



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*

98TH Sitting

Monday 3RD February, 2025

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

Assembly convened at 10.16 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

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The Assembly convened at 10.16 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair.]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

ENHANCING EFFICIENCY DURING THE CONSIDERATION OF THE ESTIMATES

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have finished the first day of consideration of the Estimates in the Committee of Supply and we ended almost two hours beyond the scheduled time that we planned. Over one hour and a half of that time was due to the fact that we waited for a quorum. I cannot do anything about the quorum. I have to stay faithful to the resolution of the Business Subcommittee of the Committee of Supply with respect to the allocation of time. What I could warn is – if we take a long time to establish the quorum, I will start deducting time from the questions. The Opposition Chief Whip will probably say – ‘you cannot do that’.

For the Government’s side, I would say, in deference to the Members of Government, they would like to start with a quorum where the Government has a majority. This is just decency – right. However, I can also warn that I will start with or without Members once I have a quorum on the Government’s side. Both sides of the House have much responsibility – as Spider-Man says. Let us see how we can efficiently utilise the time during the remaining days for the consideration of the Estimates. Remember, it is not only us here, but there is a tremendous number of staff. If there are 100 staff waiting and we lose one and a half hours, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance would calculate the man-hours lost due to lateness and tell us how valuable that is.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

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

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now continue with our examination. The House will now resolve itself into the Committee of Supply to continue this process.

Assembly resolved itself into Committee of Supply.

In Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: Today, we start with our dear Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip, Ms. Teixeira and the Constitutional Agencies. The Minister in place and I ask her staff to join her as she takes us through her agencies. I invite you, Hon. Members, to turn to pages 80 and 81. We have two hours and 10 minutes for these agencies.

Rolling over from Friday, there are 27 minutes. We will start at 10.23 a.m., which is relatively doing well, Hon. Minister.

Agency: 07 Parliament Office

Current Expenditure

Programme: 071 – National Assembly – \$2,070,831,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, you have the floor.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Minister and team. The first question that I have – could the Hon. Minister, please...? I am sorry; I just lost my whole page. Just give me a minute.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, if it will help, Members can sit because it is difficult to track the fine numbers in the Estimates and at the same time, speak with enough volume for us to hear. If you choose to, you can sit.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I have noticed some Members putting the seat up and sitting on it to be able to function better. Ms. Sarabo-Halley, you have the floor.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Honourable Minister inform the House what are the core training needs for the staff who are being catered for in this year's Budget?

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Could the Hon. Member refer to a head or sub-heading, please – line item or appendix. You may look at page 78 – Parliament Office.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, I am looking at the Estimates of the Public Sector, Volume One. Maybe I am mistaken, but it is a lump sum. I know at the back has the cost – the breakdown. Would the Minister be able to answer that question because we are dealing with the training of the staff?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mdm. ...to answer for the... referred to line items or subheadings under Appendix T in relation to the constitution bodies. This is just to help me to manage better if you do not mind. [*Inaudible*] books keep turning it off. Madam, I assume that you are asking about Education Subventions and Training on Page 669. The information is as follows: stipends for students; training of Researchers in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and training and report writing. The total is \$1.5 million. The stipend for students is \$500,000. Training of researchers in AI is \$650,000. Training in report writing is \$350,000. Does that answer your question? [Ms.

Sarabo-Halley: (*Inaudible*) Thank you.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, everyone. If you go back to page 669, for the Rental and Maintenance of Buildings, there is a budgeted amount of \$76 million. Could the Minister indicate to us what is the cost for the rental of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) to host Parliamentary Sitzings?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you. There is the rental for the official residences for five Ministers and one Parliamentary Secretary. The monthly rate is capped at \$300,000 monthly. The rental of the ACCC – where we meet here – for twenty sittings, is estimated at approximately \$9 million. For miscellaneous increases, there is the repainting of the Members of Parliament Lounge. This is rental and maintenance. Alright, Mdm. Lawrence? They are replacing the carpet in the Registry Department; lacquering and replacing carpets in the passageway; cleaning and polishing tiles on the upper and lower corridors; maintenance the roof; repainting the walls of the Parliamentary Library section; replacing fibreglass windows in the Legislative Department; repairing and repainting the stairwell and the floor of the dome; miscellaneous maintenance; and renovating the barrack room, *et cetera*. Those came up to \$22,337,000. There are other areas relating to things such as cleaners, refills, insecticides spray, water dispensers, garbage bags, cleaning cloths, Lysol disinfecting wipes *et cetera*, which come to \$22 million. The rental which I gave you for the Ministers' residences and the Arthur Chung Conference Centre come up to \$31,877,000. That brings you to the \$76,214,000 total for that sub-heading.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister indicate what are the reasons for us to continue using the ACCC and not the Parliament Chamber, given that we have expended quite a lot of money for the refurbishment and equipment of the Parliament Office. There is Youth Parliament and other activities being held there. Why are we not meeting there?

Ms. Teixeira: Madam, I think a lot of us are quite comfortable here because there is more space. However, that is not the answer. The answer is – we still have Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) around. We are still expected to carry out certain sanitary and other preventions. They have used the opportunity, I believe, to do a lot of repairs in the Chambers in the meantime while we are not in the way. That is my understanding at this point. I am not aware of any change in the policy to continue here at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre until a future date. I am not aware when that would happen.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I now...

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman...?

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

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. From this total sum here of \$2,070,831,000, which is an increase from last year and all previous years, may I ask what is the increase for the Office of the Leader of the Opposition?

10.31 a.m.

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that there has been no change in the current budget for the Leader of the Opposition, \$32,564,000. That is what it was last year and that is what it is this year. The wages and salary for the Leader of the Opposition remains the same, except for the 10% and includes: the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), gratuity, vacation allowance, fuel, electricity, janitorial services and refreshments (totalling \$4 million) telephone and internet, other supplies, water, miscellaneous expenses, which come to a total of \$32,564,000. However, please forgive me, I must add that there are many times when I had to interact with the Office of the Leader of the Opposition. Each time we send the Office Assistant to deliver mail, the building is closed. Therefore, we have to send the mail all the way to Congress Place. Every time we have correspondence to deliver to the Office of the Leader of the Opposition – and I do so on behalf of His Excellency, the President – the building is locked and there is no one body there. A rent of \$400,000 a month is being paid for this building. Yes, the rate has not changed, but that is not a reason for it not to change or increase. I raise this to ask you that if you have an office, could it be functional just to make it easier for us to have to interact with the Leader of the Opposition? Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member...

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

Mr. Chairman: I am looking for the mic. I cannot...

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

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, go ahead.

Mr. Charlie: A follow-up on the same question that the Hon. Mahipaul asked: we would like to know, on this side of the House, where the Office of the Leader of the Opposition located.

Ms. Teixeira: To answer my Colleague, the Office of the Leader of the Opposition is on Regent Street. I forgot the lot number, but it is in the upper part of Regent Street, about two blocks down from the Office of the President. Yes, that is it.

Programme: 071 – National Assembly – \$2,070,831,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 071 – National Assembly – \$55,000,000

Programme: 071 – National Assembly – \$55,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister, the Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Ministry of Finance, the Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly and the Minister's staff, for taking us through that Agency. I now invite you to turn to pages 84 and 85. I invite the members of the Audit Office of Guyana to join the Hon. Minister and none other than the Auditor General himself, Mr. Deodat Sharma, along with his staff.

Agency: 08 Audit Office of Guyana

Current Expenditure

Programme: 081 – Audit Office – \$1,537,244,000

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, you have the floor. You seem to have a palm fly inside the microphone. Somebody must be broadcasting from outside.

Ms. Teixeira: Is that a bee? It sounds like a bumble bee.

Mr. Chairman: There it is. Go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Minister tell us what is the strength of the Engineers Department of the Audit Office?

Ms. Teixeira: The strength of the Audit Office's Engineers Department is seven engineers, Madam.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister say whether there will be an increase in the number of engineers for the Auditor General's department given that we have some \$737.6 billion in capital expenditure this year?

Ms. Teixeira: I think Mdm. Lawrence is well aware that if the Auditor General desires to increase the number of engineers, he has to go through the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) with a recommendation and the PAC will determine whether it supports it or not. As far as I know, we have not received a request recently from the Auditor General. The Auditor General is welcomed to do that and I am sure the PAC will take his request seriously.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I may?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: I just want to remind the Hon. Minister, I do not sit on the Public Accounts Committee so I will not be aware of what the Auditor General submitted. However, I would like to know...

Ms. Teixeira: Ms. Lawrence, could you hold on for one second? Let me interrupt you. At the PAC, we approved three engineers, bringing the total to seven last year. That is how we got the seven, three were added in 2024. I did not say that you were part of the PAC. I said that you are

familiar with the PAC because you were there for a very long time – an old stalwart in the PAC. Clean up Mr. Mahipaul and these guys.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Could the Minister indicate which fleet of vehicles is available to the Engineers Department?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that there is one vehicle for the Engineers Department at this point, because you did not ask about the fleet for the whole Audit Office just for the Engineers Department. **[An Hon. Member (Opposition): (Inaudible)]** Yes. There is one.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: No, Mr. Chairman. I am finished.

Programme: 081 – Audit Office – \$1,537,244,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 081 – Audit Office – \$26,120,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, a pleasant morning to you and the entire House. I note that the Audit Office is requesting \$26,120,000 for the procurement of vehicles, furniture and equipment. Could the Hon. Member provide a disaggregation of this amount, including the intended purposes of purchase, the type of vehicle to be purchased, and where the vehicle will be assigned? Thank you very much.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you. Could I sit down every now and then, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you may.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you. You are correct. There is \$10.5 million for the purchase of a motor vehicle for the office. This is to service transport staff on audit assignments, physical verification and daily administrative costs. Then we have the balance of that being used for laptops, hard drives and a wireless mouse. The quantity is 30 at \$280,000 a unit. These are assigned to staff to conduct audits – 15 audit clerks and 15 to replace systems that cannot run updated programmes. The cost of that is \$8.4 million. There is the multifunction printer – \$800,000; scanner, two at \$800,000 and

two multifunction printers; 13 filing cabinets at \$65,000, totalling \$845,000; three executive chairs at \$81,000, totalling \$243,000; typist chair, 20 totalling \$1,460,000; refrigerator, eight at \$60,000, totalling \$480,000; executive desk, one at \$97,000 – this is because the formal one was not in good condition; writing desk, seven at \$76,000, totalling \$532,000 – to replace desk in Audit Manager's office and the Audit section; water dispensers, 7 totalling \$595,000; and bookshelves, 2 at \$150,000. That is how we got \$26 million.

Programme: 081 – Audit Office – \$26,120,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, AG and your staff, as well as the Minister's staff, for taking us through that with your Minister.

Agency: 09 Public and Police Service Commissions

Current Expenditure

Programme: 091 – Public and Police Service Commissions – \$230,690,000

Programme: 091 – Public and Police Service Commissions – \$230,690,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 091 – Public and Police Service Commissions – \$9,900,000

Programme: 091 – Public and Police Service Commissions – \$9,900,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

10.46 a.m.

Agency: 10 Teaching Service Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 101 – Teaching Service Commission – \$193,648,000

Programme: 101 – Teaching Service Commission – \$193,648,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 101 – Teaching Service Commission – \$8,300,000

Programme: 101 – Teaching Service Commission – \$8,300,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 11 Guyana Elections Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 111 – Elections Commission – \$7,106,973,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Appendix T, page 673, Other Goods and Service Purchased, the amount here is over one billion dollars. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the sum? I know the bulk of this money will go in preparation of hosting General and Regional Elections (GRE) later this year, but a disaggregation would provide clarity.

Ms. Teixeira: I am afraid I am not sure which area you are looking at, head or subhead.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: It is Appendix T, page 673.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, I am there.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: It is Other Goods Purchased.

Ms. Teixeira: Okay, Other Goods, I did not hear you. I am sorry. Mdm. Chandan-Edmond, this is to provide security for all Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) registration officers and cash escorts from the Central Bank; for maintaining the effective functioning of all equipment; extermination, and fumigation, *et cetera*. That comes under programme 1 at 605. We also have, under programme 2, \$508,420,000. I believe this is, in preparation for the elections in terms of having more security at all of the registration offices and I assume at the polling stations, *et cetera*.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, Sir. Hon. Minister, under Education and Training, \$193,056,000 has been allocated. Could you indicate how much of this money will cater for voters' education and training?

Ms. Teixeira: To answer your question, this head does not include the training of civic education. This does not include public education. This is to do with refunding persons trained for their transportation cost, public transportation, and provision of the participants in the training programmes with lunch and snacks. This is mostly to do with assuming training of election day temporary staff.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. On the very page 673, Recurrent Expenditure – Rental and Maintenance of Buildings: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, I note we have...

Ms. Teixeira: Could you just give me a minute? I am trying to clarify something here.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay.

Ms. Teixeira: Could you hold your horses? Thank you very much. Sorry to have kept you waiting, Ms. Ferguson. For the question to do with public education, if we look at the areas of 'Other Goods and Services Purchased', you will find \$427,500,000: for production of infomercials for radios and televisions, \$91,500,000; for publication notices in local newspapers, \$63,000,000; for advertisements of election workers, \$3,000,000; for the printing of manuals, \$95,000,000; for the procurement of t-shirts for election day staff, \$135,000,000; for the printing and distributing of flyers and brochures, \$15,000,000; and for the engagement with civil organisations, \$25,000,000. You will come up to your \$427,500,000 which would cover civic education, public awareness, infomercials, *et cetera*. I think I have answered your question now. Is that correct? Yes. One thing – I forgot to mention earlier, in response to the question on education training, which was asked, this involves 19,000 people being trained as election day staff. That figure that we gave, and the amount to cover the training programmes, the selection and the identification of all the election day staff. That is simply the training package. A total of 19,000 people have to be trained as temporary election day staff. I am sorry I forgot to mention that.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I hope we will get back our time lost. Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, if I could turn the Hon. Member's...

Ms. Teixeira: You have two hours and ten minutes. Did Mr. Mahipaul not...

Ms. Ferguson: If I could turn the Hon. Member's attention to Rental and Maintenance of Buildings, I note the Commission is requesting \$227,305,000. Could the Hon. Member explain the reason for this increase as against what was spent in 2024? Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister? You can sit, Minister.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, go ahead, pull the microphone down a bit.

Ms. Teixeira: It has to go quite a bit down. I am short. Rental and Maintenance of Buildings as you asked is \$227,305,000. This is the rental of 13 buildings and various rates – \$73,205,000 and then there are things that have to be provided for the buildings like cleaning material, *et cetera* at \$23,250,000; maintenance of buildings, \$8,150,000; rental of buildings for polling stations, \$122,700,000. This is under two programmes – programme one, \$194,744,000 and programme two, \$132,561,000. The increase because of elections and that we have to have polling stations. Some may be free, like the public buildings, but others may have to be rented.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, and thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. There is no further question on this item.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I have noticed that under 'Employment Cost', in 2024, we expended a sum of \$1,808,863,000 and for 2025, we have budgeted a sum of \$1,761,666,000, a decrease from last year. Given that salaries were increased by 10% last year and a further 8% this year, May I ask the Hon. Minister, why is there a decrease in the employment cost?

Ms. Teixeira: The wages and salaries cover the following categories of employees, including all the benefits: for Assistant Returning Officers, \$320,143,000; Drivers, \$226,741,000; Civic and Voter Education Assistants – \$320,143,000; Returning Officers (RO), \$423,925,000; Security Officers, \$430,532,000; Managers, \$794,573,000; Chief Election Officers (CEO), Deputy Chief

Election Officer, Accounting Officer and Assistant Chief Election Officer (ACO) – they total up as well. The total for programme one is \$1,603,912,000. This also includes the temporary election day polling staff.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Sir. I thank the Hon. Minister for that break down. My concern is that this is an election year, 2025, and there has been salary increases in 2024, which took the employment cost to \$ 1,808,863,000. Reflected in the numbers before me in Appendix T, is a decrease from that sum. If salaries are being increased, why is this number reflected here as a decrease from 2024?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, could you provide an explanation?

Ms. Teixeira: As you will see, the overhead expenditure was decreased, partly because there was less overtime paid in 2024. It was not an election year and therefore there was a sizeable decrease in comparison to 2023, which was an election year for Local Government.

11.01 a.m.

There are also several employees who did not qualify for Leave Passage Allowance because of their employment dates, and so forth. There was a decline from \$393,963,000 to \$149,088,000. The benefits and allowances for approximately 336 staff, which is Permanent staff, are \$69,059,000; Employee National Insurance Scheme (NIS) - \$66,392,000; Overtime – 500 hours per staff per year at \$14,437,000. That is Programme 1, under the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). In the T-form, it is under Overhead Expenditure.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister for the salaries and benefits of the Chief Election Officer (CEO) at the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM)? **[Mr. Nandlall:** The same package that Lowenfield had.] I do not know it.

Ms. Teixeira: To inform my Friend, Mr. Mahipaul, the statutory wages and salaries for the Commission has also increased by 10%. He will note that, between the Revised 2024 and the Statutory Wages and Salaries, they have gone up from \$72 million to \$226,074,000. This is the annual salary for the Chairman and the Commissioners, and stipends for Scrutineers who are doing the continuous registration. That is why there is a big increase. In relation to the CEO, statutory benefits are under Wages and Salaries – I need a magnifying glass for this – \$1,937,732; NIS –

\$23,520,000; Duty-Allowances – \$500,000; Entertainment Allowance – this is an annual figure, Mr. Mahipaul – \$200,000; Housing Allowance – \$350,000; Security Allowance - \$220,000; Uniform Allowance – that is once a year; Gratuity is \$5,231,876; and Vacation Allowance - \$1,937,732. The monthly total is \$3,331,252 and the grand total for 12 months is \$44,724,632.

Mr. Mahipaul: Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to also give us the salaries and benefits for the Deputy Chief Election Officer (DCEO)?

Ms. Teixeira: The DCEO's monthly salary is \$1,229,883; NIS – \$23,520; Duty Allowance – \$150,000; Travelling Allowance – \$17,000; Entertainment Allowance – \$30,000; Housing Allowance – \$75,000; Security Allowance – \$125,000; Uniform Allowance – \$140,000; Gratuity – \$3,074,485; and Vacation Allowance – \$1,138,698. The monthly payment is \$1,319,218 and the total payment, annually, is \$20,043,799.

Mr. Mahipaul: My final question under Wages and Salaries, may I ask the Hon. Minister to provide us with the salaries and benefits for the Chairperson of the Guyana Elections Commission?

Ms. Teixeira: I do not want to personalise because, remember, we do not use names. The basic salary is \$2,780,968; NIS Contributions – \$4,200 and the monthly total is \$2,785 and the housing allowance – \$168,000. The total is \$33,423,020. Are there any other questions?

Programme: 111 - Elections Commission - \$7,106,973,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 111 - Elections Commission - \$237,879,000

Programme: 111 - Elections Commission - \$237,879,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister and the staff of the Guyana Elections Commission, including the Chief Election Officer and the Deputy. Thank you. Let me invite the Members of the Supreme Court to join Minister Teixeira.

Agency: 55 Supreme Court

Current Expenditure

Programme: 551 – Supreme Court of Judicature– \$3,636,845,000

Programme: 551 – Supreme Court of Judicature – \$3,636,845,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 551 – Supreme Court of Judicature– \$2,205,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, there is an allocation of \$2,205,000,000, which is for the “Provision for courts, quarters...” *et cetera*, “...payment of retention”. Could you kindly disaggregate the sum, the location of these courts and the living quarters that are catered under this project code? For the payment of retention, could you also indicate which project it is for and the location of this project, please?

Ms. Teixeira: There are a lot of projects and very important ones. I think this will be a great Phillip Four and the increase is for the continuation of the building of the infrastructure and architecture of the Judicial system so that it could function more efficiently, as well as for people to have access to justice regardless of where they live. The \$2,205,000,000 has been disaggregated as follows: I will get rid of the easiest ones, and then I will come to the buildings. The land and water transport has four vehicles at an estimated value of \$8 million, and the purchase of a new Fielder Wagon motor vehicle for the Fort Wellington Magistrates’ Court – \$7 million. Fifteen million dollars is for land and water transport.

For furniture and furnishing, many of the new Magistrates’ Court and the ones that are coming on stream – \$436,530,00. These include things like generators, automatic change overs, living quarters that you asked about, consultancy services, intercom systems, variation on design and implementation on the E-Litigation Programme for the Supreme Court of Judicature and the Court of Appeal – this is \$22,427,000. This is part of a variation on a contract for manpower increase on the Project of E-Litigation, supply and installation of solar panels at Mahdia, photocopiers, printers, computers, scanners, air conditioners, units – for example, generators, chairs, desks and the usual things to go into offices. That is \$436 million.

The large bulk, which is \$1.7 billion, will go in the following way – as you know, a number of Magistrates' Court are under construction, some of them are in the defect liability period – Cove and John Magistrates' Court and Friendship Magistrates' Court are under final retentions. So, it is Fort Wellington and Suddie Magistrates' Court, for example. There are Magistrates' Court such as Mahaicony, Timehri and Anna Regina. These are all Interim Payment Certificates (IPCs) and Practical Payment Certificates that have started. La Parfaite Harmonie is in that bracket as well, a two-storey building to house two Magistrates' Courts, living quarters, conference and training facilities at Providence, and that is \$221,615,000.

11.16 a.m.

There is the construction of an annex for the Suddie Magistrate Court, \$102,244,000; rewiring of the Whim Magistrate Court, Region 6, \$4.6 million. Addition rehabilitation to the front of Suddie Magistrate Court, \$80 million, that is again interim payment; construction of an access bridge to new Anna Regina Magistrate Court, \$39,281,000 and the electrification of the Mahdia Magistrate's Court. This is the 10% contingency on contract, \$3,330,000. Now, the new projects that are listed also under this include capital contribution to Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) for electricity supply at the Friendship Magistrate's Court; Supreme Court's capital contributions required to purchase items for the supply of electricity for the Friendship Magistrate's Court. The same thing in relation to a medium voltage cable with accessories for supply to Mabaruma.

Phase 2 completion of the Cove and John Magistrate's Court for \$156,600,000. You would be pleased to hear that in this new Capital we have included elevator shafts or elevators which will be important in terms of our programme to make buildings more accessible to people with disabilities, the elderly and so on. New Amsterdam, there will be the completion of the elevator shaft and rehabilitation works at the New Amsterdam High Court at \$15 million. The elevator shaft at Vigilance Magistrate's Court, which is \$4.6 million, is a modification. Also, another modification at the Court of Appeal to facilitate the installation of the elevator, \$16 million and that is Kingston, which you all know. Another modification of the elevator shaft at Port Kaituma, Region 1, \$9.2 million; modification of the elevator shaft at Mabaruma Magistrate's Court \$9.2 million. For those of you who use the Georgetown High Court, there is an extension of the female washroom; paling of the north revetment at Charity Children's Court \$2 million; upgrading the electrification at Charity Magistrate's and Children's Court \$10 million.

Phase 3, completion of Mahdia Magistrate's Court \$41,886,000; construction of the new wing of the New Amsterdam Sub-Treasury Family and Land Court building, \$164,400,000; construction phase, extension of judge's quarters, New Amsterdam, Berbice. As you know we have more judges than before, that is why I was surprised when you asked questions under current, but we now have 19 judges. Hence, we should be proud as Guyanese that 70 % of the judiciary in Guyana is female. We have the highest percentage globally of women who are judges. We should hold our heads high up, girls. [Mr. Mahipaul: *Inaudible*] I beg your pardon?

At this point, 70 % of the judiciary in Guyana are females. I did not call any names, and I advise Mr. Mahipaul that we should not do such. Rewiring of the New Amsterdam High Court, \$11,891,000; rewiring of Vreed-en-Hoop Magistrate's Court, \$21 million; wiring of the New Amsterdam High Court \$52,693,000; construction of the Mahaica Magistrate's Court and living quarters \$57 million; construction of a Mediation Legal Resource Conference Centre at Essequibo, \$76 million. This comes up to the grand total of \$1,753,470,000. I think that when we look at the capital of the Judiciary, we should really feel confident that – the Judiciary – we are really investing in the infrastructure for the Judiciary as we have never done before. We have a modern Magistrate's Court and modern facilities. You now have e-litigation, where you can now file electronically, even for the Family Court and the Land Court. This is going to make things much easier, faster and more efficient and accessible to Guyanese. I think we should feel really proud of the investment in the Judiciary and their role in making sure that access to justice is protected. Thank you very much.

Programme: 551 – Supreme Court of the Judicature – \$2,205,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister and the Staff of the Supreme Court for taking us through that agency.

[Mr. Chairman hits gavel.]

Agency: 56 Public Prosecutions

Current Expenditure

Programme: 561 – Public Prosecutions – \$524,488,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please turn to pages 292 and 293 and I invite the staff of the Public Prosecution's Office to join the Hon. Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Members, please turn to page 522 and I propose...

Ms. Teixeira: Can I just interrupt you for one minute? Could you bring to the attention of the House that this was one of the agencies that had an erratum. There was an erratum for the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP)'s Office that was circulated on Thursday.

Mr. Chairman: The sum stated remains the same.

Ms. Teixeira: I beg your pardon?

Mr. Chairman: The sum requested remains the same.

Ms. Teixeira: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, so the sum is correct.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. It is just that the capital was originally omitted. That is why when you come to capital, it was omitted and then it was corrected, so the total that you have said is correct.

Programme: 561 – Public Prosecutions – \$524,488,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us thank the Hon. Minister and her staff of the DPP's Office for taking us through that agency. I invite you to turn to pages 296 and 297 and invite the staff of the Office of the Ombudsman to join us.

Agency: 57 Office of the Ombudsman

Current Expenditure

Programme: 571 - Ombudsman - \$71,275,000

Programme: – 571 - Ombudsman - \$71,275,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 571 – Ombudsman - \$750,000

Programme: 571 – Ombudsman – \$750,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 58 Public Service Appellate Tribunal

Current Expenditure

Programme: 581- Public Service Appellate Tribunal – \$76,441,000

Programme: 581 – Public Service Appellate Tribunal – \$76,441,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 581 – Public Service Appellate Tribunal - \$1,370,000

Programme: 581 – Public Service Appellate Tribunal – \$1,370,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 59 Ethnic Relations Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 591 – Ethnic Relations Commission - \$325,947,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir...

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

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Hon. Minister, I ask you to turn to page 709. I am looking at other reoccurring charges, you have an \$87 million increase from last year to this year. Could you kindly indicate to us what specific items were either added now or which services were added for 2025, or those which would have been budgeted to incur a higher cost than last year?

Ms. Teixeira: Under this head, you have a number of areas such as materials, equipment and supplies, fuel and lubricants, rental of buildings, maintenance of infrastructure, utility cost, *et cetera*. A number of these have increased, taking into consideration that there will be elections,

and the Ethnic Relations Commission plays a role in terms of monitoring. Also, I believe it will be putting forward its own observer mission or team to the election. The increase in the materials and equipment and supplies actually decreased, but the main focus on that is on supplies for stationary for election monitors or observers for training sessions and regional outreach programmes. In 2024, there were a number of areas that were not catered for. Fuel and lubricants have gone up from \$1.3 to \$4.2 million based on an increased volume of outreaches in 2025 and regional visits and so forth. Under Rental of Buildings and Maintenance of Buildings, the Commission intends to repaint the building internally and externally in 2025. As you know, the Ethnic Relations Commission's (ERC's) building is shared with the other Right's Commissions. However, the ERC is the one responsible and is given funds from time to time to maintain the entire building.

11.31 a.m.

In this case, they have funds put aside and this is where there is a slight increase to replace the damaged part of the roof, awning on the second floor, replace windows, replace the rotten ceiling, and so if there were broken windows, general repairs. This comes up to approximately 11... Sorry. Comes up to *[inaudible]* ...Approximately about... **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** That is what I said, \$11 million. It also envisages some increase in keeping the building in terms of materials for the building, in terms of cleanliness and hygiene. Maintenance of infrastructure... Other recurrent is the increase, as I have said from...

Transport has also gone up as well, in terms of mobilising for... In terms of transportation costs for Election Monitors and Observers to attend training and monitor meetings during the period, as you know, that is done. That has gone up from \$12.7 million to \$49 million. This is quite a sizeable increase, including transportation costs, accommodation for regional visits to the 10 administrative regions and participants coming to outreaches and so forth. It also has travelling and accommodation for staff of the investigative unit who may have to increase visits to outlying regions. There are other aspects of this to enhance the skills and knowledge of the staff, and exposure to international best practices. This also includes insurance coverage and third-party insurance for the servicing and repairs of three vehicles. It also caters for the increase to do more chartered regional flights – \$20,128,000... Sorry, and boat rentals. Okay, so you have \$20 million for charters and \$12 million for boat rentals for staff and commissioners. That is how we came up to the \$49.014 million.

Ms. Ferguson: Follow-up to the Hon. Member. Could the Hon. Member state how many observers the ERC will be catering for?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that the ERC is catering to 100 long-term, meaning those that are brought in prior to or a good time before the elections and 200 for Election Day itself.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. No further questions.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: The ERC – two impacts listed in Volume 2 says,

“IMPACTS:

- Reduced ethnic discrimination
- Improved race relations, ethnic security and equal opportunity”

Those are the impacts stated. My question is, does the ERC has a strategic plan that guides its work?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Mdm. It is on their website – the ERC website.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Cde. Chairman one of the strategies of the ERC is to investigate complaints of racial discrimination and to refer to the Human Rights Commission for further action, if necessary. Could the ERC say whether they have referred any complaints investigated to the Human Rights Commission at any time during this last period?

Ms. Teixeira: If you look at Volume 2, with the Indicators, it explains how many complaints were received, investigated, *et cetera*. However, you are well aware, Madam, that the Human Rights Commission (HRC) is not constituted in terms of the Chairperson. The other four Chairpersons are there but not the Chairperson overall. The Secretariat continues to handle, under the Constitution they are allowed to, but they have no commission as such because there is no Chairman. Therefore, there is no need in addition to any investigation or completion of investigation by the ERC to the Human Rights Commission. There is no requirement to do that. They can refer to 12 other agencies and/or if they feel it is criminal, they can then refer to the Director of Public Prosecution’s Office and the Commissioner of Police. They do not have to go to the HRC to bring any matter that they feel is concluded and requires disciplinary action, legal

action or criminal action. The Constitution does not require them to do that, and so there is not an impediment to their work, in other words.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Mr. Chairman, just a follow-up. I am happy for the response from the Hon. Minister. Could the Minister say if any matter was referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that four were sent to the DPP – four complaints. Investigations concluded were sent to the DPP's Office.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, under Wages and Salaries, there is an increase here of \$134,583,000. Last year, we spent \$130,265,000. From this allocated sum for this year, would the 12 employees who are not in receipt of their 10% increase due to a discrepancy at the ERC be paid their 10% from this allocated sum and also their 8%?

Ms. Teixeira: As far as I know, the staff that are eligible are receiving the 10%. Of course, as usual, with the Ministry of Finance if the 8%, as you are saying, is not included, the Ministry of Finance releases those funds accordingly when the instruction is given, so they do not have to worry about that.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up, Cde. Chairman. With reference to the answer, the query has to do with the 12 staff who did not receive their 10% last year. I am asking if in this sum that 10% is covered for the 12 staff who did not get their increase due to a discrepancy. May I ask what was that discrepancy?

