn farming, because we are looking at the number 2,182, if you are saying that that is the amount of small businesses that will receive from this \$600 million. The categories that you just went through cannot cater for 2,182 small businesses, so, are you saying that you are looking at individuals that will be employed within each of these individual small business sector, and that is how you are getting to that number of over 2,000?

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, that number, 2,000, was when the focus was on the dispersing of grants. Now that the focus has changed, that number no longer applies. With this new focus and these project developments, access and the impact will be way beyond the impact as it would be for grants of \$200,000 being dispensed to 2,000 persons individually.

2.24 p.m.

Ms. Fernandes: This is my final question on this. Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether the Ministry has now moved from actually giving small businesses the loans and grants, as she just stated, to giving individuals the \$200,000 cash grant, and if so, how are these individuals being identified within the various communities?

Ms. Walrond: I think the Hon. Member is missing the point. It is no longer identifying individuals. For instance, Mr. Chairman, people in the Orealla community indicated their interest in aquaculture. In Moraikobai, they are interested in having shade houses where they grow value-added crops. In Kamarang, 10 farmers have indicated that they would like to get into the solar aquaculture. It is geared towards the needs of every community and what they have requested. From these, jobs are going to be created. For instance, in Orealla, it is estimated that 20 jobs will be created and in Moraikobai, an additional 20 jobs. That is what these projects are geared towards. In addition to fostering entrepreneurship, the communities are creating jobs and ultimately lending to the sustainability of the communities and entrepreneurship in those specific communities. It is targeted and based on individual communities.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I think I am suffering a senior moment. Did you not say, similarly to the previous answer, that your people went out into the communities, changed the focus and is now dealing with community business projects and that all you are doing now is identifying specific communities that you visited? I am just trying to ensure that I did not hear wrong, or that I was not suffering a senior lapse.

Ms. Walrond: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Hughes, you have the floor.

Ms. Fernandes: No.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I will have to now put the question because we are almost 11 minutes over. I will have to put all of the remaining heads and these pertain to Agency 23.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 233 – Consumer Protection – \$171,120,000

Programme: 233 – Consumer Protection – \$171,120,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 233 – Consumer Protection – \$7,000,000

Programme: 233 – Consumer Protection – \$7,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 234 – Tourism Development and Promotion – \$927,876,000

Programme: 234 – Tourism Development and Promotion – \$927,876,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 234 – Tourism Development and Promotion – \$71,135,000

Programme: 234 – Tourism Development and Promotion – \$71,135,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 231 – Policy Development and Administration – \$52,000,000

Programme: 231 – Policy Development and Administration – \$52,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 232 – Business Development, Support and Promotion – \$5,922,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Thank you very much Minister and team for taking us through your Agency.

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Chairman, I just want to take this opportunity to thank my entire team at the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, for all their hard work and support.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us prepare for the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Hon. Vickram Bharrat and his team. I invite you all to turn to pages 162 and 163. We will take all the current expenditures, and then, all the capital expenditures. We have an hour and 30 minutes.

Agency: 26 Ministry of Natural Resources

Current Expenditure

Programme: 261 – Policy Development and Administration – \$467,796,000

Programme: 261 – Policy Development and Administration – \$467,796,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 262 – Natural Resource Management – \$1,310,965,000

Mr. Patterson: Line item 6284 – Other: Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate that? When he is finished, I will ask a follow up question.

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]: Let me thank the Hon. Member for the query with regard to line item 6284, Other. There is an allocation of \$1,045,000,000. The breakdown is to continue the reclamation and reafforestation project with an allocation of \$300 million and the mineral mapping project with an allocation of \$735 million; advertising costs – \$5 million and the review of the Mining Regulations in Guyana – \$5 million.

Mr. Patterson: With regard to the afforestation. project, last year a similar amount was allocated. Could the Hon. Minister state what was done with last year's amount and what will be done with this year's similar amount?

Mr. Bharrat: In 2024, the budgetary allocation was used to develop and reclaim lands in Region 10 specifically, an average of 30 acres of land, which we did a significant amount of reclamation for. It is one of the old bauxite mining pits. It is very close to the residential area on the Wismar end of Linden. We also spent some of the allocation provided to do some amount of reafforestation in the Bissaruni area in Region 10, mainly due to the amount of forest fires we experienced during the dry weather from 2023 to 2024. There were a number of forest fires across the country. As one would know, at that point in time, there was limited capacity to deal with forest fires. Thankfully, we now have a partnership with the Brazilian Government, where we are enhancing our

capabilities and capacities to deal with forest fires. We have had a number of personnel trained in Brazil. We continue the collaboration with the Government of Brazil to enhance our capacity because it is something we must be ready for. Climate change is real. We have already seen a prolonged dry spell. We are seeing what is happening in the United States of America (USA) – California, with the massive forest fire that is ongoing. It is something that we cannot take lightly.

Some amount of the provision was spent to do limited reclamation, because these are not pits, we are speaking of; these are burnt-out vegetations. To do some amount of reforestation in the Bissaruni area in Region 10, and specifically to do reclamation, as I mentioned, on the Wismar end of Linden, very close to the residential area, we have planted over 2,000 seedlings or trees on a 30-acre plot in that area, varying from different species such as bulletwood, baromalli and acacia. Some of them are fast-growing species, while some of them will require longer periods. I want to say, too, on this particular project that an average – many countries would have experienced it and have ongoing reclamation and reforestation – cost per acre in most countries would range from \$15 million to \$20 million. We have managed, through the collaboration between the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC), to bring that cost per acre well below \$10 million, creating employment as well. I am happy to say that during that project at Dakoura in Linden, we created over 100 temporary jobs during the phase of reclamation/reforestation. We have a few permanent jobs now to ensure we maintain that site. With regard to the allocation for 2025, this will go towards a similar reclamation exercise, this time in Region 8, the area surrounding Mahdia. I am not sure how recently or how often have we visited those communities. Maybe Member of Parliament (MP) Sinclair, who is from Mahdia, will tell you that the area within the boundaries of the township are large mining pits. Some of them are abandoned. Those are the areas that we are targeting again in 2025. It will be a total of 30 acres in Region 8, while we intend to expand the Region 10 reclamation from 30 acres to 40 acres. Thank you.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister turn to *Volume 2*, page 138? I am looking at Indicator number four which states:

“Number of sanctions related to natural resource conflicts issued”

In 2024, it was 82. However, the Minister's target for 2025 is 400. Could the Minister say if this 400 is an indication that the Ministry plan to sanction more persons to this amount for this year and which industry is this, specifically, related to?

Mr. Bharrat: Let me thank the Hon. Member for the question. It is a very good question because in the sector that we manage, there are always infractions. The monitoring of mining in Guyana is not an easy task by itself. Sometimes we are very critical to the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission and the Guyana Forestry Commission officers. We have to understand the terrains that they work in; the condition of leaving their families in the course, and working in the interior. It is a very difficult task to manage mining activities in general.

2.39 p.m.

Due to the increased monitoring capabilities and activities in mining districts, we expect a reduction in infractions in 2025. What we have endeavoured to do is to move towards monitoring by the use of technology because at some point in time, we will have to transition almost fully to using technology, even though the cost for it is expensive. With over 50 field stations, a combination of GFC and GGMC and 200/300 personnel, one would understand, and agree with me that it is very difficult to monitor all of the mining districts and all of the forestry concessions within our interior regions. First of all, we are expecting to ensure that our compliance and monitoring increase significantly in 2025. That is something that we are committed to do at the Ministry of Natural Resources. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: On the same line item 6284, in the 2024 Budget the Minister announced that \$400 million of that sum would be committed to mineral mapping. Could I ask the Minister what has been done with that \$400 million to kick start the mineral mapping inventory and if you could share that inventory or whatever is there so far with the Committee? Also, could he state exactly what was done in the area of critical minerals with respect to lithium, which he had promised at the end of his budget speech? He expressed that there is a need for mineral mapping in that area because of our transition to renewable energy. He expressed that importance, so I would like to know what was done in that area.

Mr. Bharrat: The Mineral Mapping Project which started in 2024 will continue in 2025. In 2024, when there was a similar exercise, I mentioned that it would be a multiyear project. This is an

exercise or project that should have been done a long time ago. It is very critical and necessary, especially, in keeping with our commitment to the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). It is actually included in the Low Carbon Development Strategy that we need to ensure that we have a proper inventory of our forest stocks, which we have completed, and also a proper updated inventory of our mineralisation across the mining districts throughout the country. We went through a public process of contracting a company from the USA. We advertised and five companies responded: two from the USA, two from Canada and one from the United Kingdom (UK) responding to that advertisement through an evaluation process, Global Ventures Incorporated out of the USA. It was contracted to carry out this exercise. As a matter of fact, the last time we did a mineral inventory in Guyana, I think it dated back to 1968 or thereabout, so it is very much needed. However, I think the reason why it was not done in the past was because of the cost factor. It is very expensive to carry out a total mineral mapping exercise in all the mining districts in our country. That is why we have decided that we are going to focus primarily on four of the major mining districts in Guyana, namely: the North-West mining district, the Mazaruni mining district, the Potaro mining district and the Puruni mining district. These happen to be the four most active mining districts in the country. We believe that these mining districts contain most of the mineralisation.

When we say mineralisation or speak of updating our mineral map, it is not only about gold, because most of the time we think that mining is gold only. Nevertheless, what we have contracted this company to do is to recognise, based on their survey, all minerals that exist in Guyana and to possibly put a quantity on it or quantify it. The project also entails physical drilling too. It is not only about the aeromagnetic survey, which will be done this year, but it is also about physical drilling on the ground once areas are identified where there is mineralisation or some form of mineral. Before I go to the deliverables in 2024, as asked by the Hon. Member, let me speak on lithium because that was one of the questions that was asked by the Hon. Member too. As a matter of fact, we did mention in 2024 and 2023 that the critical minerals are very important. We have to ensure that if there are critical minerals that exist or there are traces in Guyana, we must be able to explore and find them. Part of this project is to ensure that we look to see if we have those critical minerals in Guyana, which includes lithium as one would know, it is a very sought-after mineral, especially with regard to commitments around the world moving towards renewable energy. Mr. Chairman, of course, there is some amount of data at GGMC, so obviously, the project will entail

developing a dynamic data integration and modelling platform. There is a question on the floor, and I am attempting to answer that question and to provide as much information as possible. We also have to remember that it is not only for us in this Committee, but the public is also looking at it. This is a very critical and important sector, which means that we must provide information that is necessary. The reconnaissance survey was done in 2024. The inception report and strategic road map were done by the company in preparation for the physical survey in 2025. The stakeholder's engagement plan was drawn up. The environmental baseline work was done. For capacity building, we have a number of staff from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission being trained by the Company because when the project is finished, it is expected that GGMC will continue the process. I do hope that this would have brought some amount of clarity with regard to this project.
[Heckling]

[Mr. Chairman hits the gavel]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, as part of the guidelines regarding the policies for which these allocations are made, persons could speak about the policy; and have question about the policy. Hence, if we could question the policy, we should accept to listen to what the policy is. Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, you have the floor.

Mr. Holder: I thank the Minister for that marathon answer. I have a number of other questions. I should skip because I do not want another marathon answer. Let us look at line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships). Under this Programme – Natural Resource Management, if one examines *Volume 2* of the budget estimates, he/she will notice a series of strategies and explanations as they relate to the impact of those strategies. On the issue of gold, it has declined more than 30% since 2019. In fact, the declaration from small and medium scale miners has dropped by over 33,000 ounces. My question is, what strategies were implemented from 2020 to 2024 to improve the situation with gold, why those strategies failed, and what new strategies will be implemented in 2025 to ensure that the country benefits from a significant increase in the declaration from small and medium scale miners?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, I can assure you that the questions have nothing to do with the line item that was asked by the Hon. Member but for clarity and as I mentioned, it is important that we share information with the viewing public, so I will offer an answer to the questions. The line item

referred to by the Hon. Member is with regard to training of wardens and training of officers who monitor. That has nothing to do with gold production and the decline of gold production. However, I will answer the questions. There is nothing wrong with answering the questions. The figures are there for the public to see; it is no secret, unlike the Hon. Member, who decided to compare 2019 to 2024. What should have been done by the Hon. Member is to compare from 2016 because your Government was managing the sector from 2015 onwards. In 2016, we had the highest production in the country with over 700,000 ounces. In 2017, there was a decline. In 2018, there was a decline. In 2019, there was a decline. In 2020, there was a decline. In 2021, 2022 and 2023, there were declines. Our peak gold production was in 2016 and then, after 2016, every single year under both governments, we would have seen a decline in gold production. I wanted to make that point first.

There are a number of factors which contributed to one, the massive increase in production in 2016. I mentioned that in my budget speech, with regard to Troy Resources and Aurora Gold Mine – then the Guyana Goldfields Incorporated starting production. We know that for one of these large scale companies to start production, it takes about three to four years for them to build out the mine and start production. In 2016, when the production peaked, we know that the build-out of those mines started in 2012/2013 under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration. We then saw the decline after 2016: we saw the closure of Troy Resources, and the change in ownership of the Guyana Goldfields Incorporated, that is, from the Guyana Goldfields Incorporated to Zijin Mining Group Company Limited in early 2021. Those are some of the factors that affected the large-scale production. With regard to small and medium scale production, we have seen a decline over the years, starting from 2017 right up to 2023. There are a number of factors. One is the increase in alternative economic activities and job opportunities, especially on the coast with the advent and the development of the oil and gas sector. We have seen many persons leaving the mining sector, especially operators and truck drivers, to work on the coast with contractors in the oil and gas companies mainly because these people live on the coast. In the past, they would leave their families and homes to work in the interior – in the gold bush. Now, they could live on the coast with their families, in the comfort of their own homes and still earn almost the same amount of money that they earned previously. That is a fact, whether we want to play politics with the sector or not. We could easily verify that. Climate change is real as I mentioned. We have suffered over the years. One, there was severe flooding. I, personally, went into the

Mazaruni area where the water was about 15 to 20 feet above normal height. It is impossible to conduct mining in those conditions, especially when the pits are flooded

2.54 p.m.

Then, after that, we had a severe dry season – drought and one would know too that it is impossible to do mining without water. It is no secret in Guyana that there is a shortage of labour, especially in those sectors operating in the hinterland regions. Added to that, we have always been mining in areas that have been accessible and are close to communities where people dwell, especially in the North West, Mahdia and Bartica areas. They are close to where people live. After mining these areas for decades upon decades, one would expect that the amount of minerals that exist will diminish over a period of time. These factors, among many others, would have contributed to the decline in the gold production declaration over those years. I am happy to say that in 2024, we have seen an increase of over 2,000 ounces in our production for the first time since 2016. What is important to note, too, is that even though there was a slight increase in production in 2024, gold has earned an additional US\$180 million in 2024 compared to 2023.

The final part of the question, I believe, was what are we doing to address the situation? We have been working with Aurora Gold Mine – Zijin Mining Group Company Limited, so much so that Guyana today could boast of its first underground mine. It is a world class underground mine for the first time in the history of our country. We have seen an increase in production by that company in 2024, and we are projected to see an increase in 2025. What we have done in 2024 was awarded over 400 small blocks to Guyanese small miners because it is important that small miners have access to their own lands. That has always been the cry of small miners, and it will continue to be the cry of small miners. Everyone wants land but they want land with gold on it. That is the bottom line. If one asks a miner if he wants land, he will say yes, but he wants land with gold on it – he does not just want land. We are investing over \$2.5 billion in the road network, in upgrading and maintaining roads, so that there is accessibility to those mining blocks as well. What we need to do as a sector is to ensure that we work with miners to increase their recovery rates because the recovery rates in our country are too low. Once we can work with miners to increase the recovery rates, it simply means that the sector would be even more profitable, and our production would definitely be higher. It is a work in progress. It will always be a work in progress. I, as Minister of the Ministry of Natural Resources, the next minister, or the next one after that, will never be able

to solve all the problems in the mining sector, but that is why we are here. We are working with miners to work on the issues and to have them resolved as they come up. Thank you very much.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Could I go ahead, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: *[Inaudible]*

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. To the Hon. Minister, I am looking at the same Agency, Programme 262, page 138. As one of the indicators you have:

“Number of pilot studies completed”

In 2024, your figure is 15, and in 2025, I see you plan to complete 31. Out of those pilot studies that you have completed in 2024, or the ones you are planning to do in 2025, are there any plans to establish a Guyana Geology and Mines Commission office in Kamarang? Thank you.

Mr. Bharrat: The Hon. Member pointed to exactly what I was referring to when it comes to doing pilot studies and testing to increase recovery rates. I know the Hon. Member is from a predominantly mining community and is very much interested in the sector, as we are too. Most of these studies were targeted to look at possible ways in which we can increase recovery rates and what other methods could be used other than mercury because as one would know, we have to phase out the use of mercury. We will ensure that we continue these surveys and projects because we have to work with communities like Jawalla and Kako to see how we could have equipment at a central point to do some amount of what we may call or term toll processing, if possible. That is another method in which we could increase the recovery rates. With regard to the station in Kamarang, what we can do at this point in time, is to increase the frequency of visits by GGMC and the wardens, not only to monitor mining activities but also to lend technical support to the community because I believe that is what is needed. What we have said to mines officers is that you are not mining police, you are supposed to lend technical support to the miners so that they can improve their methods of recovery. Health and safety are critical with regard to mining too. We could commit to more free visits, but we have no allocation in 2025 to set up a permanent station there as yet, so I do not want to promise and then we cannot fulfil. What I could promise is more frequent visits to lend more technical support to the community.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Minister.

Programme: 262 – Natural Resource Management – \$1,310,965,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 264 – Petroleum Management – \$997,043,000

Mr. Patterson: I will start off with *Volume 2*, page 140. Indicator number five states:

“Number of new PSAs issued”

There was zero in 2024 and there are four in this year. Could the Hon. Minister say where and who are these four that he pre-empted will be issuing this year?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, I think the Hon. Members on the opposite side wanted to save time or hurry my answers so that we could reach the petroleum management sector. I want to say that we have nothing to hide about the management of the petroleum sector. We will answer the questions, whether it is in the Committee of Supply or anywhere else. We will answer the questions and continue to do so. I do not know what the big noise is about, but we are willing to answer any question anytime, not only in the Committee of Supply. The question was asked of the Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs). There are four PSAs that will be issued in 2025. Now, Mr. Chairman, you would know that we started a process of ensuring that we craft a production sharing agreement that will be a model PSA used in every single engagement as we move forward in the oil and gas sector. It will be a PSA based on international standards and will bring benefits to Guyanese or bring more benefits to Guyanese than the Stabroek Block PSA. We started that process over a year ago to ensure we build out a PSA that is recognised internationally and will bring additional benefits, so much so, we have changed the fiscal terms in the new PSA that existed in the Stabroek Block PSA, signed in June, 2016, by the then A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Government.

The PSA that was signed in 2016 covers the Stabroek Block. I want to say to my Guyanese brothers and sisters that the PSA covers only one block. The model PSA that we have developed will cover all the other blocks outside of the Stabroek Block. There are many others: the Canje Block, Kaieteur Block, Orinduik Block, Roraima Block, Kanuku Block, Corentyne Block and now, we have the new ones that were auctioned. The new fiscal terms in the PSA, as promised, will bring additional benefits to the Guyanese. Let me just go through a few for the benefit of our people. In

the 2016 PSA, there is 0% taxation by the company. That is the agreement signed by the APNU/AFC Government in 2016. The APNU/AFC Government signed an agreement to say that there will be a 0% tax. Sometimes, I do not think they want to hear it, but it is true. When the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, and the Hon. Opposition Leader spoke, they made commitments to reviewing the Stabroek Block PSA. I did not hear from either gentleman that they will renegotiate but I heard the word review. We have made it clear that we are not going to renegotiate the Stabroek Block contract, but we are going to develop a model PSA to bring additional benefits for any other PSA that will be signed with any other company, including ExxonMobil. If you look at our manifesto, indeed you will see: re-negotiation/better contract administration. You cannot read part of it and leave the other part. It says: better contract administration.

One of the fiscal terms that have already been changed in the new PSA, which the Hon. Member asked of is instead of a 0% tax in the Stabroek Block PSA, any future PSA moving forward will have a 10% tax....

3.09 p.m.

One of the fiscal terms that has already been changed in the new PSA, which the Hon. Member asked of is instead of 0% tax in the Stabroek PSA, any future PSA moving forward, will have 10% tax. Mr. Chairman, instead of two per cent royalty in the Stabroek PSA, we will now have 10% royalty in any future PSAs. Instead of 75% cost recovery in the Stabroek block, we will then have a 65% cost recovery, and what does that mean? It simply means more money up front for Guyana, while we are still paying off the cost bank or the capital investment by the companies investing. In the Stabroek block, the agreement is 75% cost recovery, which simply means that 75% of the revenue goes towards repaying the cost bank, and out of the 25%, Guyana gets 50% of the share of that. That is where you get a 12.5% share of oil that Guyana enjoys. We have kept the 50-50 profit and loss that is in the Stabroek PSA, and we have kept that in the other PSAs. We have ensured that work programmes are adhered to and if the work programme is not adhered to, there is a penalty whereby the operator and the companies must pay at least half of the amount of money that was allocated towards that work programme.

We have made that promise and we have delivered on that promise, whereby now we have two models of PSAs. I say two models of PSAs, because one is for deep water, which has different

conditions with regards to the work programme, and then there is a shallow water PSA which has different conditions with regards to the work programme. However, the fiscal regime remains the same for the new PSA as I just highlighted. With regards to the four PSAs that the Hon. Member is inquiring about, it is to deal with the bid round that we had, and those are the four PSAs that will be awarded or signed in 2025 with the companies that will be awarded those four blocks. There are the four PSAs that will be awarded in 2024 – but it does not mean four different PSAs, it just means four PSAs for four blocks – for four blocks. In no way are we doing a specific PSA for a block. The PSA for all blocks must be the same for shallow and all must be the same for deep. The fiscal conditions are all the same. It is just four PSAs for four new blocks that will be awarded. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I am sure we asked who. Sir, he has already said it is all public information. We asked him who could assign one PSA to four blocks. Who is it, Sir? You can start again with a whole new speech; the public is looking.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, we will announce the four blocks that will be awarded by the companies at a later date and for obvious reasons too.

Programme: 264 – Petroleum Management – \$997,043,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 261 – Policy Development and Administration – \$5,000,000

Programme: 261 – Policy Development and Administration – \$5,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 262 – Natural Resource Management – \$5,840,000

Programme: 262 – Natural Resource Management – \$5,840,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 264 – Petroleum Management – \$853,500,000

Mr. Holder: Project code 4404600 – Oil and Gas Sector Development Programme: Could the Minister say why there is not an allocation under this code to kickstart the arbitration?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, maybe I can help you frame it in a different way...

Mr. Holder: Could I ask the Minister if there is any provision under this allocation which deals with the arbitration process to recover the \$214 million flagged in the audit? I noticed the staff member who was fingered by the Government in relation to this matter and who has been disciplined is sitting behind the Minister. I assume that we are progressing with it.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, when a question is asked, it is only fair that we provide an answer for it. It is not a question session; it is a question-and-answer session. Unfortunately, the question that was asked of the Hon. Member, it is a bit too late. He had the opportunity to ask that question when we were examining the current expenditures, because it is not part of capital spending – it will not be part of capital spending. Under the current expenditure, with your permission, yes, we do have an allocation on the current expenditure, but it does not apply to these capital estimates that we are examining. I believe that if the Hon. Member wants to make a political statement, rather than to ask a question, similarly, to all the noise that I have been hearing on the opposite side when I have been answering the question, too. So, I think in all fairness I should give an answer, and I should provide some information to the Hon. Member with regards to that.

In fact, this question was asked of me in 2024 Estimates by the Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson. I think Ms. Annette Ferguson was the Member who asked about the \$214 million – who took the money, where is the money, and all sorts of fanciful question. It seems the Hon. Member does not understand how an audit functions. It has nothing to do with money and it has nothing to do with physical cash. An Audit is basically going through the expenses of the company, and to ensure that the expenses of the company are petroleum related. At that point in time or for the first Audit, we had Information Handling Services (IHS) Markit that was contracted to do that audit from 1999 to 2017, and the final report submitted have shown that we did not agree that \$214 million which was added to the cost bank was not used for petroleum expenses or they did not provide enough evidence, receipts or invoices to justify that it was used for petroleum expenses. That is how an Audit functions. It has nothing to do with cash transaction, money missing or money here, we need to understand the process, we need to understand the process as to how or why an

audit is carried out. It simply means that the government is saying, based on the advice from the consultant, we do not accept this part as being petroleum expenses or you have not justified or have enough evidence to show that this should be part of the cost bank that is what it simply means, Hon. Member Ferguson. It seems as though you still do not understand the process of doing an audit.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, he still did not answer the question, but I will move on in the interest of time. In 2019, we had a World Bank grant, I said this because under the same code, this is a World Bank loan. There was a collaboration with the World Bank, a grant was given for US \$1 million, to bring in the Mexican consultant, who would set up an oversight programme to lead to the setting up of the petroleum unit in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), where we have had about 36 professionals there in petroleum, health and safety, the environment and different things. Could the Minister say what has become of that programme?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chair, again, the allocation has nothing to do with this capital allocation here.

Mr. Holder: I should have said if it was merged into this programme by some means because it is World Bank and World Bank and it is along the same line of training in the Oil and Gas Sector. So, I want to know if it was merged into this programme.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, I cannot see how it can be merged into a 2025 budgetary allocation. If this grant was since 2019, as the Hon. Member mentioned but, Mr. Chairman, as I mentioned, we can answer any question, we are not afraid. I could have easily said, like the Hon. Members wanted me to say, yes or no. I could have said, it is not part of the programme, and I could take my seat. In all fairness, even though it is not part of the budgetary allocation here, I choose not to say that and to take my seat but to offer an explanation in the interest of transparency and for the people who are listening as well. The US \$1 million grant is separate – I think he is mixing up the US \$1 million grant, which is separate from the \$20 million loan from the World Bank to manage and to build the framework of the Oil and Gas Sector. It was mostly designed to build or to establish the Department of Energy, which I think was under the Ministry of Presidency which was then headed... Forgive me, I do not think I should call a name or I should call the name of the director at that point in time, but it was headed by a gentleman at that point in time.

Mr. Chairman, it was also used to build out the capacity of the EPA as mentioned by the Hon. Member, to manage the Oil and Gas Sector. You could imagine that we had an Environmental Protection Agency that was unprepared, and we knew that we had discovered oil in May of 2015, we signed the PSA in June of 2016, we were preparing for first oil in December of 2019, and I sat in this House from October 2016, onwards and I could recall almost every single Member of the Government then, boasting of first oil and that first oil will be soon. But then nothing was being done to build out the framework to manage the oil and gas sector.

3.24 p.m.

The Hon. Member mentioned a grant in 2019/ 2020... that is why I took my time to chronicle the events in the oil and gas sector. There was the discovery in May, 2015; the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) was signed in June, 2016; and the first oil was in December 2019. We are speaking of a grant in 2019/2020 to build out the framework; assist the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); and set up a Department of Energy when we were coming to the National Assembly every single year from 2016 onwards boasting of first oil. We did nothing to build out the framework to manage the first oil. Rather, we were running *helter-skelter*. We were rushing in 2019 to set up a Department of Energy under the Ministry of the Presidency and build capacity at the EPA at that point in time. What is important to note – if you issue a Production Licence then it must have an environmental permit with it too. It must have an environmental permit. If we were to build capacity in 2019/ 2020 at the EPA, how is it that the EPA issued an Environmental Permit for the Liza Phase 1 and Liza Phase 2 licensed production areas? That is a question that we need to answer because there was no capacity at that point in time. That is why the EPA illegally issued a 20-year Environmental Permit for the Liza project. It was a 20-year – Hon. Leader of the Opposition – Environmental Permit for the Liza Phase 1 and Liza Phase 2 project. The Hon. Attorney General went to court, and it was illegal. How could you issue a 20-year environmental permit for a project? Yes, it was meant to enhance and build out the capacity of the Environmental Protection Agency to deal with the new oil and gas sector. That project has continued. I think we have about 15 to 20 people who are trained to work with the oil and gas sector at the Environmental Protection Agency. We have built out monitoring capacity at the Environmental Protection Agency so that we can monitor our maritime space, detect oil spills and any activity, especially around the production areas. This is so much so that we can monitor almost in real time, any vessel

approaching or moored alongside any one of the Floating Production, Storage, and Offloading (FPSO) unit offshore. That is the capacity that exists presently at the Environmental Protection Agency. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, according to the Minister, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) did nothing in terms of the legal framework and capacity building. Yet, he referred to a loan that is currently being utilised by this Government that was put in place by the APNU/AFC. There is more to it, and I want to ask the Minister this – for the very \$4.2 billion loan that we are talking about, could the Minister say why his Government did not utilise it? They had it languishing for three years before they started to use it. Also, I recognise by the end of this year they will not complete utilising all the sum. This project, I think, has gotten an extension. They asked for an extension. It was to be from 2019 up to 2024. The World Bank has granted an extension up to 2025. If you look at Estimates of the Public Sector, Volume 3, you will see just that – 2019 to 2025. My question is – with this allocation of \$850 million, that will carry it to about 78%, leaving about 22% unspent, how does the Government intend to deal with that?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member is right. The \$20 million that we have under the World Bank project will not be exhausted in 2025. Rather it will go over into 2026. Already, we are talking to the World Bank to extend that project. We are not extending the project because we failed to utilise the money, or we did not implement and build out the framework. Sometimes, there is a mentality that if you have a loan, you have to use out the money; we are working contrary to that. The idea is not to spend out the money. The idea is to ensure that we build out a framework and architecture to manage the sector in a very cost-effective way. I can tell you that for every new framework that is in place, the new Local Content Act that came to the National Assembly has already brought significant changes in the way we manage the sector – in a very prudent manner. We could have simply used it and said we completed our programme. Building out the sector is a work in progress. It is a work in progress. I want to say – indeed – we will extend this project into 2026 as we continue to build out the legal and regulatory framework to manage the sector. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: They will have to obviously ask for an extension again if they have not done so. On the same project code, in the first 26 oil discoveries, the nation was given an update on each and that amounted to about 11 billion barrels. Twenty more discoveries have since been announced. I

believe the figure is now around 46 discoveries in the Stabroek Block. Yet, we have no update in terms of the reserves that are there. Now, my question to the Minister is – is there any appropriation in this sum in terms of monitoring and understanding the oil reserves' level as new discoveries occur? Why is this Government failing to release an update on the reserves? I want to add this to it as well, Cde. Chairman. There is a decommissioning cost that goes into ExxonMobil's account. A key aspect of the equation to calculate the decommissioning cost is the level of reserves. It has to be used in that equation. Therefore, as a nation, we will not know if we are being overcharged or undercharged if we do not know what those reserves are. In fact, ExxonMobil has reported that it provides the Government with the necessary information, so I conclude that it has the information on hand. Therefore, I would like to ask them as well how much money has been paid or deducted for ExxonMobil over the years in terms of decommissioning costs?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, again, I think the Hon. Member is asking the question under the wrong project code. Nevertheless, we will answer. When you look at it logically, there is no reason for ExxonMobil or the Government of Guyana to withhold any information as to our discovered resources. As a matter of fact, it will be counterproductive not to say that we have 15, 20 or 30 billion. It will make Guyana a more attractive place for investments. It will make our basin even more attractive with regards to companies wanting to come into the Guyana basin. I do not see the rationale – the thinking – behind it that maybe the Government is withholding some kind of information; it is state secret; and it does not want to say how much oil is there. It is counterproductive not to say that. Look at our bid round, for example. We decided that we were going to the bid round without the three dimensional (3D) seismic survey and take the limited data that we had. Now, had we done the 3D seismic – which would have probably taken 24 months at a cost too – and said that our discovered resources in the Stabroek Block are 20 billion barrels of oil, that means that we would have attracted more interests. It means that everyone would want to be a part of the Guyana basin. I wanted to say that upfront because it is proffered that the Government is withholding information and ExxonMobil is not. It is counterproductive. Look at a company such as ExxonMobil, if it can say that it has 15 billion barrels of oil in the Guyana basin, its share prices will go up tomorrow morning. Look at it logically; the share prices will go up tomorrow morning – right away. It is not that we do not want to say. That is the figure; we cannot manufacture a figure to say – *oh*, we have 15 billion and *oh*, we have 30 billion. We have to ensure that we tell the truth to the public. That is the truth – we have 11 billion barrels of oil.

The Hon. Member mentioned the additional discoveries and all that but we have slowed down too in terms of the number of discoveries that we have made over the last year or so. If the Hon. Gentleman understands how the sector works, that is, we may make a discovery but let us say we encountered 150 feet of oil-bearing sand and decide that we use are going to use that to shore up our resources or say it is equivalent to two billion or three billion, it does not work like that. There is an appraisal programme that follows every discovery, and it could go either way. Based on the appraisal programme, it could state – look, instead of 165 feet of oil-bearing sand, there is 250 feet, and we can estimate 500 million barrels of oil. The appraisal programme can go the other way and state – you know what, maybe we overestimated first and the reality is that it is not 165 feet; it is just 65 feet; it is not 500 million barrels; it is just 200 million barrels. You need to understand how the sector works. It is not about going, finding an ounce of gold and selling it to the Guyana Gold Board; it is a totally different ball game when it comes to the oil and gas sector. Yes, we may have additional discoveries but when we carry out the appraisal programme, we may realise in 2022 and 2023 we said that we had 10 discoveries and there should be X amount. When we carry out the appraisal programme, we may realise that it is really not that amount, and we have to readjust the number of recoverable barrels that we declared. It is not a straightforward thing to say we had 50 discoveries and then six more, so it is supposed to increase. It does not work like that. It is based on the appraisal programme by the company. Again, I will reiterate that it is counterproductive, and it makes absolutely no sense for the country or the company not to declare the true number of resources. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: Minister, I do not know if you forgot the last part – the question was loaded – in terms of how much money was paid to ExxonMobil or withdrawn to deal with decommissioning cost?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, I am sorry. That would be part of the audit that is being done. The Decommissioning Fund is something that was introduced in the Petroleum Activities Act. There was no decommissioning fund before the Petroleum Activities Act. The Petroleum Activities Act was passed in 2023. It was passed in 2023. None of those new developments – I think they are the Waru and Whiptail oil fields – have started to produce yet. With regards to the information that the Hon. Member requested, it will be part of the audit. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: This is the same programme. It deals with capacity building. Cde. Chairman, under the previous Government and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Guyana, Mr. Griffith, we had set up the Department of Petroleum and Geological Engineering in collaboration with the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). I would like to ask the Minister what happened with that programme, and if any sums here will be allocated to boost that programme which was started by the previous government?

