

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE FIRST SESSION (2001) OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA
UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

1ST SITTING

14:00H

2001-05-04

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (66)

Speaker (1)

The Hon. Hari N. Ramkarran, S. C., M. P., - *Speaker of the National Assembly*

Members of the Government - People's Progressive Party/Civic (34)

The Hon. Samuel A.A. Hinds, M.P.	- <i>Prime Minister</i>
The Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., J.P., M.P.	- <i>Minister of Parliamentary Affairs</i>
The Hon. Clement J. Rohee, M.P.,	- <i>Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation</i>
The Hon. Harripersaud Nokta, M.P.,	- <i>Minister of Local Government and Regional Development</i>
The Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,	- <i>Minister of Culture Youth and Sport</i>
The Hon. Dr. Henry B. Jeffrey, M.P.	- <i>Minister of Education</i>
The Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, M.P.	- <i>Minister of Finance</i>
The Hon. Shaik K.Z. Baksh, M.P.	- <i>Minister of Housing and Water</i>
The Hon. Navindranauth O. Chandarpal, M.P.	- <i>Minister of Agriculture (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)</i>
The Hon. J. Ronald Gajraj, M.P.	- <i>Minister of Home Affairs (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/ West Demerara)</i>
The Hon. Rev. Dr. Ramnauth D.A. Bisnauth, M.P.	- <i>Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security</i>
The Hon. Clinton C. Collymore, M.P.	- <i>Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development</i>
The Hon. Satyadeow Sawh, M.P.	- <i>Minister of Fisheries, Other Crops and Livestock (Region No. 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)</i>
The Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.	- <i>Minister of the Public Service</i>
The Hon. C. Anthony Xavier, M.P.	- <i>Minister of Transport and Hydraulics</i>

* *Non-Elected Minister*

The Hon. Bibi S. Shadick, M.P. - *Minister in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)*

The Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues, M.P. - *Minister of Amerindian Affairs*

The Hon. Dr Leslie S. Ramsammy, M.P. - *Minister of Health*

Mr S. Feroze Mohamed, M.P.

Mr Cyril C. Belgrave, C.C.H., J.P., M.P. - *(Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr. Donald R. Ramotar, M.P.

Mr Husman Alli, M.P. - *(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni)*

Mr. Komal Chand, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal, M.P.

Mr Bernard C. DeSantos, S.C., M.P. - *(Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mrs Shirley V. Edwards, J.P. M.P.

Mr Odinga N. Lumumba, M.P.

Mr Heeralall Mohan, M.P.

Members of the Opposition

(i) People's National Congress/Reform (27)

Hon. Hugh Desmond Hoyte, S.C., M.P. - *Leader of the Opposition*

Mr. Robert H. O. Corbin, M.P.

Mr. Winston S. Murray, M.P.

Mrs Clarissa S. Riehl, M.P. - *Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly*

Mr E. Lance Carberry, M.P.

Mr Ivor Allen, M.P. - *(Region No. 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)*

Mrs. Deborah J. Backer, M.P.

Mr. Deryck M.A. Bernard, M.P.

Mr. C. Stanley Ming, M.P.

Mr. Raphael G. C. Trotman, M.P.

Mr Vincent L. Alexander, M.P. - *(Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr. Andy Goveia, M.P.

Mrs. Volda A. Lawrence, M.P.

Dr Dagleish Joseph, M.D., M.P.

Ms Amna Aily, M.P. - *(Region No. 5 - Mahaica (Berbice))*

Ms Sandra M. Adams, M.P. - *(Region No. 10 - Upper Demerara/ Berbice)*

Mr. Jerome Khan, M.P.

Dr G. Aubrey Norton, M.P.

Ms Myrna E. N. Peterkin, M.P. - *(Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

Mr. James Kennedy McAllister, M.P. - *(Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands West Demerara)*

May 04, 2001

Miss Lurlene A. Nestor, M.P.	- (Region No. 4-Demerara/ Mahaica)
Mr Abdul Kadir, J.P., M.P.	- (Region No.10 - Upper Demerara/ Berbice)
Mr Ricky Khan, M.P.	- (Region No.1 - Barima/Waini)
Mrs. R. Bancroft, M.P.	- (Region No.8 - Potaro/Siparuni)
Mr Nasir Ally, J.P., M.P.	- (Region No.6 - East Berbice/ Corentyne)
Ms Judith David, M.P.	- (Region No.7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)
Ms. Genevieve Allen, M.P.	- (Region No.4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

(ii) Guyana Action Party/Working People's Alliance (2)

Mrs Sheila V.A. Holder, M.P.	
Ms Shirley Melville, M.P.	- (UpperTakutu/UpperEssequibo)

(iii) Rise Organise and Rebuild (1)

Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P.

(iv) The United Force (1)

Mr Manzoor Nadir, M.P.

OFFICERS

Mr Frank A. Narain, C.C.H., Clerk of the National Assembly
Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

May 04, 2001

**PROCLAMATION SUMMONING THE SESSION OF
PARLIAMENT**

The Clerk: Hon. Members, it is now time for the First Session of the Eighth Parliament to begin in accordance with the Proclamation made by the President, which for the record I will now read.