Ms. Teixeira: The Commission on its own decided to increase salaries for 12 people which were way beyond 10%, 8% and further up than 10%. So, 12 people's salaries were increased to very large amounts. Therefore, the discussion that was held between the Government and the ERC is that those 12 should be what you call red circled as in the previous when we used to do that because their salaries were way beyond – a number of them – what would be even a 25% increase. That is why they were not paid the 10% for 2024. It is something that we have to keep reviewing, but it was unknown to the Government and it was discovered late last year November but it was put into place in December, 2023.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up, Sir. Do commissions have the authority to unilaterally increase their employees' salaries without the approval of the Government and an order from the Cabinet?

Ms. Teixeira: No. You are absolutely correct. They do not have the authority. As with the ruling of Justice Harnanan, the constitutional bodies are subject to review under the financial procurement laws, *et cetera*, and by Parliament. Therefore, this decision was, unfortunately, unauthorised. We are trying to rectify it now because the staff are there, and they are staff that are important and need to be kept. At the same time, all the commissions and all the constitutional bodies, if they want increases in salaries or allowances and stuff, they have to request. It goes through the Ministry of Finance, and I also review them because I have to answer for the constitutional bodies, and we try to handle those on a case-by-case basis. They cannot be done just unilaterally.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A follow-up...

Ms. Teixeira: That is why there is a problem.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes. A follow-up, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. Given that this has happened, what action has been taken and what action is being taken to ensure that we do not have a recurrence of such?

Ms. Teixeira: We have advised the Commission in writing that there was a breach and what has to be done in the interim, but to warn them that this should not recur. It was a rather strong letter, but one that we try to make sure that... The Commission was relatively new, some of the staff were relatively new, they may not have known, but this was a decision of the Commission, not the staff. That is where the Commission itself has to be held accountable and not the Secretariat as such.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, a follow-up. May I ask the Hon. Minister for the designations of the 12 offices that received this substantial increase, and if the Minister will be kind enough to provide what was the direct percentage increase given to each of the 12?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. We do not have the percentage here; we would have to provide that. I have a list here of the full staff, but I do not have it disaggregated into the 12. We could prepare that as a separate group, and the percentage increase. No names, of course.

Mr. Mahipaul: That will be greatly appreciated, Cde. Chairman. Thank you very much.

Ms. Teixeira: That would be circulated to the House as requested.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman.

Ms. Hughes: Minister, could you remind us of whether the tribunal for the ERC was actually established?

Ms. Teixeira: No, it was not. Of course, there is provision for that, but with all tribunals, it has to go through a process which includes the President appointing the persons. Secondly, is that it is triggered when there are cases to be referred to a tribunal. My understanding is that no case of the ERC, since its formation, has ever required that a tribunal take up, hold court and review it. There has been no – what you call – urgency to develop that because there would be a tribunal sitting doing nothing. I mean if you look at the Public Service Appellate Tribunal (PSAT) we just passed, they did two cases in 2024 costing quite a lot of millions of dollars. The tribunal in the ERC case, if there are no cases that warrant a tribunal, then you will be spending a lot of money on people just sitting and looking at each other.

Ms. Hughes: Except, I think, just in terms...

Ms. Teixeira: By the way, the ERC... Sorry. Just to cut you. The ERC is completely separate from the tribunal.

Ms. Hughes: I am aware.

Ms. Teixeira: The tribunal members have nothing to do with the ERC, as you know.

Ms. Hughes: I am aware of that. That is why I asked the question. This is because, on the last occasion we met with the ERC, one of their challenges was stated as being unable to investigate some situations to the level that is required because the tribunal did not exist. I am very curious as to whether there is a time frame because at some stage it is going to be required to enable the ERC to effectively do their job.

Ms. Teixeira: The tribunal has nothing to do with investigations. The tribunal as a tribunal, is hearing a case. It does not have an investigation. The investigation is done by the ERC and if required by the police or some civil law enforcement and the DPP. The tribunal, under the ERC

Tribunal Act, has no role to play in investigations – absolutely none. I think that whoever told you that about the Commission is misguided.

11.46 a.m.

Ms. Hughes: I may have worded it incorrectly, but the reality is that if a case needs to come, can we say to this nation when we would be considering putting a tribunal in place, or are we going to wait until there is a need and then put the mechanism in place?

Ms. Teixeira: I think we have to remember a couple of things. In the context of the Constitutional Reform Commission from 1990 to 2001, we did not have a constitutional court. We did not have certain courts that are available to us now. Therefore, with a case of constitutional violation or if a person is accused of violating the Constitution, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) can go straight to the Constitutional Court, and then all the way up to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). There is no need for the tribunal. I am not saying there never will be a tribunal; I am just saying that when the Constitution was amended in 2001, it did not anticipate a number of new courts being created, including a Constitutional Court. As far as I am aware, that court tends to deal, quite expeditiously, with cases, if I am correct. Time and context may not be as urgent for the tribunal if that scenario were to occur. One has alternative recourse for domestic redress. So, I would not get too anxious, but one does not know, when one looks at Volume 2, the number of cases investigated. They have sent four to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). The volume is not a large amount at this point.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Hon. Members, please. I am still here.

Ms. Teixeira: Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. A follow-up to the questions I asked earlier. Could the Hon. Minister please provide the salaries and benefits of the Chairman and Commissioners of the Commission?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Monthly, please. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, we should have that. Thank you. Sorry about the delay. Is it just the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) that you want or....?

Ms. Fernandes: The Chairperson.

Ms. Teixeira: The Chairperson receives a \$403,710 basic salary and that is the total. There is the benefit of a travel allowance and a sitting fee of \$60,500. This brings us to a total of \$726,000 annualised.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Minister advise on how complaints are received by the ERC? I noted that for 2024, we see the number of complaints is 95, but the number of complaints investigated is 103. There were eight additional investigations compared to the number of complaints received. So, my question, Minister, is: Is there an independent monitoring unit at the Commission that goes out there and searches for persons who may be in violation of ethnic relations rights?

Ms. Teixeira: I am not aware that the ERC goes out and searches for victims or people making allegations. However, they hold community programmes where people may raise, at that time, an issue and they are advised what to do because they have to send in formal complaints. If you look at Volume 2, page 275, the number of complaints received was 103, but they have broken them down in two years. Some are for 2024, and some are for 2023. In fact, there are a number of cases going back even before 2020 that are still unable to be completed because some of the files have disappeared. The 103 includes 2023 and 2024 as of the time of reporting to finance. They may have come in sometime in September or November after this report was prepared.

Ms. Fernandes: Follow-up.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you. If the Minister can advise, I also noted that for 2025, the target is 240 for complaints expected to be received, but the number of complaints that we are expecting to be investigated is 140. So, there is an expectation that of the 240 complaints, 100 would not be investigated. Is this because of a lack of capacity for the Commission?

Ms. Teixeira: Am I to understand your first question is why such a massive increase?

Ms. Fernandes: I am asking why is it that the number of complaints that are expected is 240, while the number of complaints that will be investigated is 140, which is 100 less. It indicates that 100 complaints may not be investigated. I am asking what the reason is and if there is a lack of capacity within the body to do all the investigations as they come in.

Ms. Teixeira: This is a projection based on a number of factors. One is that this is part of media monitoring. During election time, there is media monitoring and monitoring of political rallies to make sure that people are not violating the Racial Hostility Act and the Constitution, *et cetera*. It is anticipated that there will be, as there have been in the past, statements made at rallies, on *Facebook*, or television, or whatever that would be inciting, or ethically divisive, *et cetera*. The second issue, I understand, is that this figure is projected probably more for the second half of the year, than the first half of the year – that is 2025 – in anticipation of election mode, campaign rallies, *et cetera*. Many of these will roll over into investigations in 2026 because they will come in the latter part of the year, closer to the elections. That is how they have determined that, and they feel that they have investigators. I believe they are looking to hire legal officers and media monitors to assist.

Ms. Fernandes: One final follow-up, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Fernandes: In terms of the complaints that are received, could the Minister disaggregate where the bulk comes from, whether it is from social media, from persons writing to the Commission, or from persons walking in? Where are you getting the higher volume of complaints from? Also, which regions are they coming from the most?

Ms. Teixeira: The annual report for 2023 was laid in Parliament, so that would give you some idea of...The annual report for 2024 has not been laid as yet in Parliament, but it will be soon. In that, you will see a disaggregation of the types of complaints, I think, and where they came from. For example, how many were from social media, and how many people come in with complaints.

Mr. Duncan: A quick question. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has done some work...

Mr. Chairman: Do you not think I should apply the rule that you have to be in your seat?

Mr. Duncan: We are in Committee. Would you like me to be in my seat, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Well, go ahead.

Mr. Duncan: Thank you very much. The UNDP has done some work with the entity, Cde. Minister. I would just like to know how many of the recommendations from that UNDP report have been incorporated in moving the agency forward.

Ms. Teixeira: They have been supporting e-monitoring, but the report you are talking about, I am advised, has not been received as yet under this current Commission. They have not received a report from the UNDP. There is a project that was being examined that had to do with strengthening the staff, looking at the organisational structure of the staff, training, and in-house capacity building. But that is not a report. That is a project proposal.

Mr. Duncan: Through the Chairman, Mdm. Minister, the information is contained in the ERC's annual report, so I am surprised that the entity would say they do not have receipt of the report.

Ms. Teixeira: Which report? What is the report called, Mr. Duncan? Can you help me?

Mr. Duncan: It is in the annual report of the entity.

Ms. Teixeira: I am aware of that, but I am here in the Committee. I am asking you, what is the name of the report?

Mr. Duncan: I only have the information from the entity's report, which makes reference to the recommendations made by the UNDP.

Ms. Teixeira: Is it the UNDP or United Nations (UN)? Which UN body?

Mr. Duncan: It is the UNDP. It is in the report here. I can quote some of it. It goes back to what...

Ms. Teixeira: Can you say which annual report, please?

Mr. Duncan: I beg your pardon?

Ms. Teixeria: Can you say which annual report? The 2023 report was tabled.

Mr. Duncan: It is for 2024.

Ms. Teixeira: The 2024 report has not been tabled as yet.

Mr. Duncan: It is on the website of the entity.

Ms. Teixeira: The 2024 report is on the website and not in the House. How can that be?

Mr. Duncan: You cannot ask me.

Ms. Teixeira: The 2024 report has only just been completed – the 2024 report was only finished in December. The 2024 report is not on the website. It must be some mistake. The 2024 report goes up to December, 2024. It would not have been finished as yet. When it is finished, it will be tabled in the House. The 2023 report, I am advised, does not have a reference to the UN report. Are we using the correct terms?

Mr. Duncan: Mdm. Minister, the report makes reference to what the Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes, said about the activation of the tribunal. It makes reference to raise of salary for commissioners and so on.

Ms. Teixeira: I am totally unaware of that, and I have never seen it. I do not know if it is UNDP or somewhere else. Whether it comes under an election report or an observer mission, I am not aware. But I am advised by the CEO that it is not referred to in the 2023 annual report.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, could I ask Mr. Duncan if he could provide me with the page number in the 2023 report? Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, said he would try and find a reference and so provide to you.

Programme: 591 – Ethnic Relations Commission – \$325,947,000 agreed to and ordered to stand as part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 591 – Ethnic Relations Commission – \$9,500,000

Ms. Ferguson: On the very project code, I note that \$9.5 million is being allocated for the procurement of equipment and also for the, I guess, repairs or construction of a fence at the ERC headquarters. Can the Hon. Member provide a disaggregation for the two items?

12.01 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: One of the larger unit costs under the \$9.5 million is the fence on the southern side, which is made of wood and zinc. It is rotten and so there is \$2.3 million to put a concrete structure on the southern side of the ERC building. A number of the other items include equipment such as inverters, cameras for Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV), computers, computer systems, telephones, and so forth, as well as furniture. There are a number of things such as backup systems – Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) – storage units, headphones, keyboards, computer monitors, a Blu-ray Disc Player. This is, I think, a disc burner. There are television (TV) recording devices for broadcast monitoring, hard drives, Colour LaserJet Pro Printer, ceiling fans, Bluetooth computer speakers, voice recorders, portable projector screen and stand, printers, portable speaker with mic and built-in amplifier, a gimbal, and voice over (VO) microphones. So, that all comes up to \$9.5 million. These are several small equipment that are important for the ERC, particularly in the media monitoring unit. The others are in terms of furniture, equipment and things for the office.

Programme: 591 – Ethnic Relations Commission – \$9,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us turn to pages 308 and 309. Let me thank the Minister and staff of the ERC for taking us through that agency. I invite the staff of the Judicial Service Commission to join the Minister.

Agency: 60 Judicial Service Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 601 – Judicial Service Commission – \$28,222,000

Programme: 601 – Judicial Service Commission – \$28,222,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 601 – Judicial Service Commission – \$2,400,000

Programme: 601 – Judicial Service Commission – \$2,400,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Agency: 61 Rights Commissions of Guyana

Current Expenditure

Programme: 611 – Rights Commissions of Guyana – \$198,175,000

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

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, just before I put the question, actually, I just want to remind the Committee...

Mr. Chairman: Do not make any statement; put the question, please.

Ms. Ferguson: All right, Sir. I noticed that we are approving allocations for the Rights Commission of Guyana. A number of these commissions have expired. The Rights of the Child Commission (RCC) expired in 2013. Then, we have the Women and Gender Equality Commission (WGEC), which expired in 2013. I know for a fact that through the Committee on Appointments, we laid reports in this National Assembly and have done extensive work to ensure that these commissions were reconstituted. The question to the Hon. Member is: Is it right for us to be approving allocations when we know for a fact that the lives of these commissions have expired? That is one. We know for a fact that since their expiration, we have been approving moneys in the National Assembly. I must commend the Women and Gender Equality Commission. It has been continuously laying its annual reports in this National Assembly. However, for the other commissions, we are not getting anything, but we continue to approve moneys. My question to the Hon. Member is: When can we see the reconstitution of these commissions? Remember, in order for the Human Rights Commission to be constituted, these commissions must be reconstituted. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Teixeira: Your question is not without merit. However, these, as you said, expired in 2013. The former Government continued to allow them to operate – this was from 2015 to 2020 – and so have we. They expired in 2013. No Committee met to look at any of these, except one – the

Indigenous People's Commission (IPC). On the IPC, the representation of the Indigenous people was reduced. Therefore, we did not support that one that came to the National Assembly in 2018. Whether by convenience or policy, both governments have kept and allowed the commissions, including the ERC, which was appointed subsequently, to continue without approval. That is number one. That has been going on for the last 11 years. It is not something new. Secondly, the Committee on Appointments needs to go through the reports from the consultative process to complete the process and to complete the process with the IPC. For the IPC, we were awaiting confirmation from the National Toshias' Council (NTC) about whether the nominees it had made years ago, in 2018, remain the same. Of course, they do not. We have work to do in the Committee on Appointments. I am guilty, and I accept responsibility as the Chairperson.

The commissions continue to function. They are accountable for their money. They have programmes across the country. They are keeping their mandate according to the Constitution. They are not violating these areas. If one were to take the line which my friend seems to be indicating that they should all be just closed because they expired – such as what is going on in the United States of America (USA) with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) – we just closed down shop – that would be a violation of our Constitution as well. These rights bodies play an important role in terms of advocating for the human rights of children, Indigenous peoples, and women; and secondly, in terms of creating a domestic remedy where people can make complaints and have their cases heard where it can lead to changes, improvement, and correction of wrong things. The choice, I believe, of the former Government and the present Government is that they do no harm by continuing. They are not violating the Constitution, in essence. So, let them continue until the process is democratic and concluded by the Committee on Appointments and the National Assembly.

The other thing is your reference to reports. Yes, there has been a backlog of reports; you are correct. The Women and Gender Equality Commission has been very faithful in bringing its annual reports. The Rights of the Child Commission tabled, in 2024, two reports for 2019 and 2020. It is expected to bring its other reports up to date. The IPC is up to 2022. Yes, there is a slight backlog. We have been encouraging and pushing them to get their reports done in a timely way to catch up so that by 2025, there would not be this gap for all the commissions reporting to the House. So, that is the issue.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mdm. Minister. Hon. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Minister, before I follow up, I just want to make it clear that I never said the work of the commissions should be halted. All I am asking or making an appeal for, as a Member of the Committee on Appointments, is for us to reconvene our meetings and have these commissions reconstituted. Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, for the Rights of the Child Commission, in this very House, we held consultation – I think it might have been in 2022 – and there was a little controversy over the nominee. Could the Hon. Member state for the record the current members of the Rights of the Child Commission? Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: The consultation was in 2023, not 2022. Give me a second. The staff from the Rights of the Child Commission can help me with the names. The numbers have been reduced. They still have a quorum. They are supposed to have 15 members, and they have 10, with the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you, is this to say that the Hon. Member will not provide the names of the remaining?

Ms. Teixeira: I am waiting for the person.

Ms. Ferguson: I am sorry.

Ms. Teixeira: I am sorry; I do not have a magic bullet.

Ms. Ferguson: I am sorry.

Ms. Teixeira: I am waiting to be provided with that. I do not have those in my head. I may have some, but not all. I do not want to make a mistake with Mr. Duncan here. He will put it *In the Ring*, that I do not know what I am doing.

Mr. Chairman: In the ring, in the rough and the raw.

Ms. Teixeira: He never invited me *In the Ring*. I am quite willing to go in the ring with him.

Mr. Chairman: Member Duncan, please invite the Hon. Member *In the Ring*.

Ms. Teixeira: The Chairperson is Ms. Aleema Nasir; the Deputy Chairperson is Ms. Sandra Hooper; the other Commissioners are Ms. Hyacinth Cynthia Massay, Ms. Marissa Massiah, Mrs.

Rambaran, Ms. Kaloutie Nauth, Mrs. Rosemary Benjamin-Noble, Ms. Colleen Anthony, and Mrs. Suelle Findlay-Williams. Those are the present members. There are nine.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put...

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chair?

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

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Minister advise us on what are the four dormitory schools that were monitored by the RCC in 2024?

12.16 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: The four dormitories that were monitored by the Rights of the Child Commission are Leonora, Mahdia, St. Ignatius and Karasabai.

Ms. Fernandes: I did not get the first one.

Ms. Teixeira: It is Leonora.

Ms. Fernandes: Mahdia...

Ms. Teixeira: Mahdia, St. Ignatius...

Ms. Fernandes: ...and Karasabai.

Ms. Teixeira: ...and Karasabai.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow-up, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say if there is a list of the 15 schools that they intend to monitor in 2025 or if this is just a projection being made right now, and have these schools been disaggregated by region?

Ms. Teixeira: The 15 schools they have for 2025 are all the schools that exist with dormitories.

Ms. Fernandes: Has there been a disaggregation of the schools by each region as yet?

Ms. Teixeira: The 15 dormitories are basically in Regions 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9. Those are where the dormitories are.

Ms. Fernandes: We have in Regions 4 and 6 also. That is why the 15 is 62% of the total number. That is why I put the question.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. I see what you are saying. The Commission, once its budget is approved, will then determine which of the 15 schools it will work with. The Commission will decide that. It has not done so as yet. It is a projection.

Ms. Fernandes: Okay. Thank you.

Programme: 611 – Rights Commissions of Guyana – \$198,175,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 611 – Rights Commissions of Guyana – \$726,000

Programme: 611 – Rights Commissions of Guyana – \$726,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister, and the staff of the Rights Commissions of Guyana for taking us through that agency. We now invite the staff of the Public Procurement Commission to join the Minister and take us through Agency 62.

Agency: 62 Public Procurement Commission

Current Expenditure

Programme: 621 – Public Procurement Commission – \$272,787,000

Mr. Patterson: It is a different lineup this year, but hopefully, the answers will be just as forthcoming. Are you ready, Madam? In Volume 2, under the indicators, the proposed:

“...amendments to the Procurement Act...”

In 2024, the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) said it made 20 recommendations. Could the PPC, through the Minister, one, identify for the Committee the 20 recommendations made, two, when were these recommendations submitted, and finally, to which agency were these recommendations submitted? It is a three-part question to start with.

Ms. Teixeira: The recommendations were made to the Ministry of Legal Affairs, and they were around September of last year. This, of course, has to go through a procedure with the Cabinet and the Cabinet Subcommittee on Bills, *et cetera*. I have not seen them, but I believe, as they have said, it has gone to the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

Mr. Patterson: Does the Public Procurement Commission – and you have the officers there – not have a copy of what they submitted to the Ministry of Legal Affairs?

Ms. Teixeira: I would assume so. I have not seen it.

Mr. Patterson: Well, we are hoping that they could provide us with the answers here. I know you have not seen it.

Ms. Teixeira: Do you want them to list the recommendations they have made?

Mr. Patterson: Yes. I do think the public would like to know.

Mr. Chairman: We can provide that.

Ms. Teixeira: The recommendations are their views. It has to go through a public consultative process. It does not mean that because they recommend it, it is automatic. You are well aware of that, Mr. Patterson. The issue is whether it is in a report or document at the Attorney General's office, as all draft legislation or draft recommendations. If there are general areas, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) could advise me, but I will not be able to share at this point what the draft recommendations by the PPC are. It may not have been seen by anybody in Government at this point. As far as I know, it arose from some of the consultations and open days that the PPC had.

Mr. Patterson: The response is that nobody in Government has seen the recommendations. The Public Procurement Commission does not have a copy of the recommendations.

Mr. Chairman: That is not the response. That is your interpretation of the response.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, could you enlighten me how you interpreted it?

Mr. Chairman: No. You are questioning the allocation and not my opinion. We could meet outside if you want that.

Mr. Patterson: All right, Sir. I will take you up on that. The last time I did, I won. That is very good. At indicators two and four, there were five submitted to the Minister and then five investigations. Are these the same reports, or are they separate reports? This is in Volume 2.

Ms. Teixeira: The Minister referred to here is the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service. Two annual reports were submitted in 2025, and any subject to investigations, they will submit separately or accordingly. The five reports they have submitted had to do with the summary of findings from investigations plus one annual report. That is what makes up the five. There are four that deal with the summary of investigations, and one is an annual report. That is the five for this year, and the five for next year would be two annual reports and whatever others have to do with reports on investigations, which could be less or more.

Mr. Patterson: That is what I am asking, Sir. At indicator number four, they said that they have completed five reports.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Patterson: There were five investigations and an annual report, but you said that they did four investigations and an annual report.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. In terms of the number of reports prepared and shared, they have included an annual report and the investigation reports as the five for this year and *ditto* for next year.

Mr. Patterson: There is a mistake at indicator number four. They have only committed four in the...

Ms. Teixeira: Just give me a second, Hon. Member.

Mr. Patterson: I am referring to the indicators for 2025.

Ms. Teixeira: Are you talking about 2025 or 2024?

Mr. Patterson: In Volume 2, it states that they completed five investigations in 2024. You just indicated that the reports that they submitted...

Ms. Teixeira: There were four.

Mr. Patterson: ...were four.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Patterson: Okay. They are different. Could the agency list the five investigations that were completed?

Ms. Teixeira: The fifth one is outstanding and has to go in. That, I guess, would happen in 2025. It may have been completed later in the year of 2024.

Mr. Patterson: In 2024, the agency projected to train 1200 persons. That was last year. However, only 536 were trained in 2024. Is there a reason for this shortfall?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that, yes, there was a decline in the number of persons trained in public procurement between 2023 and 2024, partly because a new commission came in, and it had a lot of outreach and training. They are down to 536 now, which seems to be quite a manageable number with regard to the Regional Democratic Councils, Ministries, other agencies, contractors, and suppliers. What they have added this year, which is not reflected in Volume 2, are the open days. They held a number of open days, which had large attendance, to explain about the commission and the procurement laws, *et cetera*. They had five open days which were advertised, and I understand people turned up in good numbers.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, go ahead.

Mr. Patterson: Sorry. I did not realise the Member was finished. Let me move on.

Ms. Teixeira: You were asking about reports. I think it is important that these bodies, when they look at the...When you asked about the number of investigations completed annually...I think we also need to look at, as we did with the ERC, the number of complaints that were received. There were four investigations from 2023 that were completed in 2024, and the summaries of the findings

were published on the PPC's website. I think that it is important to point out to the public, who may not always know where to find these things, that the investigation reports from 2023 were completed in 2024 and published on the PPC's website. For the year 2024, there were 12 complaints, and one met the threshold for investigation. It was completed with a summary of findings published on the PPC's website. Two complaints were sent to the Bid Protest Committee; nine complaints remained, seven were closed, and two are ongoing. That is just to give you an idea of the work. As I said, the PPC's website would post their reports. That is part of their transparency to be accountable and to show their work. I thought that was of importance.

Mr. Patterson: In 2023, the PPC trained 939, and in 2024, they trained 536, which brings the total for the two years to 1,575 persons. Could the PPC say how many of these 1,575 persons trained were able to win a contract with the Government based on the training provided by them?

Ms. Teixeira: I am not aware that the training was only with contractors. Is that what you are saying – that the only persons trained were contractors? I was under the impression – maybe I am wrong – that it included regional staff, the Regional Democratic Council staff, and Ministries' staff and other agencies involved with procurement, and there was one with the contractors. It was not everybody together. Could I get clarity on that?

12.31 p.m.

Mr. Patterson: I am particularly speaking about the contractors who have been trained. Could the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) state the number of contractors it trained who were successful, based on the training?

Ms. Teixeira: What context is successful?

Mr. Patterson: In the context of being awarded a contract.

Ms. Teixeira: The PPC does not monitor that. The PPC does not have any responsibility for that. That is not in its mandate. The contractors who were invited were contractors who, I believe, were already bidding. There is nothing in the PPC's mandate that requires the Commission to monitor whether they are successful in getting contracts. That is more the work of the politicians, Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: No. Very good, Mr. Chairman. Let me rephrase the question for the Minister. Does the Public Procurement Commission conduct follow-up interview sessions with persons who have trained to measure the effectiveness of the training? It is no use training people every year and then, somehow, you have to adjust. Maybe, through the training provided to them, they encountered various other difficulties. Is there any follow-up with the persons trained – contractors in particular – by the Public Procurement Commission?

Ms. Teixeira: No. I am not aware of that but I think we have to go back to what the training is about. The training is not about teaching people to bid; and it is teaching people about the procurement laws of Guyana, the financial laws and what the role of the PPC in all of this is – in terms of complaints, in terms of the bid protest, bid review, *et cetera*. This is not meant to equip people with capacities to tender; it is to equip companies, for example, to know what the laws are and to abide by the laws and the requirements, including producing satisfactory work, *et cetera*, and what the law requires. I think that one, we have to first understand what the training was about, as far as I understand – and you can correct me. Then, secondly, the PPC does not have a responsibility to monitor. This is where a number of the private sector bodies who are involved in many of these things could also assist, in terms of seeing whether this helps to make companies more compatible, competitive and small businesses more competitive. This is about, one, learning the laws so that companies can be more competitive, so they know how to get their documents ready and how to abide by the financial rules, *et cetera*, and the Procurement Act. It is about making companies understand, be compliant with and in compliance with. It is not judging whether that has made them successful in tenders. The two are not necessarily connected.

Mr. Patterson: A follow up: You say they have no responsibility to follow-up nor monitor. Are you saying that there are no internal performance indicators within the Public Procurement Commission to assess the effectiveness of its work?

Ms. Teixeira: [*Inaudible*] It must have indicators to assess the success of its work. The issue between you and I right now is what is the measure of the success. That is the difference; in that, if they are having procurement training and going by the laws, their success may be: held so many workshops, so many attended from the following agencies – these agencies are missing, and we have got to go back and get them. Was the material received well? Was the material understood? Did people come away with greater awareness of the procurement laws and rules than before? Was

this found to be a helpful exercise? The measurements are different. There is no measurement the PPC would create that says, having trained these people, how many of them successfully bid, because one would assume, therefore, that the PPC is inviting those who did not successfully bid. This has nothing to do with bidding. This has to do with creating greater competition based on the laws and what the Procurement Act and laws provide. The PPC would never measure: well, we had 100 contractors and we have invited 100 contractors who cannot get work. If that is what you are looking for, then they would have to deliberately invite contractors who do not get work, in order to have a measurement that says now the PPC are getting work. When the PPC is going to openly invite small, medium and large contractors to do this – to familiarise them, to make sure they are compliant with the procurement laws – it is not measuring whether they get jobs after. That is unrelated to what the PPC is doing. If they do not get jobs and they feel that they have been wronged, they can make a complaint to the PPC and the PPC would have to investigate it.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, very much. Based on the media pronouncements by the PPC, quite often, the first-time contractors who were trained... I was simply seeking to see if after their training, if the PPC follow up but apparently not. I will move on. Sir, investigative reports – in the investigation for the Belle Vue Pump Station contract, recommendation number seven on page 25 of that report, the public procurement, recommends strongly:

“the procuring entity strictly monitors the performance of the contract...”

They take the necessary steps, *et cetera*, including termination. Has the PPC followed up if the procuring agency is strictly monitoring the performance of the Belle Vue Pump Station contract?

Ms. Teixeira: I wish to remind Mr. Patterson that, yes, the report was done and sent to the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA), which is monitoring and working with the contractor to get the job done. I think the Minister of Agriculture – when questioned on Friday – referred to the Belle Vue. A question was asked about the Belle Vue pump station and he answered it by saying that this was being worked on to try to get the work done and, also that they acknowledged the PPC document.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, very much. I was specifically asking, after issuance of the report, has the Public Procurement Commission did any follow-up in writing to the procurement agency for an update?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised, Mr. Patterson, that the NDIA did follow up with a letter requesting the status of the recommendations and work going on there; also had a site visit to the area with the Engineer and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). This was early January of this year. [Mr.

Mustapha: (*Inaudible*) Yes, that is what I said. The Minister of Agriculture reported on this on Friday when he spoke.

Mr. Patterson: This is a different entity altogether.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, very much.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, but the main issue, Mr. Patterson, based on your question, is that is the PPC following up on its recommendations on a particular report. It is and has been as of early January this year. The report went in last year, I think.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, just for clarity, January, which is last month, was the...

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Patterson: Is that report publicly available?

Ms. Teixeira: Well, the report would have to go to the Commission. The Commission would have to look at it and then it would decide what gets published. I am not aware when the meeting was, when they went and when the PPC would meet.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, very much.

Ms. Teixeira: You know the process.

Mr. Patterson: I am not too sure I know the process but I will move on.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, very much. Mdm. Minister, you said the report will go to the Commission. Could I ask – just before I start – how often does the Commission meets?

Ms. Teixeira: The Commission meet once per week.

Mr. Patterson: That is very good, Ma'am. The Commission meets once a week. I did not ask but I want this for the record. Is the job of a PPC Commissioner full-time or part-time?

Ms. Teixeira: The Chairman and the Commissioners are not full-time. As you remember, in the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the 2015-2019 period, this was debated and the Report of the Minutes of the PAC shows that they are not full-time. In other words, they are not employees. They are not full-time; they are part-time. The Chairman, obviously, – the chairman of all commissions, whether full-time or not – is expected to be available at all times, particularly constitutional bodies.