3.39 p.m.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, again, this is probably a programme maybe from 2018/2019 that the gentleman is referring to. I do not know when the period was. This is 2025, and we have moved far away from that, so much so, that the University of Guyana (UG), since January 2025, is free and this includes the petroleum programme at the University of Guyana. It simply means, that any young Guyanese who wants to study in that field can go and register at University of Guyana, free of cost. Besides that, we are building out the Guyana Technical Training College Inc. (GTTTCI) in Berbice. That Technical Training College, Guyanese have already graduated. I was at one of the graduations where 24 young Guyanese from across the country graduated, and they are working on the Liza Unity Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) unit, as we speak. Recently, another 25 graduated from that programme. We will continue to see young people graduating from the Guyana Technical Training College to work in the oil and gas sector, besides free university education, and there is a petroleum programme at the University of Guyana. Maybe the question was asked just to justify that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was doing something with regard to training Guyanese. If you did, yes, but I am showing you what we are doing now too with regard to training Guyanese to work in the oil and gas sector. We have approximately 10 young Guyanese through a partnership with the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) who are presently studying in China on a scholarship programme. They will return soon to work in the oil and gas sector in Guyana, as well as a number of other persons who are studying through the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) programme and other scholarship programmes. They will offer services in the oil and gas sector. That is what we are doing with regard to training so that young Guyanese can be certified and trained to work in the oil and gas sector. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: Essentially, there is not very much at the University of Guyana. The Minister said something in terms of a question, and I think I should respond. I do not think he understands the level that the University of Trinidad and Tobago is at, in terms of the oil and gas, their expertise and experience and in terms of that programme, which I referred to. We are talking about building capacity.

Mr. Chairman: The first statement you made, is it asking him a question if he understands that too because you made a statement?

Mr. Holder: Well, I do not.

Mr. Chairman: I should give him a chance to talk about his information on that. Go ahead.

Mr. Holder: Certainly, if he wants to, he can comment on it. I will move on to capacity building. That is what we were talking about in terms of the oil and gas sector here under this programme. Cde. Speaker, I noticed, that in Volume 2, under the indicators at number seven:

“Number of jobs created in the natural resource sector.”

In 2024, you had 5,368 but the target for 2025, when you expect to see an increase based on all of these things that the Minister just said that they are doing, in terms of the sector and the sector growing to new heights, I noticed that there is a target of just 1980 for 2025. This is way below 50% of what they claimed to have achieved in 2024. Could the Minister explain the reason for that decline?

Mr. Bharrat: I will have some difficulty with this particular question because, with all due respect, I do not think the good gentleman is reading the budget too well. The figures that he made reference to falls under Programme 261, Policy Development and Administration. We are now discussing Programme 264, Petroleum Management. I think there is some kind of misunderstanding, or he is not reading it properly because the figure that the gentleman read out, it states that in 2024:

“Number of jobs created in the natural resources sector.”

It was 5368 and the target in 2025 is 1980. That is under Programme 261. The natural resources sector covers oil and gas, mining and forestry as well too. What we will see in the mining sector is a number of employments being created, especially with the expansion of the bauxite sector,

primarily Bosai Minerals Group (Guyana) Incorporated in Linden. They will employ a few more hundreds of persons from either Linden or the surrounding area. In terms of mining, we will see the Guyana Oko Mining Inc. project starting to build out that mine in Region 7.

In terms of the oil and gas sector, as I mentioned – and we all know – the oil and gas sector is not labour intensive; it is more capital intensive. You will never find the oil and gas sector employing 25,000 people like the forestry sector or 30,000 people like the mining sector. You will find that the oil and gas sector require more highly skilled technical personnel as we move forward. We only expect one FPSO arriving in Guyana late in 2025. We expect that FPSO to go into production. With regard to the oil and gas sector and the expansion of the oil and gas sector, we will only see that FPSO coming later in 2025 and going into production sometime late in 2025. I am sure that in 2026 we will see a difference in terms of not only job creation, but production as well in the oil and gas sector. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: It is the same Volume 2, page 140, Indicator number three:

“Number of new licenses issued for exploration and production activities.”

There was one issued in 2024. Hon. Minister you issued two for this year. Could you tell us what they are and where or is there another one that you cannot reveal?

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Hon. Member for the question. Under Programme 264, the one license that was issued in 2024 would be the Whiptail Petroleum Production License and the two that are expected to be issued in 2025 have to do with the seven projects once they are approved, and possibly the gas project, once we advance to that stage. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I think this is a good time to put the question that the sum stated for...

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Mr. Chairman, if I may?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, go ahead.

Mr. Norton: On the same page, you spoke to:

“Effective local content strategies are implemented.”

Could the Hon. Member say what are the approaches they are using for local content? Is it just the question of the company being Guyanese or would it extend to mean as well that a large percentage of the goods and services that are sold, the content is of Guyanese origin? If the latter is true, what measures are you are taking to make it efficacious?

Mr. Bharrat: First of all, let me thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question on local content because it is a very important area, especially with regard to bringing in benefits for Guyanese and Guyanese businesses. Now, the local content legislation or the Bill which we passed in Parliament, set out certain criteria as to which company or who can be registered as a local business and be given a certificate from the Local Content Secretariat. We said at that point in time that the company must have at least 51% ownership by Guyanese. It simply means that we are not shutting out again foreign investors or investment, but rather, they can partner with Guyanese and Guyanese companies. They can hold 49% and that company can be registered to acquire a Local Content Certificate. If we have a company with 51% Guyanese ownership and 49% foreign ownership, it is still considered to be a local company, providing that the other criteria are met too. With regard to the other criteria, we said that the directors – senior management, must have at least 70% within that company. So, even though you might have 49% foreign ownership, you must have 70% local directorship or at a senior managerial level. Then we went further and said that you must have at least 90% of local employees – Guyanese, working in that company. We also went further – not with the criteria – but further to advocate that 90% of the employees who are employed are at a certain level too. We do not want our workers to be cleaners or labourers only – and not that anything is wrong with that – we want Guyanese to be involved in the technical, managerial and supervisory positions that exist in the oil and gas sector too.

Today, we have a number of companies registered. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition would know too that we had a lot of issues with some companies and some Guyanese. Basically, some Guyanese, if I can use the term, are selling themselves short, in the sense that, sometimes they actually do not hold 51% of the shares in terms of assets or capital invested. With the submission to Dr. Pertab, we would see 51% that will be owned by the Guyanese company. It is something that we have guarded against. We had a number of issues where one company even took us to court and we had to sort out those issues. There are a few issues with regard to the implementation that we have been working to address and to ensure we can use the local content legislation to

bring more benefits to Guyanese and Guyanese businesses. To date, we have seen significant benefits coming to Guyana. What I am happy to note is that, even though there are 40 services in Schedule 1 with specific targets – we call them the carve-outs – we are seeing foreign companies coming to Guyana, wanting to invest or engage in services that are not in Schedule 1, yet still engaging with the local partners. We have made it clear that we are going to review the local content legislation, especially Schedule 1. This is a good sign to show that even though the service is not within Schedule 1, these companies have started to look for local partners and local partnerships. That has brought even more benefits to Guyanese. Thank you.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I think he missed the second part of the question. I said that there are two models, and one is ownership which he spoke to but then at the level of product... For instance, this is a bottle of water. The cork probably came from somewhere, the label from somewhere and the bottle from somewhere. Only the water is possibly from here and even that we are not sure of.

3.54 p.m.

The question is, in terms of improving local content *vis-à-vis* products, what is being done? Ownership is all right, but one could have a local company bringing everything from Trinidad and Tobago or everything from the United States of America, and it does nothing to improve the productive capacity of local products. To me, it is a deficiency that we should recognise and address.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, I agree with the Leader of the Opposition. The local content legislation was in no way designed to build out a massive retail sector. I think that is what the Opposition Leader is getting at. We agree because we said that from the inception. We could have left the First Schedule wide open, and then had companies from Guyana buying pipes, Christmas trees, and risers, and then reselling them to ExxonMobil. However, what we have to guard against, **[Ms. Ferguson: (Inaudible) Christmas tree.]**

Ms. Annette Ferguson does not know what a Christmas tree is – that could have been easily done – and know, too, that Guyana is paying for half of this. If we create this massive retail industry and say that we are offering opportunities to Guyanese so that they could just buy these pipes and sell them to ExxonMobil, then they will start acting as middlemen. When one starts acting as a middleman. **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]**

I am coming to the point. He/she will carry up the cost, which we are paying half for. The whole

idea behind it was to ensure that we build capacity so that we could manufacture here locally. That is important. We have to build out capacity in our local private sector so that we can produce our own products. We could have those companies coming to Guyana and establishing themselves in Guyana so that whatever is being manufactured is done right here in Guyana. For example, we could always talk about the small producers, the farmers in Black Bush Polder, the water you mentioned producing in Guyana and going offshore, or the smaller services that are needed. However, what about the valves and the pipes? We could agree that a local company could just buy these valves from Italy or wherever and sell them back to ExxonMobil which would carry up the cost, but if we could encourage those companies to come and establish a presence in Guyana and have manufacturing done right here in Guyana, only then we would achieve true local content. The idea behind it is to build capacity so that we can produce, build and manufacture locally, and not just build out a retail sector.

Programme: 264 – Petroleum Management – \$853,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister, and team, for taking us through your Agency. Hon. Members let us invite the Hon. Minister of Public Works, and his team, to take us through Agency 31. As of now, we have two minutes of savings on the schedule. Hon. Members, let me turn your attention to pages 172 and 173. I will start the clock at 4 o'clock.

Agency: 31 Ministry of Public Works

Current Expenditure

Programme: 311 – Policy Development and Administration – \$4,231,156,000

Ms. Ferguson: Let me take this opportunity to say a pleasant afternoon to the staff, my former staff, of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure then, now Public Works; welcome. Mr. Chairman, may I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6111, Administrative, under Staffing Details? I note for 2024, there were five staff, and for 2025, there will be an increase. Could the Hon. Member explain the reason for the increase and where the three additional staff will be assigned?

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and in the same breath, let me thank the Hon. Member for the question and recognise the hardworking staff

that lends support to myself and Minister Indar, of the Ministry of Public Works. There will be three new positions: one field auditor, one senior registry supervisor, and one registry supervisor. We had the movement of one person, the Director of Public Works (DPS).

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. May I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6116, Contracted Employees, under Staffing Details? I note for 2024, there was a figure of four, but in 2025, there is an increase of two. Could he explain the reason for the increase and also what are the positions for these two contracted employees?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the vastness of the work of the Ministry of Public Works should have seen us hiring many more persons, but under this Programme that we are talking about, these are two cleaners.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, may I turn his attention to line item 6264, Vehicle Spare and Service? I note for 2024, he exhausted the sums approved by this Committee, but I recognise for 2025, he is requesting an increase of probably \$2.1 million. Could he explain the reason for the increase? That is one. Secondly, could he say the number of vehicles within the fleet and also where these vehicles are assigned in the Ministry?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the reason for the increase, which is not a big increase, is that we have acquired other vehicles. Those are operational vehicles. It is just the additional vehicles that we have taken in order to get our work done. This Programme deals with policy development and administration of the Ministry.

Mr. Patterson: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: For the Berbice River Bridge, there is an increase there. I know the Minister is going to say that the Ministry is catering for free travel, but what I would like to pre-empt... [Mr. Mahipaul: One billion dollars?] ...\$1 billion from \$200... [Mr. Mahipaul: (*Inaudible*) billion dollars.] ...right, I am asking when will this commence, how many vehicles and transits is the Ministry catering for and is this a recurring expense going forward?

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. It is not a secret – the announcement has been made that at the completion of the New Demerara River Bridge, tolls for all other bridges will become free, which would mean the Berbice River Bridge, as well as the New

Wismar/Mackenzie Bridge. In this subsidy, every year there was a contribution that the Government was putting because we were subsidising the tolls. This figure is a result of watching the traffic flows and anticipating that at the end of August the toll-free regime will step in. It is calculated based on the anticipated flows of actual numbers that transit the bridge with the consideration that, with the toll being free, more people will travel.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I understood everything that he said. That is why I asked him. He made an anticipation. What is the traffic count, numerically, that he anticipated?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I do not have the Manager of the Berbice River Bridge with me here to give me exact numbers right now, but it is something that could be dealt with at another forum – getting the number of vehicles that transit. However, I can tell you that at the Demerara Harbour Bridge, there is an average of 20,000 transits every day. On Sundays and Saturdays, the transit pattern of the bridge has changed. There are more people travelling on the bridge on Saturdays and Sundays now than from Monday to Friday. The Berbice River Bridge is still a private company. It is not a state-owned company. Nevertheless, this is based on the figures that we have. We have some numbers. Let me give you some of them so you can understand.

4.09 p.m.

In 2024, there were 406,598 transits. In February, we had about 384,000, and in March, another 384,000. We average about 400,000 vehicles per month, giving a total of 4.4 million vehicles for the year. We are anticipating a 2.84 increase, with an average daily crossing of about 13,310. Those are the numbers we are getting right now, out of what is actually passing through the Bridge.

Mr. Patterson: The Berbice River Bridge concessional agreement comes to an end in 2027. Sir, does this mean that for the toll-free period, you will pay them for the two more years? The concessional agreement doubles this. Is it correct, Sir, that for the two more years, you will be paying the toll for the Berbice River Bridge?

Bishop Edghill: I cannot give that commitment right now that the Hon. Member would like to me to make. There is room for negotiations of what will take place as it relates to that. I do not want to sit here, definitively... Remember, you acquired the ownership of the Bridge. We have actually returned that ownership to the company. That is the difference between the two Administrations.

We do not stifle private sector development; we encourage it. In the environment of encouraging private sector development, we also ensure fairness because we have to send the right signal. One of the things about a developing country and this is where the difference between the PPP/C and the APNU/AFC differs, is one has to send the right signal to the private sector. We cannot, in an environment where people and companies make investments... [An Hon. Member:

(Inaudible)] We must say it because sometimes people need to hear it. In an environment where private sector people come in, make investments and there are agreements, governments must not send the wrong signal. Who knows, they might be models for others for other development projects. We must be able to keep faith with what we stand for.

Mr. Patterson: I have a follow up for the most revealing comment. Hon. Member, you have handed back the Bridge. for the tolls the Ministry will be paying from August, could you say if is it enhanced tolls – the \$8,000 per car that prompted the previous Administration to take control of the Bridge or is it the existing toll of \$2,200? Sir, in other words, if you have given back the company the Bridge, you have given them free leverage to increase their fees. The taxpayers' now will be paying a heavier burden. Thank you for revealing that to the public.

Bishop Edghill: I do not know where the Hon. Member got \$8,000 per car from. We have said it, and I will say it repeatedly, when the tolls were set for the Berbice River Bridge, whatever it cost a car to cross the steamer and return with the passengers of that car, was what the toll was. It was never \$8,000. What we are proposing to do now is, whatever the toll being paid now – this is not catering for any increase in tolls – when we say it is free, the Government will absorb that. There are no increases here. If there is any *jumbie behind the bush* that we are trying to pass on moneys to friends, families and so on, we are keeping faith with the people of Guyana, at the same level and rate as what is being paid now.

Ms. Ferguson: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: For the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD), Hon. Member, I recognise there is a decrease for 2025, from \$1.2 billion to \$1.1 billion and change, could you explain the reason for the decrease and also say to this Committee whether the amount that is catered now will suffice for the remainder of the year, and we would not see you coming in August, just before the recess, for supplementary funds?

Bishop Edghill: I am sure the citizens of Guyana can be very proud of the delivery of services by the Transport and Harbours Department over the last four years. As a matter of fact, we made it clear that the reason why we asked for a supplementary last year was because we were making more trips and had additional vessels. That is what the Hon. Member is asking. If one noticed, we started off last year with the best estimate of \$974 billion. This year we are asking for about \$1.160 billion. If there is a need for more moneys, yes, we will go to the National Assembly and ask for it to ensure that the good people of Guyana, whether they live in Region 1 – Kumaka or Port Kaituma, Region 2 – Supenaam all the way to Charity into the Pomeroon, or whether they live in Region 7 all the way to Bartica and into the interior, will continue to get the good service that the Transport and Harbours Department offers. Let me just add this. I did report to the House, and I would like to remind the Hon. Member that we have brought down the fuel cost because we have been able to kick the racket of fuel smuggling on the vessels down. We were doing more trips and spending less fuel. That is a miracle of the PPP/C since it took office.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. Under the very line item 6321, I note we have an increase for the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) as against what was approved for 2024. Could the Hon. Member, explain to the Committee what this increase will now take care of?

Bishop Edghill: It did not allow me the opportunity because of time during the debate, but the Hon. Member and Guyana would be pleased to know that the Guyana Civil Aviation Training School (CATS) has just been accredited and certified by the TRAINEDAIR PLUS Programme of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). In another week, a delegation from Guyana will be in Abu Dhabi where an instrument of certification will be handed over to Guyana, while we are attending the Global Implementation Support Symposium (GISS). Let me just inform Hon. Members what that means. It means that Guyana will not only be allowed to train Guyanese, but we could train people from all over the Caribbean and any other country that wishes to come to Guyana because of the quality of training that is taking place here with our air traffic controllers and other people in the aviation industry. I would also like to add that the Secretary General of the ICAO has communicated that the industry has recognised that Guyana offers one of the highest qualities of over-flight service that is taking place here. This little increase for the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority will see greater things being done and eventually, it will become a means of

revenue earning. As people come to Guyana for training, they will have to pay, and we would not always have to come back to the House to ask for more money. There was a time when we did not have to ask for money for the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority. When Minister Robson Benn demitted office in 2015, the Authority had more than \$1 billion in its reserve. When we got there, we were in a deficit, and it is from since then we have been trying to get us out.

Programme: 311 – Policy Development and Administration – \$4,231,156,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 312 – Public Works – \$10,542,996,000

Ms. Ferguson: May I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6116, Contracted Employees, under Staffing Details? I note there is an increase of 30 employees, from 232 to 262, could the Hon. Member explain the reason for the increase, and/or where these persons will be assigned and what are the new positions, if there are any?

Bishop Edghill: This is the Programme that is delivering to the Guyanese people infrastructural developments that are happening around the country, whether it is roads, bridges, sea defences or engineers working on aerodromes. We had seven resignations. We have employed 24 new engineers, a health, safety and environmental officer, a procurement officer, 12 clerks of works, one accountant and four accounts clerks. These are to improve the operational efficiency of the Ministry.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. I am happy to hear that additional staff are being employed so that we can get the work done, to deliver the services to our people. Let me turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6272, Electricity Charges. Hon. Member, I note for last year, we had \$416 million budgeted but for 2025, you are now seeking a total sum of \$474,050,000. Could you explain the reason for the increase and/or the areas and the buildings that will be catered for under this particular line item, that the Ministry has responsibility for?

Bishop Edghill: Hon. Member, do not only think about buildings. The daily requests of the Guyanese people for streetlights must be catered for too. You would know that we went out to public tender for the purchase of 100,000 streetlights. Eighty thousand will be on the grid; 20,000 stand-alone solar. Unlike others, when we put up lights, we pay our bills. This is to enhance that.

Just before you come back again, you would have heard from the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, and seen in your estimates under Infrastructural Development that there is going to be a massive layout of road safety measures, including the placement of streetlights on specific thoroughfares, including the Heroes' Highway, where people have been asking that for.

4.24 p.m.

The Prime Minister is heading a special Cabinet subcommittee that includes the traffic officers from all of the various regions and specific Ministers in various sectors. We have to pay for those installations and electricity to operate them, so that is why we are having the increase. It is the improvement that we are bringing to Guyana that is asking for these meagre sums in terms of increases.

Ms. Ferguson: Through you, Mr. Chairman, may I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6281, Security Services? I recognised for *Budget 2024*, the Ministry had an approved sum of \$6.4 million and it was subsequently revised to \$6.2 million. I note for 2025, the Hon. Minister is requesting \$4.7 million. Could he explain the reason for the reduction and also say to the Committee which security services are providing services to the Ministry, and the different areas in the Ministry that are benefiting from this service?

Bishop Edghill: This is for the payment of salaries and National Insurance Scheme (NIS) benefits of five securities personnel working in Region 2. The decrease is because we had debt of one security supervisor.

Ms. Ferguson: For clarification, I heard the Hon. Member stated that this sum represents the payment of salary for four securities... [Bishop Edghill: It is five.] ...five security officers, am I to understand these are security officers hired by the Ministry or are these private security officers?

Bishop Edghill: I would like to assure the Member that these are the same security officers we came and met when we took Government in 2020.

Mr. Patterson: Line Item – 6255, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure: Minister, we do agree that roads have been expanded, I did say that, but there's a new phenomenon whereby derelict cars,

junk trailers, and junk yards have been opened on these roadways; just rendering a two road into a single lane. Could you say what portion of this sum will the Ministry be putting, if any, into the removal of these cars and what will it put in place so the roads that have been constructed which are two lanes remain two lanes as opposed to one lane and a parking lane?

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. I would invite him to make a joint statement with me whereby we send a signal from the National Assembly about the intolerable, disgusting and unuseful dumping of derelicts along main access roads, private businesses that park unlit lorries, people without permission putting up sign boards and billboards that block the view and vision of drivers. We could get all of these things corrected. If I have the two signatures of both former Ministers Mr. Patterson and Ms. Ferguson, we will send the right signal to the Guyanese people so when the Ministry of Public Works starts picking up these wrecks, nobody could run to offices and make these political issues. As a matter of fact, completed just about five days ago, an entire unit from the Ministry of Public Works toured all of our main thoroughfares, all of the alignments where constructions are taking place. There is a phenomenal that is developing and that is why I am asking the Hon. Minister to join me in signing a public statement. When announcements are made people find it attractive to go and put up a shack so that the Government will now have to negotiate with them to get them out of the alignment so that the development projects could go on. We have a number of issues like that. People are pulling out their fences. People are putting things in the way to say; this is where I have been selling for the last 20 years. I have been advising some people that the only thing we will not do is charge you rent for utilising the Government reserves for the last 20 years. Most of the money that we used, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, to clear the main access roads, comes through our main access roads programme. However, this is just a small amount to help with some of the things that we are doing. It is becoming a major problem.

I listened to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition yesterday when he said that he will build roads, bridges, and even build more than what the PPP/C is planning to build at several points across the Essequibo and the rest of it. We have to be able to send the signal that when a road is widened, a corridor expanded or there is a geometric improvement of a road, it does not give anybody – no matter which party they support – the license to park on the road. To come out with cravens and open pharmacies and supermarkets on the road shoulders and roadways, we have to be able to

bring this under control. I make this call this afternoon in the Committee that this will be something politics needs to stay away from because it will affect all of us. We are addressing the matter. As a matter of fact, in the same subcommittee that I referred to that the Prime Minister is leading, one of the issues that is there to come out is a policy on trucks. We are not sitting idly by. The Ministry of Housing and Water is looking for lands within the corridors to develop which will be parking zones for trucks and articulated vehicles so we could migrate them from the road shoulders into commercial parking areas where they will pay a fee. When a person comes out from the interior, he/she can park there. When a person comes with his/her canter with smaller stuff as against encumbering and congesting. That is where we are on that.

Mr. Patterson: This issue is not a political issue. It is an issue with a broad-based concern. I know you share that concern as well. We are quite willing to share a joint statement. However, what I was hoping the Minister would say to this Committee is that there is a definitive programme. The Ministry widened Dennis Street, but right now the railway embankment there is a junkyard; containers are along there. I was hoping that the Minister would say that with the money the Ministry is going to be appropriated tomorrow or Thursday...Put everyone on notice, do not wait on the signature of poor lowly David to do something. I was hoping that was a response I could have heard from the Minister.

Bishop Edghill: For the benefit of the Hon. Member, the lawlessness on the railway embankment not far from the Alliance For Change (AFC) headquarters, a notice was served to that gentleman last week Thursday afternoon. We have removed derelicts from there and he has returned. In the presence of the Commander of the Division, we said to him, if you bring back derelicts you will be charged and placed before the courts. This goes for anybody when we move derelicts. The number that I received from the Head of this Programme in terms of traffic safety and maintenance, would show that we spent about \$45 million last year moving derelicts from Regions 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, and the Soesdyke/Linden Highway. We have to get this under control. We are making it very clear that we do not want to stifle economic activities. We do not want to take *bread out of people's mouths* but sometimes we hear the commentary when we act, but certainly safety... This is just to let the Leader of the Opposition know the magnitude of the problem so he could cooperate on this. On the East Bank of Demerara thoroughfare, we had to move sand, stone, and other debris from the road shoulders. It is dangerous to encumber the road shoulders because in the case of an

emergency and people are trapped, they would not pass. Some businesses have taken it on their own, yes, and that is why I am saying let us do this together. We are moving and will continue to move. I have just completed the exercise where I have before me the visuals, [Mr. Patterson: *(Inaudible)*], yes, of every area. I am making this public using this Committee of Supply. The instructions are, while we move that which has been and those that are, anything that comes now, the same day it comes out the same day it will be removed; no notices. The same day you come out the same day you will be removed.

Mr. Norton: Under the same line item, I want to ask the Hon. Member if he recognised on the new road that the Ministry did through Campbellville, the very fence it is putting up is blocking people's views... **[Bishop Edghill:** The views?] ...yes, the view, when one is driving. If one drives down that road, he/she will see the Ministry is putting fences as high as his/her head, so he/she cannot see vehicles. May I also ask you if you are aware that when you are turning to the Hero's Highway...The thing is so high that you cannot see. What is the Government going to do about the constructions they are doing that are blocking the view and affecting road safety?

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition. I really appreciate your comment. If it is the Conversation Tree Road Project that you are discussing, where we are putting in the picket fences, safety is the reason why we are doing that for the people who are walking in. **[Ms. Ferguson:** People do not walk there.] People do walk there and exercise, Ms. Ferguson. If it is too high, we will have a review because there is absolutely no difficulty in reviewing it. I could ask the Traffic and Maintenance Head to look at that with the engineer who is supervising the development of that area because, at all material times, we want people to be able to see. We have heard complaints about the height of the bridges on the Hero's Highway before and it is something that we are looking at because no life should be lost because somebody was encumbered, or his/her vision was blurred and the rest of it. We have had situations where we had to go personally to people. It is not a good thing to say – The way they park their caravans at the corner, one cannot see the incoming traffic. Persons would have to actually go out to peep and then drive. When we discover those things, sometimes it is the devil's job to get it under, but we will review your request. I can guarantee you that we will do a review of that.

4.39 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, before I take the next person, what the Leader of the Opposition has raised and MP Patterson just commented on, is serious. When you are going east to west, either Bissessar Avenue, Pike Street or further down, the height of that rail is being painted white right now. You have to literally come out because, especially in the daytime. You do not see when the vehicles are coming from the most southern turn. I literally travel there every single day, and it is dangerous, dangerous, dangerous.

Mr. Mahipaul: He has a big vehicle, imagine persons with small vehicles.

Mr. Chairman: Not only that, but they also have a few people that are parking their vehicles. Yes. We are not talking about the Conversation Tree end. We are talking about the entire section from Pike Street coming all the way to Dennis Street. It is serious.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I assure you that, as the Minister who is responsible for transportation, we will do a full review within the week and whatever adjustments have to be made, will be made. This is in the interest of the safety of all the citizens of Guyana.

Mr. Chairman: The other thing is most of us who are traversing that route in the mornings, we have children in the vehicle.

Bishop Edghill: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Mahipaul: We support you fully on this one, Bishop Edghill.

Bishop Edghill: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Ferguson, you may have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On that very line item, I would like to make a proposal to the Hon. Member. In his reviewing activity, it will be good for him to take a look at what is happening on the Heroes Highway as you head to Red Road and Mocha Arcadia because it is very, very dangerous when one is coming out from Mocha Arcadia, and the traffic coming from north to south, it is risky. Perhaps it is time for both ministries, the Ministry of

Housing and Water and the Ministry of Public Works, to look at the idea of mounting traffic lights there to save the lives of our people. Thank you very much, Sir.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Hon. Member for her suggestion. It is currently being included in the discussions we are having, to finalise where and where with the Traffic Department, the people who manage the traffic, as well as the various ministries and the various sectors . It is all in one discussion and we are hoping to get it concluded. The Prime Minister told me that he wants to get it completed before the current Parliament session concludes, and I will urge him that we get on with it. Thank you.

Mr. Figueira: On the same line, Hon. Minister. I am happy that you are addressing the issues of derelict vehicles on the main thoroughfares, but I think you also need to give some consideration to these derelict vehicles on the secondary roads. In many communities, there are a lot of mechanic shops, and what we discovered in some of these very communities, the mechanics with all their efforts cannot fix some of the vehicles and when that is communicated to the owners of the vehicle, it is left there. The mechanic is not taking the responsibility to move it, and it is there for months and months. In some instances, where the mechanic operates, the roadways are small and because the vehicles are not moving, the traffic congestion and the smooth flow of traffic are encumbered. That too should also be looked at when you are removing those derelict vehicles, and we get a full national clean-up of all of those bad vehicles that are messing up the flow of traffic.

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira for his intervention and the collaborative work. The Leader of the Opposition will advise you that Chapter 28:01, which I am sure he is very familiar with, takes care of the municipalities and Chapter 28:02, which takes care of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), the responsibility of those inner streets is the responsibility of the municipalities and the NDCs. They have said to us that they do not have the resources, they do not have tow trucks and so on, and what we have been doing is getting them to serve the notice in keeping with the law and when it is not complied with, then we go in and help, but Chapter 28:01 and 28:02 are still the laws of Guyana and we work with them. This is also good timing to make a call because, I get letters from NDCs as well as citizens with petitions, of people in communities that are upset that they cannot pass, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. Oftentimes you try to get community engagements because a person working and living in a community and you are obstructing the flow of your own neighbours, at some time you have got to listen to your

neighbours, at some time you have got to be together. We have had to move entire containers and people have threatened even to sue me, 40-foot containers. Leader of the Opposition, because of where you live, when we were making the bypass, since the Ogle Road was under construction, we had two containers when you are coming out to Rupert Craig Highway. We begged and begged for the man to move the containers. We had to move it ourselves. The (NDC) officials were there with us. It is a collaborative effort, and I think the consensus here in the House, and I could anticipate support from everyone, is that whatever it takes, we need to get this thing under control, whether it is on the main access roads or is in the communities, and we will be going forward with that. If we need more money to supplement what we are doing, when we come back, we are sure that you will support us.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you. Hon. Minister, I am very much cognisant of Chapter 28:01 with regards to the responsibility of the municipality but it is you who have extended the *olive branch* of collaboration and I am saying to you that given the fact, especially in Linden, the municipality, does not have the capacity to move the debris that exists in all of the eight constituencies of Linden where derelict vehicles exist, we are happy that you are extending the invitation because many of the mechanics that I have visited brought this to my attention that they have communicated with the municipality and the municipality have communicated with them, indicating that they do not have the capacity to assist in the moving of the debris. What I can assist you and your team with, in collaboration with the municipality, is bringing this to your attention and your team's attention, when they come to the community where these vehicles are, so that when you are coming, you can do one swoop or a coordination of swoops to get all of these vehicles off the road because they are cumbersome to the flow of traffic. Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I totally agree with the Hon. Member. He will know that there is a derelict dump site on the Linden-Soesdyke Highway where we take, and we are going to start selling scrap iron. We will call the sale, let people smash it into scrap and start selling. It is also important to note, that to assist the police, just the other day, we handed over to them 50-wheel clamps for cars and we are procuring 200 clamps for trucks. That is for a particular reason because once you make them immobile, you shut them down and you leave them for a while, when people's pockets start being affected, they come into compliance, and they are going to be tough measures. That is why we have the policy paper at the Cabinet Subcommittee which we will be discussing. I

repeat, this is not a targeting anyone, it is bringing back our country to a place of decency where we can operate in a safe manner. The agreement that I am hearing in this House is all of us want the same thing. We might go about doing it in different ways but ultimately, we all want the same thing, and we will achieve that. From time to time, I may call on some of you for your assistance in specific areas, especially where your voice is much louder than our voices. I am not sure that is still the case, but we will collaborate.

Programme: 312 – Public Works – \$10,542,996,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 313 – Transport – \$448,031,000

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6255 – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure. Hon. Minister, does this line item cater for the rehabilitation or maintenance of airstrips? If that is so, how much of this sum is allocated towards the completion of the airstrip at Paruima and when can the residents expect its completion? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, construction of airstrips is a capital project. This is maintenance. There are 120 plus airstrips in Guyana, 78 are under the control of the Ministry of Public Works. There are 54 that are active. This sum here is for the maintenance of those airstrips, ensuring the windsocks are in order, it is properly weeded, the approach is kept clear, visibility for the pilots and so on. As it relates to the issue of Paruima, because it is a matter of concern, the contractor that is working on the Paruima airstrip at no cost to the Government has to get the problems there fixed and as far as I am aware, the last report I had a week ago from the engineer is that work is ongoing. The airstrip is currently closed and it will be reopened as soon as that work is complete in a matter of a few months. A few months, not a lot.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Follow-up on that same answer. Could the Hon. Minister say what is the status and intention with the Wakenaam airstrip in the Essequibo River that has been constructed for a while and is in a terrible state? I know that money is being given to the Wakenaam Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) for maintenance but when one looks at that airstrip, or what is supposed to be an airstrip, it is an *eyesore*. I know Minister Indar will agree with me because he frequents the island. Could we have an update on that Wakenaam airstrip and what really is the intention with that airstrip? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I wanted to be properly advised so I can give the Hon. Member the answer.