Proclamation No. 5 of 2001, bearing Seal No. 77A/2001 and signed by B. Jagdeo, President.

***WHEREAS** by Proclamation dated 8th February, 2001, issued under article 70 (2) of the Constitution, the Seventh Parliament of Guyana was dissolved on 15th February, 2001.*

***AND WHEREAS** it is provided by article 69 (1) of the Constitution that each Session of Parliament shall be held at such place within Guyana and shall begin at such time, not be later than four months from the end of the preceding Session of Parliament has been dissolved, as the President shall appoint by proclamation.*

***NOW, THEREFORE**, in pursuance of article 69 (1) of the Constitution I do hereby appoint the Parliament Chamber, Public Buildings, Georgetown, Guyana, as the place where a session of the Eighth Parliament shall be held as aforesaid at 2 o'clock in the afternoon of 4th May, 2001, as the time when such session shall begin.*

Given under my hand and the seal of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, at office of the President, Georgetown, Guyana, this twenty-sixth day of April, two

May 04, 2001

thousand and one in the thirty-second year of the Republic.

By the President's command.

(Signed) R. Luncheon
Head of the Presidential Secretariat

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

The Clerk: I will now call in the order declared by the Elections Commission, the names of the sixty-five persons who have become Members of the National Assembly following the elections on 19th March, 2001.

Will Members kindly answer as their names are called?

(1) Declared elected on 12th April, 2001:

Guyana Action Party/Working People's Alliance

Shirley Melville - (Region No. 9)

Sheila Holder

People's Progressive Party/Civic

Pauline Sukhai - (Region No. 1)

Heeralall Mohan - (Region No. 2)

Jairam Ronald Gaajraj - (Region No. 3)

Bibi Safora Shadick - (Region No. 3)

May 04, 2001

Cyril Calvin Lewis Belgrave - (Region No. 4)
Navindranauth Omanand Chandarpal - (Region No. 4)
Bernard Celestino DeSantos - (Region No. 4)
Satyadeow Sawh - (Region No. 5)
Khemraj Ramjattan - (Region No. 6)
Ramesh C. Rajkumar - (Region No. 6)
Husman Ali - (Region No. 7)
Shaik K.Z. Baksh
R. Dale Bisnauth
Komal Chand
Indranie Chandarpal
Clinton C. Collymore
Shirley Veronica Edwards
Samuel A.A. Hinds
Henry B. Jeffrey
Saisnarine Kowlessar
Odinga N. Lumumba
Sheik Feroze Mohamed
Harripersaud Nokta
Reepu Daman Persaud

May 04, 2001

Kumkaran Ramdas

Bheri S. Ramsaran

Donald R. Ramotar

Leslie S. Ramsammy

Carolyn Rodrigues

Clement J. Rohee

Philomena Sahoye-Shury

Gail Teixeira

Jennifer R. A. Westford

Carl Anthony Xavier

Rise Organise and Rebuild

Ravindra Dev

The United Force

Manzoor Nadir

(2) Declared elected on 17th April, 2001:

People's National Congress/Reform

Ricky Khan - (Region No.1)

May 04, 2001

Ivor Allen - (Region No.2)
James K. McAllister - (Region No. 3)
Vincent Alexander - (Region No. 4)
Genevieve Allen - (Region No. 4)
Myrna Peterkin - (Region No. 4)
Lurlene Nestor - (Region No.10)
Amna Ally - (Region No. 5)
Nasir Ally - (Region No. 6)
Judith David - (Region No. 7)
Rajcoomarie Bancroft - (Region No. 8)
Sandra Adams - (Region No.10)

Abdul Kadir

Deborah Backer

Deryck Bernard

E.Lance Carberry

Robert Corbin

Andy Goveia

Hugh Desmond Hoyte

Dagleish Joseph

Jerome Khan

Volda Lawrence
Stanley Ming

Winston Murray

George Norton

Clarissa Riehl

Raphael Trotman

[Members answered as their names were called.]

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

The Clerk: Hon. Members, my first duty is, in accordance with article 56 (1) of the Constitution and Standing Order No. 2 of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly, to elect a person to be the Speaker of the National Assembly and I accordingly invite nominations.

The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs (Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud): Mr. Clerk, I beg to nominate Mr. Hari Narayen Ramkarran, S. C., to be Speaker of the National Assembly.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Samuel A.A. Hinds): Mr. Clerk, I beg to second that nomination.

The Clerk: Are there any further nominations? *[Pause]*

Mr. Hari Narayen Ramkarran, has been nominated by the Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs. The nomination has been seconded by the Hon. Samuel A. A. Hinds, Prime

Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications. There being no further nominations, I declare Mr. Hari Narayen Ramkarran duly elected to be Speaker of the National Assembly. *[Applause]*

Will the proposer and seconder kindly escort the Speaker to the Chair?