Mr. Patterson: That is very good, Mdm. Teixeira. Are any of the recommendations provided to the Minister made so that the Commissioners can now be full-time so that they could be more effective and meet once a month, in light...?

Ms. Teixeira: It is 'once a week'.

Mr. Patterson: Once a week, sorry. ... of course, of the biggest Budget ever, the biggest capital expenditure ever? **[Mr. Hamilton:** Who are the recommendations from?] The recommendations are from the PPC.

Ms. Teixeira: Well, I have not heard them. I have not heard of the recommendations from the Commission itself. I have not heard any recommendation in the media, such as In The Ring. I have not heard it in the official media or from any of the politicians or civil society. A lot of these changes come about by opinions, recommendations and stuff such as that. However, from the Commission, there is no recommendation. The Commission is working once a week; gets stipends and has an investigative unit. The staff have been increased to bring the Commission back up to capacity. I believe, more support and staff are required and the Commission will make request for that.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, very much, Mdm. Teixeira. On the question of staff, could you tell this Committee of Supply the staff vacancies that exist – not what are filled – within the Public Procurement Commission?

Ms. Teixeira: At this point, there are two vacancies, based on the organisational structure – one is an Accountant and one is the Head Operations Manager. Those are two vacancies. The PPC filled quite a number of the vacancies since reappointed in 2023.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, Sir, in closing... [An. Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] [Ms. Teixeira: Yes. They were appointed in 2023.] No. They were appointed in 2022. [Ms. Teixeira: Oh, okay.] That was the question I was about to ask. I mean, obviously, the life of this Commission would expire in July, 2025.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, I apologise. I got it mixed up with another Commission. You are right. Therefore, the PAC will have to look at this issue prior to, if possible.

12.46 p.m.

Mr. Patterson: Could I say, from the term of the two and a half years, from what you said, the PAC has issued a total of four investigative reports in two and a half years – two last year and two this year on the website?

Ms. Teixeira: What is the question?

Mr. Chairman: That was a funny one. He added the reports issued and asked you the same question, to confirm them.

Ms. Teixeira: Okay. I think we have to remember a few things. One is that these Commissions are like the Fire Stations. They wait for things to come to them. The Fire Stations cannot do anything if there is not a fire. Commissioners need complaints. Things have to be brought to their attention or to act under their mandate, particularly the Public Procurement Commission. If there are any complaints or investigations, the PPC is mostly triggered by complaints. They can on their own volition investigate the matters they believe so. It is not to stop the Commission from doing that. I also believe that the PPC had to go back and build its capacity because many of its staff contracts previously expired. Between the time of when the PPC was reappointed/reconstituted and expired, peoples' contracts ended and there was no way to extend them because there was no Commission to do that. None of us has that authority who are not in the Commission. It is only the Commission who can propose renewals, reappointments or appointments. At a ministerial level, we cannot interfere in that and when there is no Commission, appoint people as staff. That was adhered to.

The PAC would have to review. I want to say this, Mr. Chairman, when we have these Commissions... Sometimes, I think it takes time for any Commission, regardless under which government, to get the hang of it. They learn about the mandates, what rules they govern by and to review that. It takes time. Therefore, one of the things I would like to suggest – I will use the opportunity – in the Constitutional Reform process, we include an extension clause to allow Commissions to be extended. Right now, it appears in the Constitution, I am not a lawyer, that one may have to go back to the PAC and go through that whole consultative process. When there are Commissioners, I think we need to recognise that for a commission to really get capacity, really develop and have the organisational capacity and build the institution that has capacity, they need to have more than one term in office, in other words. It is something I am throwing out because I think that is something we need to consider.

Mr. Patterson: Mdm. Teixeira, I agree that has merit. I do think that if the Constitutional Reform Commission ever meets that is a submission we can make.

Ms. Teixeira: The Constitutional Reform Commission has met about 11 times, Mr. Patterson. Ask Mr. Mahipaul who comes to every meeting.

Mr. Patterson: My final question, of the 12 complaints submitted this year or last year, seven or eight of them were disqualified because they filed out of time. The Procurement Commission Act has a specific time period between when the contractor can object to most of them. I think all of them were out of time. However, the complaint from the contractors is that the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) publishes the award after the award is made. They are always out of time and they use the NPTAB publication to trigger their award. Could I ask if the Public Procurement Commission made any interventions that 70% or 80% of the persons who complaint, were out of time based on the actions of the NPTAB?

Ms. Teixeira: Just to clarify a few things, with complaints, there are complaints where a contractor may have felt that he got the wrong end of the stick in terms of a bid process and, therefore, he can make a complaint on that. It can be dealt with in terms of the bid process review period. There are also general complaints of another nature which may be that they make. I am just explaining. There were 12 complaints made. One fulfilled the investigation and was published and two went to Bid Protest Committee. Of the nine remaining, seven are closed and two are on-going. I am advised

that the PPC spoke to the NPTAB about the problem that you are raising – by the time a company knows that an award has been made, the time has passed for them to make a protest, that they have committed to putting the date and they have done it, on the website of each of the tenders so that they can look at it electronically and see what the award is and what date the award is. Whilst they are waiting for the paper thing, they can look electronically on the NPTAB, see the date and quickly get their protest in, if they feel it warrants it.

Mr. Patterson: No, Mdm. Very specifically, I do not want to use up anymore of my time, contractors, I have a list of at least two of them here who have said that the date is listed on the NPTAB's, this was verified by the PPC, the award has already been made. The law states that one has five or seven days before the award has been made. The award has already been made. When they see it and they are already out of time. The PPC has been very strict in enforcing the law, which is nothing. It is their right. The contractors are disadvantaged because when they are notified, legally they are out of time.

Ms. Teixeira: I understand that and I would like to ask the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs because my memory of the Procurement Act is, in the area of bid protest, if a bid protest is received within 'x' number of days of the contract being awarded, the awarding of the contract is paused for investigation. That is my interpretation of the Procurement Act. They may protest within the period, 16 days or whenever. Even if an award has been made, it has to be paused, pending the review of the matter to the Bid Protest Committee. That is my understanding of the law. The Bid Protest Committee has a very strict time to deal with it so that they do not *palava* for the next six months on it and hold up a contract. They are expected to deal with that expeditiously with those protests. That is my understanding of the Procurement Act. I am not sure, but I will ask the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs to look at that issue, maybe with the PPC.

Mr. Mahipaul: One question under employment costs, would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell this Committee the salary and benefits of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of this Commission? Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. The CEOs basic salary is \$1,304,126; Employer's National Insurance Scheme (NIS) is \$23,520; Travelling Allowance is \$9,096; Entertainment Allowance is \$10,000; Telephone Allowance is \$15,000 – Mr. Mahipaul, persons can now get qualification allowances that was

introduced by the President. – Qualification Allowance is \$15,000; Gratuity is \$3,521,140; and Vacation Allowance is \$1,304,126. The total in terms of grossing-up all the allowances is \$1,376,742 and when annualised is \$21,346,170.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow up: the fact that you just included there, the qualification allowance, could the Minister say whether or not the qualification allowance has already been applied – the \$15,000? For the public’s understanding, could the Minister be very direct because a lot of persons are of the impression, based on a lot of Press statements, the qualification allowance will be applied to persons who are doing the training on the job. Is the Minister saying that once persons have attained this qualification prior to this announcement, that the qualification allowance will be applied now?

Ms. Teixeira: I think that is a question when we get to the Ministry of Finance’s budget. There is a Circular from the Ministry of Finance on that issue that went out to agencies to guide under the Public Service Ministry. I think one has to look at that. There is a review process. If a person has a Master’s Degree 20 years ago, I am not sure the person fulfil... I am not sure myself. If a person has a Master’s Degree in the last two years, is on contract and is applying for that, I think there is a process of review to make sure that he/she is eligible and he/she would be given. In this case, this is a 2025 Budget and they are projecting \$15,000 for qualification allowance, for a number of people. It would have to be reviewed and approved.

Programme: 621 – Public Procurement Commission – \$272,787,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 621 – Public Procurement Commission – \$3,050,000

Programme: 621 – Public Procurement Commission – \$3,050,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: I thank the Minister and the staff of the Public Procurement Commission, for taking us through that Agency. According to my clock, it is now 1 o’ clock and we have exhausted the 27 minutes which we had from day one. On the Schedule, we are also allowed 50 minutes for

lunch. We are now running close to 50 minutes late for today. Let the Assembly resume at 1.50 p.m.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting suspended at 1.00 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.50 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

1.59 p.m.

Agency: 01 Office of the President

Current Expenditure

Programme: 011 – Administration – \$1,611,171,000

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, could you turn to page 37? I am looking at line items 6284 and 6294, Other. There is an increase of \$80 million and \$50 million. Could the Hon. Minister tell the Committee what additional programmes or expenses will be incurred for this \$130 million?

Ms. Teixeira: The increase of \$80 million to \$350 million are for a number of activities listed under that, such as: payment of the Official Gazette, \$220 million; Commission of Inquiry expenses, \$50 million; services for waste removal, \$10 million; signs and banners services, \$2 million; cable services, \$2.5 million; consultation fees, \$50 million; radio and television broadcast, \$7 million, for the President; services rendered \$2.5 million; insulation of fibre optic cables, \$ 1.5 million; miscellaneous expenses, \$2 million; and support for the Men on Mission (MOM) Secretariat, \$2.5 million. That is for line item 6284, Other. Did you ask about line item 6294, Other? Is that correct, Madam Lawrence?

Ms. Lawrence: Yes.

Ms. Teixeira: The increase from \$70 million budgeted in 2024 and was increased to \$99.916 million in 2024 revised. Now, it is \$150 million. This sum of 150 million is allocated and the majority of the cost is associated with services provided for State visits \$1,000 million. This line

also covers purchase of gifts for exemplary service or honour, \$20 million; dietary supplies such as groceries, cutleries, curtains, tablecloths, *et cetera*; for catering under this item, that is for State visits, dignitaries, *et cetera*, \$20 million. Also, there is \$10 million for miscellaneous expenses may be due to unpredictable nature of certain State visits and State House activities. This is mainly hosting of State visits as you saw last year Prime Minister Modi. We also had the visit of the US Export-Import (EXIM) Bank for example. We have had a series of meetings here including Caribbean Community (CARICOM) meetings and heads of states. The cost of hosting has gone up in terms of those functions that State House would carry out. As you know there are a lot more people coming to Guyana. Everyone wants to come here and see what we are up to. I hope that answered your questions for line items 6284 and 6294.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow up: the Hon. Minister said \$2.5 million for the Men on Mission Secretariat.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask where is that Secretariat located?

Ms. Teixeira: It is located in the Guyana Defence Force's (GDF) compound.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, very much. May I ask the Hon. Minister how many staff has been managing this Secretariat? Are they catered for under staffing details?

Ms. Teixeira: There are three staff members under the Secretariat.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the designations of these three staff members?

Ms. Teixeira: There is one, I will call him a Coordinator for now – I am not sure of the right designation. – and two clerks. They are paid by the GDF. One is paid by the Office of the President and the two are paid by GDF.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the designations of the three members?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, two clerks, as I said, so that is their title and position and one Coordinator.

Mr. Mahipaul: Are they full time staff members of the Men on Mission Secretariat?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask, for the two GDF staffs, were they removed from their functions as officers within the GDF?

Ms. Teixeira: They were assigned to; yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Were they reassigned?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, to the Secretariat and they are being paid by the GDF.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask if this Men on Mission Secretariat is an arm of the GDF now?

Ms. Teixeira: No. It is not. I think that the GDF is assisting with the coordinating and making it function. Right now, it is not a GDF function and that is why the budget for Men on Mission is under the Office of the President. When you get to capital expenditure and stuff like that you will see that. The contribution of OP to the Secretariat is \$2.5 million.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I have one more follow up?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I remind the Hon. Minister that in 2024 when we were examining the Men on Mission, there was a promise to submit the report on the Men on Mission for 2023 and the 2024. If I may quote:

“we have a report on that if you would like me to share that with you, we can do that on what they use the half a billion dollars for and their programme this year for what they intend to use the half a billion for.”

May I ask the Hon. Minister to please submit the report for 2023 and 2024? Is the Minister willing to also submit the one for this one, once completed?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. Based on the question last year I did submit for 2024 the list of activities with the Clerk as far as I know. There were three questions that were put to me, based on the whole process we went through on that day that were brought to my attention by the Clerk and we answered those. There is a copy of the letter. I have it somewhere in my file here. I can doublecheck

it and correct myself if I am wrong. The work programme is mainly in the capital, so that is where you will get the breakdown. I did provide it then and we do have one for 2025 as well, a description plus capital works. If that is what you wish you could request that and we can provide it, but I think we provided 2024 but if I am wrong that could be included.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am not in receipt of any report for 2024 and, if I am wrong, I will appreciate if the Minister can, but she did promise 2023 also.

Mr. Chairman: The Minister said she will check that.

Ms. Teixeira: It started in 2023.

Mr. Chairman: She said a list of activities for 2024 if I heard correctly. She did not talk about a report for 2023. Minister, did you say report for 2024?

Ms. Teixeira: Do you mean if I said that last year? My memory is not that good.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. I am quoting from the *Hansard*.

Mr. Chairman: Is that for 2024?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. When I asked the question, her response was ‘we have a report on that which was the half a billion for 2023. She said, if you would like me to share that we can do that on what they used the half a billion dollars for and their programmes this year. For 2024 we are getting the programmes and what they are going to do...

Mr. Chairman: If you check back, I said, you said report for 2024...

Mr. Mahipaul: Oh no, it is 2023.

Mr. Chairman: ...which was supposed to be programme. She said that she was going to check back her records and if he did not, she would put 2023.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir.

Ms. Teixeira: I do not recall; I must confess. We depend on the Clerk and his transcriptionist to record all the requests because I cannot manage requests and answer at the same time. Therefore, the Clerk of the National Assembly compiles that with his staff and then sends it to us as a reminder

that we have committed to answer the following questions. I did receive a letter on that from the Clerk and I did answer. I have a copy in the House, but it is not with me now. I can get that. If I did not provide 2023, we can do that.

Ms. Walton-Desir: A follow up: Could you please clarify? I am a little unclear as to the rationale for the Men on Mission being administered by the Guyana Defence Force.

Ms. Teixeira: It is not being administered by the Guyana Defence Force. It is under the Office of the President, but the GDF is assisting at this point with the secretarial staff. It is not administered by the GDF. The GDF is not in control of it. It is still an Office of the President project. The GDF is providing the MOM with high quality persons to help manage the Secretariat until we can get a building, an office and all those things set up.

Mr. Figueira: A follow up: Hon. Minister, we have seen Men on a Mission doing a lot of social programmes. Is this an extended arm of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security? Could you just say to the Committee what the primary roles, functions and responsibilities for MOM are?

Ms. Teixeira: The Men on Mission is a rather interesting innovation in that it is for the first time trying to get men to be actively engaged as change agents – both in terms of community involvement and family involvement. As you are very aware, in Guyana 29% of our homes are headed by single women alone. Therefore, one of its focus is to encourage men to work with their families and be responsible for their families. One of the big change agent issue has to do with responsible fatherhood, responsible husband hood, responsible partnership or whatever you may want to call it.

Secondly, there are other areas to do with gender-based violence and being opposed to gender-based violence, in terms of mentorship programmes working with young boys and men including prisoners in terms of positive behaviours and reducing violence. It is a rather innovative thing. It is much broader, in some ways, than the Gender Affairs Bureau at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. It involves over a 1,000 men for each Region in some cases. It is a way of mobilising men to get involved with campaigns to do with gender equality, domestic violence and helping to change perceptions and create healthier relations between people – men and women and men and men – to reduce the level of violence in the society in general. Also, it involves

collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The programme for 2025, for example, I could give you a whisper of that. It also, as you know from the media, tries to have men more visibly out there and looking at persons who are vulnerable in their communities who are living under very poor conditions, particularly elderly and disabled. Their 2025 programme is focusing again on the objectives of community engagement, mentorship programmes, awareness programmes, support programmes for men, which focus on emotional wellbeing as well as health. Men tend to not take care of their health as much as women. As you heard Dr. Ramsaran promoted the examination of prostate cancer, because too many of our men die from prostate cancer or find out too late.

2.14 p.m.

These are some of the well-being and health programmes and, of course, collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on broader social issues. As we said, they have done visits to Lusignan Prison over 2024 – 20 visits – and have held motivational and health talks with 638 inmates. They have a men's health programme to promote preventative medicine, collaborate with the Ministry of Health in promoting prostate health, and collaborate with local organisations in promoting men's health, *et cetera*. Activities include a health fair for men's health, including dental check-ups and how they are accessing other health services in collaboration with a local faith-based organisation. On International Men's Day, working with the Ministry of Health Men's Unit, the Cancer Society and so on, screening for men for prostate cancer, screening for men for diabetes, and so forth.

Mr. Figueira: A follow-up, Minister. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: In other words, I can go on and I will share this.

Mr. Figueira: I know you can. I have a follow-up, though.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, I am not finished, but I will pause.

Mr. Chairman: Just one second, Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, you have to allow her to finish and then let me recognise you. If you two want to have a chat, I can suspend and then come back.

Mr. Figueira: She has accommodated my request.

Ms. Teixeira: No, I would like the public to hear this, Sir, because I think there are questions like they are asking.

Mr. Figueira: Yes, but in you informing the public, I think it would be good...

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you have the floor. I am not listening to anybody. When you tell me, thank you, I will put another question. Hon. Member Mr. Figueira.

Ms. Teixeira: I do not know if I am...

Mr. Figueira: Thank you so kindly, Sir.

Ms. Teixeira: I do not know if I am misunderstanding...

Mr. Figueira: I am going to be very brief. Minister, with this MOM experiment, are the functions being evaluated to determine if the experiment that the Government is undertaking with Men on Mission helps curb some of the very ills you have identified in society? How do we assess the outcomes as if it is positive? Do we need to adjust the programme a little more so that the objectives can truly be achieved? Given the fact that military men are a part of the programme and they are attracting other men, is there an opportunity for those men whom they are attracting to be instilled with certain military training? We want to instil discipline, I am gathering from you. More so, given the fact that it is a reflection of all the 10 administrative regions, and they do whatever it is that you said they do, can the general public make a request for a house, for example, or for their son who may be challenged with discipline in the home? Is there a membership that they can send their sons to so that they can be afforded the opportunity where discipline can be instituted into these young delinquent men and so forth?

Ms. Teixeira: [*Inaudible*] points into the Men on Mission, including the health education programmes. As well as, you might be interested, Hon. Member, in the academic support, karate, computer classes, field trips for young people and its partnership. In relation to the army, I have no doubt that the two army personnel who are with the Secretariat, I am sure, will be advising any young person who may be interested. The army itself advertises its programmes and has recruitment. I think there are ample opportunities – people have to take them. For 2025, over 2,000

men interacted in these programmes – 800 young men and boys, 110 persons got housing assistance and 650 had health tests.

Under the housing programme, there were 291 applications received, 243 beneficiaries were assessed' and 50 core-two-bedroom homes were built and handed over, prioritising single parents, the elderly, the disabled and the economically vulnerable due to natural disasters. [Mr.

Mahipaul: 'Mohameds' did more than that.] I am not interested. Let 'Mohamed' come and account to you at the National Assembly. I do not have to account for Mr. Mohamed. I am accounting for taxpayers' money. I am just accounting for taxpayers' money. I am not accounting for anyone outside. Two special projects in the Upper Demerara River and communities at Santa Mission. One special home for elderly blind women of Diamond Housing Scheme. Sixty recipients received building materials. Also, 25 persons, based on the freak storm in Karasabai, received materials as well to rebuild their houses. I am willing to lay over this copy of this report, and I would like the men in this room in particular, who know that they do not do their health checks and all that, to also be change agents in their communities. Whether you join MOM or not, is that each one of the men in our room should be facilitating and advocating for responsible parenthood, against gender violence, and against interpersonal violence.

Programme: 011 – Administration – \$1,611,171,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 012 – National Policy Development & Presidential Advisory Services – \$2,101,320,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister give us a disaggregation for this \$700 million allocated on page 483? The Legend says that the project entails:

“Provision for Men on Mission projects and programmes.”

Could you kindly provide the Committee with a disaggregation in terms of the building and materials and maintenance – a sum for that – and then give us the sum for the other that says “programmes”? I do not understand the capital [*inaudible*] programmes.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Minister, please. Current. We are on Programme 12.

Ms. Lawrence: Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Chief Whip.

Mr. Jones: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations, line item 6321. Under “Youth Advisory Council”, we see a request in 2024 for \$75 million, revised is at \$16.220 million, and we have a request now, again, for \$75 million. I would want to take the Minister back to her response last year, indicating that this body would have been established in 2022. When asked about a specific programme that this Youth Advisory Council is engaged in, the Minister indicated that they were now essentially getting their feet together and there were programmes in 2024 in which we would see the young people going out into communities basically to educate them about the various programmes available in different Government agencies, *et cetera*. Could the Minister indicate what work was done by this body and what programmes were executed in 2024?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. MP Mr. Jones, the highlights of 2024: they have a primary health subcommittee, particularly among high school students. They have developed an application (app), and the app is designed to foster [*inaudible*] engagement and competition among the students, encouraging them to maintain healthy habits. They have involved themselves in several health fairs, including the Kidney Foundation’s booth and One Guyana Health Fair. They have introduced younger audiences to primary healthcare concepts through interactive workshops. They have piloted school programmes at a few community centres to test their effectiveness and gather feedback. They have done more sharing of visual material to the students. The education subcommittee has presented proposals for school shadowing programmes to enhance learning experiences and to provide students with hands-on exposure to real-world applications of their education. They have done a survey. A survey is to be conducted in Region 7, targeting the region’s diverse demographics, including riverine areas, hinterland and urban areas. The data collected will guide tailored educational interventions. They have had consultations on improving Mathematics and English performance working with the Ministry of Education.

The agriculture subcommittee has launched an innovative competition promoting climate-smart agriculture to develop creative solutions to streamline agricultural production, shadowed two

schools' agriculture programmes to gain insight into how the students actually look at agriculture as a career path, and several workshops. Constitutional reform subcommittee: they are having discussions in relation to issues regarding constitutional reform. The mental health subcommittee, in collaboration with the Mental Health Unit at the Ministry of Health, conducted awareness campaigns reaching schools and workplaces. Projections for 2025: again, the primary health subcommittee – these are the subcommittees that are functioning – expand the in-school workshop in Region 4 to cover all high schools and launch the same programme in the hinterland. This has to do with informed health choices and access to these services to have better outcomes. I am just paraphrasing because each one of these has a long paragraph. Mr. Chairman, if you think I am being long, if I were to read the full thing, it would take much more time.

Education subcommittee: pilot and scale Mathematics and English improvement programmes in six schools in Region 7. Ms. Juretha Fernandes, Ms. Dawn Hastings and I will be happy to know that Region 7 is being focused on. These programmes will utilise innovative teaching methods and resources to address the learning gaps. Agriculture subcommittee: monitor science, technology, engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) competition prototypes and host a national agricultural conference focusing on climate-smart practices, again with the Ministry of Agriculture. Ministry of Health's committee on mental health: this is a major issue in school and aims to promote mental well-being, improve health awareness and support systems for those who need help. On the constitutional reform subcommittee, they want to be actively involved in terms of the importance of the Constitution and enabling discussions about governance and legal frameworks which will foster civic awareness. I am going on. Increased spending: sufficient resources for scalability, expanding successful pilots, such as mental workshops and STEM innovation prototypes; enhanced capacity for delivery; investments in logistics, technology and training, will enable effective programme implementation; sustainability of initiatives; long-term impact. They have stated in their report that 2024 has laid a good foundation and that, with the increase in spending in 2025, we can amplify these successes and reach a more sustainable approach.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman, same line item. I turn the Minister's attention to the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. Could the Hon. Minister indicate what is the status of the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission's board?

2.29 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: Just give us a second, please. **[Mr. Mahipaul: (*Inaudible*)]** I am not the gatekeeper, Mr. Mahipaul. The gatekeeper is sitting up there.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Ms. Teixeira: [*Inaudible*] telling me once I give him back his time. I said I am not the gatekeeper you are. Is that not so?

Mr. Chairman: We have always been very flexible.

Ms. Teixeira: He knows that. Yes, Lands and Surveys. Yes, the board has not been put in place as yet, as far as I know.

Mr. Jones: Follow-up, Mr. Chairman. What is there in the interim? How do the Guyana Lands and Surveys operate based on the constitutional guidance of this body?

Ms. Teixeira: I think you will well remember that under President Granger, Mr. Trevor Benn, who was then the head of Lands and Surveys, was given certain powers to make decisions. That was withdrawn, I believe, in this Government and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) makes decisions and otherwise has to approach Cabinet, or the person who is in charge, or ultimately in terms of lands in Guyana, which is the Office of the President.

Mr. Jones: A follow-up just for clarity, Minister. No. I do not recall during the Granger Administration... For your guidance could the Hon. Minister indicate how the CEO was derived from? If I am quoting the Constitution correctly it says that the board must be put in place, and out of that board a CEO is derived. So, without a board being in place, how has the CEO arrived or derived?

Ms. Teixeira: This is not a constitutional issue; this is a matter of statute. The Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission is under statute; it is not in the Constitution.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. We stand corrected.

Ms. Teixeira: There was no board functioning either under part of 'Granger's' term as well.

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

Ms. Fernades: Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Teixeira: The ultimate decider on land and distribution is the Cabinet.

Ms. Fernades: Mr. Chairman, if I may. Could the Hon. Minister say, through you Sir, in the absence of the board, how are decisions going through? For example, on the Linden-Soesdyke Highway we know that there have been leaseholders for years and of recent we saw business individuals being given titles where they were leased before. How is that being done in the absence of a board?

Ms. Teixeira: I think we have to go back to the State Lands Act which is also the same Act that is used in regard to Amerindian land titling. And the ultimate decider on that, because it is state lands, is the President as the head. All state land comes under the President and the Cabinet – the Cabinet makes decisions on the allocations if there is a new housing scheme being open for example, and the release of lands for those purposes has to have Cabinet approval. In the case of the Soesdyke people, those issues of regularising those lands and assigning them are done through the technical areas of the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission but go to Cabinet and/or directly to the Minister in charge by law who is the President. It was the same thing under the Granger Administration. [Mr. Figueira: *(Inaudible)*] That is how ‘Lowenfield’ got his land just before the elections. Remember? [Ms. Ferguson: *(Inaudible)*] Yes, 200 acres of prime land in Region 10. I do not know why ‘Figueira’ does not ask me that question.

Mr. Jones: A follow-up with the Hon. Minister, same line-item. Minister you could...

[Ms. Ferguson displayed a document.]

Ms. Teixeira: I cannot read that far, Ms. Annette Ferguson.

Mr. Jones: Minister, you could advise if by chance I am misleading myself. I am quoting from the Constitution, the laws of Guyana.

“SCHEDULE

CONSTITUTION AND PROCEDURE OF THE BOARD AND OTHER RELATED
MATTERS”

And it goes on to state:

“1. The Board shall consist of a Chairman, the Commissioner and eleven other members all of whom shall be appointed by the Minister.”

2. (1) All members of the Board other than the Commissioner shall, subject to subparagraphs (2) and (3), hold office for a period of three years.”

And it goes on, but it referenced the board as in the laws. So is it a case...

Ms. Teixeira: The Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission is not a constitutional body.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, allow him to finish.

Ms. Teixeira: It is covered by the statute.

Mr. Jones: I am essentially just seeking the Minister’s guidance if the laws are not applicable here or if I misguided myself.

Ms. Teixeira: Let me repeat: the state lands are the property of the State. The Minister responsible for land in Guyana is the President; the Minister that they are referring to is the President. Decisions to do with land fall within the rubric of the Cabinet and the President; so we are within the law. You can talk about a board, but the point is that even if there is a board it has to have the approval. If you are listening Mr. Jones, do not let Mr. Duncan distract you as always. Even if there were a board the ultimate arbiter and decider is the Minister responsible, who is the President.

Mr. Jones: Final follow-up question. Minister, could you indicate how much lands...?

Mr. Chairman: Chief Whip to Chief Whip. Go ahead.

Mr. Jones: How many lands have been allocated transfer, leased, within the last four years, or titled in the last four years?

Ms. Teixeira: Do you expect me to have that answer here, Sir? That is a question, Mr. Chairman, I... [Hon. Members: *(Inaudible)*] Why can I not speak?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead Minister; go ahead.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, I seek your guidance.

Mr. Chairman: You have my protection too.

Ms. Teixeira: I think that is a very good question, but it is talking about four years and that is a question to a Minister under Questions to Ministers, not under a budget line item where we are looking at the implementation of the taxpayers' money, *vis-à-vis* the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. I think it is a wonderful question we can answer; we have nothing to hide; just put it on the Order Paper and the Notice Paper and let us get to that. It would be unfair to say how much land you have given out in the last four years when we are looking at 2025. We would not have been prepared for that.

[Ms. Ferguson displayed a document.]

Will you stop showing me *[inaudible]*. I cannot even see what is written there Ms. Annette Ferguson. I do not have microscopic eyes.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Chief Whip you are guided correctly.

Mr. Jones: Yes, thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: I promise you once the question comes, we will deal with it expeditiously.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman, I do agree with the Hon. Minister, the information for that question she would not have at hand. My final submission to the Hon. Minister, would you be kind enough to lay over that to the honourable House?

Mr. Chairman: She asked and I was going to direct; you can put it as a question and we will deal with it expeditiously. Hon. Members, I have Member of Parliament (MP) Lawrence. I have an observation. I do not know if the Hon. Sherod Duncan is appointed the advisor to every person asking questions. I do not know really where he sits now. Hon. Member Mr. Duncan, please, do not distract the persons around you. Ms. Lawrence.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Hon. Minister, same line item, 6321. I am looking at page 468, and the question is, could the Hon. Minister say when we will see financial statements laid in this National Assembly for the Gaming Authority, Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, Institute of Applied Science and Technology, and Office of the Commissioner of Information. Some of them have statements as far back as 2017, Hon. Minister. When will we see them laid?

Ms. Teixeira: I agree with you totally. They are here and they should listen and do it.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon Member Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Teixeira: We have been encouraging them to do their reports and some have been doing it.

Mr. Mahipaul: The same line item. The Guyana Technical Training College Incorporated (GTTCI). Last year, the Hon. Minister was kind enough to say to us that the \$50 million was to start up this college, and we see here a figure of \$78 million now. There was a Cabinet order that approved its formation since last year for it to be in existence, for it to be existing at Port Mourant next to the University of Guyana, Berbice campus. Could the Hon. Minister provide us with an update with reference to that institution and, also, how is it going?

Ms. Teixeira: I have a report from the Guyana Technical Training College Incorporated, 2024. And it reports it was a successful year in terms of the project being executed between the Government of Guyana and ExxonMobil in Port Mourant. Track one, the Oil and Gas Training Centre witnessed the building, construction and outfitting of the US\$13 million FacTor, that is the facility simulator, completed over a nine-month period, mainly in 2023, with its formal opening by the President in February, 2024. The initial intake of 24 – ExxonMobil, Single Buoy Moorings (SBM) – Guyanese trainees completed the mechanical, electrical, instrumentation, and production training, graduating in June, and thus ready to work on the Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSOs) offshore. The very first Guyanese to be trained was at GTTCI. A contract has been awarded to prepare the site for the main oil and gas training facility, and this work should be completed; it is just about to be completed. In October, 2024, a US\$35 million contract was awarded to erect the buildings and infrastructure for the facility. Foundational work should be

completed soon. Laboratory and workshop and maintenance buildings are expected to be completed in September/October, 2025, as well as the administration building.