4.54 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I wanted to be properly advised before I give the Hon. Member, the answer. We spent about \$1 million in the maintenance of what is. The operation of that airstrip is a different matter – remember the industry determines where they fly and who goes there. The Government and the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) regulate whether the industry starts doing flights or if people want flights to Wakenaam. We are maintaining the airstrip at the level as is, but the industry will have to determine if they are flying there, and if they are doing charters or what. There is \$1 million for the maintenance of what is at Wakenaam.

Mr. Mahipaul: Follow-up, thank you. Is that \$1 million per year?

Bishop Edghill: Per year, Sir.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I implore the Hon. Minister and I am sure Minister Indar and his other Minister there would agree with me, when looking at that airstrip, which was constructed in 2012, I think, if I am not mistaken. Sir, it is my view and I am sure that Minister Indar would agree with me that \$1 million has never been spent to maintain that airstrip, and perhaps there is a need for us to look at what is happening with that \$1 million because as I said it is overgrown with bushes, cows, goats, donkeys, and everything you can think about that have four legs are using it to graze and so on. I do not think we are getting value for that money, and perhaps you should take a closer look at whether it is maintained or not.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, \$1 million works out to just about \$80,000 to \$85,000 a month in terms of weeding – but we will certainly take note of your concerns. We can anticipate new things happening in Wakenaam and in Leguan because I am sure you would like to tell the House that Wakenaam and Leguan have never looked as nice as it is right now. Accessibility to everywhere, every street in Wakenaam and every street in Leguan is being built. So, I am sure that with the kind of new revival and the dynamics of the area we will be able to do that. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I am anticipating, it seems like the Hon. Mr. Mahipaul will be campaigning by airplane. So please fix the issue.

Programme: 313 – Transport – \$448,031, 000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 311 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,108,500,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, may I turn your attention and that of the Hon. Member to Project code 1214800 – Government Buildings – \$1,086,000,000. To the Hon. Member, I recognise that the ministry is requesting the sum of \$1,800,000,000... [Bishop Edghill: A sum of

\$1,086,000,000.] I stand corrected \$1,086,000,000, thank you very much. When I went to the project file, I recognised this sum will cater for two buildings and you know one is very dear to my heart that is the 12-storey complex that I am still looking for, but I will get to that in a short while. I recognise also that the sum will cater for the upgrade of the facility at Coldingen on the East Coast of Demerara. My first question to the Hon. Member, is for him to provide a disaggregation of what will go for this 12-storey mysterious building and what will go for the upgrade facility at Coldingen, that is my first question to the Hon. Member, Mr. Chairman.,.

Bishop Edghill: It is a simple disaggregation, so it is not going to take long. The \$86 million will be used at Coldingen to develop a base –a heavy equipment base, it is not just concrete but putting in a heavy equipment base so that the machines and so on could comfortably rest there and the \$1 billion is for the continuation of works; both in terms of supervision and construction at the new office complex.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Mr. Chairman, this \$1 billion that has been requested for this mysterious 12-storey building will now give us a total figure of \$8.6 billion from 2022 to 2025. Mr. Chairman, I have news for the Hon. Member, because I visited and this is what I have seen on the location, trucks entering to load up with aggregates and stone.

[The Hon. Member displayed photographs.]

This is what is happening on the site, I think this photo was taken on 17th January, 2025, just before the budget was presented. I am concerned because when I run out, the Hon. Member *does*

run out behind me to give updates and you would recall... I recognise on 2nd January, 2025, the Bishop, the very goodly man, I am sorry you are in this hot seat *boy*, but *you gotto tek the blows and come clean*. I recognise my *boy* went to the location and I do not know where and what he was pointing at, right?

[*The Hon. Member displayed photographs.*]

This is my *boy* 2nd January, and this is what the Hon. Member had to say on his at his site visit, I guess he is referring to 2025:

“By the end of January you will be seeing much, much more work being done on site...while not fully satisfied, I am pleased we are getting ahead and we are able to cross some of the hurdles and we are getting this done quickly.”

Now, my question to the Hon. Member, could you provide to this National Assembly a status report on where we are with regards to this 12-storey mysterious built office complex that I am looking for? Mr. Chairman, may I also say, as I am on my feet, Brickdam police station steel up in the air already, King’s Jewellery World hotel is up already, and Aiden by Best Western at Oronoque and Robb Streets is up already. They are finished. I do not know what is happening to this 12-storey complex, so could the Hon. Member provide an update and let us know how the \$7.6 billion spent today and what would this \$1 billion take care of?

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Ferguson for your question. I am happy. I always tell the truth. It has nothing to do with whether I am in the National Assembly or anywhere. I always tell the truth. The issue that the Hon. Member is raising, she is correct. I visited the site with my project team, observing the driving of piles – the driving of piles for the utility section; and just to remind you, it is not a 12- storey office complex, it is four towers 12-storeys, four towers 12-storeys, and all the time I have said that. Four towers, 12-storeys, that could accommodate 6,000 staff. If you are listening, you would have heard that every time, and I have shown the nation pictures of the artistic design for four towers at all material times, and all the geniuses that exist in the engineering field, whether we are qualified or we have made ourselves self-appointed engineers, will know that if you are putting up four towers, 12-storeys high, the foundation is very, very important. You have to get it right. I have reported to this House that we have moved the site from where I initially indicated that it would be on the Heroes Highway, and

we directed you to where it is now. [Ms. Ferguson: *Inaudible*] Could I be allowed to speak? I did not disturb you. You want to get a status report. I am giving it to you.

The design-build contract is subject to reviews by the consultant. The consulting firm in this instance, is VIKAB Engineering Consultants Limited (VECL). When I went on 2nd January, it is because they did all of the tests at the various areas and got the readings to ensure that we had the correct measurement of the piles and the quality of the piles that needed to be done. They were actively driving piles in the utility section to move to the actual tower one, driving up piles. I am happy that you have a photograph, but you should have updated yourself since then, because the media was with me when I went. I did not hide anything from people. I took the media so they could report it. That is how you have the story. We are in full disclosure. We know this issue concerns the people of Guyana, so I took the media with me when I went. I would invite you. If you would like to accompany me, to get on site where you could see properly and not just from the roadway what is happening, but what is on site, well let me give you a status report. [Mr.

Mahipaul: *Inaudible*] *Oh*, the overarching goal of this project is to convert and consolidate, I should say, consolidate various Government offices into a single hub for better interconnectivity and interagency collaboration. When we relocated the facility there, it was because we realised that we made a decision that we will not just go down from the roundabout to connect the Ogle/Eccles road with two lanes. We modified the contract and expanded it for four lanes. There is the connection when coming over the bridge onto the Heroes Highway or when coming from the East Coast. One of the greatest points of accessibility is where the office complex is being put. We have moved from seven to 20 acres. Thirteen acres are being used to build the office complex, and seven acres are for the operations of the Special Projects Unit – its machinery and equipment. Twenty acres of land will be for the ministries and the Special Projects Unit. With that we had to recreate the footprint, which I said was done. As I stood, I checked with the Engineers because I anticipated you. The Engineers came from the site to this meeting. They were actively driving piles to tower one. There are 13 acres for the office complex and seven acres for the Special Projects Unit.

5.09 p.m.

Cabinet has since approved the travel of our Engineer to go and inspect the factories and materials that are still yet to be shipped. I can tell you what we have right now – the generator sets out of

Panama; the Guyana Precast Concrete Incorporated (GPRI) for the supply and delivery of 198, 18 feet(ft) by 18ft and 16ft by 16ft at 105ft long; structural steel from the Classic Heavy Industry Group Company Limited in China; pre-stress hollow core slabs from Turkey; and the rebars from Colombia. The contractor has been paid his mobilisation advance, like I reported – the normal percentage Sir. There is nothing fishy; it is the normal percentage. We have paid for materials. This \$1 billion that is being sought is to facilitate payment for both the Supervisory Consultant and other costs that will come with the construction. Once we get our heavy load of the materials in.... It is a steel structure, and I know you are being very impatient because you would like to see the completed tower to admire the work of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). You will get an opportunity to do that very shortly. The efforts being made to get this done, are moving ahead. That is where we are.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I listened to the Hon. Member. Though I am not satisfied, I will move on. **[Mr. Norton]:** *[(Inaudible)]* Hear me out. This is the on the same thing, Leader of the Opposition. I am moving out from this. I am questioning. Sometime last year, I heard at – I think – some press conference, that Cabinet approved the travel of this Engineer. You have identified four countries where these steels and materials are being fabricated – Panama, China, Turkey and Colombia. Could I ask if the Cabinet has granted the approval for a staff or two to travel to all these countries to inspect these steel frames that are being fabricated? That is one. Secondly, when is the staff expected to travel and for what period? Thirdly, you made mention that the contractor has been paid mobilisation funds – \$7.6 billion as of 31st December, 2024. Could you say what is the total sum that the contractor has been paid to date? That is the first question.

Bishop Edghill: The Engineer is going to Colombia next week – that is one. Number two, Cabinet has approved... You know the system; you were a Minister of the Government. Government officers travelling overseas must have Cabinet's approval, but a contract provides for the contractor, the consultant and the Government's Engineer, to verify. There are six purchase orders that were honoured, totalling \$4,022,829,000. There are six purchase orders. These, as I told you, are for the generator sets; GPRI for the supply and delivery of piles; the structural steel from the Classic Heavy Industry Group Company Limited in China; the pre-stress hollow blocks, core slabs from Turkey; and the rebars out of Colombia. All these areas will be visited in a matter of months. We are structuring it. That is what we are doing.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, could I ask the Hon. Minister to tell us what percentage of this money is being spent on foundation? What percentage will be spent on towers? What percentage was delivered for mobilisation? It could be both percentage and amounts.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition, for your question. I could inform you that this project is a design-build project. It is a design-build project. The total mobilisation advance that was paid was \$2.6 billion. A total of \$1,837,932,278 billion was repaid under the Integrated Public Complex (IPC) 1. A balance of \$762 million remains outstanding on the mobilisation advance. We have paid the \$4,022,829,877. We have paid that in the six purchase orders. You could put your figures together and you will see where we are. The \$1 billion is to continue paying the Supervisory Consultant and whatever else needs to be paid this year as the building advances.

Mr. Norton: The Hon. Member did not answer the question, what is the cost of the foundation and what is the cost for the remainder of the...

Bishop Edghill: I could actually get that to the Parliament if you so desire from the consultant and the contractor – what has been spent on foundation of what is being spent on... We do not have it here with us. In a design-build environment, you could only pay, Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, for work that is delivered. The work that has been delivered on IPC 1 which is deducted from the mobilisation is \$1.8 billion.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, could I ask the Member – am I to infer from what he is saying that he does not have a plan which states... If I am building a little house – a little *poco poco* house – it has to get a curb wall foundation. Are you saying, Hon. Minister, that you have to wait to tell us what the foundation will cost and what the towers will cost? Explain for me, I am in trouble.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, untroubled the Leader of the Opposition.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I indicated that we could easily get that information to hand over to the Committee. We do not have it here with us. If you are going to be doing a project of this magnitude, you must have the cost breakdown. There is an Engineer from the International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC). Apart from the Ministry's Engineer, there is a FIDIC Engineer who is overseeing the project. We can only pay based upon the approvals that come from the FIDIC's Engineer. Thank you.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chair, in 2023, they paid \$ 2,654.387 billion, what was that paid for?

Bishop Edghill: It is the mobilisation advance, Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Norton: That is good. There is 2023 again for \$4 billion, plus. What was that for?

Bishop Edghill: I have just outlined to the House, the six purchase orders.

Mr. Patterson: Just for completeness, Sir, the six purchase orders are to the contractor. Who is the consultant; what is his contract sum; and how much have you paid to him?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the consultant came through a public procurement process. The name of the consultant is Vikab Engineering.

Mr. Patterson: What is the contract sum?

Bishop Edghill: What is the contract sum? Give me one second. Give me one second, Mr. Chairman. They are getting it off the system. We will get that figure for the Hon. Member. They are trying to retrieve it from the system.

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

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, have you recognised me?

Mr. Chairman: I did.

Ms. Ferguson: All right. Thank you very much. All right, Mr. Chairman, I am quoting from an article carried by *Guyana Chronicle* on the 21st of January 2024. It is headlined:

“Work to commence soon on \$15.8 billion state-of-the-art government complex”

Here is my Hon. Bishop Edghill. The article quotes him and states:

“The contract for the facility was signed on December 30, 2022 with Caribbean Green Building Inc. and is set to be completed within 30 months of the beginning of construction.”

So, 2024 finish and that was 12 months; and 2023 finish, another twelve months. This was 24 months in total with the spill-off we had from 2022. Could the Hon. Member state: one, if this project is lagging behind; the reason for it lagging behind; three, does this very contractor have the

capacity to do the project since he is currently building the Four-Point Sheraton Airport Hotel and Resort? Those are my questions to the Hon. Member. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: I did call Mr. Patterson instead of Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes. I heard you called, Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Chairman: I am sorry. You have my apologies.

Ms. Ferguson: I am Ms. Ferguson.

Mr. Chairman: You have my apologies.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, there is always a difficulty in answering the same question over and over and over. [Ms. Ferguson: Bishop Edghill, you are not coming clean.] I am coming clean with you. I told this Committee before that even though the contract was signed, we did not issue the commencement order because we were changing the location. We brought that to the House.

5.24 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you did.

Bishop Edghill: I have said that repeatedly. The status now is this: from the time of the Commencement Order, 10% of the project has been physically completed, while 34% of the time has elapsed. That is where we are. Thirty-four per cent of the construction time has elapsed, and 10% of the work has been completed. That is the current status update.

Mr. Chairman: Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

Mr. Norton: This would give me an idea, Mr. Chairman. Do you want to go? [Mr. Patterson: No. You go ahead. (*Inaudible*)]

Mr. Chairman: I already said, Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Norton: The Ministry provided the employment impact and the number of workers to be employed in these projects. However, in this case, it is for 2025, and none was provided. Could the Minister answer those questions for us regarding the employment impact and how many workers are employed at this stage in the project? **[Bishop Edghill:** Is it for this location?]
Yes.

Bishop Edghill: I will help the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and Mr. Patterson with the question they were inquiring about. The consultancy contract for Vikab Engineering Consultants Limited is \$1,320,000,000... **[Mr. Patterson:** One billion and what?] ...and \$32 million.

[Mr. Patterson: *(Inaudible)*] I am sure you have dealt with him before, so you should know that. **[Mr. Patterson:** That is why I am telling you about him.] Good. The second thing, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, is that about 32 persons are working on-site. For a project of this size, and because of what is happening in the various areas, there are people who are working off-site. I said that to this Committee before. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** We want to see it.] You will be seeing it soon.

Ms. Ferguson: I think this will be my final question. To the Hon. Member, in response to the project lagging behind, you said 34% has elapsed. Would it be safe for me to ask when exactly the project will commence and if there is a new timeline for its completion? If there is a new timeline for completion, could you say when exactly that will be?

Bishop Edghill: The Commencement Order began on 23rd February, 2024 and 30 months remain. The project is to be completed by August, 2026. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** *(Inaudible)*] It is 30 months in August, 2026. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** *(Inaudible)*].

Mr. Chairman: Well, you will inherit it. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much. The Hon. Member failed to answer part of the question put to him.

Mr. Chairman: I do not know about failed; the Minister gave an answer. You did not get the answer you wanted to hear. That is another story.

Ms. Ferguson: All right, Mr. Chairman. I asked the question whether the contractor, Green Building Construction Incorporated, has the capacity to commence the project, given that the very

contractor is currently working on the Four Points Sheraton Hotel, which is parallel to the Heroes' Highway

Bishop Edghill: The evaluation of contractors' technical and financial capacity is something that is not done by me; it is done by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB). When contracts are negotiated and offered, the Ministry executes them, but as far as I am aware, the contractor is getting his work done. As the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, indicated, while I am not satisfied – and I used that language to the contractor on-site – we issued a Commencement Order on 23rd February, 2024. We reported the relocation to the House. This is not news that we are making now. I addressed this at a press conference at the end of 2023. We came to the 2024 Budget and spent at least 40 minutes on this particular subject. If there are concerns about a matter, those concerns – as we would have seen happen here – should be raised, but we should never use the National Assembly to create impressions that do not exist. I am saying to you, just like we had done with every other contractor who has not performed, they will get their letters of poor performance and out of the 5,000 or more contracts that we presided over in 2024, less than 1% had to be terminated or disbanded. Now, tell me about that performance. Our engineers and managers are doing their best to ensure we get value for money in terms of quality, time, and delivery, and while we are doing our work, there is minimum interference with the population to ensure safety. These are the clear policy directives on how we are going forward. I am telling you now, if this contractor cannot deliver, we will give an early warning sign and start serving letters of poor performance. I will accompany you to the site when we deliver the termination letter. Thank you.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, in normal economics and project management, if there is an overrun in a project, the cost is likely to go up. Could the Hon. Member assure this Committee that this project will be done at the stated cost? If he cannot, what projections does he have as to where the cost will go, and what will this cost the people of Guyana?

Bishop Edghill: This is a fixed-price contract. We have communicated explicitly, both in writing within the contract and at our project meetings, that this project has to be delivered as designed at a cost within the timeframe. It is explicit.

Ms. Ferguson: This is my last question on this line item. Since this building cost \$15.8 billion, I would like to request that the Hon. Member lay over in this Committee of Supply all of the project documents, commencing with the contract. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Would the Minister lay over this?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I am not sure I can do that. You would have to guide me on this. [Ms. Ferguson: You want to hide it.] There is nothing to hide, I will be putting everybody's contract, who are doing everything, in the newspapers.? There are dangers involved in this because shakedowns and so on could take place.

Mr. Norton: Are you saying, Hon. Member, that this Committee, which the people have elected and who are responsible for representing them, cannot be told the details of a contract involving over \$15 billion?

Bishop Edghill: I have already given all of the details of the contract that are for public consumption. Mr. Chairman, please advise the Leader of the Opposition. Any document that is laid in this Committee of Supply or the National Assembly is not only for the Members of Parliament. It goes to the media and becomes part of the public record, where any citizen, with good or bad intent, can have access to it. That is what I am saying.

Mr. Norton: Could I ask you what is wrong with that? Are you trying to suggest to us that there is some confidentiality clause in it? If there is not, then it follows *ipso facto* that you are obligated to table it here.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman – and I could be guided by the Hon. Member, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance and the Public Service – I am no *novice* around the House since I have served before, and I was in Opposition in the National Assembly. I would like any Member of the then government to stand up and tell us which contract was given to the National Assembly and the public – name the contract – including the Leader of the Opposition. Do not ask for something that you know has consequences because when you were in the seat, you did not do that. Please, do not create illusions that do not exist. There is a contract and there is an International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC) consultant that is supervising the execution of the contract. This contract has to be audited by the Auditor General

(AG). All of the queries that you may have will come from an audit report. While a contract is being executed – Mr. Patterson, who served as the Minister of Public Infrastructure, and the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, who served as the Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure – please name and tell the Guyanese people this afternoon, which contract that was being executed by the two of you when you were at the Ministry was laid in the Committee of Supply or the National Assembly?

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I was trying to urge my Colleagues to go and... [Bishop Edghill: Name the contract.] With regard to the renovation of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), every single document, I personally, walked over and handed it to the Hon. Member. He has a staff there ...

Mr. Chairman: All right. Please, Mr. Patterson, hold on.

Mr. Patterson: No. I wanted to move on, but he called my name.

Mr. Chairman: Just hold on. I am listening carefully. Laying over means that we are tabling documents so that everybody gets it. Personally walking and handing it over is a different story.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I handed him personally and then I gave it to the staff. The Clerk is right there. I handed it to him personally because there is always a rumour that the staff did not give him.

Mr. Chairman: You can move on, then. You are saying that you are going to move on to...

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I wanted [inaudible].

Mr. Chairman: All right. We will check that.

Programme: 311 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,108,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 312 – Public Works – \$225,304,312,000

Mr. Patterson: I am reading from the capital project profile. Would you like me to give you the project code? Sir, you have \$450 million here for the Demerara Harbour Bridge, and it states:

“...gantry, end post, anchor chain, ... patrol boat.”

This is very good. I have no problem at all with the allocation. I just have a question. This is to be done immediately because on 1st September, this will no longer be needed. Could this procurement be done between now and 31st August? That is the first question.

5.39 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: I have elucidated on the matter of the Demerara Harbour Bridge in the House too often. Tomorrow morning, there will be an extra 30 minutes of the opening of the bridge because the staff who work there day and night, to minimise interruption of traffic, will use the time when we are passing through marine traffic, whether southbound or northbound, to do maintenance work. Trucks – articulated vehicles, even though managing at 18 tons – the way they drive on the bridge have been destroying components of the bridge, including end posts. The \$450 million that we are asking for is for: the procurement of anchor chains – \$116 million; fabrication of 310-foot deck plates – \$120 million; procurement and operation of patrol boats – \$95 million; rehabilitation of 60 end posts – \$54 million; rehabilitation of gantry – \$45 million; and rehabilitation of the dredge – \$20 million. Just the other day, one would have seen the *Facebook* post that span 10 encountered a little problem and even though they got it fixed within 30 minutes, the impatience that existed and the comments... This is just to keep the bridge operational. I think I said, and I repeat again, that when we were asking the Committee for money for span 9, when this new bridge becomes operational, the Demerara Harbour Bridge will not be scrapped iron. There are places where the bridge can be used. It is not money that is being thrown into the fire. It is to keep it going and to ensure that when we have to move it elsewhere, we have a proper bridge to move. I am sure you support that.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I never queried the need for it. I said the bridge is an old girl, 47 years old, do you know what I mean? I just wanted to ensure that I got what the allocation is for. Therefore, now I move on to my more substantive question. What happens to the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation (DHBC) on 1st September, 2025, given that 31st August is the drop-dead date? There are 155 employees. They will no longer be needed. There will be no tolls collected. There will be no bridge to maintain. I want to make sure, that is why I asked my question.

Where is the severance pay for the workers catered for? You said the old bridge would not be scrapped iron. This question came to me from the employees.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to doubt the Hon. Member that this question came from the employees, but it did. I have already assured all of the employees on the first working day of the year and the General Manager is here. I went to every agency under my supervision, or our supervision and I spoke with the workers. The reality of the new bridge coming into being was discussed with them. I can stand here as a representative of the Government of Guyana, the Mr. Irfaan Ali-led PPP/C Administration and say to the workers and to all their families that are listening to me, this caring Government will not throw any of them to the curb because of a new bridge. We will not do that. It is in not our deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). It is not our *modus operandi*. It is not our conscience. We are a caring Government. Listen, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation, has some of the finest welders that this country has. Mr. Patterson knows that. These men go out when it is raining, Mr. Jones, and they weld and fix things. Their services will always be needed. [Mr. Patterson: Are you paying severance?]

We have not gotten to the place of severance. They may continue to be employed somewhere. If we are moving the bridge to take it to some other location, is it not them who will have to carry it? They have to dismantle it. They have to fix it back. Let us not use the National Assembly, which makes laws, to formulate policies. A Policy is formulated at the level of the Executive, which is the Cabinet. We make laws here. When the policy is set out and it is clear, we will make that public to everybody. Thank you.

Mr. Norton: How long will it take?

Mr. Patterson: Sorry, Leader of the Opposition. I am pleased, on behalf of the 155 employees. When the new Demerara Harbour Bridge comes on the 1st September, the Minister said he is making an application for them. Could I ask the Minister where? Where in this Budget have you allocated money since the Bridge will be earning no revenue? Where will the cleaners go, because they cannot weld? Where will the tollbooth attendants go? Where is the money allocated in this Budget?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, grandstanding is not something that I enjoy. However, if grandstanding is required, I will grandstand. I will grandstand if that is what is required. The 155

workers that Mr. Patterson is talking about at the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation have a union. A union that you particularly do not like, which is the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU). Their union is GAWU. There is a GAWU representative who sits on the board of the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation who represents the workers. Mr. Patterson does not represent the workers of the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation. Their union represents them. If we are going to have grandstanding, I will grandstand in the Committee of Supply. I am not going to allow fear, pandemonium and panic to go to the people thinking that, hey, these people are going to throw us off the line. That is what this is going into, and I take serious umbrage concerning it. You are not the representative of the workers; the Union is. Mr. Chairman, I would like to repeat for the Committee of Supply and all the people of Guyana, we, at the appropriate time, with policy direction formulated at Cabinet, will engage the workers and the workers' union about the future of the workers, ensuring that none of them is thrown to the curb. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may proceed.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, permit me to correct at least one falsehood. It is said that the National Assembly does not formulate policy. It does legislation. I indicated to you that when a policy such as the policy you adopted in the National Assembly – a youth policy was adopted in the National Assembly – it was adopted, and policy can come to the National Assembly. May I go to the second contention? It is true that in the realms...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, are you asking a question or are you making a statement?

Mr. Norton: I did not hear that. Let me just finish and then I will ask the question.

Mr. Chairman: No, we are asking...

Mr. Norton: I am asking... *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

Mr. Chairman: Could the Committee allow me to address the Leader of the Opposition? We are asking questions pertaining to this project code and the policies for which this allocation is, it is a

fair game. However, we are now giving a lecture with respect to overall policy and what could come to the National Assembly and what could not. I thought you were standing to say the National Assembly represents everybody, and this is our business too. Is that not so, Mr. Minister?

Bishop Edghill: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Norton: I will ask the question.

Mr. Chairman: Good.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, do not forget, it is he who promised to grandstand. The question I want to ask the Member is, what is the plan for the workers of the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation?

Mr. Chairman: That was asked. Hon. Minister, you have another opportunity to...

Bishop Edghill: For the purposes of clarity, Sir, policies are made by the Executive Branch. It can be brought to the National Assembly to be adopted, but we do not sit in a Committee of Supply to make policy. That is the point I am making. That is what I was addressing. **[Mr. Norton:** You said the National Assembly makes (inaudible)] The National Assembly does not make policy. The National Assembly make laws. The executive branch makes policies. Secondly, for the issue that is at hand, we, as a Government, would like to assure all the people of the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation... I dare say to you, they have never been this comfortable, in terms of being compensated in history. They are satisfied. The new management that is there has earned its stripes of ensuring that the workers' welfare is taken care of, because people come first for us; things come after. That is our policy. We love people and use things. We do not love things and use people. That is the difference here on this side of the House.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I think this is a good time to put the question...

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead. We are at Programme 312, Public Works. Are we not at Programme 312, capital expenditure?

Mr. Patterson: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Did you say I put the question before?

Mr. Patterson: You were going to put the question, so I asked for Programme 312. Is it still open?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. It is still open.

Mr. Patterson: For the new Demerara Harbour Bridge crossing, in the capital project profile, this year, the figure is \$20,155,600. There was a big press conference four months ago, which put the bridge at 70% completion. The management of the Bridge itself said it will be completed at the end of the year, and then there is a drop-dead date of 31st August, 2025. I would like to ask two questions of the Ministers. What percentage of work would have been done since your last major announcement of 70% completion, and what is the current percentage? Are there any outstanding claims?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I would have loved to avoid having to respond to such a question, but I could read what our report states. The project was 78% completed, and 61.72% of the bridge was completed. We had the landmark event when girders started to be installed, but the Hon. Member asking the question fully well knows that we could not have handed over the right-away to the contractor because of, and he knows the because.

5.54 p.m.

We approached the courts because we were working out compensation and relocation benefits with everybody that was within the alignment of the East Bank Demerara Public Road and the water side on the eastern side of the bridge. This bridge could have been advanced. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson knows that when you are doing construction, when pouring concrete, it has to cure before you can proceed to the next level. We lost time because we could not put down the pairs in the section, and the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, was the Quantity Surveyor that gave people valuation that built an expectation that was way beyond the sky, which the court did not even honour. I have said it in the National Assembly, and I have said it before; politics played an important role in the delaying of this bridge because persons who were closely aligned to the Opposition worked with those residents to block their moving, to delay this bridge... [An

Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*) Take me wherever you want to take me on this. Take me to the Committee of Privileges if you want to take me. Carry me wherever you want to carry me. Sue me

if you want to sue. I have the evidence. The Hon. Member did not even show up in the court to defend his valuation. If you give people a valuation, you should go in the court and defend it.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, do you know what is sad, the people...

Mr. Chairman: Hold a minute, Minister. Are you standing on a Point of Order, Hon. Member?

Mr. Patterson: Yes, Sir. I would ask him to withdraw that, Sir.

Bishop Edghill: Withdraw what?

Mr. Patterson: That I never represented the people. I represent the people every day and I stand by it. If the Hon. Member ...

Mr. Chairman: Hold a second, please. I asked you if you are standing on a Point of Order and you said yes. You have to tell me, firstly, what the Point of Order is and then I will make a ruling on that. You do not proceed to make a speech.

Mr. Patterson: Very good, Sir. My apologies.

Mr. Chairman: It is accepted.

Mr. Patterson: The Hon. Member has imputed that I declined or never went to represent clients on a case.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I did not hear you fully but if you are saying that he represented clients rather than give valuation, it is two different things, so you will need to withdraw.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, let me make it pellucid for the people of Guyana.

Mr. Chairman: Do not make it pellucid. I will check the records and if you are saying that he represented people, we will strike it.

Bishop Edghill: I am saying that he provided valuations in his capacity ...

Mr. Chairman: That is what I thought I heard. The Hon. Member is saying something else, so we will have to check it.

Bishop Edghill: When the Government went to court to ask an impartial arbiter to set the price for compensation to the good citizens of Guyana... If one was not satisfied with what the Government was offering, let a court of competent jurisdiction and an independent arbiter declare the sum. That is all we went to court for. Mr. Patterson could have gone to the court to defend his...

Mr. Chairman: You are repeating, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Patterson: Sir ...

Mr. Chairman: Hold on, Hon. Member, please. I do not know if it is his responsibility to go to court to defend unless ...

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I did go to court.

Mr. Chairman: Did you go to court?

Mr. Patterson: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: That is why I said he should withdraw that.

Mr. Chairman: That should be withdrawn. He went to court.

Mr. Patterson: I went to court on several occasions. Mr. Burch-Smith was his lawyer. Sorry [inaudible]

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to go into all the details. He probably sat in the court. Did he defend his figures in the court?

Mr. Patterson: I defended every penny....

Bishop Edghill: You did not.

Mr. Patterson: The Hon. Member should tell the world what he ended up paying.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the MP is saying that he did. Let us proceed.

Bishop Edghill: I will proceed. I followed this... [Mr. Norton: (*Inaudible*)] Mr. Leader of the Opposition, let us be fair. The truth cannot be hidden. It does not need clutches. The people know. Let us say it. The people who did not even have titles to lands, we offered them titled properties, plus moneys for their moving. The court ruled that they were not entitled to lands, and that they just get the moneys. The person who stood up publicly with her cell phone that was shown to the whole world, that Bishop Edghill was bullying her, ended up at my office, trying to work out a deal because she did not even have a title or ownership to the property. That is what politicians were doing. All of the cases were settled; every single one was settled. In the three remaining cases that had dispute about compensation, we agreed with the court that we would lodge a specific sum with the Registrar until those matters are determined. In one case, one of the persons who was acting and behaving as if he had the title, we had to agree with the court because he did not have any legal entitlement to the money that was being paid to him. We paid the rent for all the persons to move to a house while their houses were under construction. Staff from my Ministry went with the Hiab trucks and labourers to move peoples' furnishings with clear instructions that nothing should be damaged.

We had an instance where somebody was having mental health challenges. We stayed the operation until that person was stabilised. The husband and the family moved, and that person returned. We failed to demolish because people's welfare comes before things. In every instance, the PPP/C Government treated the people there with care and ensured that whatever was required... My Permanent Secretary (PS) is sitting right here. As the judge made the orders, the cheques were written immediately. As we got the orders, cheques were made and paid. [Mr. Norton: What time (*inaudible*)?] It does not have anything to do with time. It has to do with the truth. We would like to come now and say the bridge is delayed, but the bridge is delayed because of actions taken, and it is the same thing that happened elsewhere.

Mr. Patterson: We will address this point otherwise. Every citizen by law, has the right to carry anything to court. They have the right to choose a lawyer and representatives who they want and who they feel are competent, irrespective of the opinion of the Minister. What the people of this country would really like to know is...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, if you do not have another question, I will put the question.

Mr. Patterson: I am moving on.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, please.

Mr. Patterson: Just on passing, maybe the Hon. Minister would like to lay here and be transparent and tell us how much he paid. For the East Coast Demerara - East Bank Demerara Road Linkage, \$7.74 billion is allocated. Could the Hon. Minister say the status of the project for us?

Bishop Edghill: One second, my engineers will just give me one piece of guidance. This project, even though criticised during the general debate that it is behind time, is 94% completed. We have also ensured that the connector at Haags Bosch road moved from two lanes to four lanes. All of that will be completed before the end of February this year. This is also a good time to thank the residents of Ogle, for whom we had to acquire properties. It shows the difference of when human beings act as patriots and as citizens, as against when they are politically inspired and counselled. The three families who have given us, based upon our law, to acquire and pay compensation, because they want the road to be done in a timely manner, even before everything was completed, gave us access to the properties that we wanted. What a big difference. It is 94% completed. [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] If you hear the prices...

Mr. Patterson: I am glad that he has completed... Leader of the Opposition, they probably treated him like a person at Lot 55, Peter's Hall, where they paid him \$55 million. The one next door, they only wanted to pay \$14 million.

Mr. Chairman: I am going to put this Head if you continue to make these side statements rather than ask a question.

Mr. Patterson: I was just educating the Leader of the Opposition, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Please, come on. We have time, but your interventions are not questions.

Mr. Patterson: My apologies, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: You are now asking for a comparison between compensation at Ogle versus Peter's Hall.

Mr. Patterson: I was just responding to the Leader of the Opposition, Sir. My apologies. I am moving on. For the Highway Improvement East Coast Demerara, there is \$17.477 billion, and it is for five projects, according to the capital project profile. Could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to disaggregate them? Tell us the percentage completed and the completion dates for projects 1, 2, and 3, and the feasibility study and design for project 5; what are they, when were they done or when will they be done?

Bishop Edghill: For the avoidance of doubt, that anyone could claim discrimination, the compensation paid to the people at Ogle, none of them exceeded \$2 million. There is silence in the House. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] You are making excuses now. The four-lane that is being built from Sheriff Street to Orange Nassau and the upgrade of the road from Belfield to Mahaica are moving apace. We have a major challenge. The transmission lines are in the alignment of the road. While one would have seen work being done, we understand the frustration of the people every time there is a power outage. We have worked with the Chinese to develop a methodology on how we can get sections of the road completed and useable, while we are waiting to move the transmission lines. The transmission lines will be moved to the backlands, which will be part of the integrated upgrade of the Guyana Power and Light, Incorporated (GPL). The only other place we had to move the transmission lines was towards the seawalls.

6.09 p.m.

The residents and good people of the East Coast cried against it because kite flying is still a big issue in Guyana. We do not want anyone being electrocuted. Right now, there are six contractors that have been awarded contracts for the building of the road at the back so that we can get access to put in the transmission lines; while the contractor continues to build out on the three lanes that are available to them until we get to move the transmission lines. Since you were the Minister that was responsible for Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL), when you were in office, you will know that in order to de-energise the transmission lines on the Railway Embankment, we have to energise the one at the back first. We are working with GPL, the contractor and all parties involved. We are working to get that thoroughfare fixed. We used to have major problems on the East Bank. I know you lived in Eccles, and you would get caught in that congestion before the Heroes Highway, on a daily, while trying to head into Georgetown. All of us, including the Leader of the Opposition, depending on what time he leaves home, would know that coming off from the

East Coast right now, the congestion is of a similar nature like what transpires. You could take 30-40 minutes in the traffic to get into Georgetown just because of the volume and what is taking place.

There is a major upgrade that would also include that you can turn Ogle, and you can connect with Aubrey Barker Road. Aubrey Barker Road is being pushed all the way to Ogle, contractors are working on it right now. So, you can come from Ogle and connect with Aubrey Barker Road, then you can come to Ogle on the same road we were talking about just now that Ashoka Buildcon Limited, that the Indians are building and you can connect with Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Facility, and you will be able to connect with the Demerara Harbour Bridge. The contracts for connecting the roads with the Demerara Harbour Bridge have already been awarded, contractors are in place and work has started. We have improved Conversation Tree so you could have another artery if you are heading south, we have brought it to out to Dennis Street, we are now moving it to Francios Avenue. That contract has already been signed, and work is taking place. [Mr.

Patterson: (*Inaudible*)] You have to come out to Sheriff street, and we will continue to develop as we go along. The bridge at Dennis Street, which is a choke point because it is narrow, we have to expand that, and we will put in four lanes at Dennis street. Two on the alignment that currently exists and two on the northern side of the trench. The Bills to that have already being formulated, you will have several possibilities of interacting. Mr. Norton and Ms. Ferguson, when you get out to Mandela, we are currently putting in the street, because you are in that area steady. Sussex Street is connecting from Mandela Avenue, all the way down to High Street and that is being improved.

Mr. Chairman: The Lombard Street, actually.

Bishop Edghill: Yes, the Princess Street when you come through Cemetery Road that some of us thought would never be finished, it is now moving all the way down to High Street. So, we are expanding and creating alternatives to deal with the sheer volume and increasing traffic. We have to work with our partners to get this East Coast Corridor completed in the shortest possible time and we are working on it. [Mr. Patterson: What is the percentage?] What is the percentage of what?

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman.

Bishop Edghill: Yes, we have completed 47%.

Mr. Chairman: Leader of the Opposition, the Minister is on his feet, let him complete.

Mr. Norton: It is well established that...

Mr. Chairman: Are you finished there, Minister?

Bishop Edghill: Yes, 47% of it is completed.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, go ahead Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Norton: It is well established that the way that the roads are being done, it is not solving directional conflicts... **[Bishop Edghill: It is what?]** It is not solving directional conflicts.

[Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] It is a straight question, how is this approach going to reduce congestion if it is not dealing with the directional conflicts, that is what I am asking.

Bishop Edghill: In the last four years, in Guyana, we have seen significant improvement to our thoroughfares, geometric improvements at intersections, all of that is being done to deal with traffic flow. Now, the Leader of the Opposition is raising a point, and he is saying that it is established, but it is not established, it is not. If we have more considerate road use, traffic would be flowing better. Look at the roundabout, you do not stop in a roundabout **[Ms. Ferguson: But you have police in the roundabout.]** The police have to there because of the lawlessness in the roundabout. An enforcement just like we were saying just now about the truck and the derelicts, it has to be a collective approach where we get people to use... on Sheriff Street, there is a cycle lane. I am sure you have been undertaken in the cycle lane on the Sheriff Street already. So, the issue here is that we have to get more lanes, we have to be able to get more people participating in cautious, careful, considerate driving and using our roads in a proper way, thank you.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I asked a simple question... *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

How does it deals with directional conflicts? Mr. Chairman, I am being told that is eases congestion, but Sheriff Street was never a congested like it is now. We can condemn people for their attitude, I have no problem with you saying that we have problems with the attitude of our

drivers. However, the question of coming out from Mocha Arcadia, Eccles or any one of them on that highway, has nothing to do with attitude. It has to do with construction that did not deal with the directional conflict.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you. Yes. Mr. Chair, in my own manner I might describe what the Leader of the Opposition has just told the nation that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) administration are now victims of their own success. The volume of traffic has increased because of the policy initiatives that makes it more affordable for car ownership, see how the series are clicking and changing fast. Guyana is a construction zone, work is taking place everywhere, trucks have to carry this and canters; so, there is more traffic. It is the success story that is putting us in the position we are in. I am happy that the Leader of the Opposition has admired that our policies have created a success, but it has also created a challenge; and we will deal with that challenge. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I am tempted and I am asking myself if I could ask a question.

Bishop Edghill: I will indulge, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I will stop the clock. This is the second time I will agree with the Opposition Leader, no one is studying - do not tell me about traffic flows - again, I drive Sheriff Street almost twice a day and it is the most congested time. It is easier for me to go straight across Sandy Babb Street, Vlissengen road, or go right down and cut through St. Stephen's Street and go at the back. That is one and two, when we introduced traffic circles, we never taught the people how to use it.

Bishop Edghill: That is true.

Mr. Chairman: That is true, the first thing you do is use the left lane to go for the first turn off on the second. If you want to go to the third and fourth, the inner lane, simple. I think we need to sit down and listen to people, the road users in particular, because as simple as Mr. Sam Hinds, the former President, used to say, 'it is about flows, study flows'. I think we have exhausted this, do you agree with me Mr. Patterson?

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am not going back on that, I have other questions on this here, and I agree with you 100%, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Your clock was stopped three minutes ago.

Mr. Patterson: If it is anything, Sir, once again, we on this side give our commitment that we will work on this particular traffic issue anytime with anyone.

Mr. Chairman: I am prepared to volunteer.

Mr. Patterson: Pardon me?

Mr. Chairman: I am prepared to volunteer.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, Sir we will, because it is a national issue.

Bishop Edghill: Even Minister Benn will tell you, when we first introduced traffic lights, I had to intervene.

Mr. Patterson: Yes Sir, so we will and I am on that. I am moving on...

Mr. Chairman: You still have 12 minutes remaining.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, that is why I am moving on, Linden/Mabura, this project was supposed to be completed, and it is not. I would like to be provided with the status update, Sir. The question at claims and noticed that the Opposition were not there to be involved. The contract was halted last year June for several months, could the Hon. Member say what caused that, has it been resolved and when could we anticipate? Today, 40 of the 147 kilometres are reported to be completed, when could the country expect this? **[Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** 40 of the 121 kilometres, my bad.

Bishop Edghill: This project is lagging; it is 39% completed. The initial date of completion was the 19th June, 2025, which is six months away. The Hon. Member has asked about the issue of claims, it is an interesting question because I noticed in today's online news, there was a story that was announced that this project is now for December 2025 completion. If that is being mischievous, I do not know, but as the Minister responsible, I am unaware of any engagement with my team or with the Fédération Internationale des Ingénieurs-Conseils/ International Federation of Consulting (FIDIC) Engineer, that we have agreed on a 31st December, 2025 completion. I am using this opportunity to clarify that. The House and the nation should know that the contractor

after taking the project, came with a number of propositions trying to use clauses of the contract to say that he is entitled to this and entitled to that. We shared differences on views, they invoked price escalation clauses which went to the Dispute Adjudication Board (DAB) and there have been continuous dialogue and negotiations with the contractor and at this time while we are having dialogue and negotiations, when we have not settled on everything, if others would like to be reckless, we, as a Government will maintain good faith that the ongoing talks, negotiations and settlement – we will not pronounce on that now but we will say clearly: the interests of the people of Guyana will be our number one priority when we deal with this matter.

6.24 p.m.

The Government of Guyana has gone past just the Linden/Mabura Road. We are looking right now to move the road to Kurupukari. We have three lots from Mabura Hill to Kurupukari. All the bridges from Mabura Hill to Kurupukari are under construction, just like how we have completed all the bridges from Kurupukari all the way into Lethem. The Pirara, which made the news – we did not finish it in time. The water came. It was high water. People were seen there with boats. Yes, it was true. The bridge is now completed. We are looking at an engagement, discussing with different parties how to make this hemispheric link to be complete in the shortest possible time. We will continue to engage. The contractor is working. Yes, there are issues that are not resolved, we are behind time, and as soon as we can get all of these things worked out – just like we would have done with any other project – we have nothing to hide. We will tell the nation what is going on. Since we are at this stage, I will reserve my right to not prejudice the outcome by only saying where we are.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. I am moving on. I think we have about 15 minutes left.

Mr. Chairman: I have seven minutes.

Mr. Patterson: You have to give me back the time that you used.

Mr. Chairman: I did add back the three minutes.

Mr. Patterson: The time before, Sir. I move on...

Mr. Chairman: We started at four for two and a half hours. It should be 6.30 p.m., so I added three minutes to 6.33. I will give you another minute because of this exchange.

Mr. Patterson: Gracious, Sir. I move on. There is the Farm access road. There are Parika, Goshen, Makouria and Timehri. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate those three sets and give us the contract sum, the individual percentage completed for the three sections and the anticipated completion date for the farm access roads? There are three projects there. Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Parika/Goshen road is being done in phases. I think I told the House that the bridge across the Bonasika... Is it the Bonasika Creek or the Makouria? Bonasika Creek. The bridge – I think it is 120 metres or something like that – the bridge across the Bonasika, which will make the link complete, is now out for tendering. On the Sand Hill to Bartica, the bridge at the Makouria Creek, which is about 50 metres long, has already been awarded. The bridges from Schoonord all the way through to Parika – we are now out to tender for those bridges. Right now, you can drive from Sand Hill to Foulmouth, but you will have challenges because the bridge is not there, depending on the height of the water. The entire alignment from Parika to Goshen has already been cut. The entire alignment from Schoonord to Parika has already been cut. We have been moving this in phases. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, thank you very much for the answer. It is very clear, Sir. The money that you have allocated here – if I am listening to you – the \$3 billion and what the public can glean, is primarily for the bridges because I asked you to disaggregate it and you told us the Parika bridge, Sand Hill bridge...

Bishop Edghill: I can give you the disaggregated form. Let me help you.

Mr. Patterson: That is what we asked, Sir. Also, the Bonasika bridge.

Bishop Edghill: Let me help you. Moleson Creek to El Dorado – you know we have been building the road from Moleson Creek going back, opening up farmlands to El Dorado – \$250 million. Sorry. Moleson Creek to El Dorado serves two purposes. That is where we are connecting with the abutment of the Corentyne River Bridge, and we are moving the road in... [Mr. Patterson:

(Inaudible)] Right, so that is \$700 million. The construction of bridges at Moleson Creek – \$400 million and the continuation of phase four – \$300 million. That will be \$700 million. Timehri,

Sand Hill, Makouria, Bartica – \$350 million, which is an upgrade of 11 kilometres of sand trail to unsurfaced fair-weather roadway from Sand Hill to Makouria Creek. The Parika/Goshen/Makouria Link: Construction of bridges at the Maripa main drain and Aliko main drain – \$800 million. Construction of culverts between the Bonasika River and Ithaca – \$150 million. Construction of 20 kilometres of unsurfaced fair-weather roadway from Bonasika to Ithaca – \$1 billion.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Patterson, you still have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Patterson: Two and a half minutes. Sir, we have here the Linden-Soesdyke Highway. The Linden/Soesdyke Highway has two contractors there – a Trinidadian and a local contractor. Could the Minister say what is complete, what percentage is complete and when do we expect this work to be completed?

Bishop Edghill: **Mr. Chair,** just to correct one thing – there are not two contractors. It is a joint venture. One contractor. The contract sum is US\$161,369,374.54. Signed on 19th July, 2024. Commencement date, 5th September, 2024. The contract duration is two years, which will be completed by September, 2026. Overall progress so far is 10%. We have site mobilisation in three locations: Madewini, Long Creek, and Moblissa. There is a stockpiling of materials – you see it all the time when you go on the highway. There are 180,000 tonnes of white sand, 200,000 tonnes of loam, 200 tonnes of aggregate and crusher run. There are 50 containers of bitumen. Equipment mobilisation: There are 50 pieces of construction equipment. Surveying is 95% completed. Clearing and grubbing of shoulders is 100% completed. Construction of expanded shoulders is 5%. The preparation of the base has started. Materials testing is 60%. Disbursement so far – 18% of the contract sum has been disbursed. Project progress at the end of 2025 is projected at about 60%.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Mr. Patterson, you have two minutes savings on the previous head so you still can go to 6.35 p.m.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I will go immediately to stelling. Particularly, there is a provision of \$1 billion. I do not see, Minister, Paramakatoi, Morawhanna and Kwebanna in the legend.

Bishop Edghill: Paramakatoi stelling?

Mr. Patterson: No. Not...

Bishop Edghill: Port Kaituma.

Mr. Patterson: Port Kaituma. My apologies, also, Kumaka stelling here. Can Could the Hon. Minister give us an update on those? I would assume they are under this line item.

Bishop Edghill: No, they are not under this line item, but I would not rob you of the information. It is on the transport; it is not under this line item, but I would not rob you of the information. For the Port Kaituma stelling, I have reported to the nation that the work was substantially completed and there was movement in the soil towards the waterside. I think it went into the ring because sometimes when we do not understand some things, we have to make amusement and comedy of it. We have since engaged, and, let me just put it this way, it was established at the Ministry with all of the engineers that the contractor executed the project in keeping with the design and that the person who designed this stelling also supervised the construction. Since we had the movement, we have established a team bringing in independent experts outside of the project. Last week, they made their final visit to the site and it would appear that we do have a decision on a new design to make sure we deal with the movement. The contractor has been asked to cost the difference in what work he will have to do, and, as far as we see, it can be accommodated within the contract sum.

The other stelling, which would be the Kingston Goods Wharf – maybe I should thank Mr. Brian Tiwari and BK International for acting in a responsible manner of accommodating their neighbour, because vessels on the waterfront intermingled with each other, and we are neighbours. You would have seen that the work is advancing at the Kingston Goods Wharf – not at the pace that we would like it, but we have been an inconvenience to our neighbour, and he has graciously allowed us to. We want to get that in – that is 71% completed. We are completing the work at Kumaka. The percentage of work at Kumaka... We just had a situation there that we are not proud of, but we are grateful that no one was injured. The crane driving piles toppled over. It is not a secret, but we are glad that nobody was injured or nobody was hurt. We are about 50%. The stelling at Morawhanna – we are at 15% on that. If you would like to also know, I would probably invite you to join us for the opening of the Bartica stelling, which would have been completed a long time ago. It is now being tested, and we are ready to go by the end of March. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, I give you a final question.

Mr. Patterson: *[Inaudible]*.

Mr. Chairman: Always.

Mr. Patterson: *[Inaudible]*.

Mr. Chairman: Do you want to go to programme 313?

Mr. Patterson: Yes.

Programme: 312 – Public Works – \$225,304,312,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

6.39 p.m.

Programme: 313 – Transport – \$11,194,835,000

Mr. Patterson: I only have one question. During the Minister's budget speech, he made reference that they are buying a new boat, if everyone can remember – a new boat to go up to Region 1, *et cetera*. Under Ferry Vessel and Stellings, I see \$200 million here, is this the sum you have allocated to buy the new cargo boat and the new boat for passengers? If so, what type of boat are you buying?

Bishop Edghill: The intent is that we are seeking to purchase a vessel that can carry probably more than 250 passengers and about 60 vehicles to go the on Parika/Supenaam route. We are also looking for a vessel that can carry between 150 to 200 passengers and approximately 30 vehicles to the Northwest. We have dispatched a team and have included the Director General of the Maritime Administration Department, a Mechanical Engineer from that unit, as well, to go to various sites, both in the United States of America and Quebec, Canada to inspect what is there. I have a report and we are looking to do that – that is what we are doing here.

Programme: 313 – Transport – \$11,194,835,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, before I take the suspension. We had a check of the records and we have what was laid so far with respect to Cheddi Jagan International Airport and it is the contract which was laid 15th March, 2012. The loan agreement laid 7th February, 2013 and the dollar credit line agreement for the photovoltaic powerplant that was laid 17th May, 2024. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, if we are inaccurate here, could you please work with our staff to check?

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I can guarantee you that it is inaccurate. It was a big public spectacle at the time as well.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, before you take the suspension, would you allow me...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, just before you start, Mr. Patterson...

Mr. Patterson: No, Sir. I was just saying let me offer my thanks to the staff of the Ministry of Public Works for enduring me and the rest of the Opposition. That is what I wanted to say.

Ms. Ferguson: Sir, as their former Minister, I would also like to say thank you to the staff of the Ministry of Public Works.

Bishop Edghill: I guess both Members knew what I was going to say. On behalf of my Colleague, the Hon. Member, Deodat Indar and myself, we would like to express our thanks to the men and women who work day and night, Sunday to Sunday, sometimes to their own peril to make things happen in this country, to answer the concerns of people, and to respond to the emergencies as they develop from time to time. We have not been perfect, but they have done a fantastic job. I would just like to remind you all that Guyana is in good hands with the PPP/C at the head. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I also join with you in commending your staff for the excellent road network which we have seen and more particularly for joining and taking us through your agency. Thank you, Minister and thank you staff. Hon. Members, before we go, we have five and a half hours of questioning remaining, according to my time here, we are breaking at 6.44 p.m., we will be back in one hour and the person to ring the bell that the Speaker is waiting for a quorum, for the next session is Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting Suspended at 6.45 p.m.

Sitting Resumed at 7.59 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: We will turn now to the Ministry of Labour and I invite the Hon...

Prime Minister [Brigadier Ret'd Phillips]: Mr. Chairman, I ask for...

Mr. Chairman: We would have to go back to the House. Thank you, Prime Minister (PM).

Assembly Resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Let me invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move the suspension of the Standing Orders for us to go beyond 8.00 p.m. to continue the business of today.

Suspension of Standing Orders No. 10(1)

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders No. 10(1) be suspended of the Twelfth Parliament to allow the sittings of the National Assembly to proceed beyond 8.00 p.m. until the business of today is completed.”

[Prime Minister]

Brigadier Ret'd Phillips: I ask that we suspend the Standing Orders to go beyond 8.00 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Agency: 38 Ministry of Labour

Current Expenditure

Programme: 381 – Policy Development and Administration – \$957,677,000

Mr. Jaiprashad: As it relates to staffing for line items 6111, 6114, 6116, could the Hon. Minister give us the aggregate of these individuals?

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Okay, thank you. Is the Member talking about the increase in staff and the decrease at line item 6116?

Mr. Jaiprashad: Yes, 6116. Decrease by six.

Mr. Hamilton: That is 30 to 24, right?

Mr. Jaiprashad: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Hamilton: Okay, line item 6111. The increase is new appointments, a Technical Officer, a Registry Supervisor, an Accountant, and a Senior Personnel Officer. All these persons were appointed from the Public Service Commission. The other one you mentioned is line item 6114, I think.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Hamilton: The increase, again, is five Clerks, one Typist Clerk, one Office Assistant, and one Accounts Clerk III. That is the increase. Line item 6116, that is a decrease. One staff member died and five resigned. A Personal Assistant, an Accountant, a Public Relations Officer, two drivers and one Assistant Accountant.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you very much, Sir. Line item 6321—Subsidies and Contribution to Local Organisations. The description given there, BIT, we are looking at the increase of \$100 million, are there new programmes added on to the 600 plus that we already have for 2024? Could you tell us how many programmes will be facilitated for the region?

Mr. Hamilton: In 2024, we expended \$577 million and the sum here is \$679 million. Let me go through this, the intention is training; \$70 million to be spent in Region 1; \$57 million to be spent in Region 2; \$18 million to be spent in Region 3; \$97 million in Region 4; \$14.8 million in Region 5; \$47 million in Region 6; \$44 million in Region 7; \$6.1 million in Region 8; \$45 million in Region 9 and \$20.3 million in Region 10. That gives you a total of \$422 million to be spent on training programmes. The other moneys will be administrative costs for the Board of Industrial Training.

Ms. Lawrance: Mr. Chairman, may I sit?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you may.

Ms. Lawrance: Thank you. Hon. Minister, I am looking at the same line item. May you turn to page 470, and the very last of the allocation of this \$679 million. It says,

“Support to other trade unions.”

Last year, you had the same \$8 million, but you only spent \$1.3 million. Could you kindly tell the House how many trade unions are to benefit from this \$8 million?

8.08 p.m.

Mr. Hamilton: Since I became the Minister, this money has been a subvention to be given to trade unions. The issue we have is – except for the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG), if I remember correctly and the GAWU, the other trade unions, namely, the Guyana Teachers’ Union, the Guyana Trade Union Congress (GTUC) and the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) if I remember correctly, financial statements to indicate how the money is going to be spent and how it was spent. Since that has not been happening, this money is returned every year to the Consolidated Fund. With regard to the Guyana National Co-operative Union Limited (GNCUL), the overarching supervisory body for cooperatives normally receives its subvention. I have had conversations with the people who head these unions. We want to disburse the money but we want to know how this money is going to be expended. Even after it is expended, we need them to give us a financial statement so that the next year we will give them the money. That is the issue.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am going back to Programme 381, the Board of Industrial Training (BIT). Since the Hon. Minister told us the sums of money allocated to each region, could he tell us the total amount for the programmes that are associated with each region equivalent to the sums of money that were listed?

Mr. Hamilton: I can lay over this information. There are 177 programmes, and I can go through the details. We are talking about 37 programmes in Region 4 to benefit 555 persons; nine programmes in Region 3 to benefit 114 persons; 28 programmes in Region 2 to benefit 365

persons; 28 programmes in Region 1 to benefit 397 persons; in Region 5, eight programmes to benefit 95 persons; Region 6, 14 programmes to benefit 211 persons; Region 7, 19 programmes to benefit 200 persons; Region 8, three programmes to benefit 40 persons; Region 9, 20 programmes to benefit 292 persons; and Region 10, 11 programmes to benefit 130 persons. Let me just say that added to what is on this list here, I spoke during the Budget Debate about a programme that we will do in Region 7 to train – this is additional to what we have here – about 1,200 persons to work at the Oku Mines in the first instance when they are setting up the mine and then another 1,000 persons who will be working at the mine.

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** What is the total number, Mr. Hamilton?] There are 1,200 persons in the first instance and then 1,000 persons. [**Mr.**

Mahipaul: What is the total number of programmes?] The total number of programmes are 177 – that is BIT. This is based on the money we are talking about. I am making the point that we have programmes which started that will be funded by the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF). As I just said, 1,200 persons are to be trained in Region 7 at our training centre. We have programmes where we will be supporting the National Commission on Disability (NCD); every year, this happens. Last year, we supported them, and they trained 36 persons. In addition to what BIT will be doing, there are several collaborations that are happening with other agencies, whether Government agencies or international agencies. We have a programme also to train 20 women in Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Technology and this is funded by the World Bank. That is a two-year programme. They will be trained at a higher level to become trainers in their regions – two women from each region in Guyana. Those are programmes in addition to BIT's 177 programmes in the 10 Administrative Regions.

Mr. Figueira: Hon. Minister, I believe the programmes that you are offering are informed by the needs of each specific region. Am I correct? Therefore, is there a thinking in the Ministry that some of its offerings with regard to the programmes and the training could be of assistance to programmes such as those of the Ministry of Public Works? I am saying this because in Region 10, most recently, 500 contractors were given contracts to build roads, but the region only has one regional engineer. All the roads are being built simultaneously in most respects. We do not have sufficient clerks of works to oversee all those works. Therefore, would the Ministry consider providing a training programme for people to be clerks of works to help oversee the work to minimise substandard work on the roads being done? It is impossible for one engineer to oversee all 500 roads. I am thinking if the programmes are being done to enhance not only the individual

but also ensure that the work being done could be properly overseen – if such a skill is offered – then we must create employment opportunities for more people to help oversee the work and ensure that value for money is also achieved. Would that be considered?

Mr. Hamilton: As I understand it, the University of Guyana (UG) has a programme where it does that type of training. I was told the University of Guyana has persons whom it – Minister, Bishop Edghill could correct me if I am wrong – lends to the Ministry of Public Works to help with regard to the supervision of projects that are happening. At the level of the Board of Industrial Training, its structure would not allow – at least at this time – for that type of training to be done. The BIT’s structure and work are guided by legislation about its functions, what it must do and what it is supposed to do. One of the other things is that a lot of companies are failing to use the apprenticeship scheme, which could help in large measure for a lot of these things that we have to attend to. I was told that there is a programme at the University of Guyana through which persons can become clerks of works. I would not say there is a programme that trains people to become clerks of works. I know a young man who attended the University of Guyana and was a clerk of works at the Ministry of Housing and Water at the time. The BIT will not be able to do this type of training at this time.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: this takes us to the back, on page 470, which deals with the:

“Labour Market Information System Commission.”

This is based on an ongoing conversation I have been having with the Minister, every budget. In 2023, the \$1.5 million was not utilised. In 2024, I see here that \$1.5 million was budgeted but not utilised. I see another \$1.5 million being budgeted for this year. Could the Minister say what exactly this \$1.5 million is expected to do that has not yet been done over the last four years?

Mr. Hamilton: Regarding this specific matter, let me just go back in time to bring us forward here. Between 2015 and 2020, there was no ministry for labour; it was disbanded. [Ms. Sarabo-Halley: (*Inaudible*)] Slow down over there; slow down over there. In 2020, because of that disbandment, the statistical department was degutted. Therefore, regarding this specific matter, what we are doing is trying to build that department. As I speak to you, there is no statistical department because – as I have said – it basically did not exist. We are now trying to rebuild the

statistical department. We are working with a consultant to develop a strategy around this matter. The issue is also finding good people whom we can employ. The issue of salary has become a real concern. With regard to the statistical department, this is a work in progress. While all the other departments are functioning effectively and efficiently, we are still working towards building a statistical department. The \$1.5 million is there because we are hopeful that we could start staffing that department in 2025.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, you would probably recollect that in 2024, those were the exact statements made. I am just noting that they are trying to develop a statistical department that was supposed to be implemented that year. I am guessing there is some difficulties in staffing. I noted, too, that on the Ministry of Labour's website, there is now some form of a section called the Labour Market Information System (LMIS), which means that some progress is being made. However, I am just wondering if the Minister could state when the statistics would be brought up to date. As it is right now, the latest statistics are from the third quarter of 2021. When exactly will the statistics be updated to show us not only what was happening at least up to December, 2024, but also give us some sort of a projection as to what we can expect moving forward?

8.23 p.m.

Mr. Hamilton: Our expectation is that by the second quarter of 2025, we will have staff. As I have said, we have not *sat on our hands*. We have been working with a consultant at the Ministry to develop systems. As you just indicated, we have information online. The other thing is that we have been working with partners and capturing data in the construction area. We have collaborated with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and we have some information as to the labour needs in construction. At the level of oil and gas, we have collaborated with the International Labour Standards (ILO), and we have information with regard to the technical labour needs in oil and gas. The latest study was done by the Centre for Local Business Development. Those studies presently inform the Ministry of Labour about the technical labour needs out there. We are using all of this data in the short term until we reach a point where we have a statistical department that can do the necessary work that should be done.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: It is bothersome because, over the last few years, we have been hearing the same thing – that there seems to be an issue with getting the requisite staff to fill the statistical department. Would the Minister be able to say what is causing this issue? Under unemployment, we have people who are graduating from universities with degrees and so on. Why is it that the Ministry of Labour seems to find it so difficult to find the right people to staff this particular section of the Ministry of Labour?

Mr. Hamilton: I alluded to the fact that the issue is that while some people might have an interest, they are unprepared to work for the type of salary offered. That is one of the issues we have – the type of salary. You said, there are many persons, but I will say there are not many persons with the competence to do this work and that is a matter we hope to overcome. We want the department, but as I have said, we have several areas where data is available that we are utilising to do the work and to plan with regard to what training to do with BIT and all of those issues.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow-up: Minister, given that it has been almost three years going on to four that you have not been able to get this department up and running for the reasons you have mentioned, why is the Ministry not thinking about outsourcing this particular aspect of the surveys? This is not just for the Ministry of Labour; it is for the country, so we can be able to use these statistics both publicly and privately. Could you answer why we are not outsourcing if you have that problem?

Mr. Hamilton: What I can say is that the consultant that is working at the Ministry of Labour is not just working with the Ministry of Labour. The consultant is collecting data across the government system. Whether it is health or education, that information is available. With regard to outsourcing, I have never explored whether the Ministry of Labour could outsource this function. What I do know is that, presently, our statistical officer in the Ministry is a statutory position as all of the officers. We cannot just outsource this function. This function belongs to these statutory offices like the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) officers and the labour officers. All of the officers in the Ministry of Labour, in the different technical departments, are statutory officers. It is not as easy as saying, let us just outsource this function, because the function is a statutory function. We will continue to persevere because we want the department to be up and running. We already have facilities for the department. We have already constructed and expanded the Ministry of Labour to allow for that department when it is up and running. I go back

to the point that we have not been *sitting on our hands*. Even without that department, we have been able to collaborate and work with partners and have available data which is in the public domain. All of the data I am talking about is public information. Whether it is the IOM in construction, the ILO for oil and gas or the Centre for Business Development, all is public information. We can have a sense of the needs out there in the technical areas.

Ms. Lawrence: We heard in this very House that about 60,000 persons have been employed. We heard about all of the various industries and companies that are here to establish businesses and so on. One of the objectives of the Ministry of Labour is to conduct research and generate information that it receives on labour statistics across the country. Could the Minister kindly tell us what was the last research done and where we could find this document? I do not know if we have enough time, but I want to ask the Minister one other question, and it has to do with the statistics.

Mr. Chairman: You should ask it now because we are now out of time.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One of the strategies of the Ministry is to collaborate with the Bureau of Statistics (BOS) for the production of labour market information. Could the Minister kindly say whether in 2024 this collaboration was done and what document does the Ministry has that we could refer to in order to be informed of the various areas where it placed information about the labour market, whether it is a booklet, online or whatever? Where could we find this information?

Mr. Hamilton: Apparently, Ms. Lawrence was not listening to me at all and that is why I started out by making this point. When anyone is doing an assessment on the Ministry of Labour, he/she must do it recognising the historical matter. One cannot disband the Ministry and have it not function for five years and then in four years, all that it has done... [**Ms. Lawrence:** (*Inaudible*)] Ms. Lawrence, do you want me to answer your question? [**Ms. Lawrence:** Yes.] You cannot run a government, disband the Ministry of Labour and have it not functioned effectively and efficiently for five years and then say for four years that all of these things should have been there. You contributed to them not being there. That is the first point. The second point is that I have been saying all the time that we have several sets of data to inform the Ministry of Labour as to what is needed with regard to the collaboration with the Bureau of Statistics. Yes, that is happening and continues to happen. With regard to the last labour market survey, it was done in 2021 and is

working in collaboration with the Bureau of Statistics. The fact is, the Ministry was re-established in 2020. As I have said, we know there is a need for a statistical department. I have explained what we are doing regarding getting to that point. Ms. Lawrence, you cannot come and say why I did not do this? I would say that you had your opportunity to do it, Ms. Lawrence. You were once the Minister of Labour.

Ms. Lawrence: I think the Minister did not hear me, or he is misdirecting...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member. Ms. Lawrence, I think you are being a bit disrespectful to the Chairman.

Ms. Lawrence: No, I am not.

Mr. Chairman: I determine that. The Minister is on the floor. If you want to stand on a Point of Order, you just do not put on your microphone and speak. We are not in a fish market.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, may I...

Mr. Chairman: You do not have the floor. Minister, you have the floor; continue, please.

Mr. Hamilton: From the collaboration we have had with the Bureau of Statistics, I am advised that just this week, it has requested information from the Ministry of Labour. When information is available regarding the collaboration and the way forward, we will make that available.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, we have exhausted the time. We have actually gone over by four minutes.