In January, 2025, we will see a new intake of 34 students to the FacTor for their initial six months of training at Port Mourant. The GTTCI, through ExxonMobil and SBM, will admit its first full cohort of 24 students to be trained entirely in Guyana, in September/October, using the new training and class one buildings that are currently being built. This includes the office for the director and the trainers and so on. Track one, to do with the campus, will be completed in October, 2026 – the residence, dining hall and other infrastructure works. They will hire eight Guyanese trainers, in training, and just send them initially to Canada for a 9–12-month training programme; further training will be continued in the FacTor, shadowing the expatriate (expat) trainers and on FPSOs over the following years. It is estimated this cost for training will initially be US\$1 million, to be funded through the agreement with ExxonMobil or directly by the Government of Guyana. In addition to that the institute, with ExxonMobil, is addressing other academic and policy matters associated with the registration of the GTTCI by the National Accreditation Council, and accreditation of its programme by a reputable international body. There is also a five-year transition plan between ExxonMobil and Guyana that will have to be approved.

One last thing, the new feature, not only oil and gas but the work on building the hospitality and tourism institute, which is part of the institution, track two, initially with the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) funding, began on the campus in February, 2024. It was completed in a few phases with the Government of Guyana funding and is to be completed in 2026, if all goes to plan. The Ministry of Education will also be the responsible body to work on this, as far as I understand. It is expected that the Ministry of Public Works, in 2025, will build and upgrade the access roads to the site from the public road and pave and illuminate the internal campus road that is called the GuySuCo dam. Sir, I do not have a breakdown of the \$78 million.

2.44 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I ask if the Hon. Minister can lay that over? My substantive question is – a lot of work was done with reference to this GTTCI – where did the money come from to do all that work when the budget is reflecting that from the \$50 million provided in 2024 none was spent? Where did that money come from? What will they be using this amount here, the \$78 million, for?

Mr. Chairman: As previously, that is a good question for the Minister. We are talking about an allocation.

Mr. Mahipaul: All right, Sir, I withdraw. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: If the Minister would like to proffer an answer, please do.

Mr. Mahipaul: I withdraw the question, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I will give her an opportunity. Minister, if you want to offer an answer...

Ms. Teixeira: I was trying to listen to three conversations at once. I got it wrong.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, just remember that the primary one is here.

Ms. Teixeira: I know, but I have to listen here too. I have to answer questions from there. I am on a three-way stream, which I am not very good at.

Mr. Chairman: I was at the point advising the Hon. Member that the particular question does not pertain to this allocation, but he could put that as a question to the Minister. If you would like to offer an answer, I would give you the opportunity.

Ms. Teixeira: I have no problem with the question. Yes. I think it would be better. I think there is a lot to report on and there are also reasons why the money was not used in the previous year – that are acceptable, I believe. I think it would be a useful exercise.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Members, this is a good time to put...

Ms. Ferguson: No.

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

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Minister, on page 468, there is “Details of Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations”. For the Office of the First Lady I note that we have a small increase from 2024 to 2025. My question to you, Hon. Member – over time, this Committee of Supply has been approving sums to this very office and like other constitutional agencies, though this is not a constitutional body, we are not getting

reports of the activities with regards to the Office of the First Lady. I would really love to know what this \$31.2 million will be utilised for in the year 2025. Thank you very much.

Ms. Teixeira: First of all, there is no requirement by statute for her to submit any report to the House. That is number one. The statutes covering the First Lady, or the spouse of the President, and her benefits, do not require an annual report to the House. Number one, she is covered by the Auditor General. **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** Why do you not listen? The Auditor General then would do a survey or audit of all the taxpayers' money being used under the Office of the President, including the First Lady. The budget for the First Lady actually is probably around \$61 million, but she gets from the Government... In 2024, she got \$31 million and now she is getting \$31 million, according to this. The rest is raised by fundraising activities she has, as well as project funds from donors, *et cetera* when she works with civil society. She works with civil society. She has an Adopted an Orphanage programme, which I am sure you have heard about. There are medical outreaches and the Menstrual Hygiene Initiative, which you are very well aware of; this has been public. There is inclusive ability when dealing with persons, and this is one of her areas of concern and one of her platforms – as most First Ladies have platforms – to deal with disabilities, to advocate, increase the access to services, and the de-stigmatisation of persons with disabilities. In 2025, the funds will be expended also on staffing at the Business Centre for Persons with Disabilities, and that is in Region 6. She also works with the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD).

She also has a National Beautification programme, which I am sure you are familiar with, to do with seven public recreational parks which will be completed – Anna Regina, Region 2; Tuschen, East Bank Essequibo, and Leonora, West Coast Demerara, Region 3; Diamond-Grove, East Bank Demerara, Region 4; Bath Settlement, Region 5; Unity, Region 6; and Linden, Region 10. Repairs and maintenance works will be done at existing public parks. As you know, one of her projects has been the children's park in the National Park, which is really a beautiful place now to go to even if you are too old to go to a children's park. She has been able to get donations from a variety of the private sector and civil society, *et cetera*. These have brought her up to the amount of money required to do all these projects. As you would remember too, the beautification of the Seawall Bandstand area is also one of her projects. I think it is also a beautiful place that people frequent now on the weekends, happily. It is a child-friendly, family-friendly place to go. **[Mr.**

Mahipaul: All right, Ms. Teixeira. We get you.] I am glad you get me, but if my Hon. Member does not know what is going on in Guyana, what am I to do? I have got to educate her.

Programme: 012 – National Policy Development & Presidential Advisory Services – \$2,101,320,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 013 – Defence and National Security – \$931,053,000

Programme: 013 – Defence and National Security – \$931,053,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 014 – Public Policy and Planning – \$557,600,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I turn the Minister's attention to page 468, Guyana Office for Investment. We are providing this Office with almost half a billion dollars. The last financial statement provided to the Auditor General was for the year 2020. I am asking the Hon. Minister, what is inhibiting the Guyana Office for Investment from submitting to the Auditor General its financial reports for 2021, 2022 and 2023? Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that the Auditor General is auditing 2019 and 2020 at this time. The annual report will be submitted to the National Assembly in due course. It is already published and ready to be submitted. For those of us on the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), we know that the Auditor General has been trying very hard to bring up a number of the statutory bodies with audited financial statements outstanding. As the MP Ms. Volda Lawrence said, some have been outstanding for a while, but we are pleased to see the progress made in the Report of the Auditor General in terms of catching up and trying to reduce the number of outstanding ones, at least audited financial statements. There are a number of them which are due to come to the National Assembly after the Budget.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, this is just for the Minister. She held a book in her hand. She said that it is a report. Could she say which year is it for?

Ms. Teixeira: It is for 2024.

Ms. Lawrence: All right. Thanks.

Programme: 014 – Public Policy and Planning – \$557,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 015 – Environmental Management and Compliance – \$1,947,504,000

Programme: 015 – Environmental Management and Compliance – \$1,947,504,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 016 – Police Complaints Authority – \$63,701,000

Programme: 016 – Police Complaints Authority – \$63,701,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us turn to page 483. Just give me a minute. I do not have the suction on the fingertips to move the pages as fast as you move among the seats.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 011 – Administration – \$1,243,000,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Minister, I take you to project code 1702300, Men on Mission Programme. I look at the Legend for the allocation of \$700 million, and the description states that the project entails:

“Provision for Men on Mission projects and programmes.”

I am asking, given the programme that was circulated in the National Assembly for 2024, if the Minister could disaggregate the amount that will be spent for maintenance, building of houses and materials from the total there.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you for the question. Of the \$700 million, it is broken down as follows: housing assistance, construction of new homes – \$395 million, in which Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 are included. The quantity is 52. So, for housing assistance, construction of new houses, 52 houses, \$395 million. Secondly, housing assistance, that is the provision of materials for essential home facilities such as kitchens and toilets – from Regions 1 to 10 – for 32 homes. This is assistance at \$115 million. The Youth Empowerment and Mentorship Programme is for \$84 million. This includes \$6 million for the One Guyana Kitchen and \$1 million for the Youth

Empowerment and Mentorship Programme on the East Bank, one on the East Coast, one in Kuru-Kururu, as well as one in Lethem and so on.

2.59 p.m.

Region 6: the Smythfield Drop-in Centre at New Amsterdam, Hampshire Civic Centre and Line Path Community Centre, including Regions 2 and 3. Some places are identified. It is \$6 million for each one of the Youth Empowerment and Mentorship Programmes throughout Guyana. At least every region is covered, and in some cases, one of them may have more than one. With regard to the activities and events: memorabilia, hats, t-shirts, pins – \$16.5 million; yearly men's observation activities: Father's Day observations, International Men's Day celebration, Men's Health Day and Mental Health day – \$23.5 million; special activities: village visits, men and boys seminars and workshops, youth camp, regional activities, health walk, cleanup, games and community buildings – \$51 million; \$15 million is for office and administrative support; and \$7 million for the provision of small pledges. That is for the \$700 million as proposed.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister tell us what is the One Guyana Kitchen? Did I hear you correctly? Where is it located?

Ms. Teixeira: The One Guyana Kitchen is mainly meant, for children coming from the school in the area. It is near the empty land next to the Guyana Power and Light Corporation (GPL) on Main Street, just across from State House. It is a programme where children can come, have meals, do their after-school programme and get help with their homework and things like that. That is just across from State House at the corner near School of the Nations.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, she can be assured that next week, I will turn up at the One Guyana Kitchen to get my meal. That aside... [Ms. Teixeira: Of course, you can go, but not for food. You are not going for food though, Ms. Ferguson.]

Mr. Chairman: They teach Mathematics there too.

Ms. Ferguson: All right. I note from the \$700 million, the Men On Mission (MOM) will be expending \$395 million towards the construction of 52 houses. Could the Hon. Member say whether this is in all of the regions? Secondly, what criteria is being used to ensure equity, fairness and no sort of discrimination, and is the Ministry of Housing and Water part of this entire process?

Ms. Teixeira: There are 52 houses being proposed for 2025: six in Region 1, six in Region 2, six in Region 3, 12 in Region 4, four in Region 5, eight in Region 6, one in Region 7, one in Region 8, three in Region 9 and five in Region 10. Those could change based on the circumstances. My understanding is that these are given to persons who are really, really in trouble in terms of their status. You have seen in some of the media elderly persons being found in terrible shacks with no water, no electricity, the building is falling and could fall down around them. For the elderly, yes and for the disabled, yes. There are mothers with children who have no one to support them as well as fire victims whose houses have been destroyed by fire. There are basic criteria. These are people who are vulnerable and at risk. This has nothing to do with the general population out there being able to get these houses. Then, there is the other group of 32. This has to do with the provision of materials for essential home facilities – houses that do not have a toilet or a kitchen inside, and sometimes, many persons who may have also had fires and partially had damage to their houses.

Ms. Ferguson: A quick follow up for the Hon. Member: I recognise for Region 4 you said that 12 houses are likely to be facilitated under this particular programme. As a representative of Region 4, I have two elderly persons in my constituency of West Ruimveldt. I would like for these two elderly persons to benefit from this allocation through the Men on Mission (MOM). Perhaps, we can have a sidebar of how the process could be worked out. I trust that when I put in my request...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the question should be: I have two persons and are these two homes included in this allocation?

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me just rephrase for the Hon. Member. I have two houses in my constituency... Sorry. I have two members in my constituency; would the allocation assist these two persons? How could they be added?

Ms. Teixeira: As a Member of Parliament (MP), you have the prestige to write to MoM and say, as a Member of Parliament, I am a representative, this is my community, these people are deserving, and I ask you to consider them. The Men On Mission will then do a site visit and take down all of the details. They will go into the list of people waiting because there are obviously people who were put on a list since last year for this year. I cannot promise you, but obviously, any MP has a right to represent persons who are living in very bad conditions. We are not talking about a nice house; we are talking about people who are really in dire conditions. It is wrong. That

is the idea to try to... For some of the women who are single parents who have five and six children, who have no one to support them and their husbands may have died or whatever, those are the victims and people we are looking at. Also, disabled persons who have difficulty finding a proper place to live and with conditions where they cannot easily get to a bathroom and so on. These are the kinds of persons we are trying to reach – the people who are not always reached. They are sometimes outside of the norm. These are not necessarily low-income households; these are persons who are even below that.

Ms. Ferguson: A final follow up on this.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: The Hon. Member stated that I should write to the Men On Mission. Would she be kind enough to say to whom I should pen such a letter to and the address?

Mr. Chairman: It is very valuable information the Hon. Member is requesting.

Ms. Teixeira: I would suggest that you write to the Permanent Secretary (PS) of the Office of the President and/or to the Coordinator of the MOM through the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), Camp Ayanganna.

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

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I see the Opposition assistant chief whip has now changed positions.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, he is very good [*inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: Again, he moves on. Go ahead, Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: The Hon. Minister was kind enough to say the sum of \$395 million is to build 52 homes across the country, which works out to a cost of about \$7.5 million per home. A philanthropist on social media, Mohammed's Enterprise, has been advertising that it is constructing homes at a cost of \$2 million to \$2.5 million. May I ask the Hon. Minister, why is the cost to construct a home under Men on Mission so high?

Ms. Teixeira: I think it is improper, Member of Parliament, to bring in someone who came up with \$2.5 million when you have not said what the materials are. Is it wood, concrete, troolie or zinc? What is it? In addition to that, what is the size of it? Is it 20 by 20 or is it 40 by 40? What is the size? I cannot be asked to answer a question when I am devoid of any information to do any comparison. These are two-bedroom homes with a kitchen, an inside bathroom, and a living room. They are using the model for the low-income houses that you see at the back of Cummings Lodge, which cost about \$7.5 million. It is a standard thing they are using. I could get up and say that I can build a house for \$2 million, but it would be a one bedroom or a studio. How could you ask me to compare chalk and cheese? That is not what the National Assembly is for.

Mr. Mahipaul: From social media, we can see the pictures in terms of comparison to directly know which house is big, which one is small, which is nice, which is subsidised and which is not subsidised and so on. ...

Mr. Chairman: Which is subsidised and which is not.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister if she could lay over – I do not know if she did – the disaggregation of the 52 houses to say how much will be constructed in each region? [An

Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*) She did. Sir, I withdraw. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: You are being distracted by the assistant chief whip.

Programme: 011 – Administration – \$1,243,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 012 – National Policy Development and Presidential Advisory Services – \$148,297,000

Programme: 012 – National Policy Development and Presidential Advisory Services – \$148,297,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 013 – Defence and National Security – \$493,806,000

Programme: 013 – Defence and National Security – \$493,806,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 014 – Public Policy and Planning – \$26,380,000

Programme: 014 – Public Policy and Planning – \$26,380,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 015 – Environmental Management and Compliance – \$2,880,145,000

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

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, go ahead.

Mr. Jones: Project code 3401700 – National Parks Commission: Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the amount totalling \$2.8 billion?

Ms. Teixeira: With great pleasure, Mr. Chairman. A total of \$2 billion out of the \$2.8 billion – Mr. Jones, please listen to the answers you ask questions about – is for the upgrading of the zoological park. This means that most of it will take over the botanical gardens as you know it. With the sum of \$2 billion, we will have a proper place to house and showcase our animals along with having a training school, a nature school, and all of these things in terms of educating the younger children and the adults of climate resilience, protection of wildlife, *et cetera*. That is for the sum of \$2 billion. The sum of \$600,000,000 is for the national tree planting intervention in the urban parks. Again, this is part of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) in terms of increasing our carbon coverage and so on. The sum of \$2.6 billion is covered under those two heads alone.

3.14 p.m.

The \$200 million remaining involves the construction of security outputs at the zoological park, rehabilitation of guardrails – those smaller things that are there – new water system for the zoo, zoning areas, boundary fences for the botanical gardens, an admin building, washrooms, parking shed, *et cetera*. There is a long list of what are the smaller items, including things such as the rehabilitation of the storage building, modernisation of the concession area, and then there is one double-cab canter, three electric bikes, one tractor mower, one skid-steer and compact loader, one wheel-type disc harrow, one rotary slasher, one box blade compact tractor implementer – I hope you all know what that is – a cherry picker, and three leaf blower machines. Those are in the

transport areas to be able to manage and take care of the park. We have a whole range of other equipment such as trimmers, animals traps, chainsaws, and brush cutters. That could be made available, if you so wish. I think the most fascinating thing in the budget, which I have always longed for, and personally, I am delighted about, is the upgrading of the zoological park. The Cabinet was privy to some of the preliminary designs and that has to go into a whole range of other discussions. However, I am really excited, as a Guyanese, to see that we will have a real showcase zoo.

Ms. Lawrence: I have a clarification. Is the Minister saying she will lay it over?

Mr. Chairman: She did.

Ms. Lawrence: Or did she ask?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Ms. Lawrence: Okay. Thank you.

Programme: 015 – Environmental Management and Compliance – \$2,880,145,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 016 – Police Complaints Authority – \$4,995,000

Programme: 16 – Police Complaints Authority – \$4,995,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister and all the staff of the Office of the President and the agencies hereunder, for taking us through Agency 1. We will invite members of the Guyana Defence Force to join Minister Teixeira as we prepare to consider the estimates for Agency 53 – Guyana Defence Force. We finished at 3.17 p.m., according to my computer clock here and that leaves us 12 minutes in savings.

Agency: 53 Guyana Defence Force

Current Expenditure

Programme: 531 – Defence and Security Support – \$25,900,887,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, could I ask the Minister to turn to line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships), where there is a budgeted amount of \$485,025,000? Minister, I would like to ask some specific questions about areas of training. My first question is whether any officer or officers have or will be trained in cybersecurity and information warfare?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you for the question. Yes, there is a provision in the training budget, line item 6302, for cybersecurity training. These are with some of our bilateral partnerships, for example, the United States of America, Brazil, and India. There is training in that particular area.

Ms. Lawrence: I have a follow up from the same line item. The next area I would like to ask about is – given that our soldiers are on our western border for longer periods now – what about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) management? Do we have any person or persons who are specifically being trained in that area?

Ms. Teixeira: I am advised that the GDF has a welfare staff, as well as a permanent psychologist on staff, to assist in that area.

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Member, if I could turn your attention to line item 6284, Other, I know the army is a sensitive organisation, but I recognise there has been an increase from 2024 to 2025. My question to the Hon. Member is, what would have occasioned this major increase here?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the floor is yours. Put your microphone on.

Ms. Teixeira: As you are aware, the army has been building its stock in pleat in terms of acquisition of new aircrafts, as well as what do you call marine capacity and so on. Along with this comes additional cost; the payment for airworthiness licenses for the air freight which will be increasing because of the acquisition of new aircrafts, not just the Dornier HAL 228 and the Bell 525, but also additional aircrafts have been put on order; consultation fees; software licenses; cybersecurity services, which Mdm. Volda Lawrence asked about and the usual kind of paraphernalia that the Army needs for hosting events: chairs, tents and so on. In addition, this is the 60th anniversary of the Army and the GDF of Guyana and that would have started in November 2024 and will conclude on the 31st October, 2025. This increase also caters to the year of activities for the GDF in terms of recognising its 60th anniversary.

Ms. Lawrence: I noted that Local Travel and Subsistence went up from sixty plus million dollars to \$ 87 million. I want to put three line items, if the Minister does not mind, Mr. Chairman, because they are all in the same line of my question. May I?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead. Just give the Hon. Minister an opportunity to make the notes.

Ms. Lawrence: It is line item 6261, Local Travel and Subsistence, line item 6264, Vehicle Spares and Service and line item 6265, Other Transport, Travel and Postage. There is an increase in line item 6261 for Local Travel and Subsistence, but under line item 6264 and line item 6265, there is a decrease from last year's budgeted allocation. Given this is a year where we would have the General and Regional Elections being held, I am just asking whether the exercises that will be carried out by the Guyana Defence Force are taken into consideration with regard to these two line items; Vehicle Spares and Service and Other Transport, Travel and Postage.

Ms. Teixeira: Under line item 6261, there has been an increase, as you correctly pointed out, in terms of travelling to remote locations to monitor and evaluate the projects and training of the soldiers; also the monitoring of Government projects which is the security matter; and, of course, in terms of Very Important Person (VIP) visits to borders and other locations. In terms of line item 6264, Vehicle Spares and Service, the GDF has an excess of 300 vehicles, and an additional 55 vehicles are expected to be added in 2025 from the 2024 expenditure. This is to reduce the reliance on... There will be less demand for vehicle spares and servicing than before. I should also include in here transporting troops and building materials for engineering projects. As you may be aware, when it comes to line item 6265, where, again, there is a decrease, the GDF has taken on the task of upgrading air strips at Kaieteur, Kaikan, New River and Orinduik. It has just finished the one it did at Eteringbang. This saves money but also allows the engineers in the GDF to get hands-on experience with doing some of these types of projects. In terms of line item 6265, it is not really a reduction incentive, it is just a way of using money differently. As I said, in terms of the new vehicles coming in, it is thought – usually, most of the agencies put that in their budgets – that when the vehicles are new, there is less demand for spares, *et cetera*, assuming that everyone drives them carefully.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister, looking at line item 6264 and what you have said, with the additional new vehicles coming on stream in 2025, does this mean that they are going to get rid of some of

the old vehicles because those are the ones, as you know, in the ministries are taking up all of the money? Are they going to be disposing of those old vehicles?

Ms. Teixeira: Remember, one has to go through the process of boarding assets, so once they thought that the vehicles should be boarded based on their condition, *et cetera*, then they will go through that process, boarded and then auctioned off.

Ms. Ferguson: If I could take the Hon. Member back to line item 6284, Other, based on the explanation she gave, I am happy to hear that the GDF is actually boosting its aviation arm. However, my concern and question to the Hon. Member is whether we have – yes, we are purchasing a lot of new aircraft – the capacity, or what is the staff strength in the aviation arm at the organisation there?

Ms. Teixeira: Historically, with the GDF, it has always had a combination of civilian and GDF pilots. In fact, there was one time when one could not become a Guyana Airways Corporation (GAC) pilot unless he/she came from the GDF. Now, it is a combination of civilian and GDF pilots working in the Guyana Defence Force. You are well aware of the tragic crash we had, where we lost one of the civilian pilots, Lt. Col. Charles. Well, he was GDF, but I always thought of him as a civilian, so I beg your pardon – I made a mistake.

3.29 p.m.

The issue with pilot is that every time one brings in a new aircraft, a new type or a new model, the pilots have to be trained. It is ongoing all the time. If he/she brings in a Bell 212, they have to be trained on a Bell 212. If they have to go to with a Dornier, they have to be trained on that. It is never a one-stop shop where one can train a pilot and he/she can jump into any plane and fly it. I believe the GDF is sensitive to that, and it has been doing that with training the different pilots to go either overseas or to be trained here. There is an issue with capacity; always is. I think the GDF has had enough experience in this area for quite a long time to have some capacity and abilities to manage this.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, could I proceed?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Hon. Member, could I turn your attention to line item 6294, Other? I note for 2025, we have a huge increase of \$2 billion and change. Could you explain what constitutes Other and what this sum will take care of?

Ms. Teixeira: As you are aware, Hon. Member, we have a border issue. Therefore, especially since the heightening started two years ago, the rhetoric, vitriol, *et cetera*, that the Guyana Defence Force has been increasing the intake of ranks and training. This continues in 2025, with the equipping of ranks and making sure they have appropriate kits, equipment in keeping with the new and emerging trends of modern military attire, uniform, accessories, *et cetera*, including support to the Agri Corps Section of the Guyana Defence Force, and to recognise that the combination of the border issue and the election year will equip the Army to have a higher alert or a higher system in place. As I said earlier, the 60th Anniversary with one year of activities from November last year to October of this year. That is going to be the reunion of ranks who have served, showing appreciation for Service ranks through medals, anniversary tokens, shows, outreaches and things like that, to recognise the men and women who have been in the Army and those who are alive for 60 years. This is where the \$2.6 billion will come in to make sure that the Army is equipping its Ranks properly and appropriately, in a modern context, as well as the other areas of Army work – Agri Corps, anniversaries, security, *et cetera*.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, for your explanation. Through you, Mr. Chairman, may I now turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6292, Dietary? I note for 2025, there is an increase by some \$300 million. I know for a fact that the Army has an arm to sustain itself, through poultry rearing and other things. My question to the Hon. Member is, whether this amount that is catered for in 2025 is adequate, taking into consideration the high cost of commodities in the market and also taking into consideration the Army has not been doing much agriculture. I mean, I have passed by the Garden of Eden farm, and I have not seen a lot of chicken and much agricultural activities. I want to know whether this allocation will suffice for 2025.

Ms. Teixeira: I have to watch where the Hon. Member keeps watching. She wants to watch the One Guyana Kitchen. Now, she is watching the Army in Garden of Eden. To answer the last question first, I am advised that from the Agri Corps, 30% of the chickens, 40% eggs, 25% pork, goat and sheep – venison and mutton – are provided for the Army. That is for Agri Corp. It is supplementing what they are buying. What I think we need to look at as well is, in terms of line

item 6292, the increase in the ranks that have been recruited and brought in, approximately over 1,000 and the reserved ranks have also doubled. Those are on reserves. We are feeding more people – number one and not just those who are in the Guyana Defence Force but those who are in the Guyana National Reserves. That number for the Guyana National Reserve is almost double – maybe not quite double. This includes training and feeding. The rule of armies all over the world from 1,300 years ago, in the Genghis Khan and everything else was to make sure that your army is watered and fed. You do not skimp on that; never do. All the greatest generals of the world have known – The Prime Minister (PM) will give me the right wording – always make sure the men are watered and fed well. Is that the correct one? [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: (Inaudible).]

Yes. [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: (Inaudible).] The army watches on its stomach. That is the phrase I was trying to remember.

Ms. Ferguson: Thanks to the Hon. Member. I have no further questions.

Programme: 531 – Defence and Security Support – \$25,900,887,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 531 – Defence and Security Support – \$24,492,193,000

Ms. Lawrence: Could I point the Minister to project code 2404600, Air, Land and Water Transport? The description of the project states:

“The project includes provision for vehicles, boats and out-board engines.”

Hon. Minister, I am specifically interested in the boats. Are we talking about offshore patrol boats, armoured boats or logistic and support boats? How much of this allocation are we planning to spend on the purchase of these boats?

Ms. Teixeira: Let me clarify. Are you on project code 2404600?

Ms. Lawrence: Yes.

Ms. Teixeira: Thanks. There is a heading on Marine Development which have the larger boats. There is a difference in the two. Under project code 1200300, Marine Development are the larger

boats. Under project code 2404600, are the smaller boats. Number 7 here is boats. Sorry, after a while, Mr. Chairman, I am getting a little *bazodee*. There are six boats at \$2,750,000 each, totalling \$16.5 million, to increase the riverain patrol. These are not the larger boats.

Ms. Lawrence: I go back to the project code 1200300, Marine Development. It states:

“...equipment and vessels.”

You are indicating that it is referring to boats here. Could you kindly say how many? What size are we looking at? I do not want too much description or anything, but anything that you can give the Committee an idea on of what we are investing in here and how much is allocated.

Ms. Teixeira: Mdm. Lawrence, from the total of the budget here, \$2.1 billion is for marine development. Approximately half a billion dollars is for a coastland enforcement vessel. One is \$400 million. We are also looking for an interceptor patrol vessel – \$100 million. This will help the Guyana Defence Force in intercepting in the *[inaudible]* in the coastal areas and coastal zones. These are vessels for patrolling near our coastal zones. There are a number of other matters there. Some are slightly smaller boats. There is also the construction of the concrete wharf for Guyana Coast Guard Station (GCGS) Hinds and officers’ quarters and the main bond at GCGS Hinds, a number of small engines and not boats, *et cetera*. The major cost drivers under this head are the two big boats coming in – the coastland enforcement vessel and the interceptor patrol vessel.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I have a follow up on this same project code? Are the boats new or are they second-hand boats?

Ms. Teixeira: We are kind of growing up now, so we can buy newer boats. Thanks to the oil money. When it is done, we will have to go back to maybe used vehicles... **[Mr. Nandlall:** Specially ordered and built.] Yes, these are specially ordered and built.

Mr. Jones: First, let me take the opportunity, more than likely, on behalf of all of us in this Committee, to express our gratitude to the Members of the Guyana Defence Force and the work that they have been doing. Equally, we would like to express our gratitude to their families because we know from time to time, they will be in the outlying regions for prolonged periods. We appreciate you for that.

Mr. Chairman: With that being said ...

Mr. Jones: Project code 2800 ...

Mr. Chairman: I thought you were going to ask me to put the Head.

Mr. Jones: I have one question.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Jones: I actually asked this question a few years ago. It is just a follow up essentially. Project code 2800200, Agriculture Development, the description speaks about provision for agriculture development initiatives as well as payment for retention. As it relates to agriculture development, does this relate to the Guyana Defence Force farm on East Bank Demerara at Land of Canaan, and the payment of retention is for which location?

Ms. Teixeira: This deals with Agriculture development in terms of the farm on East Bank Demerara. There is also a farm project for Baramita. The majority of the sum of \$37,498,000 is focused on East Bank Demerara at the Agri Corps land there. That is approximately \$35 million. The construction of access roads to processing facilities – \$10 million; the construction of piggery – \$8.5 million; construction of chicken coops at Agri Corps – \$10 million; and development of 40 by 40 poultry pens at border locations – \$7 million. We tried to reduce the movement and transport of food to where people are in border communities. The \$7 million is specifically to look at the border communities where our soldiers are staying for long periods.

3.44 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I turn the Minister's attention to project code 2800100, Pure Water Supply. I see that we have a sum there of \$40 million, and when we turn to the description, it says this project entails upgrading of water distributions systems. May I ask the Hon. Minister where are we upgrading the water distribution system; and is this a work in collaboration with the Guyana Water Incorporated? If so, why is this sum requested as an expenditure under the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and not the Guyana Water Incorporated?

Ms. Teixeira: We have water tanks as you said. They will be posted to various bases. They have 100 water tanks, and they also have water pumps, 40 that we distributed, and they are available

already for portable areas at bases. There are two hot water systems at Agri Corps for \$6 million to supply hot water to the abattoir and other sections of Agri Corps which will help with sanitisation procedures. Portable water plant at all bases. There are seven calculated at \$2 million, this is to provide filtered and distilled water at firm bases and border locations. It also gives the Medical Corps; for example, engineers, Seweyo Training Corps, Mazaruni, *et cetera*. There is construction of a trestle on Base Camp, Ayanganna and Training Corps. This is to facilitate water and pumps with the distribution of water at Transportation Office and Training Corps. A number of these may be based at Camp Stevenson and the Air Corps. That is \$40 million.

Mr. Mahipaul: Is this a collaborative effort between the Guyana Defence Force and the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), or is it singularly handled by Guyana Defence Force?