Programme: 381 – Policy Development and Administration – \$957,677,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 382 – Labour Administration Services – \$385,876,000

Programme: 382 – Labour Administration Services - \$385,876,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 381 – Policy Development and Administration – \$192,047,000

Programme: 381 – Policy Development and Administration – \$192,047,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 382 – Labour Administration Services – \$25,000,000

Programme: 382 – Labour Administration Services – \$25,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, to you and your staff, thank you very much for taking us through your Agency. Hon. Members, let us invite the Hon. Dr. Vindhya Persaud, the Minister of Human Services and Social Security and her team to take us through Agency 39. We will give the Minister an opportunity to get in place. Hon. Members, let me invite you all to turn to pages 188 and 189.

Agency: 39 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security

Current Expenditure

Programme: 391 – Policy Development and Administration – \$469,535,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Programme 391, Policy Development and Administration: I noticed that the budget document says that five pieces of legislation were drafted in 2024 and two are expected to be done in 2025. I think my mind serves me right when I recall that we have seen two pieces of legislation: the Family Violence Act that was debated and passed and the International Measures for the Protection of Children (Hague Convention) Bill that is yet to be debated. In my mind, there were two put before us in 2024. Could the Minister tell us what are the other three drafted and when we would expect to see them here?

8.38 p.m.

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]: Thank you for your question, Hon. Member. There are several pieces of legislation in draft. We have three pieces of legislation that are in alignment with the Hague Convention, which deals with abduction, protection, and maintenance. Those are in draft. We also have the regulations on Combating Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) and intercountry adoption. As one would, the legislation was amended recently to allow the resumption of intercountry adoption. We have passed the CTIP Act, so we have to have those regulations. The Family Violence Bill was passed. We are also looking at regulations of the

licensure for social workers. We are also looking at legislation around the Poor Relief Act. It is a very archaic piece of legislation and that is currently under review.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Minister, thank you for that response. One of the strategies for this programme states:

“Develop, implement, and disseminate social security policies, plans and programmes with the relevant authorities.”

The number of policies drafted to be addressed, as reflected in 2024, was six, and two are projected for 2025. Could the Minister list the policies that were drafted and state what are the other two expected for 2025?

Dr. Persaud: The pieces of legislation that would have already been drafted includes the gender-based violence policy and its accompanying framework and the Early Childhood Development (ECD) policy, its curriculum, and all the accompanying elements. As one would know, we are placing emphasis on early childhood development, so this is a policy that we are very invested in. We have spent a lot of time working on this policy with the Child Care and Protection Agency (CPA), and the Early Childhood Development Services Unit (ECD Unit). I would like to say thank you to Ms. Grey, Ms. Gouveia and the entire team. We also had support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) on this. This is a policy that will strategically focus the Ministry’s attention on ECD. It will guide our work in two buildings that will be open this year: the day and night care centres, and early childhood units in those centres. That is another achievement. It is the first time this is going to happen anywhere in the region. Thus, this is a very good policy.

The other policy that we are looking at is a policy on gender. There has been a social inclusion and gender-based policy. We have had that looked at. We have had a literature review, and that is in the works to have a more comprehensive gender policy going forward. We are also looking, under childcare, at the reunification/reintegration policy for children. As I had mentioned in the debates, this is important because we are not against institutionalisation, but we want to reduce it. We are looking at how more children could be reintegrated and reunified. We are also looking at the home-based care policy because one of the things we want to do is to encourage women to start their own daycares, night cares and early childhood businesses and enterprises. This is a very important

step in the work that we are going to do. We also worked on a number of other areas. One of the key areas I would like to look at this year is the policy on aging and care, to name a few.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: One last question: under indicators, 62 outreaches were done in 2024, and 100 are expected in 2025. Could the Hon. Minister confirm if any of the 62 outreaches reflected were done in the communities of Barakara in Region 6 and our only indigenous communities of Orealla and Siparuta?

Dr. Persaud: We went over the number that we had targeted last year. We actually had many more outreaches. We have more outreaches this year. I, myself went into Barakara on one of those outreaches. It was an excellent outreach. There are a number of programmes that are planned for the people of Barakara. The meetings were exceptional. They indicated their areas of interest. As for Orealla/Siparuta, I will be going to those places this year, but my Ministry has been to those communities more than once to address various social issues and to work with the people there.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: A follow-up question: Are these outreaches meant for the Minister only, or are they across the Ministry?

Dr. Persaud: The Ministry has been out there on the ground with me or without me. We are on the ground all the time. This is the process. We have a consolidation in terms of all the departments coming together to address the various areas that fall under the umbrella of the Ministry. There are ministerial outreaches, but I still have all of the departments under the Ministry. My intention since coming into office is to take the services to the people in their communities. That is a process that has been happening since 2020. That is a process that has also been the signature of all of our various ministries in this Government. We have been on the ground, with the people, sharing information and working with information. I hope that answers your question.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): We are still on Programme 391, Policy Development and Administration. Under this line item, there is \$900,000. Could the Minister tell us what training will be done?

Dr. Persaud: There are a number of areas that we want to work on for the Ministry. One of the big projects that have been in the works, with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in particular, is the creation of the new digital architecture for the Ministry. In this way, we intend to

digitise all of the beneficiary registers and digitise how people access our beneficiary programmes, notably pension, public assistance, and permanent disability. One of the things I found when I went to the Ministry is that it was rather chaotic. We did not have access to the back end. It was very difficult to navigate because data was all over the place, so this project would bring all of the data together. It will allow the regions to now collect data and have a central point where that data is integrated so that we could develop a very good database and registry.

To make all of that work, we have to ensure that the providers of these services are trained. The introduction to the new Management Information System (MIS) would be a very key thing for the Ministry to ensure that staff in the regions, staff centrally, and everyone are trained in it. User acceptance – because you cannot put an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based system or digital system out there without ensuring that the public or the beneficiaries who have to use the system... One of the big things, before I continue, is that we have introduced an online application for the first time; fully online. People could apply for these services at home: pensions and permanent disabilities. User acceptance testing sessions is another type of training that will happen. We do have to have training of trainers, because when we have these kinds of training being introduced, we want to make sure we retain that capability and capacity in the Ministry. Thus, we are training trainers. We are also working on a dashboard so that we are able to know at all times what is happening in the Ministry. We have to have training for the users of that dashboard and also people to operate that dashboard to input data so that there is a very good system that, at all times, would give us an idea of whether our systems are efficient and effective. This is a major programme. One of the key things that our Government has been working on is E-Governance and the use of ICT, whether one speaks of ICT in education or in e-governance. A lot of the training will be used for ICT personnel.

Programme: 391 – Policy Development and Administration – \$469,535,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 392 – Social Services – \$55,193,711,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Is this Programme 392, Social Services? Guide me, please. Is it page 190?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. It is page 190. Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Line item 6343 – Old Age Pensions and Social Assistance: Out of this sum of \$52,930,857,000, could the Hon. Minister tell us what is the sum associated with the procurement of the old age pension book, the pension assistance book, and the permanent disability book?

[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] Yes, you have to get the book.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you for that. The number of booklets procured included the cost of the vouchers per booklet and the cost of procuring a booklet. That was \$19,000 per month for six months, which totalled \$114,000 for a voucher within the booklet. The sum of \$389,000,000 was for the vouchers within the booklets; all of the booklets that we procured. The cost of procuring one booklet was \$88. The cost of procuring the booklets was \$300,344,000. This is for the two sets.

[Mr. Mahipaul: Is that for all of the booklets?] It is for all of the booklets. In total, if you add the two, it would be \$389,882,344 for all of the booklets, I am so advised.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow up: In terms of the distribution of old age pension, which happens through the Guyana Post Office Corporation (GPOC), where pensioners would take their booklets and go to the Guyana Post Office Corporation and so on and collect their pension. For the reconciliation of moneys, there is an issue with the Ministry of Human Services and Social Protection and the Guyana Post Office Corporation, where the Guyana Post Office Corporation has a different figure in terms of the reconciliation with the Ministry. Could the Minister provide us with guidance or an update on the current status with reference to the issue that exists between conducting the reconciliation with the Guyana Post Office Corporation in terms of the difference with the figures?

Dr. Persaud: I am unaware of what you speak of. Maybe you have different information from me, but I am so advised that there is no issue with reconciliation.

Mr. Mahipaul: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am quoting from the Auditor General's (AG) Report for her guidance with reference to the issue that says...

Mr. Chairman: Is that the Auditor General's Report for 2023?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, which points out the issue with the Guyana Post Office Corporation. It states:

“According to the summary... in the table... the sum of \$1.152 billion was indebted by the Guyana Post Office Corporation (GPOC) to the Ministry. However, an examination of the Reconciliation Statement received from GPOC for December 2023 revealed that GPOC

was indebted to the Ministry in the sum of \$1.016 billion. Therefore, there is a difference of \$136.076M between the Cash Book summary and the GPOC Reconciliation Statements. Similarly, in 2022, there was a difference of \$201.389 million.

8.53 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Although that is dated, I ask the Minister...

Dr. Persaud: Thank you. I have no problem answering that. That is something I inherited, and it has been rolling over all the time. It is something that was not reconciled for a number of years. It is an on-going issue that we have. It was there before I even came to the Ministry.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Indeed, the Minister is absolutely correct. In fact, in 2014, it was \$101.6 million...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the Minister said there is no issue. It is a roll-over thing she inherited.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much. I am asking if there is any progress in reconciling, rather than having the number building up because in 2014, it was \$101 million. Now, we are here at \$136 million. The difference keeps widening. What measure is the Minister taking to address this...?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, firstly, is it widening? Secondly, if it is widening, as far as I heard twice, there is not an issue... It was an inherited thing, but you can answer.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have no difficulty because after 2014, 2015 came and there were five years to reconcile whatever the issue was. Obviously, it was not done. Here we are and we are dealing with the issue as it exists right now. As I mentioned, we are putting in entire digital architecture to ensure that there is accountability and there are checks and balances. Every year since 2022, we have been having audited distribution of Pension Books in an effort to deal with all of the inherited issues. Thank you so much.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: The number of programmes and campaigns targeting the elimination of sexual violence, domestic and gender-based violence in 2024 was 124. In 2025, it is expected to be 110. Could the Minister tell which are the Indigenous communities that will benefit from the

programmes and the campaigns, specifically, for the elimination of sexual violence? What form will the campaigns and programmes take?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you very much. I am very happy that you asked this question. We have had number of campaigns since I came into office. In fact, this has been an area that has occupied the Ministry's attention. As everyone knows across Guyana, we embarked on the *Spotlight Initiative*, which concluded in 2023. Out of that initiative, a sleuth of programmes came to being. One of those programmes specifically targeted reporting so '914 hotline' was born – a 914 awareness, which is a 24-hour toll free hotline. It is one of the key mechanisms but not the only mechanism that is used for reporting all instances of violence. It was introduced under this Government, and it is a mechanism that allows people to report instances of violence. It has the ability in that when cases of violence are reported, and we saw many, many calls to this hotline grew. We are able to contact the Guyana Police Force (GPF) to intervene if there is an acute case of violence. Everyone who calls can have access to the services. Awareness is a very big part of what we will be doing, more awareness, in all the Hinterland communities and in all the regions. Every year, we are going into all the regions across Guyana. It is a consolidated approach, which not only deals with sexual offences and domestic violence but also through the Family Enhancement Unit, with youth, with juveniles and juveniles at risk. We deal with children through the Child Care and Protection Agency. In addition to the 914 hotline, we are also expanding how we use Information Communication Technology (ICT) across the country. As you know, the Hinterland now, with the very good programme through the Prime Minister's Office, is connecting communities at all the hubs, so people can actually access information and access services. Those are very important things. I am saying all of this because I want every Member of this House to know what this Ministry is doing. The question was asked, and it is important that everyone knows so that together we can fight the cases of violence that come up. If we do not see it as an 'apolitical thing', we will not be able to do what we need to do, which is to eradicate violence especially in the 50th year when we are going up at [inaudible], when we are talking about the elimination of violence against women, we need to make sure that we do this at home.

Back to ICT – it is looking at the iMatter application (app), which is the first of its kind in the region. This was an app that was developed. It offers resources to counter violence, whether you are in the Hinterland or on the Coastland. This year, we are adding a *WhatsApp Messenger* feature

so that people, in addition to pressing the panic button on the first page of the I-matter Application, can actually have that *WhatsApp Messenger* kind of conversation to make reports. We can offer counsel. Beyond that, we are also going out into communities to let them know that there is the Survivor's Advocacy Programme, so that survivor advocates could be assigned to persons who are experiencing violence in all of its forms. We are going out there because the Family Violence Act is very new and we have to ensure that whether persons are in the Hinterland or on the Coastland, they are aware of the measures in the Family Violence Act. If they are aware of the measures, they will understand that the Act has both a civil and a criminal component and perpetrators will face the full force of the law. It is new and it is a very tough piece of legislation. When we go into the Hinterland and on the Coastland, we are also doing the very novel thing, and I must thank my Colleague, Minister Benn for working along with me. We were on a case up to yesterday that almost concluded tonight. We are looking at how we can train the Police Officers, station by station. That is the plan this year. That plan will start very soon. We had initiated the COP Squad Initiative. That Initiative allowed 50% of the Guyana Police Force to be trained in Case Management, in responding to cases effectively.

We also started working with women, families and children on how they can access these services. Those services will go into the Hinterland, so that people understand their rights, how the law protects them and what the services are, that we offer. We have also launched the Brotherhood of Safe Spaces (BOSS) Initiative, working directly with men, so that men could understand what they need know and how they can prevent conflicts from erupting into violence. We are also working on rehabilitation this year and directly with perpetrators through a Programme called the Brave Circle. That is what will be going to the Hinterland and to the Coastland. We are also working with the stakeholders. There has been the development of the Referral Pathway coming out of the Spotlight Initiative, that works with all the providers, all the people who have to intervene in cases of violence. We will be going out there – in the Hinterland and in the Coastland to provide training for all those persons. The intention is to keep on going until we get to every community. That is a process that has started, that is a process that is continuing. In fact, as I speak today, we have been going into schools and I must thank my Colleague, Minister Manickchand. Last year, we worked in over 30 schools dealing with violence and bullying. I must congratulate and compliment them. They have been in 25 schools. We will continue to work. For me, it is not picking out communities.

For me, it is consistent on-going work, community by community until we get to where we need to go. I must reiterate again that we need everyone on board. Thank you so much.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I have a simple question for the Minister, what should one expect when they call the '914' number?

Dr. Persaud: You would have an answer based on what your question is. There would be somebody to answer the phone and answer whatever you are asking. Unless the person can say what the question is.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: If someone is calling 914 hotline to say there is an attack, a domestic violence issue, what should they expect from the person who is answering that call?

Dr. Persaud: All the officers who are manning the 914 hotline have been trained with assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF). You have to ask the particulars of the incident - where is it, who is it and what is happening. If it is an active situation and a person is in peril, like my Colleague just said, the Police is called. The Police is called in such a way that we do not call the junior police at the station. We call the Commander of the Station. This has been a tried and tested route. We want to make sure that we hold the Commander accountable. Once the Commander is called, the Police is expected to turn up. Let us say it is a case where the person needs to be removed, we have put that mechanism in place. We do not necessarily need a person to give their name or any identity details. We may ask if the person wants to, just in case we go to the location or the police has to go and we cannot find the location, we might at least ask for a number to get that kind of information. Thank you.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: People seem to think that it is funny, but it is a very serious question because a lot of people are dealing with this matter day in and day out in their homes and in their communities. The reason that I stood to ask this question is because I had to deal with a scenario of this manner. I called 914 hotline and what I got from the person at the other end was that I have to find a way to call the police. They asked me what the issue was. They told me I need to call the Police myself. I called the Brickdam Police Station and Brickdam Police Station had no police to send. I called the station closest to me, they had no officer and they had no vehicle and so for hours, I had to listen to someone being beaten because no one was there to deal with them. I am not trying to make a joke. It is not a trivial matter. What I would like to suggest is, even though

you are saying these systems are in place, a lot of people when they call the 914 hotline, what they hear is they have to call the police themselves. I am not making a joke of it and I am not trying to make a joke of it. It is something that has to be remedied.

Dr. Persaud: These Officers have been trained, and I think it is unfair to say that to them. I make random calls to the 914 hotline, to test the system. I have been doing that since it started. In the first year and a half when it started, the final call was to me. If at that time when we initially started the hotline, it was not going the way it was intended, I was the final call so then I would have to call the police myself. I would have to wake up my Cabinet Colleague or the Commissioner of Police myself. That was how we got to where we are now. I want to say that we must treat this seriously. If we make light of this, you are... *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

Mr. Chairman: Let us hear the Minister, please.

Dr. Persaud: I am sorry?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead. Your Colleagues are disturbing you.

Dr. Persaud: If we make light of this, we are telling people not to have confidence in something that can help them. Mr. chairman, this is exactly what I am very, very disturbed about. When we start to make these kinds of comments and assertions. This is how people get help by calling a hotline. I have no problem with recommendations, and I take the Member's recommendations seriously. However, I am very hopeful that it is a genuine one, because if there is an issue, I am the first one to try and reach out and ensure that issue is resolved, but we must encourage people to use this reporting mechanism because it has helped a lot of people.

9.08 p.m.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, I want to join the Minister in saying this is not an issue that we should politicise.

Mr. Chairman: It is not a statement; do you have a question for the Minister?

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I have a question, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Yes please.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: If a woman that is being abused calls in that moment and the person who answers the 914 hotline says, ‘call the police’, but there was no response from the police, then what should happen?

Dr. Persaud: The woman would not have to call the police because the 914 hotline operators would call the police.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, may I turn your attention to Volume two of the *Estimates of the Public Sector Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure* for the year 2025, page 165, your Indicators, and I am looking at number five.

“Number of elderly residential facilities meeting minimum operating standards”

You had zero in 2024 and you said you are targeting one in 2025. My question here is whether there were visits to these facilities and if so, were they across the country?? You had 100%.

Dr. Persaud: I am advised that visits were conducted to all the facilities and a report is being compiled. A lot of the issues revolved around infrastructure and the intention is to get all up to the minimum standards; and as you know, Madam Member of Parliament (MP), we do have the Visiting Committees, so we will continue to have those things. In house, there is also a process of visiting and assessing all of the Homes, with the intension of getting them to where they need to be, that is in alignment with the minimum standards.

Ms. Lawrence: May I continue?

Mr. Henry: I have a question or perhaps, a recommendation, have you in your wonderful roll out programme... [Mr. Mahipaul: It is a follow up.] ...follow-up, in your wonderful rollout programme, have you been using indigenous languages for communication purposes? If not, I kindly ask that you consider doing so. Thank you.

Dr. Persaud: I am very glad the Member raised it; it is something we have been working on. It is not 100% where we want to be, but we have done the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Programme, and we have done the Counter-Trafficking in Persons (C-TIP) Programme. We have

started to somewhat do it under the Domestic Violence Programme as well. It is very difficult to get all the languages, but we are making every effort to do it, so thank you.

Ms. Lawrence: Madam Minister, I would like to turn your attention to number 10 of your Indicators, on page 165, and it indicates here that there will be an increase in terms of persons in these indigent residential facilities. If we look at pages 470 and 471 you have at least four of these Homes listed here... **[Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** ...the subsidies at the back. They are all receiving the same amount of moneys, \$100,000 to three of them and the Dharam Sala, receiving \$2 million dollars. My question to you is, given the high cost of living and the inability of many of these people to pay the requisite fees to upkeep these facilities and to ensure that they have a balanced meal *et cetera*, is the Ministry doing anything outside of these allocations to assist these Homes? There was a call last December by the management of Dharam Sala for assistance and I know Archer's Home and Byer's Homes and so on are the same thing.

Dr. Persaud: The \$2 million dollars given to the Dharam Sala was a direct commitment from His Excellency the President and so that is why that one is there like. We have also been trying to assist; we have assisted Uncle Eddie's Home when they had some infrastructural issues, and we try from time to time to assist as best we can. However, it is something that we are looking at and when we look at aging in general, the care economy and the care system, more so, it is something that we will definitely consider; and we have been looking at, thank you.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: The number of reported cases of domestic violence in 2024 is 1,863, could the Hon. Minister tell us how many of those cases were prosecuted?

Dr. Persaud: I will not be able to give all that information, I will happily lay that over or present that later, but I will say this, prosecution is dependent and has been dependent on the person who experiences violence wanting to do that. What we have instituted through the Ministry, in addition to the heavily subsidised or the subvention we have been giving to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), like Legal Aid. We have started the Legal Pro-bono Initiative; it is three years old; we actually have a Unit now at the Ministry that allows partnership. This is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) we signed with the Guyana Bar Association to provide legal advice and support to any person experiencing violence and we have been able to that for thousands of women. The intension with the Family Violence Act, education, and all that we are

doing is to encourage people to go all the way to prosecution. In fact, the Hope and Justice Centres that would have been a collaboration between the Ministries of Human Services and Social Security and Legal Affairs, it is a very robust collaboration in those Hope and Justice Centres. There is one in Region 3 and one in Region 4. We have attorneys placed there at all times to ensure that persons have access to legal recourse. This is the kind of thing that we have to keep strengthening so that we increase the rate of prosecution.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: There are a number of reported cases for trafficking in persons, I think it is stated as 34, how many of these cases were prosecuted in 2024?

Dr. Persaud: I know that the numbers of cases that were prosecuted are increasing, in fact that is one of the ways we have kept our tier one ranking. It started about two years ago and it has been increasing, not as fast as I would like to see it increasing but it is growing and also the whole process of restitution is one that has been increasing as well.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Line Item – 6292: I would like if the Minister can tell us which of the agencies under the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security will benefit and if it is more than one if she can disaggregate.

Dr. Persaud: Yes, I can tell you the Homes that will benefit: the Palms, the Mahaica Hospital, the Night Shelter, the Hugo Chavez Centre for Rehabilitation and Reintegration Centre, our Domestic Violence (DV) Shelters, you will appreciate why I will not say where they are for all the obvious reasons and our C-TIP Shelters. I will tell you the same thing, but I can give the cost but I will not say where they are. I can tell you the Palms will get \$57,232,000, the Mahaica Hospital will get \$7,387,600 and then you will have the Night Shelter getting \$41,756,000 and the Night Shelter for the first time will have its own kitchen to prepare meals for those residents who are there and the Hugo Chavez Centre for Rehabilitation and Reintegration Centre, will get \$36,500,000. Our shelters will all get \$1.8 million plus and the C-TIP Shelters will range between \$2.9 to \$1.4 million plus, each.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: A follow-up question. I understand that you cannot say where, but could you tell us how many shelters for domestic violence and how many shelters do you have for trafficking in persons and which Regions are they in?

Dr. Persaud: I can tell you how many, but I cannot tell anything else, again, for all of the obvious reasons. We have four DV Shelters, three TIP Shelters and that has been an increase from what I met when I came in. We have done new shelters as well and we have rehabilitated the other shelters.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Line item 6311- Rates and Taxes: Hon. Minister, I actually have a complaint, so I have to ask you a question under that. Rates and Taxes, I was made to understand that the Social Services Offices in New Amsterdam, have not paid their rates and taxes from since 2020 and so I am asking if there is any provision under this sum to pay that?

Dr. Persaud: The building is shared. I will just say that the building is shared and we should be moving to a new building in New Amsterdam. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Chairman hit gavel]

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I can hardly hear myself, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6302, how many departments under Social Services will benefit and how much is allocated to each agency? I believe that this is training.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, all the departments will benefit there are 11 such departments. There are a number of key areas we want to spend on training, notably in management training and leadership training for all the Heads of Departments and fire and safety training at all the shelters. We would also like to work on increasing capability and capacity among our key personnels, notably probation, family and welfare services, orientation and training of new officers, focus group sessions for young people, basic and advanced counselling, basics of crisis management, coaching and supervising management, therapeutic approaches in dealing with trauma, youth and family violence, aggressive replacement therapy, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), Basic Life and Employability Skills (BLES), mental health and suicide awareness, positive youth development and trauma and informed care. In fact, one of the things we are planning to do, especially for our staff members across the Ministry, is to utilise the Coursera platform which has been utilised by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security since 2021, to ensure they have access to core developmental courses as part of our overall capacity building for all the staff of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. We are also focused on training our Local Board of Governors (LBGs) through the Social Security Unit. At

the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute, we are doing a series of programmes and the thing about it is, we are training persons in 113 courses and that is key. We are adding a number of courses that are diverse and one of the things I want to say is that we do not only offer training for the Women's Innovation & Investment Network (WIIN) Programme, but we also offer training for the Men Promoting Opportunities Wellness Empowerment and Resilience (MPOWHER) programme, which is focused on men. They have the same access to the programmes that the women have. It is both in-person and online training that all these people will benefit from. The Palms geriatric facility will have special training in body mechanics refresher courses. One of the key things which we do have to report on is the area of gender mainstreaming. There is a series of courses that will happen: gender and development training and capacity building for our regional and local leaders, community-based groups, training the Inter-Ministry Committee, training for the gender focal points, training for senior public officers, media operators and policymakers in contemporary gender relations in Guyana. Sensitisation sessions – [Mr. Mahipaul: What happen Dr. Persaud? You were going good.] I was asked – with members of the Guyana Police Force and the Community Policing Groups of Guyana, gender-responsive budgeting – we have already started to do some training in that, women in leadership and governance, staff development, shared roles training, grassroots men's forum, training and awareness sessions will continue for barbers, disc jockeys (DJs), taxi drivers, bartenders and sports personalities.

9.23 p.m.

If we turn our attention to the Hugo Chavez Centre for Rehabilitation and Reintegration, we are offering training that will benefit the staff so that they can deal with things like substance abuse, anger management, mental health awareness, self-esteem and empowerment workshops. We are also working significantly with people who are living with disabilities. As you know, the Learning Lab was opened by this Government – the first one in the country – and that focuses on all-round training for persons living with disabilities. We are offering training opportunities to the people who give the training, as well as the persons who are receiving the training: training in adult literacy and numeracy, basic computer skills, garment construction, social media marketing, jobs for the visually impaired, video and audio editing, sign language for public servants and many more. We are offering over 15 courses. For the Night Shelter, there are lots of persons who would have experienced addiction and because of the tremendous work that is happening at the Night

Shelter, we are also focusing on ensuring not only the persons who give the training at the Night Shelter or the persons who are responsible for the Night Shelter have, but also that those persons who are residents at the Night Shelter can benefit from the training offered by the Government of Guyana through Board of Industrial Training (BIT), WIIN and all the programmes. Programmes include substance abuse, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) empowerment, conflict resolution, record keeping, fire drills and keeping law and order workshops. Then we move to human trafficking and prevention services. We are doing anti-trafficking in persons (TIP) training for Criminal Investigation Department (CID) officers, police inspectors, sergeants, traffic ranks – pretty much the police force – foreign affairs officers, National AIDS Programme (NAP) Secretariat, local government authorities, food and drug inspectors, private sector nurses, teachers, magistrates, medical practitioners, miners and loggers, media personnel, civil society prosecutors, forestry officers, transport officers, labour, occupational health and safety officers, Guyana Defence Force (GDF) officers, geology and mines commission officers, custom and law enforcement officers, translators, re-migrants and fire officers. Are you getting the gist? The last... [An Hon. Member (Opposition): *(Inaudible)*] Okay, I am glad. The last category is the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Policy Unit. This will involve a number of training programmes, including those for social workers, community workers, Toshaos, village counsellors, parents and teachers associations, survivors' advocates and the list goes on and on.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to believe that you are training the whole of Guyana, but, Minister, we have read the 2023 Report of the Auditor General and I want to ask a specific question. Does the Ministry have a monitoring and evaluation unit that will be able to monitor this so that we can have value for money?

Dr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I inherited a Ministry that did not have anything to monitor anything. One of the first things I decided to do under the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) project is to set up a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Unit and a Research Unit and so that will materialise this year as the IDB project comes to a conclusion on various aspects. I think it is important to have internal monitoring and evaluation and that is why there has been that direction that we have taken to ensure that a M&E unit is set up at the Ministry.

Programme: 392 – Social Services – \$55,193,711,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 393 – Child Care and Protection – \$1,058,393,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have one question and perhaps a follow-up after. The number of cases of child abuse reported in 2024 is 4,032 and the target for 2025 is 4,000. Could the Minister tell us what are the systems in place to help to eradicate child abuse in Guyana?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Child abuse has been something that has existed for many years. There would have been thousands of cases of child abuse that would have existed prior to this. Why have we deliberately put less? No one can predict cases of child abuse. I would like to think that one day in our country, we will wake up and there will be no cases of child abuse, but it exists and so the systems are in place for it. First of all, there is a hotline. The Child Care and Protection Agency has its own hotline. There is also the 914 hotline to report cases. Then, we are developing a rapid response team from the Child Care and Protection Agency so that when reports come in, there can be that kind of response where children can be, at the forefront of our efforts so that their safety and security are paramount, as they should be in accordance with the legislation,. That rapid response team will also lead to what is necessary in many cases that exist when you have child abuse, that leads us to the forensic interviewing of a child. That is an essential part of dealing with and responding to matters of child abuse. We have increased the number of child advocacy centres. This is a partnership with ChildLink and Blossom. This partnership is heavily subsidised by the Government, with over at least \$140 million between the two agencies. In addition to what happens there with the forensic interviews, we are also opening our own forensic interview unit, which will be based in Region 3. It is the first time for our country. This is part of the IDB project as well. We are working on training our own staff to develop them and to be able to do the forensic interview. We have sent the first batch off to India to have an introduction to it. We will be following up on that.

A part of what we do also involves the aftermath of trauma. We have to deal with post-trauma counselling so there will be more efforts to develop that. In addition to what is done with the collaboration, more needs to be done because you cannot only do one or two sessions; you have to do a series of sessions to get that child anywhere that they need to be, and it needs to be

continuous. Much effort will be placed on that. Awareness is key. As I said about gender-based violence, domestic violence and family violence, it is important that everyone joins the effort to promote the hotlines and the reporting structure so that people are aware – down to children are aware that they can report matters of child abuse. If we look at how they can, aside from the hotlines, they should be able to tell a responsible adult. We will be working, as we are working in the schools currently, as I mentioned, to educate children on how they can report, how they can get support and how they can actually gain help from us. We have our children's homes. We have a children's visiting committee that will also work with the homes outside the state care homes. That has been happening. We are working to ensure that these homes are in line with the minimum standards so that is also another way in which we are dealing with it.

Mr. Chairman, the strategy is a multi-pronged approach. We have a multi-media awareness effort that not only allows us to focus on using the medium of radio, television, social media and all of those things but we also go directly into communities, and we work with the children and their parents. There is Every Child Safe programme, which is an overarching programme of the Child Care and Protection Agency. We are working with children and parents. We have a parenting programme, which is a significant component of the 'Every Child Safe' programme because you cannot only focus on the children; you have to focus on the parents and the caregivers. There is a manual and a workbook that have been developed and the training, for now, will be done in person because I believe that personal connection is important to really eradicate it. We also have the family enhancement services section that will work with children, a little older than the Child Care and Protection Agency, to curb the issue of child abuse.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, our time has been exhausted for this agency, and I would now put the remaining programmes.

Programme: 393 – Child Care and Protection – \$1,058,393,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 391 – Policy Development and Administration – \$238,000,000

Programme: 391 – Policy Development and Administration – \$238,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 392 – Social Services – \$1,218,000,000

Programme: 392 – Social Services – \$1,218,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 393 – Child Care and Protection – \$155,468,000

Programme: 393 – Child Care and Protection – \$155,468,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much Hon. Minister and your staff for taking us through your agency. Let us invite the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water - Hon. Member Mr. Croal, to take his place. I invite you to turn to pages 226 and 227.

Agency: 45 Ministry of Housing and Water

Current Expenditure

Programme: 451 – Policy Development and Administration – \$235,643,000

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. May I say good night to all in the House?

Mr. Chairman: Good evening.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, could I turn our attention to line item 6223 – Office Materials and Supplies? Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, I have noted an increase from 2024 to... from \$2.6 million to \$3.3 million. Could the Hon. Member say what has occasioned the increase and who is likely to benefit from this allocation?

9.38 p.m.

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]: Mr. Chairman, what the Hon. Member did not state is that the original budget for 2024 was actually \$3.3 million. Nonetheless, the allocation is used for raincoats, windbreakers, long boots, safety boots, life jackets, torchlights, and umbrellas.

[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] Oh, you want to... Let me retract that. I will start again.

Line item 6223 – Office Materials and Supplies: The allocation is to purchase ink and toner, papers, file folders, stamp pad inks, rulers, stapling machines, permanent markers, paperclips, and pushpins. I could provide a breakdown. The users will be all the persons who fall under Programme 1, and if one looks at the Staffing Details, it also includes the two Ministers, the Permanent Secretaries, the secretariats and the staff.

Ms. Ferguson: If we look at page 198 in *Volume 2* of the Estimates, we will notice under the Indicators, it states:

“1 Number of sector policies being implemented and actively monitored”

Or effectively monitored. I note, in 2024, we had one, and for 2025, the Ministry is now catering for two. Could the Hon. Member explain the reason for the increase or the addition?

Mr. Croal: Two is correct. One is to complete the housing policy. We are now at the stage of terms of reference for the consultancy. The second is about the water sector. It is for the policy, and we are currently finalising that.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, if we look at Indicator three, which states:

“Number of staff trained in key technical areas”

I note that for 2024, you trained 20 persons, and in 2025, you have estimated training for 15 persons. We would recall that during your budget speech and even at press conferences, you boasted about the number of houses and roads to be built and all kinds of things. Could you explain, with such a vast work programme, why you are training only 15 persons and not more than what you trained last year?

Mr. Croal: I am very proud that I have a close follower and a keen fan; that is very good. Hon. Member, the agencies take care of the expenses for training that is conducted for their staff. It is recorded here. This caters for the Ministry of Housing and Water’s central staff.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Minister, I am looking at Policy Development and Administration. This will come under the Ministry of Housing and Water. Am I not correct, Sir? Last year, the Ministry trained 20 technical staff, and this year, it intends to train 15 technical staff. Could you say where

exactly in the Ministry of Housing and Water these technical staff will be located and also, why only train 15 persons and not more based on your work programme for 2025?

Mr. Croal: First of all, there are three main secretariats for the Ministry of Housing and Water, that is, for the two Ministers and then there is the Permanent Secretary who has the administrative and accountability responsibilities. Therefore, he would have several staff under his purview and those are within those brackets, the 15 staff members.

Ms. Ferguson: Could you list the positions these technical staff are assigned that are expected to be trained in 2025?

Mr. Croal: Could you refer to the line item? Mr. Chairman, through you, when one goes to the respective programmes that deal with staffing, it would be better to highlight the relevant staff.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, what is the line item? Minister, if you choose to sit, just pull the microphone closer to you.

Ms. Ferguson: For clarification, I am referring to what is contained in *Volume 2* of the Estimates on page 198.

Mr. Chairman: You are outlining the overall policy.

Ms. Ferguson: It is the Indicators. My question still remains.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, before I answer, we have billions of dollars before us that the nation would love to know how it is being spent, and I would love to bring out and deliver to the nation, the programmes that we are advocating for 2025 than to be bogged down in terms of a training programme for a few staff, but let us go. For example, there is training in procurement, risk management, supervisory management, Human Resources (HR) management, customer service and computer studies. These are the training areas that we are catering for.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I have no further questions for this programme, we could move to the next programme.

Programme: 451- Policy Development and Administration – \$235,643,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 452 – Housing Development – \$1,643,535,000

Ms. Ferguson: In *Volume 2* of the Estimates, I am looking at page 199, Housing Development. My questions will be premised on a few of the indicators listed here. Hon. Member, number 15 of the Indicator's states:

“Number of lots allocated”

In 2024, the Ministry had recorded some 10,389 lots that were distributed in total, giving a breakdown that 10,184 were allocated on the coast, while 205 were allocated in the hinterland. Mr. Chairman, I recall reading a press statement by the Ministry, quoting as saying that it issued 10,791 lots in 2024. In 2024, based on this information regarding the Indicators, it has allocated a total of 10,389 lots. Mr. Chairman, perhaps the Hon. Member could say to the nation what happened to the difference between the 10,389 and 10,791 that the Ministry boastfully announced to this nation.

Mr. Croal: In 2020, 2,759 lots were allocated in total. In 2021, 6,989 lots were allocated in total. In 2022, 10,695 lots were allocated in total. In 2023, 9,056 lots were allocated in total. In 2024, 10,797 lots were allocated in total. In this year already, in the month of January, we have completed 512 lots. In total to date, it is 40,808 lots. These lots that I have just listed are residential lots.

Ms. Ferguson: Something is definitely wrong because it is recorded publicly that 10,791 lots were distributed in the year 2024. Now, the Minister is saying to this Committee that for 2024, 10,797 lots were distributed. I did not ask him how many lots were distributed in the month of January. Based on the indicators...

Mr. Croal: This is quite alarming...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, let me hear her out.

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

Mr. Croal: May I respond, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, just one second.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I am working with what is contained in *Budget 2025 Volume 2* of the Budget Estimates. This is not Ms. Ferguson making up numbers here. The number of house

lots allocated in 2024 was 10,389 in total, with a disaggregated number of 10,184 lots for the coast and 205 lots for the hinterland. If one adds 10,184 and 205, it will give him/her 10,389. I am simply asking the Hon. Member... I do not understand where the difference is.

Mr. Chairman: What is the correct figure?

Ms. Ferguson: Between 10,389 and 10,979...

Mr. Chairman: Allow him to answer you. Which pages of which document are you quoting those numbers from?

Ms. Ferguson: It is *Volume 2*

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, for a total of 40,808, this is a big wow factor; just imagine that. However, we are allocating every day, so the reality is if we are doing reconciliation at the end – after all, there is a period of time one has to submit data for the budget preparation – and if I am here giving the final figure of what the year total was, then I do not see what is the big alarm and wow factor.

9.53 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: I will move on. I note that the target at the very Indicator at number 15, it states that the number of lots allocated is 10,000. Could the Hon. Member state where exactly these lots are likely to be allocated and in which region?

Mr. Croal: Again, Mr. Chairman, at the time of the initial submission and in keeping with our Manifesto's commitment, we have 10,000 lots remaining. We can do more, and we are going to do more. We will triple this by 300%. As a result, we have been able to move beyond the 10,000 lots. In our engagement with the various regions, we were able to come up with our target that we intended. That is why the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, in his speech announced that we will be allocating a minimum of 25,000 lots. Now, to answer the other part of the question – it will be in all regions, including Region 1 in both Mabaruma and Port Kaituma; in Region 2; Region 3; Region 4, on the East Coast

of Demerara; Region 5; Region 6; Region 7; Region 8; Region 9 and Region 10. In summary, it will be in all 10 Administrative Regions.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, the very line item, during course of the day, I guess the entire nation saw a publication carried by the *Demerara Waves* as it relates to a private developer who was able to amass 12.5 acres of land in Lethem and five acres of prime land on the Heroes Highway.

Mr. Chairman: Is that contained under this line item?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Sir. My question to the Hon. Member is, since he has 10,000 house lots to be issued for 2025, could he say from that 10,000 lots if ordinary Guyanese would be able to benefit from the allocation of lands along the Heroes Highway?

Mr. Croal: When I look at the new areas, preceding my period and in our early tenure, I see, left and right, ordinary Guyanese living along both sides of the Heroes Highway. I am not sure what the question is. [Ms. Ferguson: *(Inaudible)*] The areas to be allocated in Region 4 are going to be on the East Coast of Demerara.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, the very line item, in response to what the Hon. Member just stated...

Mr. Croal: What is the line item?

Ms. Ferguson: It is Indicator number 15. The Hon. Member stated earlier that when one travels along the Heroes Highway, he/she will see a lot of buildings and houses. I do not know what he is seeing compared to what I am seeing. Could the Hon. Member say to this Committee, from 2020 to 2024, how many applications on file were applicants who were able to benefit from house lots along the Heroes Highway?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, I must ask, what does the Hon. Member mean by along the highway? Could I get that clarity? I do not see any encumbrance along the highway.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Ferguson, is it immediately adjacent to the highway, one street in

Ms. Ferguson: Let me be specific. It is from the first roundabout, the Eagles Roundabout to the second roundabout, which is the Jaguar Roundabout. I am speaking about lands on the eastern and

western corridors of the Heroes Highway. Let me be specific: there is the Sheriff Group of Companies now putting up a new international mall; there is Sheraton; and I think there is Blue Water Shipping. I am asking the Hon. Member a question, Mr. Chairman. From the 10,000 lots you intend to give out for 2025, will consideration be given to those applicants to acquire or be allocated lands along that corridor?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I think you were very pellucid, but you will get a chance to answer again. I just want to repeat my understanding of the two questions. First, the answer that you gave was, these allocations are now along the East Coast. Is that right? Secondly, the Member asked if persons could access lands. You then asked the question, what do you mean by along the eastern highway? Maybe, we may have to take a drive and see if there are residential properties on both sides. Your turn, Minister.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, when I drive, immediately on both highways, I see reserves on both sides. When I move beyond the reserves, I see activities in different areas. If I am driving from Mandela, I look to the left and see houses from the south. Then, I will enter Houston and on the left, I will see development – the Ministry of Housing and Water and the Guyana Water Incorporated. Then, I will see private lands that are not owned by the State. On the right-hand side, it is similar beyond the reserves. If I move beyond Eccles, it is similar. I am not sure; the Hon. Member may have to come back with a graph to say how far it is beyond or... **[Hon. Member:** A picture...]

Provide a picture.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I have no further questions for this particular programme; let us move on.

Programme: 452 – Housing Development – \$1,643,535,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$ 1,721,985,000

Programme: 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$1,721,985,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 451 – Policy Development and Administration – \$4,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, for project code 2507000, Furniture and Equipment, I note that the Ministry is requesting \$4 million for this provision. Could the Hon. Member provide a disaggregation of the items that will be procured and state where these items will be assigned?

Mr. Croal: There will be three executive chairs, one for the Permanent Secretary (PS) and one each for the Ministers; one small refrigerator for the Permanent Secretary's secretariat; three battery backups, one each for the three secretariats; three filing cabinets, one each for the three secretariats; two desktop computers, both for the Permanent Secretary's secretariat; two laptops for the two Ministers' secretariat; four waiting chairs; and two digital cameras. **[Hon. Member (Government):** Are the chairs green or red?] They are neutrally coloured chairs.

Ms. Lawrence: I refer to project code 2802600, Urban Sewerage and Water. **[Ms. Ferguson:** He did not put that yet.] He did not put this yet. I am sorry.

Programme: 451 – Policy Development and Administration – \$4,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 452 – Housing Development – \$110,950,640,000

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

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. At project code 1903100, Infrastructural Development and Buildings states:

“Provision for highways, building, infrastructure works and payment of retention”.

This is a sum of \$101,813,640,000. This sum of money will see several roads being constructed in these communities that are under the Ministry of Housing and Water. This is along with other roads, bridges and so on; water distribution as detailed on page 199 of *Volume 3*. What I have noticed is that several of these roads that are being constructed are not done to cater for two vehicles to pass side by side. In the community of Herstelling and Farm, several residents have complained about that. There is no consideration for walkways to cater for... Is there any consideration by the Minister for the Ministry to improve the way it is constructing these roads so

that the roads can accommodate two vehicles, side by side – vehicles as big as Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) – and also walkways, so that residents in these communities can get to exercise in the corner, walk and so on?

Mr. Croal: For community roads, there are two main agencies that are involved. There are the Ministry of Housing and Water and the Ministry of Public Works. Generally, for upgrades, where there are existing roads, one must be cognisant of the width that one has to play with. For the roads that we are constructing for the communities, this varies, but they are not less than 18 feet in width.

Ms. Lawrence: Project code 1903100 – Infrastructural Development and Buildings: Hon. Minister, I am looking at the Legend here and at number two, it states:

“Provision for building, roads and highways”

10.08 p.m.

Could you kindly indicate the disaggregation in terms of the amount allocated for the building, the roads and the highways? How many highways are you talking about, and where and what will be the cost of each?

Mr. Croal: Hon. Member, it would be useful to give what the \$101 million is for and then I will disaggregate it. For example, it caters for rollover projects; new infrastructure works for housing schemes; the installation of infrastructure for regularised areas; land acquisition – these are for new lands that have been acquired, the utilities and the infrastructure because electricity and water is part of what we do in the schemes – and upgrades in existing areas. That is the breakdown for this allocation. If you look at one aspect, such as the rollover projects, there are a number of activities that have started and are now continuing. I can give you a few. We have just completed the Schoonord to Crane road as well as the Meer Zorgen to Crane road. While those projects are completed, this year it caters for the retention to be paid. Similarly, for the Eccles to Diamond road, the retention has to be paid. Thirdly, the Diamond to Craig road is ongoing, which is expected to be opened for access by April at the latest. We have also catered here, not just for highways, but buildings too. This would be the office building or building that is ongoing which the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, has been admiring. I can go on. If you want, I can list a number of projects, there are a lot. If you would like I can go into them; just have to tell me.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, through you, all I asked for was the disaggregation of the cost from the sum here of \$101 million in terms of the activities the Minister has at number two in the description of the project.

Mr. Croal: Sure. We have the Schoonord to Crane road and the sum catered for is \$3 billion, final payment; the Meer Zorgen to Schoonord road – \$1,012,000,000, final payment; the main bypass highway that connects us from Great Diamond to Craig, another \$1 billion to be paid here for final payment and retention; the Eccles to Diamond retention and the four lane at Great Diamond – \$197 million; the road widening works or enhancement works that were done around the Massy Road, Windsor Estate and Greenfield road, the final payment and retention to be paid – \$1,089,000,000; the four lane nearby at Liliendaal – \$510 million to be paid; and the four lane approach for the new Demerara Harbour Bridge – \$5,359,000,000 is expected to be paid this year on those activities for that road. Then, for the building aspect, there is the Ministry's head office, phase two – \$914 million to be paid this year and a retention for phase one of \$197 million. Those will be for the highways.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you.

Ms. Ferguson: Looking at the Indicators in *Volume 2* of the Estimates on page 198, I recognise that the Ministry intends to construct 1,000 houses, but I heard the Minister provide, not so long ago, a disaggregation of \$101 billion. Could I ask the Hon. Member, with the construction of these 1,000 houses, where the moneys will be coming from? If it is from *Budget 2025*, could you say where?

Mr. Croal: Hon. Member, as a former Minister, you would recall there are two aspects of a housing programme: the infrastructure work, which is hybrid and is done through capital funds, and the construction of houses, which pays for itself through the beneficiaries.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. However, what I would like to bring to the Hon. Member's attention is the number of unoccupied houses in the housing schemes. We know for a fact that many Guyanese are still waiting for a house lot to construct a house or in some cases, to be given one of those units constructed by the Ministry. As it is right now, the number of houses built in Little Diamond, I know for a fact, the Venezuelans are living there free of cost. Although we know that thousands of Guyanese are still waiting, there are houses unoccupied and

overgrown with bushes. What is the Ministry doing to address this problem or what is causing persons not to take up the houses?

Mr. Croal: First of all, I would like the Hon. Member to withdraw her statement suggesting that we are making our housing programmes available to Venezuelans.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, the Minister is stating, categorically and he is the authority, that no house lots are being allocated to Venezuelans. If you cannot prove that, you will have to withdraw it.

Ms. Ferguson: First of all, I never said that Venezuelans have been allocated lands.

Mr. Chairman: Nor houses.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, I did say that Venezuelans are living in houses built by the Ministry of Housing and Water. I have the proof because I was on the ground and I engaged with the people.

Mr. Chairman: All right, Hon. Member. You clarified my misstatement. You said 'living' and not 'given'.

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

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Croal: All of the houses, upon completion and because we have a heavy demand, go through a process. If it is for young professionals, even before the houses are built, the beneficiary is sent to the bank for pre-approval because the release of the... [An. Hon. Member (Opposition):

(Inaudible)] I will come to that. The release of the financing for the construction of the houses to the contractors is tied in with the banks. For the other model houses, this is done upfront through our housing funds. Once we assign the beneficiaries, they would go to the bank or if they are paying in cash or partially, that is done on a reimbursement basis. I, nor anyone else, can scrutinise whose partner or family I bring into the house that has been done through a legal and legitimate process, or who else goes into that house. That is why, in my initial response, I alluded to the allocation process because it is about the allocation process. Every time people come through the door, they are always with all kinds of scenarios. Once we have processed the ownership and they have a title, then I give the Hon. Member that task to continue getting that person out.

Ms. Ferguson: The Minister has not addressed part of my question.

Mr. Chairman: Which is?

Ms. Ferguson: Which is many of the houses are unoccupied. Secondly, what is the Ministry doing to address this situation? We know for a fact that many of our people such as a public servant who earns \$86,000, cannot go to the bank and get a loan for \$5 million or \$7 million on his/her own.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you stated a question that you said you did not get an answer for. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, I challenge – this is the second part of the question since the second one is fresh, I will come to the first one – the Hon. Member says to the banks that somebody earning \$80,000 cannot pre-qualify for a low-income house. That is not true. A person who is working part-time for \$40,000 can pre-qualify for a low-income house. It is true that the Government's mechanisms, prudent management and the wisdom the banks have seen in our housing programmes is why the low interest mortgage rate was reduced, in most instances, by 2% to 3%. As for the first aspect of occupancy, I have noticed that the goalpost has shifted. We started off by saying that the houses are filled with Venezuelans, and now the goalpost has shifted to occupancy. That is fine. I will respond. At our level, we do not have houses that are complete...

[**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] ...and I will respond to that same [*inaudible*] housing if the Hon. Chairman give me the chance. Once it is completed, we go through the process. After that, I cannot dictate to the beneficiary who they have in their house. A title is processed because that is lodged and used by the bank as collateral. In terms of the very houses you alluded to at Great Diamond, I would like to get back one of those. All of those houses are occupied; all of them. By the way, those houses are in prime locations and that came about because of our programme, where we are building access roads. In this case, there is a highway that has been constructed. We, in the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, are proud of our housing programme and we will continue to build more.

10.23 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. May I share, shortly, with you that the CH&PA and the contractor promised the house would be turned over, but it has been almost 28

months since the cash payment and Mr. Croal and Ms. Rodrigues are sitting on their hands? I have many contracts that I could share...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, what is the question?

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, the question is, why is it that when the contractors are building these houses to substandard work and the beneficiaries lodge their complaints to the Ministry, why is it that the Ministry is not addressing the people's concerns?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Minister, why is the Ministry not addressing concerns?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry has a project department. They have a team of staff that are assigned with responsibility for the houses and they all have defective liability period. Once issues are identified... let me also make this point – before a house is handed over, an inspection is done by the bank and the beneficiary. What the Hon. Member is mixing herself up with – because we have had some challenges... [Ms. Ferguson: *(Inaudible)*]

Mr. Chairman: Member Ferguson, you had a chance to ask the question. Allow the Minister to give his answer. I guess Ms. Ferguson has completed her questions. You have the rest of the time to answer.

Mr. Croal: What is also factual, Mr. Chairman, we have had issues with some contractors. That is factual. I will not sit here to say that we have not had challenges. One of the major reasons has been because of our deliberate policy to ensure that the houses are not constructed at a profit-making basis because they are kept to a minimum to allow affordability.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Project code 1903900: Could the Hon. Minister indicate what the target is in terms of the construction of Core Homes for 2025? It is not in your indicators.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, is it included in the estimates?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, the Core Home Support programme, which is under the Adequate Housing Urban Accessibility Programme, for this year, we have 133 Core Homes to be constructed.

Ms. Lawrence: The next item on this same project code, according to the project title and the description, is Subsidies for Home Improvement. We know there was the allocation to the people in Laing Avenue who had documents. Which other housing schemes will you target in 2025 and what is your target?

Mr. Croal: Thank you, Hon. Member. Let me outline the various areas we have for the subsidies broken down. You have the Laing Avenue project, as you identified. There is also the Lethem Housing Project, for which those houses are being built at \$3 million – \$1 million is subsidised through the Government and \$2 million by the beneficiary. We have the Steel and Cement Initiative and that was launched at GuyExpo in 2022. The Steel and Cement Initiative programme continues and will continue. That is one aspect. In terms of other areas, we have not identified other areas. What we are targeting are programmes across the board, rather than specific areas *per se*.

Ms. Lawrence: Just a follow-up, Mr. Chairman. Minister, what are you going to do for those people in the housing scheme, like those on Laing Avenue, that do not have documentation because it is just passed down from generation to generation? What are you going to do for them?

Mr. Croal: We have been helping them. You are correct, in some cases — we have a few who have not been able to benefit from the subsidy as a result of their inability to show ownership. We have been helping some of them to put their paperwork in order, because one of which you know is whether it is a letter of administration or other challenges. Once we can also prove that that individual has been the one living there, *et cetera*, we have started to make exceptions. The reality is that we were supposed to show ownership.

Ms. Lawrence: This is my last question on this, Mr. Chairman. You said the Steel and Cement Initiative continues. I am shocked at that because several people have said to me that your staff have told them that this is finished, this initiative is closed. I am very happy that you are saying it. Or is it only now specific to certain regions or areas? What is happening here?

Mr. Croal: No, it is not. It continues. There was an initial \$600 million that was made available for this programme. We have not exhausted the resources, hence, it continues. It is not for Region 4 alone, it is for various regions.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Continuing on that very project code, I could take the Minister to Capital Project Profile number 200 in Volume 3. I note here you are seeking \$1,637,000,000. I also note this is under the Adequate Housing and Urban Accessibility Programme. I know the money is being made available through the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) or foreign funding, I note, based on the description of the project you have here:

“Home improvement and construction of core homes on existing serviced lots between La Bonne Intention and Diamond and Parfaite Harmonie.”

Mr. Croal: Those are the boundaries for the project.

Ms. Ferguson: I understand that because this is a continuation from what we left in 2020. Could you say how many people are likely to benefit from this year’s allocation in the various areas where the project is expected to unfold?

Mr. Croal: I actually answered that when the Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence asked. For both the subsidies and the Core Home Support programme, it is 133 on the Core Homes and 793 on the subsidies programme.

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

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: On the very project code, if you look at item 3, in the description of the project:

“Consolidation of existing housing schemes.”

Could you say which housing schemes will benefit from this allocation, and perhaps, as I am on my feet, could you provide a disaggregation of those areas? Thank you.

Mr. Croal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a total of 17 kilometres of roads, 9 kilometres of drainage, 4 kilometres of sidewalks and streetlights, all within the Farm/Herstelling area.

Ms. Ferguson: I asked for the cost – the cost associated with each area.

Mr. Croal: Hon. Member it is ongoing. The total sum to be spent, in terms of those in the infrastructure aspect, will be \$880 million. Hon. Member, we intend to bring closure to this project by the end of this year.

Programme: 452 – Housing Development – \$110,950,640,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister and your team, for taking us through your agency. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ferguson: No, Mr. Chairman. Excuse me. You did not put programme 453.

Mr. Chairman: That is what I just put – programme 453.

Ms. Ferguson: No, but we did not...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, least we are challenged, I again propose a question that the sum stated for programme 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management – Capital Expenditure. Is that not the one we just dealt with? Housing development?

Programme: 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$21,280,000,000

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, Minister, I propose the question that the sum stated herein for programme 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management stands part of the estimates. Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, you have the floor.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Unfortunately, we only have two minutes remaining on this one.

Ms. Lawrence: Could I ask my one question and Ms. Ferguson asks her one and then the Minister answer both?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, I will take both.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. Hon. Minister, I am looking at project code 2802100, Hinterland Water Supply. The legend says that you are making provision for new wells and water supply systems.

Could you kindly say where and how many wells and water supply systems you are budgeting for here?

Ms. Ferguson: The very project code, Mr. Chairman. I know for a fact, Sir, that when the Ministry came for a supplementary in August, a promise was made that the rusting of the water will be addressed by December, 2024. Could the Minister indicate to the National Assembly and the people of Guyana what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the colour of the water is properly addressed? Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Member Ferguson. You are correct. I actually called 513, the page rather than the programme, earlier when you interjected. Minister, the floor is yours.

Mr. Croal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the hinterland programme, the new systems, you asked for wells, but I will give you some information. For Region 9, at Awarewaunau, Shea, and Mururanau, we will be constructing elevated storage. For Region 7, there will be a new water system for Phillipai and Amokokopai; expansion of the water systems in Batavia, Karrau, Kartabo, Iteballi, Dagg Point, 72 Miles, Kaburi Lower Mazaruni; expansion and upgrade of the water systems in Kamarang, Warwatta, Jawalla, and Waramadong; here in Middle Maz, we will upgrade the water system in Kangaruma, Isseneru, and Tasserene and in Upper Maz now, there will be an expansion of the water systems in Paruima, Kaikan, and Kako. For Region 8, there will be an expansion and upgrade of the water system in Mahdia – this will be Central Mahdia; upgrade and expansion of water supply system in Chenapau and similarly, in Kato, Kanapang, Paramakatoi, Red Creek, Penak, Arasawa, Mararuwau. Then in Region 1; in-house drilling – this will be done by Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI's) rig in Wanaina Hill, Tobago Hills, Thomas Hill, Barabina Hill, Barimanabo and the Mabaruma Central. Mr. Cox, you should be good. I will continue, there will be in-house drilling over the Moruca sub-region, in Kwebanna, Karaburi, Three Miles, Huridiah and that is at the Aquero junction and Santa Rosa Islands for Kabokalli.

10.38 p.m.

For Region 2, there will be in-house drilling at Wakapau, Akawini, Kabakaburi and Mainstay/Whyaka. Those are all tendered. Similarly, in Region 9, installation of new water systems for Hiawa, St. Ignatius, Katunarib, Potarinau, Rupanau, Mururanau, Shulinab, Apoteri, Aranaputa, there is a gap between Oasis and the Annai Junction, Kwatamang, Karasabai,

Achiwuib, Karaudarnau and Aishalton. Drilling of water wells in Region 9, Hon. Member, despite all the things you said you did in Region 9, drilling of wells in Nappi, Sawariwau, Annai, Crashwater, Fairview, Rewa and Krakana. Expansion of the water system in same Region 9, Toka, Kurikak, Jowari, Wichabai, Churikadarnau and Parikwarwaunau. Hon. Member, Mr. Cox listen, In Region 1, drilling of wells at Manawarin, Wallaba, Haimacabra, drilling of a 200 metres water well at Kumaka/Santa Rosa and this is for the central Santa Rosa deep well. Similarly, construction of water supply systems in Bamboo Landing, Assakata, Three Brothers, Aruka Mouth, Sacred Heart, Barasina, Black Water Barima and St. Dominic's. Construction of new water supply system at Morawhanna, Hobo Hill, Santa Cruz, Kinchee Creek, Five Star Cluster, Unity Square and Waikarebi. Upgrade of the Baramita Water Supply System similarly. Let me go. I am not finished. Construction of Water Supply System at Arakaka. This will now complete Arakaka because as you enter the Arakaka area, this is the One to Three Miles Area.

Construction of water Supply System at Canal Bank, extension upgrades in Region 2 at Mashabo, Capoey Sands. Upgrade of the Moraikobai Water Supply System, Region 5 and construction of new water supply system at Saxakalli, Silver Hill, Barakara, Great Falls and Muritaro. This is something we are adding this year, Hon. Member. The provision of rainwater harvesting systems in Regions 1, 7 and 8, which will have with them both tanks and the supply of zinc aspect. That is one part. That is for the Hinterland Programme. In terms of water and the quality of the water coming here in the coastland, we outlined a programme as to how we will reach to what is considered a minimum of 90% of treated water on the coastland. Here I referred to Charity to Moleson Creek. Initially, we had said Crabwood Creek but we now added Moleson Creek. We started at 52% in 2020. At the end of 2024, which was one month ago, we ended at 84%. In addition to the seven plants that have already been tendered, under the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) Programme....

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** (Inaudible)]

Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul just listen. We have Wakenaam and Leguan Islands. We will also be constructing the treatment plant for each of those Islands and will be drilling a well in Leguan Island. We already drilled the Wakenaam Island, similarly, for Region 2, from Walton Hall to Charity. The treatment plant will be located at Maria's Delight. We already have Onderneeming that is coming on stream and will be commissioned very shortly. That is three so far.

In Region 5, the treatment plant to be constructed at Bath will cater for Number 7 Village to Kingelly. We are drilling two wells to supply the system. The fifth major one will be for Berbice, Region 6. The treatment plant will be constructed at Adventure. This will cater for Tain to No. 50 Village. We will also be drilling a well to supply this treatment plant. Similarly, we have commissioned one of the seven on East Bank Demerara already and another five will be commissioned before the end of this first quarter. That will give you six. We have the Hope Canal Project. That has started and that is tapping into the fresh water source and will be harnessed for treated water. Similarly, we have now started for East Bank Demerara, to tap into the Conservancy...

Mr. Chairman: Minister, we are now six minutes.

Mr. Croal: Okay sure. In summary, Mr. Chairman, by June of this year, close to 90% of the persons on the Coastland will be receiving treated water. When these five programmes that I have outlined are completed, then we will have the entire coastland receiving treated water.

Programme: 453 – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$21,280,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister and your staff for taking us through your agency. Let me invite the Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Manickchand and her staff to take us through Agency 40 – Ministry of Education. Hon. Minister, are you ready?

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Mr. Chairman, before the time begins, I think it is important on this good evening for the nation to know who is with us. Sitting directly to my right would be the Programme Head of the particular Programme. Sitting to her right or his right would be the Expenditure Planning and Management Analyst (EPMA).

Mr. Chairman: Is it a male sitting next to you?

Ms. Manickchand: No. It will be a male at some point. We believe in diversity. We also have the Chief Education Officer directly behind me and next to him is the Permanent Secretary (PS) and Accounting Officer. As the Programme heads come in, I will introduce them.

Mr. Chairman: We start the clock running at 10.47 p.m.

Agency: 40 Ministry of Education

Current Expenditure

Programme: 401 – Policy Development and Administration - \$2,788,451,000

Ms. McDonald: The first question for the Minister is, under Programme 402, Volume I... [An

Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] Programme 401, sorry, ...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, if you want, you can sit. Pull the microphone closer, so you will be able to see the book better.

Ms. Manickchand: I would be very happy Mr. Chairman, if there is no question for Programme 401; that we put it and move on to Programme 402.

Ms. McDonald: We would be happy to start with Programme 402.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, please put the question for Programme 401.

Programme: 401 – Policy Development and Administration - \$2,788,451,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 402 – Training and Development – \$3,641,175,000

Ms. McDonald: Line item 6284 – Other: under training and development, we have seen an increase there of \$321 million. Could the Minister explain to us why the huge leap and what does ‘Other’ entail?

Ms. Manickchand: Could I ask the Hon. Member, to speak into the microphone because we are having difficulty hearing. I heard the question, why is there an increase? This is to cater for some new programmes that we are doing in the Ministry of Education. The Hon. Member may be aware that the Caribbean suffered a severe decline in the mathematics pass rate at the last Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination. The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), which is the body that manages CSEC, has said publicly that they will find some in place to try to change that by modules and some other features. Guyana will not wait until that is done in September, 2026. Guyana has taken its own measures, as an intervention and we are giving scientific calculators, geometry sets, textbooks, graph papers and past papers organised by topics

to every fourth and fifth formers. We are also producing lessons on the Guyana Learning Channel and going into schools and speaking parents because one of the complaints in our research is, while we have some excellent teachers doing far more than we can expect them to do, or we would have expected them to do. We also had complaints of teachers are not teaching the syllabus, not finishing it and not teaching it properly.

We have hired Mathematics Monitors from across the country, to go into schools to make sure the syllabus is finished, to make sure that teachers are teaching, to make sure that their hands are held, and they get on the spot training, all with a view to improving our pass rate at Mathematics. We are talking rates and percentage, all with a view to giving each child a better chance at thriving in this new Guyana. That is very different from 2016, when we had a 14% pass rate at the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA). By 2017, the only thing the A Partnership for National Unity/alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) had done was to announce that they were going to set up a Commission of Inquiry (CoI), to deal with that Mathematics failing grade. We, on the other hand, are trying to change the grade actively and proactively, by producing more and giving students more. We are very happy to do that. Very shortly, we will also be launching a literacy movement across the country, that is, to improve with an aim of making sure every Guyanese child, regardless of where they live, is literate by the age of Grade Four. That has been a beautiful programme crafted and developed mostly by our (Assistant Chief Executive Officer) ACEO for Literacy Ms Stembiso Grant and a large team of mostly women that are diverse from across the country. We have Literacy Support Officers and we are paying them under this Head also. I would be happy to tell you more about the Literacy programme, if you want to hear about that.

Ms. McDonald: I have no other questions on Nursery, but we move to Primary Education on Programme 404.

Mr. Mahipaul: I have a question.

10.53 p.m.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, we are obviously putting this question then.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am going to line item 6301, under Training and Developments, Cyril Potter College of Education's Stipend. I see that for 2024 no sum was spent and we have a budgeted sum

of \$1,905,000 and sorry if I may have referenced last year. I did ask the question as to why the reduction and the Minister said that the reduction and I quote, ‘the reduction is because we are no longer paying \$12,000’. Let me tell you how this is...

Ms. Manickchand: No...

Mr. Chairman: Minister, please allow him to finish and give me an opportunity to put the question to you. Are you finished, Mr. Mahipaul?

Mr. Mahipaul: No Sir, I am quoting what the answer was,

“ When your party was in office, you paid \$12,000 to each teacher trainee per month. What we are paying now is \$104,000 to each teacher trainee per month and so they are being paid under a different line. but I could tell you which one. It is under employment costs in the salary...”

Could the Hon. Minister say why is it that we are still budgeting \$1,905,000 under this Line when it is no longer catering as seen in the zero that is at 2024.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you for the question, this is not [*Inaudible*] so the answer remains the same, Hon. Mahipaul. When we came into office in 2020, trainees were receiving just under \$10,000 each, we have changed that completely and we are paying every trainee teacher at Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) at least a salary of over \$100,000, so this is the wrong Line you are looking at; but I am happy to tell you about this Programme. We have changed the number of teachers in our training programme from 250 to 500 to 2000, but this Line here deals with payment and stipends for board members of the CPCE Board, it does not cater for the teachers. The teachers’ salaries are catered for under ‘Salaries’, that is a very different Line.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, follow-up, is the Minister saying that in 2024, no payment to board members of CPCE was made?

Ms. Manickchand: In 2024, we did not have an active board for the entire year.

Mr. Mahipaul: Ok, thank you very much.