Ms. Teixeira: This particular item on Capital Expenditure is specifically for GDF, not for communities with GWI.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, in terms of the upgrading of the water distribution system, would it require the Guyana Defence Force going to public tender to secure or to get these materials and equipment to do this work or does the Guyana Defence Force have the capacity to do it on their own without going to public tender?

Ms. Teixeira: As we stated earlier, the Engineer Corps of the army has the capacity to do these things. What would be considered labour, you would go out to tender for the materials. These are materials contracts, not contracts for the completion of work. That is my understanding, yes.

Ms Ferguson: May I turn the Hon. Member's attention to Project code 1200100, Buildings. I note that you are requesting \$1.6 billion and based on explanation given in the project file, it is for payment for retention, provision for buildings and other facilities. My question to the Hon. Member is, could you explain what the retention cost is for and which building? Where are these buildings located; and also, what is the additional to take care of provision of building and other facilities. Could you say where these buildings are, what constitutes other facilities and could you also state the cost associated with the two descriptions given here, thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: This particular project code deals with a number of projects that focus on border locations, barracks (sleeping accommodations), *et cetera* and kitchen facilities for our men and

women in the army. A number of buildings were identified where this will take place in different parts of the country; and so, the focus is on those areas to make sure that the soldiers are living under good conditions and full improved conditions from what they had before. I am looking to see if there are those where there is retention in this area. There are several projects that involves the extension of offices, club and mess facilities at Base Camp, Ayanganna. For example, one of these where there is a retention for the contract.

Mr. Cox: Good afternoon to the Hon. Minister and her team. Hon. Minister, on the same project code, 1200100, Buildings, I note earlier you mentioned that the Guyana National Reserve has been expanded to the point it probably has been doubled, which is a good thing, and we are proud of that. I know in Region 1, more specifically Mabaruma, we have making representation for our own reservist base *per se*. We have done that through our local CSM and our CO as well, is there any provision under this line item for such buildings, if in Region 1 or any other bordering regions? Secondly, is there any provision under this line item for the complete establishment of the military base in Cursima in Region 1.

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member Mr. Cox, there is provision under this project code. One, in terms of rehabilitation of barracks of \$250 million and in the case of Baramita, there is a construction of accommodation at Baramita for the troops but there is a proposal to look at the drill hall at Baramita to be used by the reservists. Those buildings will then come under the \$250 million that are being looked at to be rehabilitated and so forth.

Programme: 531- Defence and Security Support – \$24,492,193,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister and the staff of the Guyana Defence Force for taking us through that head. Let us now invite the Minister's staff to join us for Agency 6. At 3.53 p.m. we ended the Guyana Defence Force and we are now down to just seven minutes of savings. Hon. Members, let us turn to page 72 and 73.

Agency 06: Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance

Current Expenditure

Programme: 061 – Policy Development and Administration - \$194,180,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. To the Hon. Minister, at page 58 Volume 2, it is stated that the Ministry plans:

“To contribute to effective Government’s Parliamentary Affairs management and increased citizen’s participation in decision-making and the national democratic processes.”

Could you kindly outline the specific strategies or initiative that will be implemented to achieve these objectives. I am particularly interested in the mechanism that will be used to achieve greater citizens’ engagement in governance.

Ms. Teixeira: This is the objective of the Ministry, it is a long-term objective in terms of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance in the business of the House as well as the Anti-Corruption Human Rights Sections with regard to a new Ministry that was created in September, 2020. In terms of Indicators that have been put, these are designed by Ministry of Finance, but we also have to report to the Ministry of Finance on a variety of other indicators on how effective we are being as a Ministry in terms of our work in Parliament. In terms of the number of Bills that are brought and passed, number of Committee Meetings at the Parliamentary level by the Government, Caucus Meetings, *et cetera*. It is more about looking at how is government doing its work in Parliament and so, the indicators here tend to look at what is the Ministry’s staffing, training sessions and budgetary allocations. The overall objective which is listed there is part of what we are building on as a Ministry in terms of the strategies and impacts that are defined in the same objective to implement in disseminating Parliamentary Affairs and Governance’s policies in terms of optimal use of financial, human and physical resources and the impacts. Of course, you know that when you go further into the reading of the Ministry, we have three programmes, one is Policy and Development which is what you have here, here is also one on Parliamentary Affairs and there is one on Governance which deals with human rights and anti-corruption. Those are the three areas of the Ministry in terms of how we will try to have a greater impact on the effectiveness of the work we do.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, can you disaggregate line items 6284 and 6294.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, thank you very much. The total that is being asked for is \$100 million. It is what we asked for previously, Stakeholder consultations; \$12 million, consultancies experts in governance human rights as needed, \$10 million. We are hoping to have a governance conference

\$10 million; legal services when required about \$3.6 million. Technical reports and preparation of technical reports to the various treaty bodies we have to report to, we are putting a figure of \$8 million there. Human rights anti-corruption Expo which we started three years ago, which has grown, it was held up to 9th and 10th December last year, it has become an annual feature, that is \$12 million put aside for that, so that is how we get the \$100 million. You asked for line item 6294 as well?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Yes.

Ms. Teixeira: Line Item – 6294 as well, this figure has gone up, well it is what we budgeted in 2024 and we are getting back the same amount. These are for work study students and similar stipends, for the office - miscellaneous cost – tents if we have a yard meeting, *et cetera*.

3.59 p.m.

There is not a large amount of money but the work study students who come to us are given stipends. Also, my own staff – we are a very small staff – all the work we do for the Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Expo, which is two days and at least one day physically setting it up, those staff members are given a small stipend as appreciation for working overtime and additional tasks.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Okay. Minister, you mentioned a governance conference. Do you have the proposed team and the likely dates of this conference? Will this be another anti-corruption conference?

Ms. Teixeira: Not necessarily, not exclusively, no. It will not be exclusively, but it will deal with the concept of governance – what is governance and what is democratic governance? I think there is a lot of confusion in our society. We say governance and government simultaneously; they are not the same. I think that what we are hoping for, depending on a number of factors, a number of variables, is that we would like to have it earlier in the year than later because of elections. We were probably looking at the month of April but now we have to make sure that we are not conflicting with things like Caribbean Premiere League (CPL) and all these things that distract people from attending boring things like workshops and conferences from time to time. We are looking at the month of April for that – very tentatively right now.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: All right. Minister, you also mentioned stakeholder consultations. Are your consultations limited to the rural and urban areas, or do you engage members from the interior?

Ms. Teixeira: The stakeholder forum that we have has been focusing on civil society bodies, not individuals or communities as such. We have been working with trying to build a stakeholder forum with religious, business, labour, women, youth, as well as indigenous organisations and the National Tshosa Council. A lot of what we are doing with policy discussions, if the Government's... like we had one on the Sexual Offences Act and the amendments, and we had one on the Matrimonial Causes Act – these are which we try to include the stakeholders to be involved in the discussions. We are more focused right now on civil society and stakeholders than on communities *per se*. We have a governance structure but not under this programme – not under Programme One. There is a governance structure in Programme Three that looks at... It is a pilot programme with the interior and that is a different way of approaching it.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First question. In Volume Two, page 58, the indicators show that the percentage of budgetary allocation that was expended in 2024 was 54% and there is a target now of 100%. I guess the target for 2024 was 100%. Could the Hon. Minister say what caused them to not be able to utilise the entire 100% that was allocated last year?

Ms. Teixeira: If we look at the breakdown by programme, the figures are different in the sense that the averages are different but when we compare them, that is when you come up with the total percentage. The revised target for 2024 has a 67% expenditure. One of the issues is the money we had under the same line item 6284 to do with \$100 million – what we were going to spend it on, we were unable to spend it on. We were also frugal. We could have spent all the money out if [inaudible] but we did not. We were very careful, and we used...

Mr. Chairman: Minister, we are not hearing you well.

Ms. Teixeira: ...and going to tender.

Mr. Chairman: You have to speak into the microphone.

Ms. Teixeira: I beg your pardon.

Mr. Chairman: Speak into the microphone.

Ms. Teixeira: Oh, did I not? Oh, sorry, you could not hear me?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: We heard.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, you can hear me. Who is not hearing?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I Just have one other question, Mr. Chairman. On maintenance of buildings, line item 6242. They budgeted \$4 million, but only \$1 million was spent, and now there is a budget for \$3 million. Could the Hon. Minister say what they are expecting to do with the \$3.4 million this year and which building? I am guessing it is the building that you are housed in.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. We were hoping that at some point we would get a new building because my building is getting a bit cramped, even though it is only 22 of us. We want to expand and, our staffing to bring in new skills that we may need. In the interim, we are maintaining what we have, and we love our building, which is a beautiful traditional Queenstown wooden building, but it has its challenges as well. The \$3.4 million is to be used for polishing of hardwood, upper floor at the beginning and end of the year – \$2 million. We found some old furniture. This was the Coronavirus disease (COVID) Headquarters before. There was a lot of old broken furniture in the place and we repaired them, sanded them, painted them and made them look quite nice. Some of them are actually really good pieces. The general maintenance of \$1.4 million to do with furnishing, plumbing, electrical, servicing of the water pump system, replacement of lights and replacement of some of the wood panels on the wall that might be rotten. That is not a large amount, but one that we can handle.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: My final question, Mr. Chairman. This is an overall policy question based on the impacts that are in Volume Two. What I see is that there is an attempt by your Ministry to make government more effective through your different programmes but what monitoring and evaluation do you have in place to see whether all of those things that you are doing are actually having a positive impact on the Government, the policies and the implementation of those policies in those various departments as well?

Ms. Teixeira: It may not be as programatise as it should be but in terms of representation of people, if we approach agencies representing cases, people complain. They have long lines, long this, no

response, or they applied for this a long time ago and they did not get it, and they want to know why. We try to represent them to find answers for them. When we find that institutions have been delinquent, we try to say to them they have to improve – they cannot go on like this. There are times when we try to contact agencies by phone but cannot get through on any line, no one answers. We then write a letter and raise it with them that this is not the right way for us to serve our people. It is not institutionalised yet, where you have an institutional format in which to deal with it. We also have two other bodies, which will come through Programme Three that deals with the National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up and the National Coordinating Committee on Anti-Corruption. These two bodies have representatives of Government agencies on them. We have to prepare reports, we have to prepare updates, and this is where the discussion takes place many times with these focal points appointed by the ministers, as to what is or is not going on right in some of the places where there are weaknesses that they need to address, *et cetera*. A lot of it has to do with access to services and goods.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. If I can turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6265 – Other Transport, Travel and Postage. Hon. Member, I note last year we approved \$6.2 million but you would have expended less than what was approved – some \$665,000. However, this year, 2025, I recognise you are requesting the very sum that you sought last year. Firstly, could you provide an explanation for why you spent less last year and, secondly, why you are seeking the same amount as you sought last year? Perhaps, you can say what this \$6.2 million will be utilised for in 2025.

Ms. Teixeira: One of the problems we had last year was that we did not have a Deputy Permanent Secretary (DPS). Our DPS resigned and we did not have one for quite a few months, which slowed down the execution of our projects. We are a small ministry with a DPS, and therefore, several of our current and capital were delayed until we were able to find a new DPS. That was in general for the programmes. The second issue was that, in terms of visits to the interior in particular – other was for travel both in the interior and along the coast – regrettably, part of it was my fault. I was not as well as I should have been and, therefore, was not able to go out into some of the areas I went to before. However, members of staff were able to try to keep some of our fieldwork going, particularly in the Upper Mazaruni and Middle Mazaruni.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Through you, Mr. Chairman, I guess it will be the same explanation for line item 6261 – Local Travel and Subsistence, where we approved \$3 million, you expended less and now you are seeking the very sum like last year, so I guess the explanation remains as is. Thanks.

Mr. Chairman: You asked and answered. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. There was a decline in the number of field visits.

Programme: 061 – Policy Development and Administration – \$194,180,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 062 – Parliamentary Affairs – \$17,266,000

Programme: 062 – Parliamentary Affairs – \$17,266,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 063 – Governance – \$181,069,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the Hon. Minister, on page 62 of Volume Two, it is stated that you intend to:

“Bring Guyana into compliance incrementally with its international treaty reporting obligations.”

Could you please indicate which treaties are currently in full reporting compliance? Secondly, which treaties are we still working towards achieving compliance with?

Ms. Teixeira: Impacts and strategies. These are ongoing issues. There is no end limit to when you will bring all of Guyana’s things into compliance. Year by year, new ones are added on. New deadlines are added based on the schedules of the United Nations (UN). This is an objective that we are working towards – bringing treaty obligations up to standard and up to compliance. Last year, the one that was featured in the media here, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) – we are up to date with that, the fourth report. The Universal Periodic Review, we are due to appear in May before the UN Human Rights body. Our report was submitted in January in keeping with the deadline. We are in order for that in terms of our submission of our

report and we await the review by the working group and the UN Human Rights Council in early May.

4.14 p.m.

Our US State Department reports, which is another treaty obligation we have in terms of Trafficking in Persons (TIPs), worse forms of child labour, religious tolerance and human rights. Those are in order as well. Organisation of American States (OAS) reports, the Mississippi women's ones are up to date. We did the Montevideo National report, which was up to date. The OAS reports relate to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the number of petitions that are sent to us. We have been obligated to answer those IACHR petitions as well as the United Nations (UN) petitions and precautionary measures on Guyana. It is an ongoing one. We have reports that we have drafted and are trying to get out of the way as quickly as possible, some of which are overdue. One is the rights of the child, and one is the economic, social and cultural rights, those are a covenant and the one on children. In terms of our anti-corruption, we are up to date with the Mechanism for the Implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (MESICIC) which is the Mechanism to implement Inter American Convention against Corruption MESICIC and we reported on a sixth cycle, in 2024, we are up to date the report was adopted as we were well received and we submitted in 2023, our second self-assessment on the UN Convention against Corruption. We have been recently told that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) will be bringing in the peer review team to do the *in-situ* visit this year, most likely in March. We are up to date in quite a number, we have some that we are not up to date with, and we are trying to catch up with them.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Teixeira: Women and gender are up to date, for example, but their cycle begins soon again.

Ms. Hughes: Minister, could you disaggregate line item 6284?

Ms. Teixeira: What is that?

Mr. Chairman: Line item 6284.

Ms. Teixeira: It was \$44 million, it has gone down to \$23 million, this is our Anti-Corruption Conference, Human Rights Conference, and National Mechanism for reporting and follow-up. This is the body that was set up in 2021, to help us to have an inter-agency collaboration in terms of treaty reporting, treaty monitoring and looking at evaluating progress that has not been made and looking at where the gaps are and also advising the Cabinet in a timely matter what recommendations are outstanding and which ones the Cabinet can examine and give guidance on a policy. The regional governance conference project is where we hire people to help us be the community links in Region 7 and make *in-situ* visits on the coast. That is where the \$23 million goes to. We have a number of conferences we had one last year on the public sector and ethics and responsible report –in terms of public sector integrity. That was held as a one-off workshop roundtable with permanent secretaries and regional executive officers, for example, the human rights conference again has to do with some of the issues that we are dealing with in our assessments. We have had different meetings to do with preparation for the universal periodic report in November, with civil society, for example.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, lastly, for line 6302, who are the beneficiaries of this training.

Ms. Teixeira: At the end of 2023, we kind of realised that people talked a lot about human rights but they really were not clear and were not clear on some of the conventions and even our own Constitution, so, we worked and designed a programme called the International Human Rights Law Certificate Course which was to be virtual to make it accessible and to also approach UN bodies, the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights as well as to look for local experts in Guyana who could teach the course. It was meant to be online in the afternoons from 6.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m., twice per week and to have Guyanese experts on it as well as foreigners. When we advertised – when we planned this thing we thought it was only going to be for maybe 40 people – we think you know not a lot of people, however, when we advertised it on *Facebook* we got 1000 thousand hits of people who wanted to come on board it, we brought in 200 from across Guyana both private and public. The majority were females, which is not surprising, and we had people from various parts of the regions as well as the public sector, private sector and civil society. Out of that, 162 graduated from the programme, and we are trying to institute that every year on an annual basis. People who did not get on the last programme are reminding us and they are waiting to get on this programme. We were quite overwhelmed. We did not expect that, we really did not,

and the Guyanese experts did as well, so when we think sometimes that we do not have the capacity, we actually do and as well as and young Guyanese as well. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights gave us persons who are in their regional offices in Latin-America Caribbean.

The cost of the programme was quite cheap since it was virtual. We did not have to pay to bring anyone here. Basically, it was our graduation and materials that cost the most, and that was not a lot of money. It is actually a cheap programme, which we would like to extend for this year. Sorry, I was a bit carried away. We have done training for the National Mechanism for reporting and follow-up, as well as for public officials. We have done some training with public officials with Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the convention on the rights of people with disabilities too, because I think we have to report on that, in the next year, and that is about \$1.2 million. The anti-corruption workshops for public officials and the private sector will continue at \$2.6 million. This year, my staff came up with the idea, this is not my idea, it is theirs and we will try it, that is, sensitised sessions on human rights in secondary schools. We are a small Ministry. . We will select some schools and experiments. We are dealing with some of the human rights issues in schools. This is a pilot that we will start.

Programme: 063 – Governance – \$181,069,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Estimates

Programme: 061 – Policy Development and Administration – \$3,755,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, for project code 2512200, could you indicate what type of equipment is skated here? I know offices have to be fully furnished, so I am not particularly interested in the furniture. I am just interested in the equipment that will assist in terms of efficiency.

Ms. Teixeira: We have \$200,000 for the service server room for the ministry. We are going electronically, so we try to make sure that our documents are safe, and that our capacity to have an internet connection is at a high speed and secure. We have things like fireproof safe, laptops with docking stations, we have three of those, four monitors and two wireless fidelity *Wi-Fi* access

points because we have to make sure that we are always online. Filing cabinets, and tablets – this is an intervention with children who do well in the regions at the common entrance. Microwave security cameras – this is to expand our exterior camera and one interior camera. Weatherproof table and chairs – we have a little eating area for the staff, and we need to put some furniture in there. An office chair, multiple handsets and a cordless landline. It is just a small amount, but these are all things that can help us to function better. Every year we can buy some more and be able to function better.

Programme: 061 – Policy Development and Administration – \$3,755,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 063 – Governance – \$5,750,000

Programme: 063 – Governance – \$5,750,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister and your staff, for taking us through your agency, but in particular, to you and your meticulous staff for working with us and all the Constitutional agencies for the past five months to get these budgets prepared, submitted and defended here. Thank you very much to you and your staff.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and the Members of the Committee. I am very proud of the team of people I work with, both within my Ministry, as you can see, they are all young people, as well as the Members of the other bodies I had to report to. In the earlier period, we dealt with these Constitutional bodies, we dealt with \$18.9 billion, which increased. When you are looking at the Constitutional body, you do not realise the total. The total is \$18.9 billion, for two major areas in terms of our branches of Government: Parliament and the judiciary, whereas you saw those two, particularly the judiciary and then, of course, the third area which is important in the Constitution, and that is the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), and you asked all the important questions. The questions were not frivolous. I think we are honing our skills in terms of questioning and I think that I need to recognise that as well, to thank you and to make sure that we get really out of it, I think that there are some areas which I am surprised you did not ask questions about but I will not trouble you about that. **[Mr. Patterson:** You can tell us the areas.] Do you want me to tell you about the area? They were there in your face. Anyway,

Mr. Chairman and the staff, thank you very much for accommodating us and for the Members of Parliament, thank you very much. It is our pleasure to serve.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister and team. Yes, it was a very long day, Hon. Members. Let us invite the Hon. Prime Minister and his team to take us through his agency. Agency 2, as of now, we have...

An Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, we will not take a break. We have cancelled the small break, which is the 4.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. and we will take a break after the Prime Minister. We only take two breaks, as we agreed on during the discussions prior. We will break after the Prime Minister.

Mr. Jones: Could you confirm the amount of time saved?

Mr. Chairman: The time saved was 27 minutes and we had seven before, so we are now at 34. Does that concord with what you have in total. Go ahead, Minister. We cannot hear you.

An Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

4.29 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. The Prime Minister (PM) can use the other side. Prime Minister, you can use the station to the right. Prime Minister, the ladies want you closer to them.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Are you speaking about the Hon. Kwame McCoy?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Not at all. The Prime Minister is competent to defend his Ministry. I see things are looking very brown with the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) and the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA).

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: They are browning out. Prime Minister, do you need a five-minute suspension?

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: No. The Permanent Secretary (PS) is coming.

Mr. Chairman: Prime Minister, you can use on the right. Permanent Secretary, Mr. King, on the right. Are they coming for 5.00 p.m.? Permanent Secretary, you cannot take...You are an experienced person in this.

Mr. Patterson: Let us have a break.

Mr. Chairman: The problem is resuming. Then, we will run an hour late.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us take a short suspension.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: We will be back at 4.55 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 4.33 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.05 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: Let us invite the Hon. Prime Minister and his staff to take us through Agency 02, Office of the Prime Minister. Hon. Members, please turn to pages 52 and 53.

Agency: 02 Office of the Prime Minister

Current Expenditure

Programme: 021 – Prime Minister's Secretariat – \$688,086,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Dr. Cummings, you have the floor.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6284 – Other: I have noticed, Prime Minister, Hon. Member, that, in 2024, the revised figure here was just \$130, 965,000. For 2025, there is a whopping increase of approximately \$155 million. Could you say what constitutes that increase and, maybe, disaggregate what makes up this?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Thank you for the question, Hon. Member of the House. The increase is related to the expenditures. I can disaggregate it here quickly for you. The increased allocation will cater for an Adviser on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) – \$39.6 million; the hire of consultants for support and the request of proposals for Phase Two of the Gas-to-Energy Project – \$64.6 million; request for proposal, operations and management of Gas-to-Energy/Phase One of the Natural Gas Liquids Plant – \$96 million; Adviser/Consultant to the Hon. Prime Minister – \$42.5 million; annual subscription for Human Resources Management System (HRMS) – \$1.5 million; payment for Adviser/Consultant to the Office of the Prime Minister, purchase of items and authentic software – \$4.5 million; hard drives – \$800,000; stipends for Media and Telecommunications Branch (MTB) members and items for the Official Residence and Office of the Prime Minister – \$9.7 million; procurement of flags, labels, *et cetera* – \$3 million; procurement of t-shirts, caps, *et cetera* – \$6.1 million; and Mashramani-related activities – \$15.2 million. That gives us a total of \$285 million.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member said he has two sets of Advisers. There are Advisers to the Prime Minister for \$42 million. Sir, could you say who or what agency is advising such a man from the Special Forces, as you just mentioned?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Hon. Member, for your question in relation to the Adviser, is it what is the sum?

Mr. Patterson: Sir, you said there is an Adviser to the Prime Minister for \$42 million. Then, you said, there is another Adviser for, I think....

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There is an ICT Adviser for \$39.6 million and the Adviser/Consultant to the Hon. Prime Minister for \$42.5 million.

Mr. Patterson: That is right. That is correct, Sir. I know the amounts. I was asking who or what firms are these Advisers from?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Adviser for the \$42.5 million is... We put aside that money there because we are to be advised on the design of the Gas-to-Energy procurement process.

Mr. Patterson: Prime Minister, you also mentioned – I did not get the amount early on – that you have an Adviser for the Gas-to-Shore Project.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I did mention earlier the hiring of consultants for the support and the request for proposals for Phase Two of the Gas-to-Energy Project – \$64.6 million; request for proposal operations and management of the Gas-to-Energy Project, Phase One of the Natural Gas Liquids – \$96 million; Adviser/Consultant to the Hon. Prime Minister – \$42.5 million.

Mr. Patterson: You have two sets of Advisers for Phase Two of the Gas-to-Energy Project.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There are two different consultancies related to Phase Two.

Mr. Patterson: Could you enlighten the Committee of the difference that is specific to the one for \$42 million, the one for \$64 million, as well as the company?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We have to have advisers. I hope I can take this opportunity to decomplex this whole issue. For the operations of Phase One, we have advisers for that. With regards to Phase Two, we have the Adviser for the Natural Gas Liquids in that regard. For the whole other aspects of Phase Two, there are three sets of advisers.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, thank you very much. For the first set of advisers, can you be specific? There is \$96 million for Phase One, and I assume they are hired. Could you enlighten the Committee: Who are they and what are they being paid?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, we will lay over the list of all the advisers to the Committee. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, could I remind the Committee of how many times the Prime Minister has committed to lay over and is yet to lay over any document? Could I remind the Committee? Through you, the last time was in November, Sir. He said give him two days to lay over for the \$400 million which he had allocated.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Just let me give some clarification. Laying over means he submits it to the Committee.

Mr. Patterson: That is correct, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Tabling is another story. Is that right? Let us check with the Clerk to ensure that the statement you are making is accurate.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Check with him first. Hon. Prime Minister...?

Mr. Patterson: Sir, are you advising me? I thought you would have checked.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I rather suspect that I am aware of the issue being raised by the Hon. Member. I have that information here to be laid over to the Clerk. Kindly excuse my tardiness. I would have liked to do it early this morning, but I will do it at the end of this examination. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Prime Minister, actually the Standing Orders do state that when you make the statements and refer, you should lay it over after. Be ready to lay it over just after this.

Mr. Jordan: Since November [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: You do not know if it was laid over. Did you check with the Clerk? Mr. Jordan, did you check with the Clerk? Please, this is the competent authority to pronounce on that, not you. Go ahead, Hon. Member Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: No, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Is that it?

Mr. Patterson: If he is laying it over, Sir...

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Patterson: The rest of the Assembly, the country, and I will wait with bated breath....

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: ...to see if it is laid over.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put a question... Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, you have the floor.

5.15 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, if I can turn his attention to line item 6242, Maintenance of Buildings. For last year, the Committee approved \$9.5 million. There is then a revised sum of \$37,239,000. I recognise that for 2025, he is seeking \$11.9 million. Could you explain the reason for the revised figure in 2024? I also noticed, I would not say a decrease, but more like a small margin increase of what you got last year when this House made the approval. Which buildings are to be maintained? Thank you.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I guess by now all the Members know that the Prime Minister has the privilege of working and living equally in one of the oldest buildings in Georgetown. I guess we...

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** Is that how?] ...It is not bad treatment, but it is an honour to live in those two buildings – to work from one and live in one. They are both listed as heritage buildings. The Hon. Members can, at any time, with short notice, be invited to tour the two buildings and get a sense of what it is to be in them. However, you will appreciate that they were part of the wooden architecture of Georgetown, and tremendous maintenance is required. It is better to do it on a regular and annual basis. While we asked for a certain amount of money in 2024, by the time we used up that money, we recognised that we needed more money to continue the maintenance that started in 2024 with the voted provision. That is why we had a supplementary provision. This means that this year, we will spend less on those buildings, and that is why we asked for the sum stated there.

Programme: 021 – Prime Minister's Secretariat – \$688,086,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 022 – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$41,324,616,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, line item 6294 – Other: I recognise that the Office of the Prime Minister is requesting \$40.45 billion. I note that last year you came for a supplementary of \$30.5 billion. I remember your explanation was to pay for the first tranche of the \$100,000 cash grant. Based on my calculations, the sum that was approved in November catered for some 305,000 Guyanese. Based on the report coming out from the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service he said that 90,000 cheques were cut. Therefore, my calculation is that \$9 billion and more was

expended just before 31st December, 2024, leaving us with some \$21.5 billion to play with. You, like many of us in this House, are aware that many Guyanese who registered – whether it is 400,000 – have not received their cash grant. Could you explain the reason why 305,000 Guyanese were unable to receive their cash grant as of 31st December 2024? Now that you are seeking \$40.4 billion, could you, perhaps, give us a breakdown of what this sum represents?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: First of all, I would like to commend the staff of the Ministry of Finance and the other ministries who were involved in this process. As you know, the process involves registration and the actual payment of the cash grant. In less than two and a half months – and I hope the Member can make a note when I speak – we have paid 121,000 Guyanese their cash grants. To add to that, we have 300,000 cheques that were cut, so do the math. We have cut 300,000 cheques and we have already paid out 121,000. This is an ongoing process, both the registration and the payment. Basically, we are in every region of Guyana, and there is a schedule out, where we advertise before we go, by sensitising people. We are working with all the ministries that are doing similar payouts, for example, like the old age pension, *et cetera* so that when people congregate to collect one, they can either register or collect their cash grant too.

The feedback from the people has been very positive. They are receiving their money, and they are very thankful to the Government. I am quite certain that all the Members in this House would have either registered or already collected their \$100,000. **[Mr. Jordan:** That is from Freedom

House alone.] It has nothing to do with Freedom House. Freedom House may just...

[Mr. Jordan: Freedom House is not Guyanese.] No, no, no. I do not want a *to and fro* with any of the Members, but our Ministers and our Members of Parliament are all over the place. It is a perfect example of *boots on the ground*. They are on the ground, and they are giving us real-time feedback as to what is happening out there. The people of Guyana are thankful for their \$100,000. We will continue with the money in this year's budget, and we envisage that some 600,000 Guyanese will receive their payment. The money is there and the attitude to ensure that people of Guyana receive that money in the shortest possible time is there among the workers. Let us commend our workers again, the foot soldiers who are paying the people.

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

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister.

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

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

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

Mr. Chairman: Could persons keep it down and be quiet? I am having difficulty... Just raise your mic up a bit so I can see the... All right. Go ahead, Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A follow-up, Mr. Chairman. We support the distribution of the cash grant. I trust that you got yours because I remember the last time you said...

Mr. Chairman: I got it delivered here.

Mr. Mahipaul: All right. That is very good, Sir. We support the delivery of the cash grant. From this sum of \$40.450 billion that is being requested, may I ask the Hon. Minister about the \$30 billion, is that towards the cash grant?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, to answer the Hon. Member, yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up again. That would mean, based on this figure that we have here in this budget, that by 31st December, 2024, \$30 billion would have already been expended, based on what is reflected here. According to the FMAA, the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Part VI, Section 43, all sums of moneys – even if the cheques are cut by law – ought to be returned to the Consolidated Fund. May I ask, the Hon. Prime Minister, why is it that the 184,000 cheques that were cut – given that he said 305,000, I think, were cut of which 121,000 were distributed – were not returned to the Consolidated Fund so that the right figure can be reflected in the expenditure of 2024 and then you can start the next financial year the correct way in keeping with the law? [Mr. Nandlall: Do you want to delay the payment further?] It is already delayed. Nobody is getting it. What is the cheque doing in his hands?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, with my limited knowledge of the financial regulations of Guyana, those cheques have already been cut, and they have the name of the payee on them. They are stored and will be paid out. Those cheques have six months before they become stale-dated.

Mr. Mahipaul: Given the FMAA law which was passed in this National Assembly and in complying with this law, no other action should be seen above that. That is the law. Would the Hon. Minister consider himself violating this Fiscal Management and Accountability Act by having all of those cheques in his possession?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I, personally, am at a loss because I do not know the law. We can always have an aside with the Attorney General who is the advisor to the Government on legal issues.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I can quote the Law.

Mr. Chairman: You just made a definitive statement that it violated and that is your opinion. Please...

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. At section 43 of the FMAA states:

“43. Except as otherwise provided in this Act or in any other law, at the end of each fiscal year, any unexpended balance of public moneys issued out of the Consolidated Fund shall be returned and surrendered to the Consolidated Fund.”

Sir, the Prime Minister is saying to us...