Mr. Figueira: The Indicators, Hon. Minister, I have recognised several Indicators speak specifically to training opportunities for teachers, and during the debate we would have mentioned. A lot of comments were made in regard to the use of ChatGPT and such like, which is not a bad thing because with the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI), I think it helps to enhance the teacher's performance in the classroom and more so, give the students exposure to the use of AI. Are any of the training programmes that would to be offered here in the indicators cater for teachers being exposed to the use of AI in the classroom to enhance their performance and more so help the children to be prepared with the AI advancement that is happening?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, well it is a good question, as you know the world is currently discussing how to incorporate AI into life in a sensible way and I say 'sensible way' because we have seen speeches in this House that used AI that missed the sensible part. We cannot escape it; you have some teenagers that I know scorn the use of AI because they say it is not credible, and it is plagiarism. Then you have some people who are experts at extracting from AI what is good. What is Guyana's way forwards; and that is open for discussion, we would be happy to have you on board to lend to that conversation. What we have done, we have said to our teachers through a circular that you are allowed to use AI to plan your lessons, and we are aware that AI is being used in various ways to deliver lessons. Shortly, the President's baby, a digital school is going to come on board and to escape and make our children more comfortable with accents used, AI will be incorporated in that. Our Exams Department has begun to use AI to test, to prepare questions, all of these things have drawbacks and many of them are still being studied, so Guyana is taking a cautious approach, but we are not burying our heads in the sand. We prefer to err on the side of dealing with an issue rather than pretending it does not exist. The issue here is an opportunity with AI, how do we incorporate that into the education system that makes it beneficial for teachers and our children, our learners. It is still a matter that is open for discussion, and we are talking about it in various groups. We also have the Information Technology (IT) Department and our training centre at National Centre for Educational Resource Development (NCERD) that deals with IT, looking specifically at some of these topics.

Ms. McDonald: Line item 6281– Security Services: We noticed that in 2024 it was \$363 but in 2025, our security cost has gone down. Could the Minister indicate to us why the reduction in the cost of security since we are having...?

Ms. Manickchand: Which Programme is the Hon. Member on?

Ms. McDonald: We are on Secondary.

Mr. Mahipaul: No, we are on Training and Development.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, perhaps, again, we are not at Secondary; this is the fifth year and she cannot get it right.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you asked for clarification...

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, I just said we still have one more question on Training and so I moved there. [Mr. McCoy: (Inaudible)]

Mr. Chairman: I cannot hear you, I am hearing other people.

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

Go ahead, Ms. McDonald.

Ms. McDonald: I just asked that we have one more question on the Training ...

Mr. Chairman: We are still at 402.

Ms. McDonald: Yes, so we are moving from there now...

Mr. Chairman: No.

Ms. McDonald: I am asking you to put that and then we will do that.

Programme: 402 –Training and Development - \$3,641,175,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 403 – Nursery Education - \$5,485,004,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Line item 6301, is there an increase with this sum that has increased there for the school Grant from \$426,596 to \$457,284, is there an increase in the number of nursery schools that we are catering for now in 2025 as opposed to what was catered for in 2024?

Ms. Manickchand: I missed the line item, Sir. Could the Hon. Member just repeat it for my benefit. **[Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** This increase is because when the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) came into office we met the abolition of the '*Because We Care*' cash grant. You would recall that the APNU threw it out the window and we promised that we would restore it and we would increase it every year. Last year it was \$40,000, this year it is \$50,000, so the amount each child gets will go up. That means we will be putting more than \$11 billion versus \$9 billion last year into the pockets of parents. That is why you see an increase here, that caters for one of the increases, then uniform assistance that caters for public students at \$5000 per child and the distribution of the cash grant costs, also...

Mr. Mahipaul: I know the Minister is passionate about her cash grant and we are happy that the students are getting that amount, but if I may, may I repeat the question because I believe she did not hear it. I said specifically to school grant, there is an increase for nursery school grant from \$426,596,000 to \$457,284,000. The question is, is there an increase in nursery schools that we are catering for in 2025 as opposed to the nursery schools catered for in 2024, and if there is that increase, how many nursery schools have we increased to?

Ms. Manickchand: That is a very good question and I am very happy you asked it. What we, the PPP/C Government introduced one year ago, the PPP/C Government, was to give each school their own grant to purchase their materials and janitorial supplies themselves. That means they would get it in the quality and the quantity and in a timely manner that they want it. We are in the process of building 60 nursery schools across the country, six-zero, many of those will be finished this year, and so we will have more schools to give the grant to; I am sure you are happy to hear that. As a result of which you see actually more money being placed in this Line. Mr. Mahipaul, that does two things, puts untruth to the statement we heard that schools were not getting enough supplies in the House, during the debate, and that they had to scrounge for supplies, it makes that a total untruth. Schools are getting their own resources to buy their own janitorial and stationary supplies. If someone came into this House, and the Hon. Member, Ms. McDonald did come into the House and read that then she clearly does not know what is happening in the schools. Secondly, teachers used to complain that they would have to use money from their pockets to provide these grants and the truth is, that is the truth; the good teachers use their money to provide things; perhaps Mr. Cox is one of them. They no longer have to do that because we are providing this grant for

teachers to get the materials they need. Thirdly, teachers would ask parents to provide Dettol toilet paper, cardboard and crayons, we no longer have to burden parents with that because the PPP/C Government is providing it to each classroom. That is why you see that increase there.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put the question that the sum...

Ms. Flue-Bess: I have a follow-up to what the Minister said, schools normally have to get the pricing, *et cetera*, because they will get this grant. If you give the school the grant and the prices increase, is there a mechanism at the Ministry of Education where the school could actually come back and get any additional moneys?

Ms. Manickchand: Each school gets 4,500 for each child per term on the coastland and because we try to serve equitably, because things are more expensive in the Hinterland, each school gets \$5,500 per child. A school like St. Josephs High School where the Hon. Member teaches, with about a thousand children, would therefore get \$4.5 million per term that they did not get before.

11.08 p.m.

Now, is that enough? What is enough? We believe it is enough because we have priced what is needed. Zero is what your Party gave. We are giving \$4,500. Also, for national schools, which St. Joseph's High School is, will get a million extra – our six form schools. If a teacher wants to be objectionable and make herself a problem in service, nothing will be enough. We have not received that complaint from teachers. We have had teachers who have pretty much said to us that they are very grateful for this grant and that it is working for them. That is how we consult before we decide what we are going to do.

Programme: 403 – Nursery Education – \$5,485,004,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 404 – Primary Education – \$16,664,364,000

Programme: 404 – Primary Education – \$16,664,364,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 405 – Secondary Education – \$13,366,151,000

Mr. Mahipaul: For Secondary Education, I have taken note that at line item 6284, Other, there is a heavy increase there. [*Noisy discussion*]

Ms. Manickchand: What is the line item? Sorry.

Mr. Chairman: It is line item 6284. If your Colleagues could give you an opportunity of a bit more quietness, you will hear.

Mr. Mahipaul: That line has increased from \$234,009,000 to \$1,255,370,000. It is a very big increase. Could the Hon. Member please provide us with an explanation for this huge increase?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. I briefly mentioned – and I do not want to take credit for it, which is why I will leave it for His Excellency to do when he launches it – the creation of a digital school. For this digital school, the dream of His Excellency is that each and every child in this country will be able to access, from nursery to Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), lessons on the channel, free of cost, which align with our local curriculum and any international curriculum such as the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). That is going to be launched very soon by His Excellency. Our children all across, beginning with fourth and fifth formers, are expected to have access to lessons. I remember the Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, speaking about equity. We will no longer see only those who could access the fancy teachers in Georgetown getting service. We will now have this same lesson available to everybody across the country. Just two days ago, we connected Chinowieng, which is a deeply remote village in Region 7. They will have access to the digital school. Mururanau, Awarewaunau, Nappi, Monkey Mountain and Karasabai are all places that will have access to this digital school. That is why this is significantly increased here because that is what we are going to be investing in our children.

Mr. Mahipaul: I have a follow up, Sir.

Ms. Manickchand: Also...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul is on the floor.

Ms. Manickchand: Also, I am very happy to... Sorry, Sir. May I?

Mr. Chairman: I have already turned over the floor to Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul.

Ms. Manickchand: Okay. I did not finish the answer, Sir.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I follow up, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you may.

Mr. Mahipaul: This digital school will, therefore, require teachers and so on. I am assuming we will be using teachers that we already have in the system. Will teachers who are teaching in the normal school system now be engaged in this extra duty of delivering on the digital platform?

Ms. Manickchand: It is multifaceted. Your Colleague just now spoke of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Your Colleague spoke of the introduction and incorporation of AI into the classroom. Some of it will be AI-delivered. Some of it is going to be our local teachers. All of it will be aligned with the curricula that are being tested. That is what we are very conscious of. From this digital school, there are tests that are going to be marked; assessments, if you are to use the fancy modern language. There are going to be books that can be accessed from this digital school. Of course, as you may be able to imagine, it is going to be uploaded to a place where children can refer to it later on. It is not only live. It is going to be available as a pre-recorded school also.

Mr. Mahipaul: Another follow up with your permission, Sir. For the local teachers that will be used to execute this digital school, is there a criterion in terms of how you will select specific teachers for specific subject areas? You would agree with me that we have very competent teachers from Region 1 to Region 10.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Mahipaul, we always look for our best. We do not always see them close to us, so you would not be seeing some of your best teachers close to you or some of the country's best teachers close to you. I will tell you this, we are going by advertisement. We have already placed an advertisement asking for people to come forward. The system knows the expert teachers who are not only good in the classroom but who are good at training. There may be a really good teacher who could review the content of someone's video but hates with a passion going on camera, so there are different nuances to this. I want to assure you that we are very keen on two things: getting expert work and having the content aligned to our local and international curricula because it is very important that we do not teach things or fail to teach things that will be tested. We are very careful about that.

Mr. Mahipaul: My follow up: The fact that an advertisement has already been placed means that there is a conclusion on the honorarium. stipend or probably a salary, I do not know, for the teacher that will be engaged. May I ask if there is one standard salary, honorarium or stipend across the board for all teachers participating? If not, is it separate and what is that amount?

Ms. Manickchand: No, it is not fixed. It is an assumption you are making. As I told you, this is very heavily nuanced. The person who has to create the content may get more than the person who presents the content or may get more than the person who reviews that presentation. It is very nuanced and it is not settled as yet.

Mr. Mahipaul: All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. McDonald: Under line item 6281, Security Services, I notice that in 2024, the cost for security was \$363,575,000 and then in 2025, the security rates are now...

Ms. Manickchand: I am not hearing the Hon. Member, Sir. I do not know if you are hearing her.

Mr. Chairman: Some of the Members are challenged with respect to the microphone and then looking at the books. You may need to come closer to the microphone, Ms. McDonald.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, are you hearing me now?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. That is better.

Ms. McDonald: Good. I am looking at line item 6281, Security Services. In 2024, the sum allotted there for security charges was \$363,575,000. In 2025, I recognised it went down to \$325,088,000. I am asking what is the reason for this since I recognise, especially in Georgetown and other secondary schools, that there has been theft.

Ms. Manickchand: At no school has the security been lessened. This is enough to cover our contractual arrangements without changing the number of guards at the school. Do we have challenges with security companies that say they will send six and send one or two? Yes, we do, and we are dealing with those as they arise. However, this is adequate to provide for security without lessening the number of guards at all the schools in Georgetown.

Ms. McDonald: I notice under the Indicators in *Volume 2*, Indicator two states:

“Percentage of students attaining grades 1-3 in 5 or more subjects...”

I notice that the pass rate was 26%. I am asking what is the reason for the dropping of that rate?

Ms. Manickchand: The reason was given earlier. Across the world, Mathematics is a problem. In fact, as we are in the Committee, I think we could get a little bit more informal. You would recall that I gave that in the year that you wrote Mathematics, 16% of the population passed. I remember you not being so anxious to disclose whether you were part of the 16%. In the year that I wrote, which is 1992, I think even fewer passed. The Caribbean recorded, through the Caribbean Examinations Council, that every single country in the Caribbean saw a significant decline in their pass rate for Mathematics. Now, the children who wrote Mathematics in 2024 are children who suffered from two things that they could not control. One, the Coronavirus Disease (COVID). The first, second, and a little bit of third form students were home. Two, a politically inspired strike for five months immediately preceding the Mathematics exam. Guyana had peculiarities that had our children suffer a little bit more than the Caribbean. The Hon. Member is aware of both of those.

Matriculation is directly related to the number of children who pass Mathematics and English because we count matriculation as five or more subjects, including Mathematics and English. We have been able to take, as the Hon. Dr. Singh pointed out in his rebuttal, for anyone who was able to either listen and/or interpret what he was saying, the number of children who are entering and passing Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination from 2,000 in the 1990s to 10,000 and more in 2024. Numerically, we are graduating more children who have a chance at entering tertiary education and jobs such as at the banks and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centres. Additionally, we have established the Get Ready for Opportunities to Work (GROW), where more than 2,800 young people are able to access secondary exit-type exams that allow them to go on to do tertiary examinations. Those would be the people who did not get to complete CXC; dropped out or failed Mathematics. I am happy to say that of the 2,800 who graduated on either the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) or the General Education Development (GED), 80% of those are registered and currently studying for degrees in foreign universities at no cost to themselves on the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL).

11.23 p.m.

Ms. McDonald: While I hear the Minister, I just wanted to say this. In 2018...

Mr. Chairman: Is that a question or are you making a statement?

Ms. McDonald: It is a question I am going to ask. Our pass rate was 46% in 2018 and we had an industrial... in 2018, but I will move to the next indicator. **[Mr. McCoy:** Forty-six per cent of what? *(Inaudible)*] A 46% pass rate.

Ms. Manickchand: That is actually not accurate. I can tell you right now that is not accurate.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. MP, the Minister interjected to correct your statement. Minister, please provide us with the correct information.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Chairman, if you would give me one moment, in 2018, the pass rate for Mathematics was 43% and English was 67%, and 43% remains lower than in 2015, under the PPP/C Government. Also, since I know the public is listening, for us, every child deserves the chance to pass Mathematics, and that is why we have the Mathematics intervention programme, where we are looking at each and every child across this country because we are not going to haggle over whether it was 46%, 44% or 43%. We want 100% and we are going to work until we get 100%. We know that will not be overnight, but we are going to work until we get it.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. McDonald, you have the floor. I have the Hon. Jaiprashad waiting for quite some time.

Ms. McDonald: I am happy that the Minister was able to give us pass the rates and that they were higher. Indicator 14 states:

“Student to ... teacher ratio”

Ms. Manickchand: Which line item are you talking about?

Ms. McDonald: I am at the Indicators.

Mr. Chairman: It is the policy.

Ms. McDonald: The student teacher ratio was 16:1 in 2024 and 16:1 in 2025. Coming from what is in the schools, that ratio is not accurate. We are seeing in our schools, and I can give you examples of schools...

Mr. Chairman: Please, if you do not have the physical evidence. I would not challenge the Minister on what is published.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, I do.

Mr. Chairman: Minister Edghill, again, will tell you about his experience with inaccurate figures. Minister, go ahead.

Ms. Manickchand: I am aware that last night, the General Secretary of the Guyana Teachers Union (GTU) – we are contending a squatting on that position – sent out a message saying, Colleagues, good evening, can you indicate by the name of the school at each level where you did not have the following and she asked a number of questions. The Hon. Member does not know what is on the ground. Last night, she sent that out, asking what is happening. The teacher student ratio does not deal with a school. It deals with the number of children divided by the number of teachers. In some schools, there will be 30:1. In some schools, there will be 5:1. Then, there will be an average out. I would not ask you to try to understand that now but play this back later on and go and figure out what averaging out means. It is offensive to question numbers that people at the Ministry of Finance have spent a lot of time putting together based on realities, not only from Guyana's records but from the Caribbean's records, the Bureau of Statistics, and a whole host of other places that inform this kind of information. That is how the student teacher ratio is calculated for this purpose. I will say this, we are currently on a major expansion programme. If one had passed the East Ruimveldt Secondary School three years ago and took a picture, it had one L-shaped block, now it has three other blocks. That means we will have more classrooms now, so one could take a classroom of 30 students, 35 students or 40 students, and split it into two, and now have a lower student teacher ratio. It will be 20:1.

When we came into office, St. Rose's High School was demolished in 2017. There was a failure, neglect, and/or refusal to rebuild it. We rebuilt it last year. That means we now have more classrooms to divide the children up. We have extended the Queen's College (QC), Bishop's High School, St. Winefride's Secondary School, and East Ruimveldt Secondary School. We have rebuilt

the North Ruimveldt Secondary School. We are currently building and extending the Tucville Secondary School. This year, we have a lot of extensions, so you will see that going on, but it does not go on by magic. It goes on because we put a school or an extension in place, where we could now split classrooms and give teachers fewer students to teach. Additionally, we are now training four times the number of teachers we used to train. We now have more teachers in the system. When the Hon. Members' party was in office, the highest number of teachers they ever graduated out of Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) was 535. Last year, we graduated 1,700 teachers out of CPCE. We have more numerically. We have a higher quality of teachers. Those are all things that feed into changing teacher student ratios. It is not just a *gyaff* or something to say when you are on television (TV) that you want five seats or you can win five seats for your party. One has to be put measures in place for these things, and he/she has to invest in getting to the place where he/she wants the target met and that is what we are in the process of doing.

Mr. Chairman: Thanks for that comprehensive explanation of the generation of that ratio. Could I take the Hon. Member Mr. Jaiprashad?

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A Follow up question to line item 6284. Could the Hon. Minister indicate to the Hon. Committee, as it relates to the digital platform, if it will be a sample for regions or if it will be for all secondary schools within the country?

Ms. Manickchand: What do you mean if it will be a sample for regions? It will be available to every part of the country. It is a digital school, so it will depend heavily also on the internet. When We came into office, let us just take CPCE for instance, we had one CPCE and 16 satellites. We now have 123 learning sites for teachers, which means we have been able to get 30 in Region 1, 30 in Region 7 – I do not remember all the numbers, but we have been able to expand where we have internet connection across the country in a major way. One would have heard of a broad policy where we are looking to make sure everybody is connected. Thus, it would be available to everybody who has access. It is free of cost to the Guyanese students. We are going to aggressively try to make sure children learn and that this is something they can access. We will help them register for it.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Any follow up?

Mr. Jaiprashad: No.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, you have the floor.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you. Good evening, Minister. I understand the issue of education is vast. There is a lot that goes into the education of a child because there are so many variables. My question to you is, when you are dealing with the students that are attaining grades, when you look into the school and the education of a child, is there training that goes into determining where the child is at in a classroom? For example, a teacher may try to finish a curriculum in a particular period, three students get it, and two do not, but he/she still has to figure out how to get to those two that did not get it that term. How are you training our teachers to understand that maybe a child has Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or maybe the child needs a little bit more than they are currently getting in the term? Do you understand what I am trying to say?

[**Ms. Manickchand:** I understand perfectly what you are saying.] How are we working with teachers to get them to understand the differences between the children?

Ms. Manickchand: Hon. Member, that is why...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister?

Ms. Manickchand: Sorry, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: It is a bit rude to interrupt the person while he/she is making his/her statement and asking his/her question. Do not anticipate. Let him/her finish and then let me get a chance to put it to you because the conversation between you two will deteriorate. Please, go ahead.

Ms. Manickchand: She is finished. The question is about the challenges. The challenges are not only in our system but in the education system, generally. The countries that do better are the countries that have very small numbers of children in each classroom. That is why the speaker – I do not remember if it was Hon. Jaiprashad or somebody else who said we must produce at the National Centre for Educational Resource Development (NCERD), a national lesson plan that everybody must do at the same time. We cannot do that because a child at Black Bush Polder in grade three or the class at Black Bush Polder in grade three might not be ready for week three or might not be at week three, but Stella Maris Primary School is. One can produce a national plan or a national lesson, and then he/she can say if you reach this time, you can use it. However, the

challenge has been determining how to get every child... We have been very clear to teachers that every single child in their classroom must move from one level to the next, and the next must be a better level. They do not all have to reach 100%. If a teacher takes a child with 20% and moves him/her to 40%, then that teacher probably did better than taking a child with 95% and move him/her to 100%. We speak about that and train on that. The Cyril Potter College of Education is focused on that. We are dealing with human beings. There is a lot of retraining and re-talking that we have to do to get this to happen. It is one of the challenges of the education system worldwide – how do you move each child equitably every single day?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Just a quick follow up. I agree with you. It is something that is very challenging. Then, how do you deal with the testing part of it? In the classroom, you may recognise that a child knows the subject and work, but once it comes to the exam, he/she cannot do what is required because he/she does not know how to sit an exam. Is there any conversation happening in terms of different ways of checking to see if the child understands the topic and not just the final exam that happens where everybody has to sit in the exam? The child may fail because he/she cannot sit in the exam, but you know that they know the topic.

Ms. Manickchand: This is at no line item and no target; we are just *gyaffing* here, but it is a good *gyaff*.

Mr. Chairman: Here it is not a *gyaff*. It is a policy issue and you have the allocation for it.

Ms. Manickchand: We cannot set a national test everywhere; everywhere would not be the same test. We have to train teachers to make sure the children can meet the outcomes that each lesson looks for. We also have to get parents on board with what it is we want their children to know at week one, week two and week three, and where they can access this even if we ourselves do not know. This is a very complex issue. It is not one that is easy. A policy decision that is heavily criticised by the APNU, although it was never changed by it in the five years that it was in office, is what it calls the automatic promotion policy. The reason that policy make sense is you can be a child, let us say in first form, who gets 80% in Mathematics; 80% in English; 10% in Music and 5% in Art – you either hate the subject, the teacher or something, so the percentage was below 50%, so we kept that child back just because he/she did not pass, whatever you consider pass to be. The better thing to do is to promote and remediate; that is what we do. We promote, and then

we look to see where there are weaknesses, especially in the core subjects and teachers – I say with caution – are supposed to remediate. That is what we train and retrain to do. Of course, there are different people. When there is a system of 14,000 teachers, there will be excellent ones amongst them, and there will be delinquents who need to be refrained among them – that is the challenge.

11.38 p.m.

Ms. McDonald: Line item 6301 – Education Subventions and Grants: I recognise that in 2024, the grants were \$4 million and in 2025 it moved up to \$5 million plus. Last year, we asked about the schools such as QC and President’s College, which receive subvention and grants. We were hoping that this year, some consideration would be given to the other board schools, but I am not sure this is happening. Could the Minister explain?

Ms. Manickchand: The President’s College is guided by an Act of Parliament, which means a law of Guyana that was brought about by the APNU celebrated Mr. L.F.S. Burnham... [An

Hon. Member: The former President of this country.] ...and former President of this country. That subvention is given because, by law, we have to. Board schools can also receive subventions. However, this is not what this is for. This is for the Because We Care Cash Grant, which we reinstituted and increased to \$50,000 and uniform assistance, which we increased to \$5,000. Thus, each child will receive \$55,000 in secondary school. This is for the national school grants that secondary schools are getting. I want us to be careful. It is emotive and sexy to send a message that other secondary schools are not getting what QC and President’s College are getting. That is totally fallacious – absolutely fallacious. All the children in secondary schools will get the Because We Care Cash Grant that your Government took away from them. All the children in secondary schools will receive the uniform grant that you refused to raise. Every secondary school will get the school grant that is given to schools to ensure they are prepared for their children. Therefore, the thought last year was wrong and fallacious. This year, it remains wrong and fallacious, but it is not surprising that you asked.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Line item 6292 – Dietary: There is an increase of almost \$21 million. Could the Hon. Minister indicate if this will subsidise some form of meals for the secondary school?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. I am very glad you asked. We made a decision that every child in a dormitory school will receive lunch. What was happening under the A Partnership for National

Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was that only the resident students would receive lunch while the non-resident students would just be looking at them while they ate. We introduced that every child in dormitory and secondary schools will receive lunch. That is why you see the increase here. Dormitory, of course, is in the hinterland. The reason for that, Hon. Mr. Jaiprashad, is that although there are non-resident students who go home and come back, due to the geographical layout of those regions, it would take them more than the hour which they get for a lunch break. That is why we are giving them lunch. I am sure, as a School Welfare Officer (SWO), you are very happy to hear that.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I raised this issue last year concerning President's College and Queen's College. I see in *Budget 2025* that the President's College will receive a sum of \$508,601,000 and Queen's College will receive a sum of \$210,086,000. These are board schools. I understand that President's College is governed by the President's College Act, hence, it receives this subvention. There are several other board schools such as Queen's College. The fact that these are subventions means that they are given to the boards in accounts to manage and expend. How are other board schools receiving their moneys to manage their schools?

Ms. Manickchand: It is an interesting question. If you were to ask Queen's College if it wants to stay a subvention agency, you might be surprised at the answer because the majority of this goes to its salaries and staff. When we give them this, we do not pay their teachers for the rest of the year. The College pays the teachers. Most of the money is spent on salaries, gratuity, pensions, and all the other things it has to pay out in that line. It is the same thing for President's College. The question you are asking is why are we not doing it for other schools? Right now, there is no difference in what teachers enjoy. When we give this grant to Queen's College, it pays its teachers the same amount that we agree on with the Guyana Teacher's Union. The Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, depending on where the school is, pays the teachers in every other school the same benefits and salaries. There is no difference in what happens at those schools.

Mr. Mahipaul: I have a follow up. Based on the answer the Hon. Minister provided, ask Queen's College if it is comfortable being a subvention because all the money basically goes to salary, why not remove Queen's College from subvention and treat it equally as all other board schools?

Ms. Manickchand: We do not operate like that. Queen's College has a board, a Parent/Teacher Association (PTA), staff and students. We must consult with all those stakeholders before we do it is not because a Member of the Opposition fails to understand, year after year, why this is, we would just go and take it out of the budget. That is not how it works, Mr. Mahipaul. It must be that we speak to them, engage with them and we do what they want. Now, I said to you, you might be surprised because there have been rumbles about that. There have been rumbles about them wanting more and them not being able to get more because all of this goes towards staff. When this first happened, it was because there was a consultative decision taken amongst all those stakeholders. The Ministry before me repeated this throughout your Government's term in office. This was repeated for five years while you were in office. There were no problems with it. Now, you are coming and asking me to just snatch it from them like you snatched the cash grants from the nation's children. That is not how we operate.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I ask the Hon. Minister if there are other board schools that have requested from her to be treated as subvention agencies, similar to how Queen's College is treated as a one? May I say, Sir, it is not about snatching it; it is about treating all the board schools at one level in the eyes of equal treatment for all.

Mr. Chairman: You are now asking the same question in a different way.

Mr. Mahipaul: No. I am asking her if other board schools...

Mr. Chairman: For me, the question would be, are other board schools included in this sum? While we talk about policy, we also have to speak about what this allocation is for. I think the Minister said it about three times. Hon. Minister, you could do a better job than me.

Ms. Manickchand: No, Sir. I have not received, either now or in my previous iteration, any school asking me to go as a subvention agency. All they would be asking for would be for us to give them their salaries upfront so that they could manage it. That is all those schools get as a subvention agency. Everything else is given, either under the cash grant, the schools' grant or the agricultural plot and so on. It is just the salaries that are placed in the schools' accounts – most of the salaries.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. This is just to alert everyone that we have exhausted the first hour of consideration. We have one hour to go. Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, you have the floor.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good evening to the Hon. Minister and her team. Hon. Minister, under the Indicators on page 179, it states at number 9:

“Percentage of teachers appraised using the new instrument...”

I know there is a new instrument created for the appraisal of teachers, but in 2024, it states 0%, while in 2025, the target is 100%. Could you say why the instrument was not yet used and how you see this critical instrument used. Of course, it is for the assessment and evaluation of teachers. How do you see this as a critical analysis for improving students’ performance? I know those are the key areas that were discussed during the implementation of this new instrument.

Ms. Manickchand: You have raised – that is why I said your earnestness in education is very impressive and I told you that privately – the same question that Ms. Sarabo-Halley raised. I hope we can speak in one voice when we say that this is too important a profession to have people who just squat and collect a salary. Now, that is not the majority of our teachers. The majority of our teachers teach their hearts out, but we also have teachers who do not; teachers who can be encouraged not to; teachers who refuse to train and get upgraded; and teachers who... We have to move to a place where we are using an objective instrument to assess the standard and quality of a teacher, with a view to reward as well as determine what kinds of retraining might be needed. The reason you see zero in 2024 is that it has not started yet. We did not start it because for five months of 2024, some teachers were on strike. We hope to start it in 2025. We hope we will get the support of all of us in the House to do this in an objective and fair way so that we can take this profession to a place where it is truly noble. That will mean, Hon. Mr. Cox, that the system is going to have to develop a way of cleansing itself like other professions do. When *you are too bad an apple and you are rotting the whole barrel, the system must cleanse that barrel of that rotten apple*, so that the others can thrive and in thriving, deliver to our students what you want – better outcomes. That is something we have to all work towards and not get political about it. If one amongst us becomes political about it, we have to shut that down. That would be our duty to the nation’s children. I hope you remember that when we start this assessment.

Programme: 405 – Secondary Education – \$13,366,151,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 406 – Post Secondary/Tertiary Education – \$15,527,161,000

Mr. Chairman: I want to remind persons that we have dealt extensively with a lot of policies, and we are now with Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education. Ms. McDonald, you have the floor.

Ms. McDonald: Line item 6301 – Education Subventions and Grants...

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, if we could just let... This would be the University of Guyana (UoG). Could we just let the Vice-Chancellor...

Mr. Chairman: Just give the Hon. Minister and staff an opportunity to change around. Welcome the Hon. Vice-Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Guyana.

Ms. Manickchand: It is the Vice-Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Finance and Administration).

Mr. Chairman: Ms. McDonald, you have the floor.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Cde. Chairman?

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

Mr. Jaiprashad: Line item 6301 – Education Subventions and Grants... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we are trying to hear the Pandit. Hon. Member, Mr. Jaiprashad, go ahead.

Mr. Jaiprashad: This is line item 6301, Education Subventions and Grants. Could the Hon. Minister give a disaggregate for the sum of \$14 billion and more as it relates to tertiary education?

11.53 p.m.

Ms. Manickchand: I am not hearing you.

Mr. Jaiprashad: It is line item 6301.

Ms. Manickchand: Yes.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Could you disaggregate the amount?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, disaggregate the amount.

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. The Adult Education Association of Guyana (AEAG)...Sorry.

Mr. Chairman: There is a listing at the back of the book with respect to the subventions. Hon. Member, Mr. Jaiprashad, would you like a further disaggregation?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, please. I would be happy to disaggregate the sum: the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (CTVET) – \$108 million and the Guyana Industrial Training Centre (GITC) – this is also under page 467 of the budget book.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. I mentioned that to him and he indicated that you could now move on because he would check it.

Ms. Manickchand: All right. I would be happy to list it though.

Mr. Mahipaul: My question is related to the University of Guyana (UG) and I would like to say thank you that we are having [*inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: I would like to hear you. Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. A question was asked earlier when we were considering the supplementary that this meant the student would have to pay no money – none at all. Previously, the student would normally pay a student due for the student society as well as for the sports facility, and so on. I would like to know if, in this sum, there are sums specific for the student society, the sports facility, and if students have to write an I-grade exam, supplemental exams, and so on, if all of this covers those additional costs that would normally have a cost to it.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, the University of Guyana is very precious to us. The University of Guyana was established by Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C's) founder and it was referred to as the Jagan's Night School. At that time, we could not have imagined we would have oil, but he knew, as a vision, we could not develop as a country without exposing our people to tertiary training and education, and we could not compete in the world if we did not do that, so he established his school. I noticed a specific interest in the University of Guyana Student Society (UGSS). As I said in the budget debate, the country went through a very hard time in the 80s, so much so, that the World Bank said that we had one of the lowest illiteracy rates in the Caribbean and in Latin America in the 60s. By the time we hit 1990,

we were one of the lowest performers, educationally and health wise, in the country. As a result, the World Bank said that if quality service was to be given, fees had to be introduced. So, fees were introduced at the University of Guyana. Over the years, that continued, so this dream that every Guyanese could access university education, become competitive in the world and develop Guyana through their training and skill could continue. When the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) went into office, UG's fees went up by 35%. Whether we call it facilities fees or students fees or whatever it is, the student had to pay 35% more. This was at a time when the APNU/AFC was earning \$90 billion a year more in revenue than the PPP/C was earning when it was in office and did not raise the fees.

In our plea to the people of the country, when we said to them give us your confidence, give us your vote and we would look after you, one of our promises was that we would find a pathway to write off the debt of the students who owed the University of Guyana, and that we would make university education free of charge. I am very happy to say, as usual, before the end of the term, we are fulfilling that promise by making the University of Guyana tuition free and the facilities fees free, so the student does not have to pay those. I am also happy to report that just a few short weeks ago – I think about two weeks ago, post 17th January, when Dr. Ashni Singh presented the budget – the University of Guyana celebrated receiving universal accreditation for the university. The Vice Chancellor is here, and she must be commended for that because that would have been a lengthy process. Dr. Hutson who is the Executive Director of the National Accreditation Council is here. I am very proud of both of them for that. At that event, the Vice Chancellor was very emotional about the issue. I think we have it on recording. She said very clearly – and I am paraphrasing, all governments have supported UG. Support is different. This budgetary allocation of \$13.2 billion would change what UG means and how it had to scrounge for funds. This is the best support it has received, and I am happy to say all of the recurrent requests that were asked for have been met by this budgetary provision. That is to answer you – a long answer – and say that tuition will be free. There will be no facilities fees, but in any university – and I note your deep interest in the UGSS fees – you will have expenses that would not be included in this free university education. It will require a responsibility from the students also that they do well at their exams and not be encouraged that because it is free, they do not have to turn up to write an exam and they do not have to turn up to the classes. As we build this 'new Guyana' where there is free tuition for

education at the tertiary level that is the University of Guyana, we would also have to build a new culture that sees responsibility going with it.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put the question...

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, no. I have two other questions please.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Having heard the Minister's lengthy answer, from this sum allocated here, may I ask what is the sum that would go to the University of Guyana Student Society? May I also ask my second question: there are genuine reasons why a student may miss an examination, someone may have died for them and there are different circumstances. Does this sum also cater for the additional exams that would have to be set and would come at a cost for students who genuinely would have to be considered for supplementary exams and I-grade exams?

Ms. Manickchand: So, \$1,000 per student caters for UGSS. That was part of the facilities fees. Until 2023, UG allowed two resits per year. At the request of the students, it made four resits per year, but I want you to hear what I am saying. It means he or she is failing four courses per year. It means...

Mr. Mahipaul: No. That is not what it means.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, go ahead. You do not have to answer him. He is not on the floor.