Mr. Chairman: Just give me one second, please. Let us just get one second. I am not a lawyer. I do not argue about the law, but I have spent over 30 years making laws in this House. Unexpended – as far as I am concerned, if an invoice is received, an expense is raised and a cheque is cut in terms of payment, it is expended. Am I wrong, Attorney General (AG). Let us move on.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I just have a follow-up?

Mr. Chairman: Let us move on, please and we can resolve that elsewhere.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. May I say to you, Sir...

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: ...that I am serving on the Constitutional Reform Commission and a cheque was cut in my name by the Ministry of Legal Affairs for my stipend. I was unable to collect that cheque

even though it was cut in my name by 31st December. The Permanent Secretary returned it to the Consolidated Fund and I have to wait now for the process of bringing it back to me. That is the practice at the Public Accounts Committee that we stress on as PAC Members. The Hon. Teixeira, Hon. Edghill, Hon. Datadin and the other two Members, we stress on the sum...

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Please do not put my name in something that is not accurate. Please do not do it.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, we stress on the sum...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, we are dealing with an allocation of \$40 billion for expenses for 2024 and I ask that the question relate to the expensing of this \$40 billion.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I ask the Hon. Prime Minister when he envisages the completion of the distribution of this total of \$60 billion for this cash grant and if he foresees another cash grant happening before November 2025?

Mr. Chairman: Well, if he foresees or if another cash grant is contained...

Mr. Mahipaul: Or if another cash grant is contained. Thank you.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I will restrict my answer to what is in the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: That is perfectly correct.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We will endeavour to pay out the remainder of the money in the shortest possible time.

5.30 p.m.

Ms. Hughes: Prime Minister, with regard to line item 6292 – Dietary: We have a pretty large increase there. I am wondering how you will explain it, if there is something specific that you anticipate will happen or will occur? We are at line item 6292, and the budget has gone from \$279,672,000 to \$470,842,000.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Thank you for the question, Hon. Member. As you know, under this line item, under Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management, we prepare food hampers,

mainly, and distribute them to affected individuals in the different communities throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. While you may not have seen a lot of rain, people are still affected out there, all right. The extreme dry weather is affecting food security in many parts of Guyana, and it is not being reported. That is why we have this increase in expenditure. This is because, judging from what happened in 2024, we have to make provision for the continuation of the extended dry weather in 2025. If I could read out what is written here, the increase caters for food hamper distribution, anticipating the frequency and intensity of impacts in all administrative regions. The allocation caters to the provision of 23,500 relief food hampers for distribution to vulnerable communities and residents across the region.

Ms. Hughes: Prime Minister...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Hughes, allow him to finish.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: After hazard impacts, including droughts, floods, and wildfires, in 2024, 15,000 hampers were procured and distributed. There was a shortfall of 4,000 hampers which were catered for by supplementary provision. I want to add that, in 2024, we literally had to purchase cassava from the coast and distribute it to affected communities in the hinterland, both during the dry season and the rainy season. During the rainy season, because of root rot, food security becomes compromised. During the dry season, because of slow development or undeveloped root crop, it becomes compromised too. We literally had to be purchasing foodstuff and distributing it to all those affected communities.

Ms. Fernandes: I am going back to line item 6294. Through you, Mr. Chairman, could the Prime Minister say how persons who did not receive... There are two questions I am going to ask in one. How will persons that did not receive their cash grant as yet – persons that missed the distribution dates – how could they access those within the regions? More importantly, given the chaos that persons experienced in the distribution process, is there going to be a revised distribution system for 2025? For example, putting the moneys into the public servants' bank account, *et cetera*?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: In regard to your last question, there is an increase in the number of distribution points inside communities. That itself we have seen positively impacted the distribution in the sense that less people have to congregate at any one point to collect their cash grant. That has been working well. We are using schools, we are using community centres, and we

are involving staff from other ministries. It is more or less like a whole-of-Government approach to ensure that the cash grant, moving forward, is distributed in a faster and more efficient manner, with less chaos, as you call it. I mean, Guyanese are excited to get this money. This has never happened before in Guyana. [Ms. Ferguson: It is taxpayers' money.] No, it is

taxpayers' money. Mr. Chairman, do not get me wrong. It is taxpayers' money, but a government with a mandate, properly elected in any country, will determine how the taxpayers' money is utilised. All I am saying is, this is history-making, because you have a Government from 2020 to 2024, and onwards to 2025 – and who knows onwards – that has already made several decisions that have resulted positively in money going into the pockets of every Guyanese, from every walk of life. Whether you are a millionaire, a billionaire, or an ordinary Guyanese, you are entitled to the money just from the mere fact of being Guyanese.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow-up on that. First of all, I have to agree with the Prime Minister. This is the first time this has ever happened, and I am agreeing with him. I further say that this is the first time the National Assembly of Guyana is approving a budgetary allocation of \$1.3 trillion based on oil resources, so we expect to see a lot of first, particularly given to the people. Sir, when it comes to the distribution, Hon. Prime Minister, we have had difficulties within communities because it is a requirement – and please advise me if it is still a requirement – for an Audit Office representative to be present in order for the moneys to be dispersed at the various locations. That has been a hindrance because the Audit Office does not have the capacity to send persons throughout the country at the same time. Is there any other system that is in place right now to remedy that hindrance?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member is raising an important issue. That is a requirement in keeping with the financial laws of Guyana. We cannot budge. However, seeing that you raised the issue, we will endeavour to improve and ensure that the Audit representatives are there in ample or adequate numbers to ensure that the process continues.

Ms. Fernandes: Finally, Mr. Chairman, through you, has the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Finance considered having those moneys for the remaining public servants and remaining pensioners that are expected to receive in 2025 dispersed when the pensioners are collecting their pensions and when the public servants are collecting their salaries? Has that been considered, and is that a direction that they are moving in with the 2025 distribution?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, everything that the Hon. Member mentioned has already been done and we will continue to do that. If there are any more suggestions you want to make, feel free to text me or call me, and I will ensure that we implement those suggestions to improve something that is already going good for the whole of Guyana.

Ms. Fernandes: I will put it to the National Assembly, Sir. Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister and I thank you for taking recommendations that were made by my Colleague, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, this year when we questioned last November. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Chief Whip?

Mr. Jones: Yes, just a quick...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister first? No? Chief Whip?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: No, I just wanted, Mr. Chairman, to endorse the Member's comments and say we are thankful and we are always amenable to positive contributions from the Members on the opposite side of the House.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman, to the PM, just for clarity, based on the last question that was asked by Ms. Fernandes, are you saying that as it relates to public servants and pensioners, that one, at the place where the pensioners receive their pension, they will have an opportunity to collect their cash grant there, and, as it relates to public servants, those moneys will appear in their salaries? That is essentially what you just confirmed, based on what she asked.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, it seems we are in different places.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, if the Hon. Member recalls when we paid the public servants, the money was paid at the place of work. They signed and received a check. I myself signed and received a cheque. If you are talking about incorporating it into their pay packet, that is something that has not been done as yet, but every suggestion is on the table for consideration. This is not for me to tell you yes or give you a commitment now, but as we seek to improve the system, we will take on board all positive suggestions. With regards to the pensions, we have already been registering pensioners at the place where they collect their pensions. In terms of the

paying out there, when it becomes available, I do not see a problem with that. Anything to make it better, we are ready to take all these suggestions on board.

Mr. Mahipaul: For persons who registered during the registration period and may have had to leave the jurisdiction for one or another reason, could they submit an authorisation, along with their identification card, to have their cash grant picked up once the cheque is printed and available at a location, as they may not be able to do so themselves?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, let not the pensioner be worried. The cheque is there. Whenever they return to the jurisdiction, they can collect their cheque.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Prime Minister.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, a follow-up. Sir, thank you. That service of submitting an authorisation, along with the Identification Card (ID) of a person, was extended to us here in the National Assembly. We could have, as Members of Parliament (MPs), submitted an authorisation along with the ID card of the person we are collecting on behalf of, and the cheque is given. Could the Hon. Prime Minister guarantee the citizens that that service will also be extended to them?

Mr. Chairman: The Prime Minister answered. Hon. Prime Minister, you have another crack at it.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, there is no follow-up. We have regulations and we will follow the regulations.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, PM. Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, you wanted a follow-up?

Ms. Fernandes: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you. Through you, Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Prime Minister just indicated that public servants received their cheques at their place of work and I just want the Hon. Prime Minister to indicate to me in which regions he is speaking about, because I can tell him, in that Region 7, that did not happen and in Region 4, that did not happen either. If the Hon. Prime Minister could indicate to me where that happened, that would be nice because he is misinforming the House, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, you have just accused the Prime Minister of misinforming the House. Please, one ought to be able to show that Office greater respect. I would not allow it. Prime Minister, what the Hon. Member is saying, is that accurate?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, first of all, the Hon. Member is confused.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I owe her the responsibility of clearing up that confusion. If you recall, the first set of people to register were the public servants. Many of them registered at their place of work and, therefore, when the cheques became available, they were paid at their place of work. Nothing stopped a public [Interruption]. Listen to me, I received my cheque at the Office of the Prime Minister. All the staff working for the Prime Minister, Mr. Chairman, received their cheques at the Office of the Prime Minister. Nothing stopped a public servant – just listen and learn – who is home, on time off, from going and registering somewhere in his district where he lives. When the cheque becomes available, he will receive his cheque there. However, a provision was made for public servants to register where they are working and therefore, they got a cheque there, so you had a mix. To come and tell the House that public servants did not receive their cheques at their place of work that is inaccurate. There is a mix of people who received cheques at their place of work from the simple fact that they registered at their place of work – [Dr. Anthony: Ministry of Health.] The Ministry of Health and the Office of the Prime Minister. Why are we doing this to ourselves? Do you need photographs or Facebook posts to clarify this matter?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Prime Minister.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, anything that goes good with this Government does not lie well with the Opposition. Again, I will take the opportunity to thank the hard-working public servants who made it possible for us to pay out one hundred and twenty-one thousand cheques and to have the remainder cut and being paid out as we speak.

Programme: 022 – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$41,324,616,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

5.45 p.m.

Programme: 023 – Power Generation – \$25,540,797,000

Mr. Patterson: Through you, Mr. Chairman, line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: We go to the Guyana Power and Light Inc (GPL). Some \$18 billion has been requested this year. Could the Prime Minister please disaggregate the \$18 billion?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The justification for \$18 billion funding under current expenditure for 2025: I request that I read out everything here, instead of giving the short answer to the Hon. Member, in the interest of clearer understanding for the Hon. Member. I read: At the current fuel price of approximately US\$104.00 a barrel, GPL can procure 1,657,371 barrels of fuel at the current customer tariff without any increase in customer rates. And it is important that you listen carefully to this part: However, GPL needs 2,462,380 barrels of fuel to meet its generation requirements. The GPL needs funding to procure, therefore, an additional 805,009 barrels of fuel at approximately US\$104.00 per barrel. This equates to \$18 billion, with the exchange rate being \$215.00. GPL is projected to utilise 2,462,380 barrels of fuel in 2025 at an average weighted cost of US\$104.00 per barrel. The break-even cost that the company can sustain is US\$70 per barrel, given the current tariff structure charged to our customers. The company requires a difference of US\$34.00 per barrel to maintain its operation.

Mr. Chairman, I need to add some additional information in the sense that we have not increased the rate of electricity for the household and for any of the consumers from the time we have taken office. Notwithstanding the shocks that would have seen fuel prices going through the roof on many occasions and other issues suffered by GPL, our people today, January, 2025 are paying the same rate that they were paying for electricity pre-COVID-19 in Guyana. The point is that you have a Government that has not increased electricity rates in five years. We took off value-added tax (VAT) from old age pensioners and all those people who were not paying before. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, if you want to engage in a shouting match, you will have to do it outside. If you cannot do it voluntarily, we can ask you to do it by a motion from the House.

Ms. Lawrence: Under the same line item 6321, may I turn the Hon. Prime Minister's attention to page 468 – Guyana Energy Agency (GEA)? Could the Hon. Prime Minister kindly say when we would see the reports for 2016 through 2023 for this Agency being laid in the National Assembly?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, that was already laid in the House at the last sitting.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow-up: Through you, Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Prime Minister kindly say when the last report was laid?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The report for the year 2022 was laid in the House ...

Mr. Chairman: We can check the records and clarify. In fact, Mr. Patterson, on 15th January of this year, the Prime Minister (PM) had complied with tabling the information. I was so informed by our staff.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to interrupt. The PM had several Questions, including the contracts for the gas-to-shore and these things. What he laid on 16th January was the disaggregation of the money that he ...

Mr. Chairman: He had answered some of the others in terms of what he can do and what he cannot.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, could I refer you to the *Hansard*?

Mr. Chairman: Please do.

Mr. Patterson: I went through them. He apologised for not laying them here, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, we have the report from the Prime Minister that reports from that agency were tabled for up to 2022.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Prime Minister. Could the Hon. Prime Minister tell this Committee what is being done to assist the other agencies – Hinterland Electrification Company Inc, Lethem Power, right through to the Port Kaituma Power and Light Company so that they can get their financials up-to-date and lay them with the Auditor General? I refer you to the Auditor General's 2023 Report.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Thank you for raising that question. We have since appointed some special Auditors to travel to each of those utilities and do the audit work to bring them up to speed with the requirements for submission to this House.

Mr. Patterson: I am back to GPL. On page 468, the Hon. Prime Minister has given us a number. Could the Hon. Prime Minister say to this Committee, in anticipation of fuel required, how much fuel will be for power ship 1, power ship 2 and Colombia 27 sets? In addition to this, the Hon. Prime Minister, when this agency came here before, indicated to us that there were other costs, other than fuel...that is outstanding because he promised to do that, Sir. You are nodding, so you understand that is outstanding. They had to pay transportation and other auxiliary costs. Where is that catered for? All that the Prime Minister stated was that the \$18 billion goes towards fuel. It is a four-part question.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I will lay the information over. The Hon. Member is asking for a lot of information and it is better for me to lay it over.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Prime Minister.

Mr. Patterson: Transmission and distribution. The Hon. Prime Minister is on record as telling this House that whenever there is a blackout, all you have to do is connect two wires, and you would get back power. Could the Hon. Prime Minister say if any of this \$18 billion is for the connection of two wires so that we do not have any blackouts?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: A *gyaff* in the House should not be formalised at this stage. That was not officially mentioned in this House. If I could recall, there was a break, and there were a lot of discussions across the House, so that should not be formalised. What should be formalised and accurately reported on is the state of the transmission and distribution system that we inherited when we assumed Office on 2nd October, 2020. That transmission system is being maintained and improved from then to now. It has been modernised, too, in preparation for the evacuation of the current from the gas-to-energy project. What we are doing, with everything else in Guyana...Firstly, there was a rescue operation, and then there was the putting of everything on a sound development trajectory. This is year five of it.

Mr. Patterson: That seems to have evoked a lot of comments from this side. Could I ask the Prime Minister...Maintenance is ongoing. Is anything contained here? I asked about the transportation for the fuel, and I asked for the other auxiliary costs, which came up to \$600 million when he came here before, initially for GPL. He omitted to respond to that.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Hon. Member is fully aware of how the GPL operates. The simple answer is that within the operating costs budget of GPL, everything that he mentioned there is being funded. What we are funding is the fuel. The movement of the fuel, *et cetera*, is funded by the operating costs of the corporation.

Mr. Patterson: Could the Hon. Prime Minister say what is the current level of loss – line and commercial loss – inherited at the moment?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I can recall at the time of becoming Prime Minister, when I asked a similar question to the management of GPL, I was given a figure of 28. Today, I would like to report that it is 24.5.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman – and could check with the Parliament as well – when this question was asked of the Prime Minister, he, in writing, stated that GPL, under our government, was saving over \$450 million annually because of the reduction. Is he saying that when he said that he was incorrect? The record is there in writing at the Parliament.

6.00 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Hon. Member is being disingenuous here, and I really do not want to get into a back and forth with him. There are many factors that led to those savings, including the drop in fuel prices that they, during their time in government, failed to pass on to the people of Guyana. Those moneys went as revenue into their pockets.

Mr. Patterson: My final question is through to the Parliament and to [*Inaudible*] of course that the Hon. Prime Minister responded to a question saying that the reduction that they inherited saved GPL \$450 million. It had zero to do with fuel. It was a reduction in the losses. Can I ask you, Mr. Chairman, as you have done before, to ask the Parliament to find the response and, as you have done before, circulate it? Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: We will endeavour to fact-check and circulate. Hon. Prime Minister, do you want to respond?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I will subject myself to the fact check as so directed by you.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Prime Minister, on the very line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. On page 468, Hon. Member, I note for the National Communications Network (NCN) that we had an approved sum... *[Interruption]* Sorry, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Are we getting a repeat of education here? Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions under Power Generation.

Programme: 023- Power Generation – \$25,540,797,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 024 – Telecommunications and Innovation - \$6,675,727,000

Ms. Hughes: Mr. Prime Minister, 6242: could you say which building this refers to? For 6242, Maintenance of Buildings, there is \$40 million there.

Mr. Chairman: Give him a chance; he is checking with his staff.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: This 6242 is related to the maintenance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) hubs, and that is throughout the length and breadth of the country where we have ICT hubs.

Ms. Hughes: A follow-up: Does that relate to the maintenance of all of the hubs? Some of the hubs were just established, so I am curious as to where those hubs might be and which ones.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Some of these hubs were constructed about three years ago, so some of them are subject to some minor maintenance.

Ms. Hughes: I am sorry. I could not hear. Could you repeat?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am saying that some of these hubs were constructed about three years ago and two years ago, and there are some minor things like plumbing works, some electrical works...

Ms. Hughes: So, the budget...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, give him a chance to answer.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There are some minor repairs to some of the rooms. We talked about lighting already. So, that sum will go towards the minor repairs for the hubs throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. It may look like a large amount, but if you really disaggregate it among 40 hubs, it is not much.

Ms. Hughes: Follow-up: How many hubs are included?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: At minimum, 40 hubs will be maintained with this money.

Ms. Hughes: Can I go to 6284?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you can.

Ms. Hughes: Prime Minister, could you disaggregate that amount? Again, we have a huge increase from the previous sum.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The disaggregation of the \$277.1 million in our budget under 6284 will cater for operational costs for the Digital Identity Card, the registry main office and nine regional offices. Secondly, internet connectivity charges, software licence and, finally, industry and innovations programme. The money will be utilised under those four headings. I can repeat it for you if you want.

Ms. Hughes: No, that is okay. Thank you, Prime Minister. Would you be good enough to tell me the companies that the internet charges are being paid to?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The charges are being paid to the National Data Management Authority (NDMA).

Ms. Hughes: Okay. Is none going to the private sector companies? I know that in the past, we would have paid to Digicel. There is no private sector, just the NDMA.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am advised that we purchase in bulk from Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (GTT), which is now One Guyana and Digicel. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** It is One Communications, not One Guyana.] One Communications. My correction.

Ms. Hughes: I want to go now to Volume 2 and just ask you to break down how many ICT hubs were created and opened since 2020 to where we are in 2024. The question associated with that is really in relation to the ICT Access Project, which should be finished by now.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am happy that the Hon. Member did ask that question because I have a little history that perhaps may be placed in one my future books. When I assumed the appointment of Prime Minister of Guyana, we had about 14 containers parked in the compound. When I started to inquire about this project, overnight, a building was rented, and everything was moved from those containers into that building. Basically, we had months upon months of nothing being done and staff being paid. We have reached the stage today where I can report that 131 ICT hubs were constructed and equipped and are now functional in mainly, as the project denotes, Hinterland, Poor and Remote Communities of Guyana. The project has been extended to February, 2026, and this has been deemed one of the most successful projects as such around the hemisphere. It has been extended so we can complete the 200-odd ICT hubs that have been envisioned to be completed under this project.

Ms. Hughes: A follow-up. The 14th August, 2020, *Guyana Chronicle* would show that when you assumed office, 70 ICT hubs had been created. So, therefore, if you are saying from 2020 to now, you are in fact saying that you have created just 56 hubs in the last four years. So, please, could you clarify? There are Department of Public Information (DPI) reports that go back to this statement, including the most recent ones. So, I am curious as to how many hubs you created in 2023.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: What we had was 70 Wi-Fi connections at different locations around Guyana, mainly on the Coast, not ICT hubs that were constructed, as the project signified, Hinterland, Poor and Remote Communities. That is a separate connection. We call it Wi-Fi GY now, but this project with the US\$17.1 million really took off after the 2nd October, 2022.

Ms. Hughes: For the record of the House, I just want it to be absolutely clear...

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I have the information ...

Ms. Hughes: That I signed...

Mr. Chairman: Hon...

Ms. Hughes: I thought he had finished. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

[Interruption]

Mr. Chairman: Pot and kettle.

Ms. Ferguson: Me?

Mr. Chairman: I am just talking about pot and kettle; I am not speaking of lid or bottom. Go ahead, Hon. Prime Minister. You were on the floor.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I have some information here that talks about Wi-Fi connectivity by region, and it talks about us, in 2020, having 405 Wi-Fi connections, giving one megabyte per second. By 2023, we had increased the connections to 850, and we had expanded the bandwidth from one to five megabytes per second. At the end of 2024, we had increased the Wi-Fi connections to 1091, and we had expanded the bandwidth from five megabytes per second to 300 plus megabytes per second. It means that in the hinterland communities, our citizens can have their Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship and study from home; our medical personnel can utilise this for telemedicine. So, all in all, working as a whole of government approach – you like to talk about a whole of government approach – has led to improving the lives and livelihood of people of Guyana, especially the people in the hinterland. This is another example of us being able to not only bridge the digital divide but also bridge the development divide in Guyana.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Prime Minister, your numbers were announced too fast for me, but see if I get this right. You moved from one megabyte to 300 megabytes in five years.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Correct, Mr. Chairman. One megabyte in 2020 to five megabytes in 2023, and at the end of 2024, 300 plus megabytes.

Mr. Chairman: There is a 300 times increase in bandwidth.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Yes, Mr. Chairman, 300 times increase.

Mr. Chairman: The connectivity was from 400 to 1,000.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: From 50 to 1,091.

Mr. Chairman: That is 2.5 times. Okay, thank you.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Fair, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to go to 6322 – Subsidies and Contributions to Intl. Organisations. Actually, I can take it from Volume 2, Mr. Prime Minister. Is the Telecommunications Agency paying any subscriptions to international organisations and which ones?

Mr. Chairman: I was about to ask if it is not contained.

Ms. Hughes: It is actually not listed in the appendix.

Mr. Chairman: No?

Ms. Hughes: That is why I am asking.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: At present, we are not paying any contributions to any international or regional organisations.

Ms. Hughes: Just for clarification, the International Telecommunication Union, the Caribbean Telecommunications Union and all the Latin American agencies that we work with – are we not paying for any of those?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: It is not being paid through the Office of the Prime Minister. As you would recall, those are paid through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ms. Hughes: I know those agencies come directly under...In terms of the operation and going to international meetings and that kind of thing, it goes through the Telecommunications Agency. That is why I was asking if it is being paid.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: To the best of my recollection and I will get this information and perhaps lay it over to you....

Ms. Hughes: Sure.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: ...whenever these requests come to the Office of the Prime Minister, we prepare a Cabinet paper, it goes to Cabinet, and it is directed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation deals with it.

Ms. Hughes: Right. I did not see it under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Ministry of Finance or under your ministry. Maybe if you could lay over a listing of the agencies that we are still maintaining...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you know there is a standing rule. If there is zero, you cannot ask a question.

Ms. Hughes: That is why I asked it under this.

Mr. Chairman: Hear me out. If there is zero...I permitted you to go for an explanation. The Prime Minister said a Cabinet memo goes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. You can prosecute that when we come to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Programme: 024 – Telecommunications and Innovation – \$6,675,727,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 021 – Prime Minister's Secretariat – \$57,000,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Under the Government Information and Communication Services, line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – a sum of \$915,647,000... Programme 25, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Mahipaul is on the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. Programme 25, current expenditure. Am I correct?

Ms. Lawrence: He did not put it.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry. That fell to the bottom of my page on the computer. I actually put 021, capital expenditure

Mr. Mahipaul: Oh, capital expenditure.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence? We will come back to that because it fell to the bottom of my page.

Ms. Lawrence: No, Sir. I was just drawing your attention to that.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, where are you at? I think everybody is a bit confused now. Are we on capital expenditure, Programme 021?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, we are.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you.

Programme: 021 – Prime Minister's Secretariat – \$57,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: I will finish the capital and come back to Programme 025, current expenditure, because it fell off at the bottom of the page on my computer.

Mr. Mahipaul: Okay.

Programme: 022 – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$150,000,000

Programme: 022 – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$150,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: We may need to get the power generators back with the Prime Minister.

Programme: 023 – Power Generation – \$55,385,481,000

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. It was even before me. Project code 2610600 – Gas to Power Project. We have already expended \$105.3 billion. This year, we are coming for \$51.2 billion. The first thing that I will ask the Prime Minister is quite a simple question, Sir. What is the completion date of this project based on your... [*inaudible*]? Easy question; you should have it at the top of your head.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: For the Hon. Member, on 1st November, the simple cycle will be on stream for the gas to energy project.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, PM. Sir, you have \$51.184 billion for 2025. Firstly, can you disaggregate that? You are anticipating it; I see you have it in front of you.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The disaggregation: \$36.2 billion - natural gas power plant and natural gas liquid plant; Lindsayca CH4 Guyana Incorporated – \$1,754,046,000; project management consultants – Engineers India Limited; transformers – Cumming's Electrical Company Limited – \$331,745,230; transmission lines and substations – Kalpataru Projects International Limited – \$4,549,437,478; supervision, transformers, transmission lines and substation control centres – Stantec Consulting International Limited – \$325,238,700; supply, integration, installation and commissioning of SCADA, GMS, EMS, OTS and remote terminal units – Open Systems International Incorporated – \$958,400,000; consulting and engineering services for the integration of Guyana National Control Centre (GNCC) SCADA, EMS, GMS by deBarr – \$67,179,478; engineering, procurement and construction services for the construction of a building for the Guyana National Control Centre – PowerChina International Group Limited – \$554,326,457; consultancy services for the construction of a building for the Guyana National Control Centre – Green Soul Engineering – \$38,989,125; Dispute Avoidance and Adjudication Board –

\$74,007,280; land acquisition – \$33,000,000; relocation of subsea cables – \$6,255,000,000. That gives us a total of \$51,148,235,000.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, just a follow-up. To whom is \$6 billion payable for the relocation of the subsea cable? What is the location? Are you relocating the one from Vreed-en-Hoop to Kingston, and who is that contract being paid for?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We will have to advertise and go through the process to determine who will do it. So, the money is just being allocated for that task.

Mr. Patterson: Can you inform the Committee of the location, and are you discontinuing the subsea cable Vreed-en Hoop - Kingston?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We will lay over all the details pertaining to this, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Prime Minister. Lay over again... Gas to shore II: You have made provisions, I know, for the consultancy in your current expenditure. Is there no provision in this for any works for the Gas to shore II capital works?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, for gas to shore, the only thing that will be done as part of this budget is a consultancy for the evaluation of the request for proposal (RFP).

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. Of the names gone through here, what is the status of the Siemens Energy SAS contract for the operation and maintenance (O&M) of this gas to shore I and what is the O&M cost associated with Siemens Energy SAS?

6.30 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Yes, Siemen Energy SAS is the company but, all costs related to the contract is being negotiated now. We are not in a position to tell you what it will cost. The negotiation process is in progress as I speak.

Mr. Patterson: Was the public information that Siemen Energy has been awarded a contract premature?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: No. A contract is awarded but the cost associated with that contract is still being negotiated.

Mr. Patterson: Could the Prime Minister explain that he awarded a contract without a contract sum to the country? That explanation is not to me because I am a simpleton.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: No. Let me explain that to you first. Siemens Energy was selected – yes. In order to award the contract, we have to arrive at figures. The selection has been done. However, the negotiation is ongoing. At the end of the negotiation, the formalisation, which entails the signing of a contract for ‘X’ amount of money for ‘Y’ number of services will be done. Sorry for rushing the answer earlier but I thought you understood where I was coming from but I had to be technical there. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I do not know how technical it is but, fortunately, this is live streamed so the rest of the country can assess how technical your response is. Siemens Energy has been awarded the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) for the power plant. The distribution, bottling, all the other fancy procurement sales and all the other fancy auxiliaries claimed on this project, could the Hon. Prime Minister say the status of that?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There is an advertisement out for that aspect of the project.

Mr. Patterson: Could we say that all of this will be done before 1st November?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The simple answer is yes.

Mr. Patterson: Could I ask now about the various big sub-contracts? There is Lindsayca with the sum of \$34 billion; what is the current percentage? The (inaudible) I think for the transmission and distribution is \$4.55 billion, what is the percentage completed as of 3rd December? The 1.8 billion which is the number two. The Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) operations, Power China's... [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: *(Inaudible)*] ...current percentage completed for the various components starting with \$32 billion.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The information for Lindsayca CH4 Guyana Inc. (LNCH4) engineering 68.54%, procurement 84.41%, logistics 33.40%, construction 20.15% and overall 62.46%. I will have to lay over the additional information that you asked for.

Mr. Patterson: Could I move on now, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: You have the floor, Hon. Member.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the Small Hydro project, you have now a sum of \$148 million, which is quite commendable. What would that cover?

Mr. Chairman: Which head is that?

Mr. Patterson: Project code 2610100 – Small Hydro Projects – \$148,500,000.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. We are on the same page. Did you say \$8 million?

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I said \$148 million. Well, I did not use the point five.

Mr. Chairman: Okay good. You have the floor, Hon. Member.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: My understanding is the Hon. Member wants a disaggregation of the \$148,500,000, if that is so: the Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) contract for the rehabilitation and upgrade of the Moco Moca hydropower plant to 0.7 megawatt (mw) and Kumu 1.5-megawatt hydropower plant in Region 9, \$55,220,000 and as a final payment for the operational acceptance of Kumu. Secondly, the EPC contract for transmission lines is \$90,682,000 which will go to the completion, acceptance and final installation works of 16.84 kilometres (Km) of 13.8 kilovolts (KV) transmission line and communication infrastructure. Project Management Unit (PMU) support staff, \$596,000 – that will cover emoluments for the Clerk of Works and Technicians. There are two Technicians there. The PMU support logistics, \$2 million and the cost for maintenance of two vehicles. This will give us a total of \$148,500,000.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Project code 2610100 – Small Hydro Projects: Is there any of the small hydro or mini hydro geared for middle or upper Mazaruni for 2025?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The simple answer is no. It is not in the budget, so it cannot be there for 2025. What we will have to do and I would like to put my neck on the block and promise you that in the next five-year development cycle that will start from 2026 to 2030, I will ensure that we have that discussion of hydro for middle Mazaruni.

Mr. Patterson: I want to go back to power generation and gas-to-shore. The \$74.2 million for arbitration services, could you say who that is paid to? Could you also update the Committee on the status of the two arbitration claims reportedly? That is the first because it is a two-part question.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The sum is for both the international and the local components who will be representing us in the arbitration. However, at this stage, I am unable to comment on the status of this arbitration.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, you are unable to comment. Could you say if the first one is completed or not – I think just for wholeness if at any stage – not the money?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I did mention and perhaps I should repeat that I am not in a position to comment on the status of the arbitration.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am going back to the EPC contractor. You stated that the construction part is 20% completed.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Correct.