Ms. Manickchand: No. I would like to correct myself also. It means for whatever reason a student did not complete four courses – whether he or she failed them, or he or she did not turn up for them. In most countries, there are accompanying fees for things like that. If you are going on an expedition to check the sand in Barbados *versus* the sand in Leguan and it is not a part of your course – or even if it is – that may not be something considered to be in your fees. What I can say to you is that the PPP/C Government has given to the University of Guyana – which is established by statute – everything they asked for under their recurrent budget, every single cent. That is going to be used by the University of Guyana. I was going to give you a direct quote from the Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan who said that the \$2 billion he allocated for them in 2017, would have to be carefully used and responsibly used by the University that needed \$13 billion at that time. I am

saying to you that every cent that the University of Guyana sat down and thoughtfully asked for under their recurrent budget, is being provided by this Government through this budget.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I have one other question please.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, in terms of salary increases for the academic staff (UA) and non- academic (UB) staff at UG, may I ask what percentage is being considered from this sum allocated for 2025?

Ms. Manickchand: The Government announced an 18% increase – 10% for last year and 8% for this year. That is what is catered for the staff at the University of Guyana.

Programme: 406 – Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education – \$15,527,161,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 401 – Policy Development and Administration – \$3,028,082,000

Programme: 401 – Policy Development and Administration – \$3,028,082,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 402 – Training and Development – \$404,000,000

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, you have the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Sir. Allow me to turn to my...

Mr. Chairman: I propose the question that the sum stated for Programme 402, Capital Expenditure... I put the question that the sum...

Mr. Mahipaul: No, Sir. I am asking a question here on...

Mr. Chairman: ...stated for Programme 402, Capital...

Mr. Mahipaul: ...1215...

Mr. Chairman: You just told me I could go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: No. I said that I am turning my page to get the profile.

Mr. Chairman: You shook your head when I said it. Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I am turning my attention to project code 1215100, Teachers' Training Complex:

“Provision for furniture, equipment and upgrading of facilities.”

There is a sum of \$124 million. Could the Hon. Minister please, not only disaggregate, but tell us something about this facility?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. This is for the Teachers' Training College. We are doing a gym for our trainee teachers. We will buy 16 plates – 55 pounds, 44 pounds and 33 pounds. I am assuming those are the plates for weight training and weightlifting – 24 medicine balls, 12 wall balls, six ball racks, one high jump upright ball. Let me continue with that and then I will turn back the page: four portable floodlights, 16 hurdles, five air conditioner (AC) units, — 20 filing cabinets, 10 tens desks, 4 drawers, 12 microwaves, and we will be doing two industrial gas stoves, two freezers, 40 desktop computers, six smart boards, four violins, four keyboards, five Congo drums, six bongo drums, 10 microphones with speakers, one public announcement (PA) system, five guitars, one drum set, six maraca shakers, two acoustic guitars, six conducting batons, one steel pan set, four triangles, 20 music stands, and 22 dumb bells.

12.08 a.m.

I am happy to say that this gives you a fair indication that we have just introduced to the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) a music programme because we have a shortage of music teachers. This is what we are buying so that we could train our teachers well, so that they are able to teach our children on what we hope would be a five-priority extracurricular programme when they get into the schools.

Programme: 402 – Training and Development – \$404,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 403 – Nursery Education – \$1,535,923,000

Programme: 403 – Nursery Education – \$1,535,923,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 404 – Primary Education – \$6,639,032,000

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, we are looking at payment retention and we would want to ask to whom is the retention being paid and what amount? It is under Nursery Education. We are looking at Nursery Education.

Ms. Manickchand: This is not Nursery Education, Madam. That is finished. We voted. We passed that.

Mr. Chairman: We are at Primary Education.

Ms. McDonald: Is it programme 403, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Primary – we are at Primary Education.

Ms. Manickchand: This is beginning... totally ridiculous.

Programme: 404 – Primary Education – \$6,639,032,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 405 – Secondary Education – \$27,959,032,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I see this is a provision for schools... Project code 2610500, Human Capital Strengthening Project, and I see that it speaks to piloting of Grades 5 and 6 curricular, and also improved facilities, education and training, among procurement of textbooks for Grades 7-11, institutional strengthening, and the construction and rehabilitation of schools. My specific focus, Hon. Minister, through you, Mr. Chairman, is on the description that speaks to piloting of Grade 5 and 6 curricular – nothing else. Could you please tell us some more about that?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, just help me a bit. I am a little slow. We are at Secondary Education, right? Mr. Mahipaul? Just bear with me, we are at Secondary Education, right?

Mr. Mahipaul: Pardon me, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: We are at Secondary Education here?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Secondary Education, but...

Mr. Chairman: Grades 5 and 6 are ...

Mr. Mahipaul: They are captured in it.

Mr. Chairman: They are captured in it.

Mr. Mahipaul: I do not know if it is a mistake.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, please, the floor is yours.

Ms. Manickchand: Pre-Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the intention was to change out the curriculum to make it more hands-on. So, reduce some of the content while making sure that we were on par with our Caribbean brothers and sisters about what they were learning, and make sure that the teaching/learning process had more practical engagements. Thus, you would see more tools, more equipment and more manipulables. The COVID-19 hit us, and it hit us after we had already piloted Grades 1 and 2. We continued piloting, but the children who are writing Grade 6 this year were in Grade 1 when COVID-19 hit. The COVID-19 still has an impact, although we are not wearing masks and we are not distancing, it has a huge impact and continues to have a prevailing impact on the education system. The children who will write the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) in 2025 are children who were in Grade 1 in 2025, and they stayed home for three years – Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3. We cannot introduce a new curriculum piloted at that time. We had to introduce it in bits and pieces and it will begin later this year.

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

Mr. Mahipaul: No, Sir, I am good there. Thank you.

Ms. Manickchand: You fight with a Personal Assistant (PA) every day and cannot ask a single question; you cannot ask a single question.

Programme: 405 – Secondary Education – \$27,959,032,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 406 – Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education – \$2,980,059,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy? Hon. Member, Ms. McDonald, you have the floor.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Chairman, we are looking at reference number 182, under Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education, provision for upgrading of facilities. Could the Minister indicate to us the facilities that we are looking at upgrading, and what exactly are we going to be doing with those facilities?

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, we just passed that programme. That is programme five. The Hon. Member has gotten it wrong again. Whole day, everyday...

Ms. McDonald: No, it is Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education that we are at.

Mr. Mahipaul: It is Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education. We have not passed Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education.

Ms. Manickchand: There is no provision for facilities under Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we are at programme 406, Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education.

Ms. McDonald: Exactly.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I have a question please. Under Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education, Project code 1216000, University of Guyana (UG) - Turkeyen, the sum of \$225 million for the upgrading of the facility and payment of retention, may I ask what are the additional works that will be done be done at the University of Guyana for the sum, and how much money is for retention?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. There will be the rehabilitation of the New Building Society (NBS) Hall of Residence dorms; the rewiring of the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry (FAF) building; the rehabilitation of the Faculty of Natural Sciences (FNS) Annex; rehabilitation of the senior common room building, remodelling and rehabilitation work of the FNS mushroom house; electrical upgrade and civil works of the old registry building; construction of fire escape for NBS Halls of Residence; rehabilitation of the School of Entrepreneurship and

Business Innovation (SEBI) roof, At the Tain Campus, there will be the construction of a two storey building for classrooms and laboratories at the John's Science Centre.

Programme: 406 – Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education – \$2,980,059,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister and your staff, for taking us through your agency.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you very much Mr. Chairman and I want to say that this is a team that I know put in a lot of work this week. I want to say a big thank you to them and their staff who stayed back and worked to get this done. They clearly expected more. I also thought it would be a good time to introduce the country to our newest Deputy Chief Education Officer for Administration, Ms. Tiffany Harvey, who was here sitting next to me at Programme 2. Thank you, all.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I now invite the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport and his team to take us through Agency 44. We do have some savings because we are now at 12.20 a.m. and we should have stopped at 12.47, so that looks like 27 minutes. Hon. Members, I invite you to turn to pages 214 and 215.

Agency: 44 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport

Current Expenditure

Programme: 441 – Policy Development and Administration – \$447,572,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, you have the floor.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: I note there is an increase of eight contracted employees. What are the designations of these employees?

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman. Thank you very much...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, if you are challenged, you can sit and pull the microphone closer.

Mr. Ramson: I like to stand. Yes, thank you very much Cde. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Well, if you are handicapped...

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member for the question. You have the variance in the line, which I will include in the positions: six employees relocated from line item 6111 – one Procurement Manager, one Assistant Secretary, one Technical Assistant, two Administrative Assistants, and one Confidential Secretary – to line item 6116, two appointments...

Mr. Chairman: They are finding it difficult to hear. You may need to sit and pull the microphone...

Mr. Ramson: Let me sit down then. I like to stand, though. I like to show the House the respect.

Mr. Chairman: I know you are handicapped because of height.

12.23 a.m.

Mr. Ramson: I like to show the House due respect; I like to show the House respect. I was saying that the variance is as a result of six employees relocated from line item 6111 which includes one Procurement Manager, one Assistant Secretary, one Technical Assistant, two Administrative Assistants, one Confidential Secretary and two appointments: one Administrative Support Officer and one Accounts Clerk. Additionally, with 10% increase in salaries, allowances, gratuity, vacation entertainment, duty, responsibility, *et cetera*.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: I note that there is an increase. Was a new building added to this line item?

Mr. Ramson: Line item 6242, yes. There is a slight increase of \$1.6 million. There is no new building that is added. The building is old, and it needs to be repaired. In fact, it falls under the protection of the National Trust of Guyana. There is a particular kind of rehabilitation work that has to be done which tends to be a little more costly. It is important for our heritage preservation. It is also required as part of what we do when we rehabilitate these buildings that fall under the protection of the National Trust of Guyana.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Volume II – Indicators, I note the number of policies developed or updated for Culture, Youth and/or Sport, 2024 was one and in 2025 it is two. Could the Hon. Minister state if the Culture and Sports policies were completed?

Mr. Ramson: No. The Cultural policy was not completed but the Sports policy was. However, we never got the opportunity to do the consultation at the Sports conference. We opened the process for an academic review, which we did, and we had completed that as well. That is something that the National Sports Commission had made the recommendation for before we go out to consultations. We did that, and also the academic citing. That was something that was also important that was raised in the discussions that we had. We wanted to make sure that the references, the bibliographies, *et cetera*, were appropriate, as well as accurate. We wanted to make sure that when the document goes out to the public, it must reflect a very high standard which we believe will be reflective of that. Other countries in the region will be looking at what we do here, they have already started to take notice of our results. As far as our policy is concerned, we want to make sure it reflects a standard that we can be proud of.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Last year in this House, when the Minister was asked about the Policy, he stated that there were two active policies and that both were being updated. That is since last year. He said the process will continue with consultation. He spoke about the Cultural policy, as well as the Sports policy. Both have already gone through extensive preparation and submission based on last year's response. I will ask the Hon. Minister, what guarantee do we have that these policies will come to the House this year?

Mr. Ramson: I do not want to give the Hon. Member any guarantees. What I am certain about is, the Sports policy is completed, will be published and will be presented. It is a document that must happen especially given the fact that we have seen how the meteoric rise, especially in the last three to four years of our sports men and women. Today, we have had the signing of one of our promising athletes with the University of Georgia. That is Ms. Springer, who I genuinely believe has the potential to become our first track Olympic medal winner. I would just like to congratulate her. In this House, I would also like to publicly congratulate Malachi Austin who preceded her for signing with Louisiana. These are top rated Universities that were scouting our talents here, in addition to the fact that we were able to see that they secured deals with major shoe companies and brands, as prospects for the future. That is something I want to say parenthetically.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Mr. Chairman, before I proceed, let me also congratulate Malachi Austin and Tianna Springer. I know that they are athletes who will shine from their dedication, their skills and their talents. Indicator No. 3 – you have:

“Number of international cultural, youth and/or sporting events at which Guyana participated.”

I see there is a decline from 78 last year, to 66 this year. Could the Hon. Minister say what regional competitions will we participate in, in 2025?

Mr. Ramson: Here is listed as 66. I cannot say what regional competitions will be. It is too long of a list. I want to correct the figure because when we submitted this, we did not get to complete the updating. For the House to know, it is important for us to place on the record – one. What we participated in, in sport alone in 2023 was 51. For 2024, it was 102. For the combined areas, which is Culture, Youth and Sport in total, it is 108.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am following up based on your response, are you saying that we took part in 102 sporting events, and that would cover both regional and international level.

Mr. Ramson: International.

Ms. Flue: All right, that was just for clarity

Programme: 441 – Policy Development and Administration – \$447,572,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Programme: 442 – Culture – \$1,565,983,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6242, I notice that there was an increase again here for Maintenance of Buildings, does this reflect a new building added or is it the same set of buildings being maintained?

Mr. Ramson: The answer is no. There is no new building.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6255 – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure: Does this allocated sum cover the preservation of records and artifacts?

Mr. Ramson: No, it is for infrastructure. This would not fall under that area.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Looking at the Indicators for Culture, under which line item is the cost for preservation of records and artifacts located?

Mr. Ramson: You want the Minister to...

Ms. Flue-Bess: I asked if it is under line item 6255 and you said no so I am asking.

Mr. Ramson: It does not work that way.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, please help the Hon. Member.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I need to know.

Mr. Chairman: I will put the question as the Minister will indicate.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Mr. Chairman, I am not finished.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Mr. Chairman, ...

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, go ahead.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Indicator No. 5:

“Updated legal framework in areas pertaining to the preservation and conservation of our heritage.”

Is there any plan to update the Copyright legislation?

Mr. Ramson: Not this year. Let me speak about this a little bit. Last year we were able to complete two bits of legislation – one that we passed in this House, the World Cup Act and we laid the Horseracing legislation in the House as well. We completed the Review and Redrafting of the National Trust of Guyana Act. We also had, as part of that, a collaboration as well as a cooperative approach where they participated in the Review which is the Commonwealth Heritage Foundation which has an engagement with the King’s Trust, where they are creating some different areas of projects and preservation with the Office of the President. This is linked to what we are doing. The National Trust of Guyana also participated in several areas of collaboration to ensure that the work

it is not being done in siloes. The answer for Indicator No. 5, in this year, we will be tabling a new National Trust of Guyana legislation that will be under a different name and will be passing. It also caters for the incorporation of the Heritage element, where we are working with the Commonwealth Heritage Foundation and the King's Trust foundation as well.

Mr. Jones: Line item 6322 – Subsidies and Contributions to International Organisations: I note where there is the International Centre for the Study of the preservations and restoration of cultural properties, there is an allocation of \$268 but we note the revise was only 87. For 2025, a request is there again for 288. Could the Minister indicate what would have occasioned the reduced sum instead of the entire allotment?

Mr. Ramson: I am advised that this is based on submitted invoices and not by dictated sums. That is the reason for the reduced expenditure.

12.38 p.m.

Mr. Jones: Am I to assume that the submitted invoices speak to \$87,000 as a payment that we would have had to make to this international organisation?

Mr. Ramson: I am advised, yes.

Mr. Jones: Based on those invoices that we had to submit, why is it now, in 2025, instead of it being \$87,000, we are putting it back at \$247,000?

Mr. Ramson: Whatever the subsidies and contributions are, we do not reduce that. We maintain that as a standard sum. Chances are it can increase, but it is very rare that it will go down. The sum is stated to the organisations, however, at the same time, we have requirements in relation to how we spend the moneys. We have to follow our process.

Mr. Jones: Noted, but taking into consideration what you just said, Mr. Minister, it is very unlikely it would reduce, but in this case, in 2024, it was reduced.

Mr. Ramson: No. It was based on what was submitted, but the allocation itself was not reduced.

Mr. Jones: Noted. Just below that, there is the:

“International Cultural Council of Archives”

There is an allocation of \$247,000, and in the revised sum, it is zero.

Mr. Ramson: I am advised that this is because there were no invoices submitted to us.

Mr. Jones: Noted, thank you.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line Item 6284 – Other: Could the Hon. Minister say if from this allocated sum, the Institute of Creative Arts will get funding?

Mr. Ramson: The answer is yes. However, it is a very important opportunity to speak about the Institute of Creative Arts and why the concept was first initiated with Minister Frank Anthony and Dr. Rose James during their time. The focus is on an academy at a tertiary level for dance, music, visual arts, creative writing and drama. In 2023, when I was questioned about whether we could have the Institute, I said that the Institute would be accredited by the National Accreditation Council. The Hon. Member's Colleague sitting just below her said that I did not know what I was talking about. In fact, the words were that I clearly did not know what I was talking about and what was required was a legislation in order for the Institute to be accredited. They did not even accredit institutions. I am pleased to share that we were able to get the Institute accredited and that is extremely important. I just wanted to say that this is extremely important. It is a lot of hard work. We did a lot of hard work for about a year and a half, ensuring that we reached all of the standards that were required, which, in many instances, were comprehensive. When young people want to advance their passion and talents – in many instances, the pursuit of a passion of a burning desire is to advance a talent – they will receive a document from us to say this is a course of study they undertook, and it is recognised and mobile. The recognition of the certificate is mobile, meaning that persons can take it anywhere and it will be recognised. That is something we are extremely proud of.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Could the Hon. Minister say when the Institute of Creative Arts was accredited?

Mr. Ramson: We passed all of our assessments at the end of last year and the certificate was issued earlier this year.

Mr. Chairman: It was displayed here.

Mr. Ramson: I brought it with me.

Mr. Chairman: Did you not raise it in your presentation?

Mr. Ramson: I raised it during my presentation; that is correct. In fact, it was presented by Dr. Hudson, who was here with the Hon. Member, Minister Priya Manickchand, just a few minutes ago.

Programme: 442 – Culture – \$1,565,983,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 443 – Youth – \$1,069,360,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6231 – Fuel and Lubricants: I note that there is an increase here. Was there a new vehicle added to the fleet of vehicles that the Ministry already have?

Mr. Ramson: The answer to the question is no, there has not been a new vehicle under this Programme head, but it is the increased cost for increased activities.

Ms. Flue-Bess: In *Volume 2*...

Mr. Chairman: Can I put the question now?

Ms. Flue-Bess: No, Mr. Chairman, just hold. In *Volume 2*, under the Indicators, it states:

“Number of public - private - NGOs - community partnerships”

I note that there is an increase by six under this heading. Could the Hon. Minister say what are the six new Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that will be added here?

Mr. Ramson: That is our target. Our target is to hit six new ones. In the previous year, we had 66, but our target is to increase the number of partnerships that we have. I am unable to say with specificity but enough for me to state in this Committee, the ones that we are targeting. Our target is to increase it to 72.

Mr. Jones: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: I will state both of the bodies. There are two bodies here:

“National Youth Commission”

I am seeing an allocation of \$400,000, the revised is zero and for *Budgeted 2025*, it is \$400,000. There is also the:

“West End Committee”

This has an allocation of \$60,000 and the revised is zero and then it requests \$60,000, again. For the second part of the question, what is this body, the West End Committee?

Mr. Ramson: I am advised that it is a regular NGO that does training with young people. For the first question you asked, there has been no request for the sum so that is why there was not any given.

Mr. Jones: I assume it is the same thing for the National Youth Commission. Similar, too, what is this body?

Mr. Ramson: I am advised that was a body that once received some kind of contribution before. I am unable to advise the Committee whether they are still in extant.

Mr. Jones: Noted. Cde. Chairman noted, too, as former Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Dr. Anthony and in my time there as well, there were several of these bodies that just... [Mr.

Ramson: Pop in and pop out.] That is correct. Perhaps if there is a process, the Ministry can just remove them, if necessary, as opposed to having them there.

Mr. Ramson: I will be quite frank with you. When it comes to the smaller kind of groupings, I do not pay too much attention to that part of it so I cannot say that I scrub the list that is submitted, but I agree with you.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I note under the Impacts:

“Existence of a new and more responsive policy for youth development”

Could the Hon. Minister say... [Mr. Ramson: What is this?] Is this not Programme 433, Youth? It is under Programme 443, Youth. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] No, I am looking at the Impacts in *Volume 2*.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member, do not get distracted.

Mr. Ramson: Which one of the Indicators it is?

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am looking at the Impacts. From the Impacts listed there, the first one states:

“Existence of a new and more responsive policy for youth development”

I am asking where is the new youth policy?

Mr. Ramson: There is already an existing youth policy which will have to be revised. There is no current commitment for a revision of the policy because it is now coming to its expiry date. This is not really an indicator, this is just an impact. It is not something that I think we have made a commitment to get done.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Indicator 3 states:

“Number of youths 14 to 35 years old trained by the DoY”

And Indicator 4 states:

“Percentage of youth gaining employment after being trained by DoY.

Firstly, let me ask about the training. When these youths are trained in the programme, is there any aspect of this training programme that teaches the youths about occupational safety at the workplace?

Mr. Ramson: There are a variety of programmes or a number of programmes that fall into the overall training programme of which there is a compilation of these numbers or constitute the summation of these numbers here. There is coding, robotics, the President’s Youth Award Republic of Guyana (PYARG), Volunteer Apprenticeship Support Platform (VACS) and I want to pause here just to speak about those two before we continue. The PYARG Programme was an extremely successful programme for young people that was done in collaboration with The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. It is an international programme which is internationally certified. It started under, the Hon. Minister, Ms. Gail Teixeira and then continued under the Hon. Minister, Dr. Frank Anthony. Then, the APNU/AFC Government just let it die in 2017. We resuscitated it in 2022.

12.53 a.m.

Now, I want the Committee to know, not just for popularity and the effectiveness, but also to get a sheer sense of the numbers so that we are clear about how effective this Programme is. If the Hon. Member wants to know about the details of some of these or what goes into the programme, I could say that because there is life skills, health and safety expedition, and a number of those kinds of things. Anyway, for last year alone, we trained, under the President's Youth Award Republic of Guyana (PYARG), 5,028 young people. In total, since its revival in 2022, it was 13,000 young people all across this country. What one has to appreciate when it comes to getting to young people is that he/she has to be able to get to them by different means, not necessarily directly by saying, go and learn your book or go and study. Sometimes, they might be interested in different areas. Sometimes they might want to explore different types of activities. Most of them are extracurricular. What PYARG does is it allows them to do that in a safe environment supervised by our coaches and trainers who we have trained a lot of in the last two years or so. That is how popular... I also want to mention the VACS Programme. When I went into the Ministry, this programme was called the Volunteer Support Platform (VSP). Minister Anthony, you might remember, it was called the Volunteer Support Platform. Really and truly, it had about 11 persons who would come and do stints at the Ministry and get an experience about learning public service work, *et cetera*, and it would pay them stipends under that programme.

For the new programme, which is the Volunteer Apprenticeship Community Support Programme, just in 2024 alone, 2,426 young people participated in it. Let me tell you what we also did. As part of the Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training (YEST) Programme, which we reformed, and I know that the Hon. Member was critical about having a more concise programme for vocational training... This programme that we have on YEST has five areas where persons can learn things such as: welding, plumbing, electrical insulation, carpentry and masonry. Last year or the year before, we were able to secure the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) Level 1. It is now registered as a regional accredited body. When persons receive their certificate, it is no longer a situation where they just get a paper that is valueless. It is an accredited certificate that they get. We take those same students and put them into this Volunteer Apprenticeship Community Support Programme. On the weekends, we put them to do additional work and pay them a stipend. While they are doing their work they go and help to build and rehabilitate community grounds so that they could get the theory as well as the practical. It is supervised by the trainers and instructors from the institution. We did 84 projects last year alone.

This is a very useful way. It is small projects for them because they are now learning, but that is where they have *to cut their teeth* and *get their hands wet*. They build walkways, build fences and build small things. However, at the same time, they are not only *catching their hands* but also getting the experience and providing value to the community anywhere they go. It is a very important programme. I just wanted to give the Hon. Member an idea of what are some of the programmes. We also did construction project management. We did literacy and numeracy. Essentially, we are helping young people to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. We also did robotics and coding.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I wonder if I am getting back this time. The Minister is taking too long to give direct answers. I asked a direct question. However, as the Minister spoke of all these programmes of which I am very much well aware of, I asked the question, specifically, about occupational health and safety for the workplace. I also hope that these programmes that are being done are taking into consideration the problem there is with the uses of the youth on the road with the accidents and all these things. If you are running these programmes, I believe they should cover the social impacts, things that are affecting us in society. The programme should carry some aspect of life skills to help these people. Moving along with the question I had...

Mr. Chairman: Are you making a statement or are you going to ask the Minister if it does include aspects of life skills?

Mr. Ramson: I answer that, Mr. Chairman. I also want to say, and this is something significant, as part of the YEST Programme, we have financial literacy as one of the subjects that we teach in that programme. I gave that class one of the lectures myself. I went in and I dedicated some time and gave lectures in that class to those young people, sharing my advice on financial literacy.

Mr. Jones: A follow up question: The Hon. Minister mentioned that there were several coaches that were trained over the past two years. Could he indicate how many of these coaches are now licensed, whether it is for football, basketball, cricket, *et cetera*? How many of the coaches that the Ministry trained over the last two years are now certified licensed coaches in those sports disciplines?

Mr. Ramson: What I am happy to share with the Hon. Member is that all of our coaches who are working at the National Sports Commission are certified. What is also being done in connection

with the sports associations is that we are using that as a vehicle to expand the number of coaches. Through their bodies, they get free courses where they can actually do the training to be licensed. Since you mentioned that, we were able to commission and complete that. They are going to start their distribution this year, a very novel and innovative way in which we can get coaching into the hinterland. We have now put all of the coaching programmes for the 12 disciplines for the National Sports Academy, on video and flashes. They can be downloaded on the internet. For the folks who are in the hinterland, where they do not have access to coaches, could now have access to the material. When we designate individuals, we can now go and train them, and then they can implement the coaching programme right there. It is a great way now. This happened from all of the community outreaches that we had in the hinterland. There were a number of requests saying we want support to help with our coaching opportunities. However, we cannot put coaches in the 248 villages permanently. Now, in the villages, they choose the persons who they want to become coaches and then we go and upskill them with these virtual training programmes.

Mr. Jones: A follow up: Minister, exactly how many of the coaches that were trained over the past two years are licensed and certified?

Mr. Ramson: I do not have the figure in front of me, but I can try to get that for you.

Mr. Jones: All right. Could you indicate whether or not any of them have been certified, for example, by the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA)?

Mr. Ramson: I am unable to say. I do not want to mislead you. That is something I can verify.

Mr. Jones: Okay.

Programme: 443 – Youth – \$1,069,360,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 444 – Sports – \$1,017,834,000

Mr. Chairman: Let me welcome the former Member of Parliament, Mr. Steve Ninvalle and the others on the team.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I would like to go to the Indicators in *Volume 2*. Indicator number six states:

“Number of community sporting grounds upgraded”

I know that last year, a target was set for 251 grounds. I see the Minister is saying that 471 grounds were upgraded, which is an added 220 to what was targeted. Could the Hon. Minister say, as per region, how many grounds were upgraded in the different regions?

Mr. Ramson: The upgrade as per region is as follows: Region 1 – 91, Region 2 – 37, Region 3 – 42, Region 4 – 87, Region 5 – 8, Region 6 – 77, Region 7 – 33, Region 8 – 26, Region 9 – 57 and Region 10 – 13. This gives a total of 471. Just so that the Hon. Member understands, too, included in this figure as well as last year's, out of our ground enhancement programme, we were able to support the ground enhancement for 247 community grounds in the hinterland. We did 246 community grounds last year and 100 community grounds the year before. This year we are going to be doing about 254 community grounds at the next National Toshaos Council (NTC) Conference because now the number has expanded, according to the Hon. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai.

1.08 a.m.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I could not hear the responses given by the Minister after Region 4, because of the banging on the desk, so I would like him to call back from Region 5, the grounds as per region. I did not hear the answer.

Mr. Ramson: For Region 5, it is eight.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Is that for Region 5?

Mr. Ramson: Yes.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Okay.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, the very line item, I heard the Hon. Member... [Mr. Ramson: It is not a line item.] Okay, from the indicators, the Hon. Member stated, I think it is about 80 grounds in Region 4. [Mr. Ramson: It is 87.] Good, it is 87 grounds. Could you say within that number whether the Bel Air Community Ground is included in that 87?

Mr. Ramson: Yes.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I need to make it clear here because we have several Bel Air areas. I am speaking about the area in Bel Air, I think it is Eping Avenue that runs parallel to Duncan Street. There is that ground there and I would like to know whether that ground is included in the 87.

Mr. Ramson: The project is being done with support from the Ministry of Public Works, so that is one of the grounds that is being done too. [Mr. Persaud: Mr. Mentore (*inaudible*)] It is not Mr. Mentore, it is Mr. Royston King. [Ms. Ferguson: (*Inaudible*)] That is not your Constituency, so what are you worried about? You are supposed to be happy; you are supposed to say congratulations.

Programme: 444 – Sports – \$1,017,834,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 441 – Policy Development and Administration – \$16,649,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Project code 1205700 – Buildings: I see there is a payment for retention. Could the Hon. Minister say which building will this money be paid for?

Mr. Ramson: We did an extension to our main building. The project is completed. We made the investment because of the increased workload that we have and the required space that is needed. For example, we now have some additional persons in the Technical Services Unit headed by Mr. Sherwin Moore who is behind me. That sum caters for the retention payment for that.

Programme: 441 – Policy Development and Administration – \$16,649,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 442 – Culture – \$1,280,000,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Project code 1205700 – Buildings: I see there is:

“Provision for art gallery, museum and other facilities.”

Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the sum for these projects?

Mr. Ramson: We have set aside \$500 million each, but essentially, the President, Dr. Irfaan Ali led the People's Progressive Party Civic Government of Guyana and made a decision that we want to have a new museum and art gallery, which is something that is very important for the country. I think it is something that when the design is concluded – just for clarity, we went out to tender last year for the design... Those designs are being presented right now to us. There is a cabinet sub-committee that is going to assess it, and then we are going to go out for procurement when that is completed. Those are the sums that we have put aside for its construction. It is something that is very important now that we are moving into a different tier of development, which is for the permanent display of our culture as well as our heritage – and I say that distinctly. We have three museums that are in three different locations: the Museum of African Heritage, the Guyana National Museum and the Walter Roth Museum of Anthropology. They all carry different pieces of our history, but they are not connected. We also have in our art gallery and national art collection, some extremely important, beautiful, and invaluable pieces of artwork that people do not get to see on a permanent basis.

Just to let the Committee know, we had 15 exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art Castellani House last year alone. For those two weeks when we had the exhibition, those pieces were displayed by other persons, but those that form the inventory of our National Art Collection, we do not get to see on a daily basis. When people come into the country, the young people in the country or anyone here that is interested and want to go and see the quality of the arts that we have which is valued at millions of dollars, not Guyana dollars, but millions of United States dollar (USD), we want to be able to show that to the world. A very beautiful building is also important for that display.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I see a provision for recording studios. Where will these studios be constructed?

Mr. Ramson: As you know, Cde. Chairman, we have completed the construction of the first studio which we went out to tender for at the end of 2022. The building is completed. Some of the equipment is already installed. In fact, we had a producer recently come to test it from the United States of America (USA) who works with international artists. The person is very famous. I do not want to say here obviously because they were doing different kinds of work with us, but they came here to test it. We are now moving on to building three more because it is something that we believe is very important for the development of the environment to advance talent, especially the

singing talent area. One was built in Region 6 and now we are going to have one in Region 10, one in Region 3 and one in Region 2. The area of singing is where we can see potential. As it is right now, some of our artists have some of the highest-trending songs in the Caribbean. They have some chutney songs on *YouTube* that have 25 million views and it is moving into other areas in the world, especially our diaspora. It is also one of the reasons why these persons are getting a lot of opportunities for overseas work. That environment where we are investing in the bottom house type style of studios where one wants to sing something, he/she has a talent, then he/she could experiment with that. This is not even the highest level, because the highest level can be as much as US\$1 million for the equipment – it can go all the way up as high as that, but it takes it up to a much higher level where the quality is improved so when one is exporting it and it is being heard in different parts of the world, there is no distinct kind of quality.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Where in Linden will this studio be constructed?

Mr. Ramson: I will try to get the address for the Hon. Member and when I do, I will tell her.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Was any contract signed for any of the recording studios as yet?

Mr. Ramson: No. We went out to tender already... We have signed contracts for Region 2 and Region 3, I am advised, but we have not issued commencement as yet.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Did you say Region 2 and Region 3?

Mr. Ramson: Yes.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I went on the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) website, and I noticed that on 27th December, 2024, Sovereignty Investment Construction Services (SICS Builders) got a contract for the construction of the Digital Recording Studio in Region 10 for \$32,076,160. I do not know if the NPTAB website is wrong. Hon. Minister...

Mr. Chairman: Is the website wrong? Is that the question?

Ms. Flue-Bess: It is the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board website.

Mr. Chairman: Is it wrong, Minister?

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am not sure if the information there is wrong.

Mr. Ramson: I am advised that all three have been signed.

Mr. Chairman: The information is not wrong; all three have been signed.

Mr. Ramson: The Region 10 one was only signed in January.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I would love to hear you out more, but your one hour is up.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: I have no recourse but to put the question for the programme.

Programme: 442 – Culture – \$1,280,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 443 – Youth – \$165,000,000

Programme: 443 – Youth – \$165,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme 444 – Sport – \$7,025,239,000

Programme 444 – Sport – \$7,025,239,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: At the end of day one, according to my calculations, the savings is 27 minutes. Thank you very much, Hon. Minister and staff, for taking us through your agencies.

Assembly Resumed.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 1.22 a.m. on 31st January, 2025.”

[Prime Minister]

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that we adjourn the Assembly to Monday, 3rd February, 2025, at 10.00 a.m.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly stands adjourned until February 3rd at 10.00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 1.23 a.m.