Mr. Patterson: If that is correct, could you state what remain to be completed of the 80% so we can get a picture?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There are some additional works from the foundation and the assembly of the plant to be completed. However, the components are basically in the country already.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am asking about the construction component, not the entire project. I am asking of the 20% construction component and not the assembling or the plant but the physical construction.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am advised that the civil works and the foundation – those are the main construction components and that is why we give you that figure. The rest is just a matter of assembling everything together.

Programme:023 – Power Generation – \$55,385,481,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 024 – Telecommunications and Innovation – \$10,062,350,000

Mr. Patterson: Project Code 1219100 – National Data Management Authority: You have a provision and you are seeking an allocation of almost \$10 billion being \$9.924 billion. Could the Hon. Prime Minister indicate or disaggregate that sum for us?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Capital expenditure \$9.9 billion caters for rollover projects as follows: provision for the expansion of safe country programme – phases three and four – \$6.2 billion; electronic gate (E-gate) and border control systems – \$1.9 billion; electronic identification (ID) enrolment and issuance system – the identification project – \$1,041,000,000; and safe road intelligent system – \$382.9 million. There is an additional \$.4 billion which caters for other capital expenditures such as: land transport – \$78.3 million; generators – \$65 million; solar power – \$45 million; internet infrastructure upgrade – \$40 million; surveillance systems – \$31 million; core routers – \$20 million; and software, furniture and equipment – \$118.8 million.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, regarding the e-gate system by the National Data Management Authority (NDMA), could the Hon. Prime Minister state, how many e-gates this \$1.9 billion caters to? Who is the company from which you procured them from?

6.45 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The 12 electronic gates (e-gates) were catered for under this project – six at Arrivals and six at Departures. The company's name is Nova Technologies.

Mr. Patterson: On this same project code for the query on the e-gates, is the Hon. Prime Minister aware that there was a contract signed and awarded for 10 e-gates at US\$3 million? This was previously, Sir. I think the contract was signed in 2019. It was for 10 e-gates at a cost of US\$3 million – \$600 million.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I can only answer for what is in this Budget. Unfortunately, I do not have a historical memory of what transpired before.

Mr. Patterson: That is absolutely correct. I just wanted to get that on the record so we can speak. Sir, the National Electronic Identification Programme was supposed to be rolled out in 2022. Could the Hon. Prime Minister say, at this late stage, why it was delayed? What are the deliverables, if they have changed from the two-year delay?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I have a document before me. I was briefed on this long before now. On 10th March, 2023, was the date the contract was signed. Everything is going according to the contract and we are scheduled to go live in 2025. We are now in 2025.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am quoting from an article. This is September, 2024. [Ms. Ferguson: It is 4th September.] It is 4th September, 2024. Thank you, Ms. Ferguson.

“... ID card before end of year”

This is the *Stabroek News*, Sir. Of course, I am quoting the Hon. Prime Minister:

“It is coming along. We have moved through all problems and are on target to deliver to the people of Guyana”

In July, 2024, the Hon. Prime Minister... I do not know the document that he quoted from. I am quoting based on what he told the *Stabroek News* – the first one would be delivered in November of last year.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I think the Hon. Member is trying to take us back to when reasons were given for us going live in June, 2025. The reasons given then were refurbishing and retrofitting of the building and the requirement for an additional power system. This, as was mentioned then and again, is on target for June, 2025.

Mr. Patterson: The Prime Minister is saying that he was misquoted by the newspaper.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am not saying that. I am saying that June, 2025 is the date of the completion for this project. Any project will have challenges and one must work with the contractor through these challenges.

Mr. Patterson: Prime Minister...

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: If we agree that the new date for the completion of the project is June, 2025, then the new date is now June, 2025.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am only responding to your initial response, which said that we are making up these dates. I am quoting you, Prime Minister. I acknowledge that every project has delays.

You said that we are making up dates. I do not know if somehow or the other we transposed these dates into your head to make them up. You reported this to the people of Guyana.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, it is on record that the people of Guyana have been clearly reported to on this project. The people of Guyana, in 2024, were given the reasons for the delay. They know full well that the new completion date for this project would fall in June, 2025.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you. For the \$6.4 billion, is it for the Safe City or Safe Road project? What is the correct name? Could the Hon. Prime Minister say once again when this project would be completed and delivered? This is for the \$6.4 billion. You have Safe Road and Safe City, I think. Who is the company executing at the moment?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, if you would recall, when this project started, it was Safe City. It has since been expanded to the Safe Country Project. Obviously, there would be different delivery dates because we are talking about the 10 Administrative Regions. The expansion that we are talking about to complete is in Region 4. It is projected to be completed by the end of 2025. These are 320 Intelligent Video Surveillance (IVS) sites and supporting systems to complete Region 4 as projected by the end of 2025.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. I assume the rest of the country would be done at a subsequent later time. Is that what you are providing for here, Sir?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Hon. Member is correct – Safe City to Safe Country. We will go little by little until we finish it.

Programme: 024 – Telecommunications and Innovation – \$10,062,350,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 025 – Government Information and Communication Services – \$180,000,000

Mr. Chairman: We are asking the Government Information and Communication Services' staff to join the Prime Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, you have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Member, may I turn your attention to project code 4502900, National Communications Network (NCN)? I notice a request for \$150 million for 2025. The explanation given here states:

“Provision for upgrading and expansion of the network.”

To the Hon. Member, could you say where the upgrade will be done? Is it at the NCN in Georgetown or the NCN in Region 10?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, are you fixing up Region 10 where you are from?

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: The expansion will take place in Georgetown, Linden and Essequibo.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much, Prime Minister, for your response. May I to assume that with this investment and the likelihood of an expansion in the network at NCN, Guyanese – whether in Region 2, 10 and some areas here in Georgetown – would be able to have a wider viewership of the workings of the National Assembly between the Opposition and Government?

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: To answer the Hon. Member, Guyanese are already enjoying improvements as a result of what we have accomplished in 2024 and some of the previous years. This is just a continuation of the development ensuring that the improvements and the wider population in the other regions can now also benefit from what you have mentioned – the improved communications coverage by the NCN. This is part of our development programme. Development, support and communication are important for Guyanese to understand what their Government is doing for them, not only in the communities but throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. When they speak to their counterparts, be it Guyanese in the diaspora or wherever, they are more informed as to what is taking place in Guyana; what took place from 2nd August, 2020, to now; and what is going to happen and continue taking place in Guyana for the remainder of 2025 and in the possible future.

Mr. Figueira: Prime Minister, on the same project code, for the NCN Linden branch, the equipment being utilised for the service provided to the community by the NCN was procured for the Linden Broadcasting Network (LBN) – the cameras, the monitors and every aspect of the entire makeup of the Linden arm of NCN. That equipment which is being utilised is that of LBN. The upgrade that you are doing, would that facilitate the purchasing of NCN’s own equipment so that the present equipment being utilised – which belongs to LBN – could be returned to LBN?

[**Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)]

Pardon me.

[**Hon. Member:** The NCN is upgrading.]

What is the premise? Yes.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: My understanding is that this purchase here is a set of components to ensure there is a relay system. That will result in the improvement in the coverage in Linden. As it pertains to the LBN...

Mr. Figueira: Sir, are you aware...?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: My understanding is that everything in Linden, including what you mentioned, the LBN, has been incorporated under one umbrella – the NCN. As we speak, they are operating two channels. The issue as to the LBN does not obtain.

Mr. Figueira: It does not what, Sir?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: It is now NCN. It is now NCN. Everything has been incorporated, and the people today, are having two channels instead of one.

Mr. Figueira: They always had two channels and it is because of the...

7.00 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: They have two operational channels. There were times when one of the channels had issues, but now all two are fully operational. I am aware of what is happening in Linden. We are committing ourselves, from time to time, to keep modernising and ensuring that the service provided to the people who will benefit them from the improvements that are taking place on the coastland.

Mr. Figueira: I have a follow up, Cde, Chairman.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Sometimes, it is good to go back in history to understand and appreciate what we have done for you over the last four years. In January, 2021, the National Communications Network's technical team installed a new master control operating software, allowing the station to function independently. Since then, NCN has made major investments in the branch which include: the installation of a new 60 Kilo-volt-amperes (KVA) generator and applicant tracking system (ATS); repairs and refurbishment of the broadcasting tower and antenna system; procurement of essential equipment – including clerical and production-related computers, wireless microphones, large format uninterruptible power supply (UPS), battery replacements; and, very importantly, recruitment of several staff members to enhance the operations. These

efforts reflect NCN's commitment to strengthen the Linden branch by ensuring reliable broadcasting and improving efficiency. We are working for you.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, for the history lesson, Hon. Prime Minister but my question remains the same. The equipment that was purchased for NCN, Cabinet approved finances for the purchase of those equipment for the LBN. Are you saying to me, Hon. Prime Minister, that all of the equipment and the purchases that were done are now under the purview of NCN? If so, what legal instrument gives you that prerogative to take up all of the equipment that were purchased for LBN?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The simple answer to the first part of the question is, yes. Everything is now under NCN – one umbrella. The second part – what is important to the people? The station that you know as LBN continues to operate and provide better service due to the infusion of capital to ensure that the service is improved in Linden. Everything is under NCN, but everything is on a better footing in terms of the delivery of the service to the people of Linden.

Mr. Figueira: Do you have the legal remit to occupy all of the equipment that was under the purview of LBN?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The National Communications Network is a legal entity.

Mr. Figueira: So is LBN.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: They are working hand in glove

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

The issue of illegality does not obtain. Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I was just going to bring the Hon. Member's attention to the line item we are dealing with, which is the purchase of equipment. You have been very gracious, Prime Minister, to answer questions outside of this remit at this time.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, may I?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I will have the Hon. Member, Ms. Beverly Alert first.

Ms. Alert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Prime Minister, if I may turn your attention to Volume 2, Indicators five and six. The State radio and State television reach 10 regions, but Indicators one and two says that you are going to put down two new radio stations and two new television relay stations. Could you rationalise that for us? What new areas are you going to reach that you have not reached? What is happening here?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, rationalise that, please.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: You are correct. Basically, we are doing the new relay system which will further enhance what is already being delivered to the people. For example, in Region 10, the relay station will serve the Linden community and its environs, with an approximate range of 17 miles coverage area. This relay system can be integrated with a radio studio to include local programming. The relay station will broadcast the content directly from the Voice of Guyana (VOG) and will receive the content *via* satellite. We are improving the existing system for wider coverage. There are several satellite communities in Linden, and once there is the relay system in place, people will be able to reach those communities.

Ms. Alert: What is the present geographic coverage of NCN radio and NCN Television? With these new relay stations and a radio station, what would now be your expanded geographic coverage? Would that cover 90% of Guyana or 100%? What would be the geographic coverage?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I would just like to repeat that we already have a presence in all of the 10 regions. With these relay systems, we are increasing or expanding the coverage within the existing regions. I do not know if that makes sense to you. There may be a station here, but it only has a certain range. When a relay station is put in nearby, it expands the range, so more people will have coverage. By saying that, there may be stations in each of the administrative region, one could go back and put in the relay stations to expand the coverage within that region. I already said earlier that, yes, there may be a station that is covering Linden but, what happens to the people in the satellite villages or communities outside of Linden when the relay stations are put in those communities can be reached. There may be coverage already in Region 10, Linden, but we are improving or expanding the coverage within Region 10 by putting in additional relay stations.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, just to bring to your attention, I can take one question. We have exhausted the 90 minutes allocated for the Prime Minister's agency and, in addition to that, the 34

minutes of savings. We are supposed to stop this head at 7.09 p.m. It is 7.08 p.m. Hon. Chief Whip, go ahead.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, very much, Cde. Chairman. My question is premised on last Thursday's Sitting in which the Prime Minister was addressing the House. I note that the National Communications Network was not carrying Members live at the time. My question is, what percentage of coverage for the Parliamentary Opposition is made available *via* NCN?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There was 100% but none was carried live. It was obviously a delayed broadcast for the entire debate – all of the presentations. It was not only for Thursday. I think I know what you are getting at. Those *Facebook* posts are inaccurate. All of the presentations were not carried live; they were delayed.

Mr. Jones: No, but that is the question. It is premised on that. The fact that the Prime Minister of Guyana is addressing the National Assembly and the National Communications Network is not carrying him live, but rather we are seeing the Vice-President.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: There was a decision made to carry all of the presentations by all of the Hon. Members of the House in a delayed manner. Personally, as the Prime Minister, I will take offense if one tries to treat me more special than the Hon. Members of the House here.

Mr. Jones: All right. Could the schedule be made available?

Mr. Chairman: To the Hon. Chief Whip and the Hon. Prime Minister, I do not want to treat anybody with more preference, so let me stick to the time as agreed. It is 7.10 p.m.

Programme: 025 – Government Information and Communication Services – \$180,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Current Expenditure

Programme: 025 – Government Information and Communication Services – \$1,395,045,000

Programme: 025 – Government Information and Communication Services – \$1,395,045,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, we thank you and all of your staff from all of the different agencies.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Hon. Members on the other side of the House, for all the questions that they raised and the fact that I was able to deal with all those questions to the satisfaction of them. Thank you, very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much, Prime Minister and your staff. Hon. Members, we have two agencies remaining. If we take a 45-minute break, we can get an earlier closure today. We will return at 7.55 p.m.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting suspended at 7.11 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.58 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: I invite the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, the Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlal and his team. We need to let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

Suspension of Standing Orders No. 10(1)

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No.10(1) be suspended to allow the sitting of the National Assembly to proceed during the consideration of the Estimates beyond 8.00 p.m. until the business of the day is completed.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we suspend the necessary Standing Orders so that the Assembly could work beyond 8.00 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Agency: 52 Ministry of Legal Affairs

Current Expenditure

Programme: 521 – Policy Development and Administration – \$218,359,000

8.00 p.m.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Attorney General, I have noticed in line item 6116 there is an increase of six staff members. While I am not interested in their names, could you please provide me with their designations, their remunerations, their skill sets, and their qualifications? Thank you.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: I certainly could. For the personal assistant to the Attorney General, the salary is \$234,300; for one Systems Administrator, the salary is \$257,587; for one Accounts Clerk II, the salary is \$106,324; for two Typist Clerks, the salary is \$94,765 each; and for one Clerk II (General), the salary is \$106,324. I do not think you need their...

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I would not need their qualifications, having regard to their designation.

Mr. Nandlall: You do not need their qualifications.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: No, having regard to their designation, it is implied. Could you kindly disaggregate line item – sorry, Mr. Chairman, through you – 6284, please?

Mr. Nandlall: Line item 6284. This fund caters for the recurring activities such as advertisements, stipends for Ministerial Tender Board members, a Microsoft 365 business subscription, as well as a new software, as recommended by the National Data Management Authority (NDMA), to address certain identified cybersecurity deficiencies.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, I turn the AG's attention to line item 6117, Temporary Employees. I see that there is one here for 2025. Would this employee be working for the full 12 months of the year as a temporary employee?

Mr. Nandlall: It is a part-time, temporary cleaner or cleaners.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cleaners? May I ask how many cleaners?

Mr. Nandlall: Sorry. It is a part-time cleaner.

Mr. Mahipaul: A part-time cleaner. Sir, may I ask the Hon. AG, when he says a part-time cleaner, how many hours per day?

Mr. Nandlall: I am told that whenever the current permanent cleaners go on leave, this person is used instead or in lieu.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman.

Programme: 521 – Policy Development and Administration – \$218,359,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 523 – Attorney General's Chambers – \$1,284,154,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. AG, I noticed that you plan to table 50 pieces of legislation this year, and I once again wish to commend you for your proactive and progressive stance in the justice sector. I know I might get some backlash again for saying this, but that being said, which of these bills are considered priority for the fiscal year? Are there any governance or constitutional related among them?

Mr. Nandlall: First of all, I will deeply appreciate it if you report to me the backlash, so that we can deal with it. We have a very aggressive legislative agenda which I have articulated on many occasions publicly and in this Committee. We have, for example – if I may list some that are considered a priority – the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill; the Integrity Commission (Amendment) Bill; the oil spill bill, that is not the proper name – it has a long name, but loosely it is called the oil spill bill; a trustees bill – we do not have a trustees act in Guyana. We have amendments to the Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT)

Act. We have a bill that will allow the State to dispose of assets that are held by the State while cases are pending, and that bill will authorise the State to sell those assets and deposit the moneys recovered therefrom in an interest-bearing account. The mischief of that legislation is to prevent assets deteriorating while cases are pending in the court. We have the Evidence Bill, which I doubt will reach the floor of the National Assembly. We have three bills coming out of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM): a CARICOM Arrest Warrant Bill, an Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record Bill, and we have a Regional Security System Bill. Do you want me to go on? It is a long list.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: What are some of the major ones?

Mr. Nandlall: Those are some of the major ones. My list is certainly not exhaustive, and Sir, I have many more. I cannot remember them offhand, but I can provide the Hon. Member with a list in terms of the priority.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, may I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6284, Other. I note for 2024, we had a budgetary sum of \$682,457,000, with a revision of \$627,090,000. I note that for 2025, the Attorney General's Chamber is now requesting \$424,715,000. My first question to the Hon. Member is whether he could disaggregate this sum and then I will have a few follow-ups, Sir. Thank you.

Mr. Nandlall: I certainly can disaggregate the sums, Sir. This line item covers payment of legal fees and payment for a new website for the Official Gazette – as the House would be aware, the Official Gazette is now online. It is a very important facility that our citizens access on a regular basis to apprise themselves of important publications. That website, which was created in 2013, I think, is the same website that we have been working with. It drastically needs modernisation and reformatting. That would be done this year. We have provision also under this line item for our anti-money laundering countering financing of terrorism activities. There is a broad spectrum of activities that we pursue under this head to keep our financial systems intact and to comply with other international regulations. We have also under this head the Land Regularisation programme, which is a special programme that the Ministry runs in tandem with Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, the Deeds Registries Authority, the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA), and the Ministry of Housing and Water, as well as the Land Registry. We have

successfully, Sir, undertaken in this exercise and delivered to hundreds of families – we have not reached the thousands as yet – titles and transports for lands that they have been occupying for decades. Next month, for example, over 250 transports will be distributed to the residents of Walton Hall on the Essequibo Coast. In a very well-publicised handing-over ceremony, we delivered over 250 titles at Cotton Tree, and we have a thousand more in the pipelines for about four or five villages on the West Coast of Berbice.

We are also working with the Ministry of Housing and Water to deliver 450 titles at Ann's Grove on the East Coast of Demerara. At Number 46 Village, on the Corentyne Coast, we have an entire village that we will regularise and deliver transports to. Those are just a few that I have mentioned, which are catered for under this head. It is also public knowledge that the Government is committed to doing that which is necessary for the establishment of a law school here to be managed and run by the Council of Legal Education of the West Indies. Work has begun already on the establishment of this initiative. We have already located approximately seven acres of land within the precincts of the University of Guyana's campus at Turkeyen. We have submitted a preliminary feasibility study to the Council of Legal Education as requested by the Council. The Council established a subcommittee of the Council to specifically address the issue of the establishment of another law school of the Council, this time in Guyana. That subcommittee met only last Wednesday, and certain timelines were agreed on for the submission of the entirety of the feasibility study in time for consideration by the Council at its September meeting. This head also covers the project of the Revised Laws of Guyana. It is well known that the last revision exercise was concluded in 2012, which produced the 'Nandlall Volumes' of the Laws of Guyana in purple.

Mr. Chairman: Here it is.

Mr. Nandlall: We started another law revision exercise because from 2012 to now we would have passed many laws. We are now concluding that law revision exercise, and that will bring our laws up to date up to 31st December, 2022. That will be the 'Nandlall Law Revision' Laws of Guyana, part two or the second edition – the only Attorney General who would have accomplished that feat twice. That exercise, Sir, as the distinguished Minister mentioned in his Budget speech, will be concluded in June of this year. Also under this head are moneys for the completion of the Law Reports of Guyana. The last volume, or last set of law reports, spanned 1977 to 2007. That, again, was launched between the period 2011 to 2015 when a particular person occupied the post of

Attorney General. Another edition, from 2007 to 2020, is now being completed. We have the volumes ready, and they are about to be sent to the printery, the Guyana National Printers Limited, for printing. That also will be launched or would be completed by June of this year or even before.

8.15 p.m.

We also pay for online subscriptions to law journals and other facilities that the lawyers use – library subscriptions like vLex and LexisNexis, *et cetera*. Sir, we intend to purchase a new case management system, to manage the thousands of files that we are dealing with every day in the Chambers of the Attorney General. I believe I have exhausted the exercises that are covered in relation to this sum.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Mr. Chairman, through you, yes, it is a long list, but I would like to pick from that list though the Hon. Member did not put cost association with each item that he listed. He made mention of legal fees. My question to the Hon. Member is, for this particular line item, whether he will be paying the remaining fees... First of all, let me ask him a question, whether moneys from this particular line item were paid for the ‘Gail and Burke’ matter, were paid for ‘Bharrat Jagdeo versus (vs) Bryan Max’ and were paid for ...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I see you are using the past tense. We are now dealing with...

Mr. Nandlall: I did not want to say it, Sir, but thank you very much.

Ms. Ferguson: I am getting somewhere. I am asking whether any funds from this allocation will be used to pay additional legal fees for the ‘Burke versus Gail’ matter, ‘Bharrat Jagdeo versus Bryan Max’, ‘Mustapha versus Aubrey Norton’ and ‘Annette Ferguson versus Bharrat Jagdeo’. Could the Hon. Member say whether there will funds in here to pay an additional, pay off, the fees, and whether he could tell the National Assembly who is the retained lawyer in these cases that I have just alluded to. Thank you very much.

Mr. Nandlall: All legal fees that would become due and owing, for the which the Attorney General’s Chambers retained lawyers, will be paid out of this account. That is the first thing. Secondly, if it is that the Attorney General’s Chambers retained any of the lawyers, in relation to any of the cases that the Hon. Member mentioned and those fees become due and payable, based upon the retainer contracts, then it will have to be paid.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow-up to the Hon. Member. Could the Hon. Member say whether moneys were paid for the cases that I made mention of earlier and when the first 50% of those funds were paid and, second, are there agreements between the Attorney General's office and that of the retained lawyer?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General, I think you have answered but you have an opportunity...

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Chairman, what is under consideration here are the Budget Estimates for the year 2025. I am not here to answer questions hitherto but in *futuro* only. My colleague has another facility to ask those questions. She did ask questions of that nature, but she did not ask them properly during the course of last year. [Ms. Ferguson: You would not like to know what I have.] The answers that I gave to her are not the answers that she wanted, simply because she did not ask the question that should have been asked.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you, could the Hon. Member provide to this National Assembly a status as to whether the cases that I have alluded to earlier, for which moneys were paid, are still ongoing or whether they have concluded?

Mr. Nandlall: Whether a case is pending in the High Court or not has nothing to do with these Estimates. These Estimates are for moneys that I have to account for to the people of Guyana for spending for the year 2025. I believe that I have adequately discharged that burden and responsibility.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up from the Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond's earlier question concerning legislation – the bills to come to the National Assembly. The Hon. Attorney General alluded to 50 bills. May I ask him, in keeping with the PPP/C's Manifesto, will we have a political campaign finances bill before the National Assembly among those 50?

Mr. Nandlall: Throughout these debates, beginning with the Budget Speech of my distinguished brother, Dr. Ashni Singh, we have repeatedly said that every single promise that we have made will be delivered. That is how I will answer that question.

Ms. Ferguson: Line item 6294 – Other. I note last year you expended \$1,787,000 and this year you are requesting a smaller sum of \$180,000. Could the Hon. Member say what this amount will be utilised for? Could he provide a disaggregation and whether this is enough, and if any moneys

from this line item will be expended to purchase Christmas gifts at the end of the year? Thank you very much.

Mr. Nandlall: I am happy that the questions are coming. This is being streamed live on the National Communications Network (NCN). The very paltry sum that is stated there, in the grand scheme of the \$1.4 trillion Budget, will cater for some law students from the University of Guyana, whom we normally accommodate every year to do an in-service programme. We pay them a small stipend of \$40,000 each.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Line item 6321– Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. The details of those subsidies show an allocation of \$218 million to the Constitution Reform Commission (CRC). Hon. Attorney General, could you advise the Committee as to whether the budget for the CRC has been approved, in keeping with the requirements of the Act?

Mr. Nandlall: Your Honour, the budget was submitted to the Ministry of Finance. We did not get an opportunity to pass it through the Constitution Reform Standing Committee. I plan, at the earliest opportunity, to have the Committee stamp upon it its *ex post facto* approval. The Hon. Member is correct in identifying a procedural hiccup.

Ms. Walton-Desir: A follow-up, Hon. Attorney General. This seems to be more than a procedural lapse. It is actually in direct contravention of section 13 of the Act. We are in the area of being in breach of our own Act that we passed in this National Assembly. I will move on. Mr. Chairman, through you, the Act also provides that the Commission, within the first month of its first meeting, ought to submit to the Committee its methodology and its time frame. To the best of your knowledge, has that been done?

Mr. Nandlall: That has not been done. The Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, can advise you that Mr. Sherwood Lowe is heading a sub-committee that is planning the agenda currently. I believe Mr. Mahipaul is a member of that Committee as well. They have not completed that task so that requirement has not been satisfied.

Ms. Walton-Desir: To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Lowe was appointed last week to head this committee. I am therefore wondering, what is the basis upon which we arrive at this number? We

could not have plucked it out of thin air. Could we? The allocation, the \$218 million, what does the Constitution Reform Commission envisage that it will be doing that will cost us \$218 million?

Mr. Nandlall: A budget was submitted and it includes a number of... First of all, you have the payment of stipends for the Chairperson and the members of the Commission. Then you have the activities. Though they have not been planned, they have been projected for. Though they have not been formally planned... Mr. Mahipaul will concur with me... [An Hon. Member: Hon.

Member.] Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul will concur with me that we have planned a programme that will bring the Commission in contact with experts from the Caribbean and further afield. In fact, that was a suggestion that came from Mr. Sherwood Lowe. There is also a public awareness initiative that the Commission has decided to launch, to bring public awareness to the citizenry of the importance of the Constitution, to educate our citizens about the provisions of the Constitution and perhaps, most importantly, the nature and purport of the constitutional reform exercise.

As you are aware, a large part of the constitutional reform programme will be the public engagement in a consultative process across the length and breadth of our country. That will require the Commission members and the Commission's secretariat to travel throughout Guyana to hold public hearings so that we can illicit the testimony, for want of a better word, of the members of the public for the preparation of the report. All of that is catered for here. We do not know how much of it will be accomplished. As you know, 10 members of the Constitution Reform Commission are politicians, and this is an election year. I want to be candid with you. I do not know how many of those outreaches, but every effort, no doubt, will be made to ensure that the work of the Commission is proceeded with alacrity.

8.30 p.m.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Hon. AG. Just one follow-up. Do you have a hard stop date as to when these activities are projected to begin? For example, the public outreach, is there a month? Could we anticipate that by March we will start seeing the roll out of this or that has not been decided?

Mr. Nandlall: Please appreciate that I am a singular member of the Commission and I am speaking on behalf of the Commission and I do not want to commit the Commission to a course that they

have not agreed upon. What I can assure you, and again the Hon. Member Mahipaul can corroborate me, is that we are in the process of working out that very schedule. I cannot put a time frame to the exercise.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: A quick follow-up to the Attorney General, and please guide me, I may be off. The question for you, Sir, is based on line item 6284 and what had been said previously. If there is a current or, possibly in this year, a private matter between a member of the Government and some individual, does the line item 6284 allow for moneys to be spent from it to deal with a private matter?

Mr. Nandlall: No, not a private matter; a private matter between two private citizens will not be paid for by the State.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Noted. So once the person is a government minister does that matter no longer be deemed private because the person is a minister?

Mr. Nandlall: When I say a private individual, I mean a minister is a public officer.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: So, in any case, once it has been deemed to be a minister then the matter is no longer considered private and so the funding can come from that line item 6284.

Mr. Nandlall: It depends on a case-to-case basis. There are private matters that are purely private, that the State does not get involved with, but if a minister is sued, or wishes to sue in respect of their performance of his or her official duties, then the State will pay for that, just like every public servant, any public officer. If you drive the Government's vehicle on the road and you make an accident, the Attorney General appears for you. Every police officer in this country, when they go out to execute their duties and they are accused of wrongdoing and are sued the Attorney General appears. The same principle applies to the Ministers of the Government, there is no differentiation or no priority in treatment, neither is there any discrimination in treatment.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: A follow-up, Mr. Chairman. Before I ask this question, are you familiar with 'Gail vs. Burke' matter? Are you familiar with that particular case?

Mr. Nandlall: It is 'Burke vs Gail' not 'Gail vs Burke'.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Sorry, ‘Burke vs Gail’; so you are familiar with that. Would you consider that to be a private or public matter for the Attorney General’s Chambers?

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Burke chose to sue Minister Gail Teixeira in relation to a statement that Minister Gail Teixeira made in her official capacity as a Minister of the Government; so that, obviously, is not a private matter.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Sir. I just wanted to confirm that.

Mr. Mahipaul: From this sum at line item 6284, \$424,715,000, the compensation to the family of Mr. Orin Boston, that \$24 million, is it being paid from this line?

Mr. Nandlall: No, the Ministry of Finance has a special account from which judgements are normally paid.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put the question...

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, please crave my indulgence. A follow-up to the question posed by MP Sarabo-Halley, my question is if a member of the public intends to sue a Member of Parliament, whether Opposition or Government, will the AG’s office then come in to play to represent that MP?

Mr. Nandlall: If that Member of Parliament is a minister of the government, then the AG will represent that person.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Attorney General, for clarifying that.

Programme: 523 – Attorney General’s Chambers – \$1,284,154,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme 524 – State Solicitor - \$49,378,000

Programme: 524 – State Solicitor - \$49,378,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme 521 – Policy Development and Administration – \$30,400,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Just a confirmation, under project code 1201300, that this project for the fire escape and trestle is at the Ministry of Legal Affairs' building on, I think it is, Carmichael Street.

Mr. Nandlall: Unfortunately, we only have one building.

Programme: 521 – Policy Development and Administration - \$30,400,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme 523 – Attorney General's Chambers – \$25,000,000

Programme: 523 – Attorney General's Chambers - \$25,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme 524 – State Solicitor - \$3,500,000

Programme: 524 – State Solicitor – \$3,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Attorney General and your staff for taking us through your agency. At 40 minutes past the hour of eight we have saved 20 minutes on this particular agency.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, Sir and thank you to the Hon. Members who participated.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Let us now invite the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and his staff for Agency 12, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. As they get in place Hon. Members, let us look at pages 102 and 103. Take some solace Hon. Minister, you and I share the same worse labour.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]: From the other side.

Mr. Speaker: I did not say.

Agency 12: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

Current Expenditure

Programme 121 – Development of Foreign Policy – \$4,011,637,000

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Todd, I just have a few questions for you this evening. Line item 6116 – I am just interested in the contracted employees; it increased from 49 to 60. So, I was wondering what is the level of the particular expertise of the staff contracted.

Mr. Todd: These are for the Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) that we have recruited, five of them last year.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Line item 6284 – Other.

Mr. Todd: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, that will be 11 not five.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Eleven.

Mr. Todd: Eleven FSOs.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, line item 6284 you were on.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Todd said five, I did not say five. Line item 6284, Other: I would be grateful if the Hon. Minister could disaggregate that amount, that sum there for us.

Mr. Todd: We have payments of legal fees, advocacy, public diplomacy and public relations activities, diaspora engagements and outreaches, digitalisation of the Ministry's records, bank charges and remittances to overseas missions, information technology (IT) infrastructures which will include software applications, antivirus, firewall, Adobe and Line access, operational expenditure in keeping with the 2025 spending mandate.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I have a follow-up. The Hon. Member referenced the digitisation of the records. Could the Hon. Member advise as to how long is that project because we budgeted for that last year. Do you have a timeline in terms of, are you doing the backlog and continuous digitization, and when do you envision that you will finish that backlog?

Mr. Todd: We were generally paper based, so we are trying to digitize all of our records, and we have a lot of important information that we need to digitize. I cannot give you a timeline now, but I can probably furnish you with that later.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Another follow-up to what the Hon. Minister said. He referenced public relations (PR), and you know Mr. Todd has been very vocal about our international PR as it relates to Venezuela. Is there a programme, is there a PR firm retained, internationally, that sort of pilots a PR campaign for Guyana in the context of our Venezuela controversy?

Mr. Todd: For the international firms that are covered under advocacy, but we also have an in-house PR Committee that we use locally for our PR campaign, and we do have a programme.

8.45 p.m.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I have one other follow-up on line item 6322, Subsidies and Contributions to International Organisations. Earlier, the Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes, posed a question to the Prime Minister about the dues to the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU), *et cetera*. Now, there is a list of bodies that have been outlined, but the CTU and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) are not there. Is there any particular reason why? That is the first question. What is the methodology that is used? Is it as these organisations submit invoices? How is it determined?

Mr. Todd: Mr. Chairman, it is not covered under our programme agency description. Maybe the Prime Minister could shed some more light on that. [Ms. Walton-Desir: He said to ask you.] It is not covered here. I could probably update you on that. I am advised that on page 474 of *Volume I*, has a breakdown of all of the estimates. [Ms. Walton-Desir: I know. I checked the breakdown, which is why I am asking.] Are you not seeing it there? It is not covered under our Ministry, but we, the Government, could provide you with the information.

Ms. Walton-Desir: All right. My last question on this is in terms of Public Relations (PR). Last year, you indicated that you had plans to roll out an education campaign in the areas close to the border, in those regions. Is there such a plan this year? Are you able to tell us or layover for us – either one – the particular areas that you plan to visit this year in pursuit of that education plan?

Mr. Todd: We plan to cover Regions 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9 with priority areas. We will also do some work on the coastland, particularly in Region 4.

Programme: 121 – Development of Foreign Policy – \$4,011,637,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 122 – Foreign Policy Promotion – \$5,088,026,000

Ms. Walton-Desir: On the issue of training under line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships), could the Hon. Member indicate the allocated sum and what it is for exactly? I notice you have scholarships in brackets there. Does that also cater for the Foreign Service Institute (FSI)?

Mr. Todd: This covers the diplomats at the posts, language training, professional development and consular affairs training.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Could the Hon. Minister indicate to us the line item under which the Ministry makes provision for the Foreign Service Institute in terms of training? If it is not that line item, which training heading is it?

Mr. Todd: It is under Programme 122, line item 6302.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Line item 6261 – Local Travel and Subsistence: There is not a drastic difference in what is budgeted, but could the Hon. Minister explain to us the \$85 million for local travel and subsistence? Just a quick breakdown of that.

Mr. Todd: This is what has been budgeted for our overseas missions.

Mr. Figueira: Line item 6284 – Other: Minister, for this allocation here, I want to know, with regard to the work of the embassies abroad – because when I was in Suriname, I had an opportunity to engage with the Ambassador there and he said that the Ministry also is taking the opportunity to promote Guyanese products at the respective embassies – is this line item going to be catering for that with the promotion of Guyanese products so that when foreign dignitaries visit the embassy, our products are exposed to them to open markets in the countries where we have embassies?

Mr. Todd: That is catered for under line item 6294, Other.

Mr. Figueira: Okay. Under the same line item 6294, is this programme of promotion of Guyanese products done at all of the missions we have overseas?

Mr. Todd: Yes. That is correct.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you.

Ms. Ferguson: May I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6281, Security Services? I note we have a large increase here for 2025 as against what was budgeted and passed in 2024. Could the Hon. Member explain to the Committee the reason behind the increase and which area or areas in the Ministry will be benefiting from this allocation?

Mr. Todd: This is to cater for the appointment of heads of mission that will require 24 hour security.

Dr. Cummings: I have two questions for the Minister. For the question that Hon. Member Mr. Figueira asked, you said it is line item 6294, but for the increase of about \$71 million at line item 6284, could you disaggregate the figure? What is it for?

Mr. Todd: It is for bank charges, advocacy, public relations services, legal and consultancy, upgrade and maintenance of website, operational expenditure, insurance of diplomatic staff's residences and chancery.

Dr. Cummings: The other question has to do with the Indicator which states:

“Offers received from the Diaspora in support of national development...”

Do you have a list of the skill sets that could help to develop the country? What have persons from the diaspora offered? What are some of the skill sets that they have offer that will benefit the country?

Mr. Todd: There is a broad array of expertise that we have identified in health, engineering and architecture. On the services side, there are a lot of persons who have competency in hospitality and hotel management.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, with your permission, could I put line items 6271, Telephone and Internet Charges to line item 6273, Water Charges all together, or should we do them singularly?

Mr. Chairman: Let us do them line by line.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. Could I turn the Hon. Member's attention to 6271 – Telephone and Internet Charges? I note we have a large increase from \$41 million to \$70 million. Could the Hon. Member explain the reason for these increases?

Mr. Todd: This is owing to the appointment of the heads of mission and also for our seat on the United Nations Security Council. We have an entire outfit to cater for that.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for your explanation. Through you, Mr. Chairman, for line item 6272, Electricity Charges, I also recognise we have a great increase from 2024 to 2025. What would have occasioned the increase for 2025?

Mr. Todd: The explanation is similar to what I just gave prior – the heads of mission and the United Nations Security Council.

Ms. Ferguson: All right. Mr. Chairman, I would not put the other line item 6273, because I guess I will get the same response as I got for line item 6271 and line item 6272, respectively. Thank you very much. I have no further questions for the Hon. Member.

Mr. Figueira: Hon. Minister, same line item 6294. Guyanese who are looking at this programme right now and were unaware that the Ministry gives Guyanese products such exposure in the different missions around the world, but they have a product that they are producing, how can they get their product to be advertised in whichever respective mission that the Ministry facilitates these products? I know the Guyana market...

Mr. Todd: We work in collaboration with the Guyana Office for Investment (Go-Invest). It provides a lot of expert advice on promotion, so there is a strong relationship there. Apart from that, the heads of missions are also the chief promoters of our trade and investment. Coupled with that, we also have advisors.

Mr. Figueira: Say a local producer of plantain chips in Linden, for example, was unaware that this is being done by the mission, but he/she wants to have his/her product expose like Beharry's Chowmein, which is in all of the missions, how could he/she have an opportunity as well for the Ministry to consider his/her product? Is there a website that persons could find out and get additional information? How could they know and tap into this opportunity for Guyanese products

to give much more exposure? [Mr. McCoy: (Inaudible) production level...] Let the Minister answer.

Mr. Todd: We have the Guyana Marketing Corporation and Go-Invest. We work in collaboration with these agencies because, at the level of the Ministry, we are responsible for trade policy. However, we also have a responsibility to promote products, whereby we use the agencies to help us to promote them.

Programme: 122 – Foreign Policy Promotion – \$5,088,026,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 121 – Development of Foreign Policy – \$153,000,000

Programme: 121 – Development of Foreign Policy – \$153,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

9.00 p.m.

Programme: 122 – Foreign Policy Promotion – \$103,602,000

Programme: 122 – Foreign Policy Promotion – \$103,602,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 123 – Development of Foreign Trade Policy – \$200,000

Programme: 123 – Development of Foreign Trade Policy – \$200,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Hon. Members, join me in thanking the Hon. Minister and his staff for taking us through his Ministry and Agency.

Mr. Todd: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Colleagues. Thank you to my staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Members, we now invite the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs and her staff to take us through her Agency, which is Agency 16, Ministry of

Amerindian Affairs. As the Minister and her team get into place, we have saved 20 minutes on the Ministry of Legal Affairs and 39 minutes on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, so we now have 59 minutes of savings, confirmed by our staff, Mr. Rickey Hardeen.

Agency: 16 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs

Current Expenditure

Programme: 161 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,045,007,000

Ms. Lawrence: If the Hon. Minister could just turn to page 106 of *Volume 2*, for the Objective in the second to last line, speaks of:

“...managing efficiently the available human, financial and physical resources critical to the successful administration of Ministry operations.”

Hon. Minister, could you kindly tell this Committee when we will see the amendment to the Amerindian Act of 2006, which will make provisions for the operation of the Amerindian Purpose Fund (APF)?

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]: Mr. Chairman, I did not get the first part of the question or the beginning of the question.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, can you repeat, please?

Ms. Lawrence: Sure, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, I am looking at your Objective on this page, which speaks to:

“...managing efficiently the availability of human finances...”

Et cetera, for:

“...the successful administration of the Ministry’s operations.”

I am asking you, when will we see in this Committee the amendment to the Amerindian Act of 2006, which will make provisions for the operation of the Amerindian Purpose Fund? I am asking that in tandem with the Auditor General’s report, which speaks to the omission of this particular funding act.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs is currently addressing the issue of the revision of the Amerindian Act. It is not yet completed. It is a work in progress. We will look at it at that time. I do not have an exact date or exact time, but we are actually addressing the review and the revision of the Amerindian Act.

Ms. Lawrence: Just a follow up on the same fund: While you are attending to the amendments of the Act, I would like to know what progress has been made in terms of the reconciliation of the cash book, because the fund is still active. Where is the Ministry in terms of the reconciliation of the cash book?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I am advised that work is progressing on the reconciliation and the Ministry expect to finish it this year.

Programme: 161 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,045,007,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 162 – Community Development and Empowerment – \$779,070,000

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Through you, Mr. Chairman, let me direct the Hon. Minister to page 104 of *Volume 2*. I observe and note that you have listed under your Activity:

“...Land Conflict Resolution”

It is public knowledge that there is an ongoing conflict between miners and two of our Indigenous communities, namely Isseneru and the Chinese Landing. My question to you, Hon. Minister is, do you have a subcommittee in your Ministry that deals directly with an issue such as?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The Amerindian Act is very clear. We have a very simple process that addresses the titling of lands, the demarcation of lands, and of course, the sponsoring or the support for the financial expenditure dealing with land titling and demarcation. With respect to the issue on the Chinese Landing, the matter went through the court system. I think that the Chinese Landing is still within the courts. Just to add, these issues have been dealt with domestically, meaning that all the sectors involved have had supporting advice and guidance... worked with these communities. The communities opt to go court, so we will have to allow the court to stay its course.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: On the same page 104, as the Activity listed, under:

“Land titling

Extension

Demarcation

Titling”

And the one that I just referred to:

“Land Conflict Resolution”

Could the Hon. Minister say to this Committee how many extensions were completed and granted in 2024? My second question is, how many communities were demarcated and how many received their titles for 2024?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Just to confirm the years you were referring to, is it 2020 to 2024 or is it 2024?

Ms. Hastings-Williams: It is for the year 2024.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: We have done two surveys in 2024: Karasabai, and Arau. We have finally completed Arau after waiting for a long time for it to give us approval for the activity. The Absolute Grant for 2024 – Absolute Grant means extension included because they have had their Absolute Grants. These are extensions. They have to have the Absolute Grant before surveys too. Hobodia, Hotoquai, Redhill, Akawini, Moco Moco and Sawariwau... Additionally, seven demarcations were completed. *Mind you*, this is in one year and not five years.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you, to the Hon. Member, may I turn your attention to line item 6291, National and Other Events. I note you have a request for \$205 million as against what was given in 2024 – \$151,277,000 as revised. Could the Hon. Member explain the reason for the increase and which communities are likely to benefit from this year’s allocation?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, the \$205 million is the expenditure for the heritage celebration. Since 1993, our Government, has recognised that Amerindian culture, tradition, and customs play a very important part in the fabric and tapestry of our country, so we continue to invest and increase the investments. The increase will take into consideration the attendance of

culture groups from Brazil, Suriname, and Belize. We will only cater for the in-country expenses. We are going to expand our culture internationally. We have done it before in our previous term. Since we came back, the Coronavirus Disease (COVID) affected us but now we are fully integrated in a less-COVID environment.

Ms. Ferguson: I just want to remind the Hon. Member that Mr. Burnham loved the Amerindian people. I just want you to know that. **[Ms. Campbell- Sukhai: Especially at elections time.]**

I will turn your attention now to line item 6302, Training, (including Scholarships). I note we had an approved sum of \$81 million expended in 2024, but you are now requesting \$128 million. Could you say who will be benefiting from this allocation? What areas of training will the beneficiaries be exposed to?

9.15 p.m.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Line item 6302 caters for our scholarship students, ranging from national to regional scholarships. The increase now caters to the expansion of the extracurricular activities for these young students and career development programmes.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mdm. Minister. I will ask my last question. This is on the very line item 6302. Could you say how many young people will be benefitting from this allocation? What is the number?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I wish to say that our target is 804 students. These are students who are eligible and meet the requirements for our Amerindian Development Fund Scholarship Programme.

Mr. Henry: Line item 6284 – Other: Could the Hon. Minister say how much of the allocated sum is dedicated towards supporting the families of the 21 Amerindian youths who perished in the Mahdia Secondary School Dormitory fire?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I believe that every question is a good one but, in this case, the Hon. Member's question is irrelevant to the allocation at hand.

Mr. Henry: Hon. Minister, through the Chairman, could you say what is the current staff in the Welfare Department at the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, who execute the activities of this Department? This is under the same line item.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, this is related to a different line item. It is in the current budget under Programme 161. If you will allow me to go back, maybe I will do so but we have gone pass there. This has to do with allocation to support those who are sent out to Georgetown for tertiary level health support. The Ministry takes care of them.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Could I direct the Hon. Minister's attention to line item 6292, Dietary? You have allocated moneys to the tune of \$108.7 million. Could you say which institutions or organisations will benefit from this allocation?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The estimate or allocation caters to dietary for the Amerindian Residence and the Hinterland Scholarship students' dormitories.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: I have a follow-up question, Minister. There have been some concerns and complaints about the students and patients who stay at these institutions. The meals that are provided are probably inadequate. My question to you is, what mechanisms do you have in place to monitor and ensure that children and patients are not shortchanged and are receiving nutritious meals?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, the Member of Parliament might be out of touch with the realities of the return of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. She is reminded of the complaints during the five years preceding our return. The mechanisms in place are, at the students' dormitories, we have a daily menu chart; at the Amerindian Residence, we just finished renovating the kitchen and our staff there is very much monitored by the Administrator with regard to meals. In terms of allocation for the provision of the dietary items, we never had to come back to this Institution for supplemental. Hopefully, we would not have to do so this year. We are providing adequate food items. To extend it, for three days of the week, we are providing Indigenous food items too such as farine and cassava bread.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you for your answer, Minister. I asked about your monitoring process for these things so I was hoping that you could have given me that. I have a follow-up

question on the hinterland scholarship students. Could you inform this Committee of what the stipend or pocket allowance – as I knew it when I was on scholarship – for the students is? Do they receive it on a monthly or quarterly basis? If not, what is hindering you from having the children receiving their pocket allowance monthly and on time?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The pocket allowance for scholarship students is \$4,000 per month. The national scholarship students receive it here in the city while the regional scholarship students' allocations are warranted to the regions. In the early period when I came in 2020, there were some hiccups. I ensure that two scholarship Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) track every payment because we are not in charge of payment per se, we warrant these to the region. The regional scholarship students are at schools located in the particular regions. Thus, the Regional Administration takes care of that. I can assure you that I track it. It is also done through the Permanent Secretary (PS) because I am very strict about it. They have to provide evidence that the warrant is sent at adequate times. I have also instructed both officers where there is connectivity, send a *WhatsApp* message, find out from the parents and alert them when the money has been warranted so they will start making the preparations to collect.

Mr. Cox: Sir?

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

Mr. Cox: Good evening to the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs and her staff. I have a follow up question on Dietary. I did not hear the Hon. Minister answer the question that was asked by my Colleague, Ms. Hastings-Willaims. I want to ask, at the Hinterland Scholarship Student's Dormitory, do you have a trained nutritionist who works with the staff in the kitchen to ensure that nutritious meals – as was asked previously – are provided on a daily basis for students? I am asking this because I spoke recently – two weeks ago – with persons who were there visiting their relatives and indeed, they complained about the quality of meals being prepared. There is no doubt and we are not making this thing up. Do you have a person who monitors the provision of these meals?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I would have liked if, at the time the complaint was made – if there was indeed a factual complaint and not a made-up or fake one – it had been directed to the school's Education Officer, who is on the spot at the dormitory, even the administrative staff, or contact us. I do not have a trained nutritionist, but the meals are common to Guyanese and this country. The

students – time living in the Amerindian Hostel – during their free time, participate in the kitchen. They look on and learn a few things too. In addition to that, I am very proud to say that while we may have constraints in transportation – the number of buses that we have to deliver meals – this Institution, the Hinterland Scholarship Student’s Dormitory for secondary schools, delivers lunch for all our children. They do not have to go hungry. They leave with a solid breakfast, and they come back. They have snacks also. If you want to look at some of the photographs – I am very proud – there are students who are engaged in learning how to make pastries and so on during their spare time. We are not putting them to work; it is an extracurricular session that we do within the institution.

Programme: 162 – Community Development and Empowerment – \$779,070,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 161 – Policy Development and Administration – \$78,380,000

Ms. Hastings-Willaims: Project code 1400100 – Amerindian Development Fund: Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the allocations for the three projects that she has outlined under Description of Project, which states:

- “1. Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme.
2. Presidential Grants.
3. Amerindian development projects and programmes.”

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, I think the Member has skipped Programme 161. You have put Programme 161. We are not yet at Programme 162 for capital expenditure.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Ms. Hastings-Willaims, you have the floor.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Cde. Chair. I will now redirect my question that I just asked.

Programme: 161 – Policy Development and Administration – \$78,380,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 162 – Community Development and Empowerment – \$5,307,700,000

Ms. Hastings-Williams: I will repeat my question. I am looking at project code 1400100, Amerindian Development Fund. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the sum for the three projects that she outlined under, Description of Projects, namely:

“Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme (YEAP)

Presidential Grants

Amerindian development projects and programmes”?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The YEAP Programme is \$1.5 billion; the Presidential Grant is \$532, 300,000 and the projects are \$2.5...What was the third one? There was Presidential Grant, YEAP and what else?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Hastings-Williams, do you want to repeat?

9.30 p.m.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: No. I just want the third one which is for the projects catered for under the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF). Is that what you are asking for?

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Yes, [*inaudible*].

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: It is a long list. I could go through it if you will allow me to.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you are allowed.

Ms. Hastings Williams: I was asking her to disaggregate the sum and she was doing very well. She said \$1.5 billion for the Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme (YEAP), presidential grants – \$532 million and the Amerindian development project and plans would have been the remainder.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Yes. Do you not want to hear the projects?

Ms. Hastings-Williams: No.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: All right.

Mr. Chairman: You can ask a question for those who want to hear. Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, you may proceed.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Minister state the amount allocated for the revision of the Amerindian Act for this year, 2025?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The allocation this year is \$80,590,000.

Mr. Henry: Could the Hon. Minister state a timeline for the presentation of the draft revised Amerindian Act to the indigenous villages of Guyana?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: It is a work in progress. We are still addressing the education and awareness component of the activity. As soon as we start the consultation and the full length of it is over, I am pretty sure that those responsible will provide us with a first draft, but we have not started consultations as yet.

Mr. Henry: Could the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs state if the deadline for the completion of the revision of the Amerindian Act will be before the end of the year?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: That is a very good but tough question. Guyana's hinterland and the Amerindians are located across 10 administrative regions. Logistically, we would love to have it finished by tomorrow, but we have to ensure we stand to the commitment that this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government made to consult with every Amerindian village. That will take us a pretty long time, but we have efficient and trained facilitators. We have experts supporting us from the legal fraternity. In fact, the Attorney General's (AG) office is very supportive of pushing this activity forward. I am sure that we will be able to revise it, but I would not say in 2025, because we are still dealing with the awareness. As a leader and a politician, the Hon. Member will know that even if you go to a village and you speak to the ordinary villagers, some of them still do not know what the specific clauses are that are relevant to a situation they may be facing. For us to have a conversation and ensure we have good, learned and informative recommendations by the people, we have to complete this component.

Mr. Henry: What we have here is that it will not be completed in 2025. Under the same heading there, could the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs inform the House of the number of

Community Service Officers (CSOs) who were registered at the beginning of the CSO programme in 2020? Could the Minister say how many are currently enrolled?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you may need to rephrase that because we are speaking to the allocation here.

Mr. Henry: Hon. Minister, could you state how many CSOs are currently on the CSO programme?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: The CSO programme is a very successful programme and for 2024, the expected figure will be 2,759.

Mr. Henry: Hon. Minister, could you clarify the process that takes place when a CSO leaves the programme and a new individual is brought on board? Will the former CSO's name be removed from the pay sheet? If not, what is the procedure in such cases?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: When anyone leaves the CSO programme, the rule is that he or she gives a month's notice to our Management Development Officers (MDOs). However, there are instances when a month's notice is not forthcoming. When anyone leaves the CSO programme within a particular month and works for about five days or seven days, his or her name will still be on that month's pay sheet because he or she has worked. When they are no longer working with the CSO programme and they are off, whether it is by their own will or whether they have opted to go into a different profession, their name will not appear on the paysheet.

Mr. Henry: In terms of tractors, could the Hon. Minister say if more tractors will be purchased in this year's budget, added to the 204 tractors which she mentioned in her recent budget speech which were said to have been distributed to the villages? Could the Minister state the status of the inordinate number of tractors and trailers that were seen in December 2024, some of which were covered by dry vines in the compound of the student dormitory at Liliendaal?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: With respect to supporting the development of agriculture and food security in the hinterland, our Government see the Amerindian villages as one of the key players in this work. We have supported them by providing tractors, which are not only for agricultural purposes but also for road building and transportation needs within the village. Sometimes these tractors are used externally to come from the South, Lethem or when they want to come to an exhibition, they would put the produce and go to the Rupununi Rodeo Exhibition or the Rupununi

Expo. It is a very useful multipurpose machinery. With respect to the status, the Toshaos or the Village Council that receive this piece of machinery is responsible for its good care, maintenance, and of course, the use of the tractor. The Government will give its support, but it cannot *spoon feed* all the time. I will tell you that there are challenges in some villages where there are need for repairs and who have not maintained their tractors well. Our Ministry has a list of those areas. I was just asking for the list, but they did not walk with it. Our Ministry has a list of those areas that we are supporting in terms of repairs and maintenance, and in fact, the provider of the tractors are involved in assisting in this task.

I am pleased to also announce that we have trained more than 100 tractor drivers, providing them with driver's licenses so they will be able to use this machinery and its implements in a very professional manner. This year, we will continue to add to the one hundred plus drivers. We have come a long way. In terms of the status of how many tractors there are in the compound, we have moved mountains to get these tractors. For example, to Arau. I can give you the experience of taking a tractor to Arau. We have to cut the tractor, take it apart, and split it in two. We have to then get the army caravan that is big enough to take these heavy pieces of equipment that are dismantled. Then we have to land it at Kaikan, take another mechanic to go and reassemble all the parts that have been taken off and then boat it down to the village. All at the cost of the Government. This is only one example of how we transport our tractors. In other places, it can take gruelling months because you will understand that in the hinterland, there are not all-weather roads everywhere and sometimes the road link is not only about the roads. It is a mixture of road and water. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, who comes from Region 7, will know too that to get a tractor in Kako or in Jawala, it is very, very smart working.

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: You have to take it from Georgetown by road.

Mr. Henry: Hon. Minister, would those tractors be sent or taken to those villages? If so, how much moneys have you put aside for that purpose?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: We only have two tractors and they are there for training purposes. As you know, we do tractor driving. We also have tractors there that will be used for training the drivers.

Mr. Henry: I must say if you have moved out nearly 30 tractors within the last two months, that is excellent and I will say thank you for that.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I will take you there.

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, I have another question. According to the requests made by the villages, are there any funds in this amount here for the revision of the lands being granted to them? For example, Sawariwau. Sawariwau is saying that they have not received what they have asked for and they are very upset about it. Even their ranches are out of the extension at this time. Are there any funds that can be used to correct this?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, it is not irrelevant, but I may have to give a history if you will allow me. As a resident of Region 9, I think the Hon. Member needs to keep abreast with what is occurring, not only with land, but with development *et cetera*. I want to say to him that Sawariwau's title has been granted. They have applied for an extension which will be processed.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, if I heard him correctly, he said that Sawariwau stated they did not get what they asked for and he implied... Is what they asked for included in this allocation?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I will explain it differently. Sawariwau was and is a titled village. They can only ask for an extension. The extension has not yet been processed to the point of delivering a title. Sawariwau had a unique occurrence. In the 60s, there was an issue with Katoonarib located within Sawariwau's village. That matter has been resolved. Katoonarib has received their title and Sawariwau remains with the remainder of the land, which was legally awarded to them and titled to them. It is not a matter of asking and being unsatisfied. At the current stage, Sawariwau has applied for an extension which the Ministry has on its list to address.

9.45 p.m.

Mr. Henry: Under the same heading, could the Hon. Minister state whether the accrued amount in this year's Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) includes royalties paid into it, as defined by Section 51(3) of the Amerindian Act 2006 which states that:

“The Guyana Geology and Mines Commission shall transfer twenty per cent of the royalties from the mining activities to a fund designated by the Minister for the benefit of Amerindian villages.”

If so, what is the amount that was transferred this year and last year? Also, what is the current status of that fund?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We are dealing with the 2025 budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. The Member’s question does not align with our work here this evening.

Mr. Henry: Hon. Chairman, I asked a very specific question, which was not answered. Even if the Minister says yes or no, I will be satisfied. The question was, could the Hon. Minister state whether the accrued amount in this year’s Amerindian Development Fund – which is here, – includes royalties paid via the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission? That is the question I asked. How could it be irrelevant?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, again, I maintain that his question is irrelevant and irrelevant means...You interpret what irrelevant means to the work that we are doing here.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, do not let us break *lance*. We are here to approve expenditure. Revenue is a different aspect. Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, the floor is yours.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me take you back to Volume 2, Minister, page 106. I see you have as one of the indicators,

“Percentage of budgetary allocations expended”

For 2024. You have here 66% for 2024 and you are planning to spend 100% in 2025. My question here...

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

Thank you, Cde. Chairman. My question to you...

Mr. Chairman: We have a Deputy Assistant Speaker.

Ms. Ferguson: I thought the Deputy went home

Mr. Chairman: Check online.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question to the Hon. Minister is what additional support mechanisms do you have in place to achieve 100% spending this year?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, looking at the 66% would raise eyebrows. It is a mistake and it is supposed to be 99% instead of 66%.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, you have a six for a nine there.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Yes, we have 66%, but it is 99%. We have discussed this with the Ministry of Finance and this matter will be changed. We attained our target Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). It is a current question too, so we bypassed it.

Mr. Chairman: She just had to turn around the page and she would get the right amount?

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. When we look at the indicators, Hon. Minister, we see here, ‘Proportion of villages implementing their village sustainable plans,’ and it shows 253 in 2024, which represents 100%, and a similar target for 2025. Are you saying that there are no challenges whatsoever in any of these more than 200 indigenous villages across Guyana? If there are, what are the challenges, and how will your Ministry attempt to work with villagers to ensure that you maintain this 100% target? Thank you.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, I see you are becoming very indulgent. We have gone back to current expenditure, but I will oblige him with an answer. Is it where you see here, “Number of village councils reporting increased villager attendance at meetings”, is that 254 as opposed to 253? Or is it the sustainable development plans, ‘Proportion of villages implementing their village sustainable plans’?

Mr. Chairman, the Member would be acquainted with the work of the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs by now. He has been in the National Assembly for a couple of years, and he would be acquainted with the capacity of the village council. Yes, there are challenges, and our Monitoring and Development Officers (MDOs), who are technically trained to work with village councils are responsible and have dedicated their time with the Ministry to work along with the village councils.

There will be instances where a project or two in various regions may not be totally successful, but by and large, we have had major success in the implementation of all the support – financial and otherwise – that we have provided to the villages. Presidential grants, for example, in Region 8, I looked at the records earlier and the week proceeding now, because I did not hear a question from them, but I want to report that 100% of the presidential grant project in that region has been completed. This can be repeated but not in the level of 100%. Like I said, in some villages, it is the capacity of the village council. They also had the challenge of coming into their term – that is the village council – in May last year, which gave them a little lead time, they had to change over bank accounts and decide whether they wanted to go with the projects. We have been advising village councils. It is like when a government changes. If it is a good programme, just roll it over and bring the benefits to the people. Do not reverse the benefits. Those are the challenges that we have to work with.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Hon. Minister, for your response. I have a follow-up question on a question asked earlier by the Member of Parliament, Mr. Henry, on the revision of the Amerindian Act 2006. You did mention that there are a few challenges. One, you clearly mentioned, was that even if you spoke to a few ordinary indigenous people, they may have very limited knowledge of what the Amerindian Act 2006 actually entails. You do not see it being completed for 2025, although we probably would have liked to... [An Hon. Member: I never said that.] Well, you did not say clearly that it will, or it will not. Let me just say that again. Mr. Chairman, I am just saying that the Hon. Minister did mention that she cannot say directly if it will or it will not, although she would like it to. Now that we both can agree that the revision of the Amerindian Act requires extensive revision, which we clearly see being ventilated in the public domain by village representatives, what are your Ministry's measures to ensure that these challenges that you did identify are properly addressed so that we can accelerate the revision of the Amerindian Act?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, I want to clear one aspect of his assumption or belief. I never said that there is extensive revision. I said that there will be extensive consultation to the revision of the Amerindian Act. With respect to the measures, we will continue to do public awareness, and of course, as long as we can cover it by mid or a little beyond mid of this year, we will hopefully be happily launching the full-fledged consultation.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, it seems that we are now trying to, manufacture some questions on our feet.

Programme: 162 – Community Development and Empowerment – \$5,307,700,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Hon. Members, let us thank the Hon. Minister and her staff for taking us through her agency. At 9.55 p.m., there are eight minutes saved on this head, and, along with the 59 minutes that were previously saved, 67 minutes will go over to tomorrow. Let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

An Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: You are not going to come?

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do adjourn until Tuesday 4th February, 2024 at 10.00 a.m.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillip: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we adjourn the House to 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday, 4th February, 2025, tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m., 4th February. Have a safe trip home, everyone.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.56 p.m.