[The Speaker was escorted to the Chair.]

[The Speaker in the chair]

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

The Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. My first task is to preside over the election of the Deputy Speaker. I invite nominations.

Hon. E. Lance Carberry: Mr. Speaker, I rise to nominate Mrs. Clarissa Riehl for the post of Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Deborah Backer: Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the motion of Mrs. Clarissa Riehl for the post of Deputy Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other nominations? *[Pause]*

There being no other nominations, I declare Mrs. Clarissa Riehl as duly elected Deputy Speaker. *[Applause]*

OATHS

The Speaker: Hon. Members, the oath will now be administered to Members of the House by the Clerk of the National Assembly.

The oath was made and subscribed by all Members as follows:

I do hereby solemnly declare that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the people of Guyana, that I will faith-

May 04, 2001

fully execute the office of Member of the National Assembly without fear or favour, affection or ill-will, and that in the execution of the functions of that office I will honour, uphold and preserve the Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

Mr Hari Narayen Ramkarran

Mrs. Clarissa Sabita Riehl

Mr Samuel Archibald Anthony Hinds.

Mr Reepu Daman Persaud

Mr Clement James Rohee

Mr Harripersaud Nokta

Miss Gail Teixeira

Dr. Henry Benfield Jeffrey

Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar

Mr Shaik Kamrul Zaman Baksh

Mr Navindranauth Omanand Chandarpal

Mr Jairam Ronald Gajraj

Rev. Dr. Ramnauth Dale Arlington Bisnauth

Mr. Clinton Carlton Collymore

Mr. Satyadeow Sawh

Dr Jennifer Reginalda Ann Westford

Mr. Anthony Xavier

May 04, 2001

Miss Bibi Safora Shadick

Miss Carolyn Rodrigues

Dr. Leslie S. Ramsammy

Mr. Sheik Feroze Mohamed

Mr. Cyril Calvin Belgrave

Mr. Donald Rabindranauth Ramotar.

Mr. Husman Alli

Mr. Komal Chand

Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal

Mr Bernard Celestino DeSantos

Mrs Shirley Veronica Edwards

Mr Odinga N. Lumumba

Mr. Heeralall Mohan

Mr Ramesh Chandra Rajkumarr

Mr Kumkaran Ramdas

Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan

Dr. Bheri Sygmond Ramsaran

Mrs. Philomena Sahoye-Shury

Mrs. Pauline R.Sukhai

Hon. Hugh Desmond Hoyte

Mr. Robert Herman Orlando Corbin

Mr. Winston Shripal Murray

Mr Everette Lance Carberry

Mr Ivor Allen

Mrs. Deborah Jan Backer,

Mr. Deryck M.A. Bernard

Mr. Cyril Stanley Ming

Mr. Raphael Gregory Conwright Trotman

Mr Vincent Luther Alexander

Mr. Andy Goveia

Mrs.Volda Ann Lawrence

Dr Dagleish Joseph

Ms Amna Ally

Ms Sandra Michelle Adams

Mr. Jerome Khan

Dr George Aubrey Norton

Ms Myrna Elizabeth Neomi Peterkin

Mr. James Kennedy McAllister

Miss Lurlene Anita Nestor

Mr Abdul Kadir.

Mr. Ricky Khan

Mrs. Rajcoomarie Bancroft

Mr. Nasir Ally

Ms Judith David

Ms Genevieve Purvesta Roxanne Allen

Mrs. Sheila Valerie Agnes Holder

Mrs Shirley Juliana Melville

Mr Ravindra Dev

Mr. Manzoor Nadir

PRAYERS

The Speaker: Hon. Members, the Clerk will now read the Prayer.

The Clerk read the following Prayer:

Almighty God, we, who are here gathered together, do most humbly beseech Thee to guide us in all our consultations, so that we may together build a land where knowledge is free, where the mind is without fear, and the head is held high, and where words come from the depth of truth.

Grant us, O God, Thine aid and guidance, so that we

may deal justly with the several causes that come before us, laying aside all private interests, prejudices and personal preferences, so that the result of our counsels may be to the glory of Thy Blessed Name, the maintenance of true religion, the preservation of justice, the safety, the honour and happiness of the President, and the peace and prosperity of Guyana.

Grant us, O God, the vision so to lead, that all the people of this fair land may enter into that state of brotherhood and unity, where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever widening thought and action.

REMARKS BY THE SPEAKER

The Speaker: Hon. Members, I thank you for the confidence which you have placed in me in electing me as your Speaker. I accept with humility the challenging role of presiding over the National Assembly and participating in the management of its business. I intend to ensure that the Standing Orders are observed while at the same time applying flexibility and impartiality so as to ensure productive debate and discussion. I look forward to your full support at all times which is vital for the successful conduct of our business.

The Constitution of Guyana provides that Parliament may make laws for the peace, order and the good government of Guyana subject to the supremacy of the Constitution and the power of the judiciary to declare invalid laws passed in Parliament which offended the Constitution. The Parliament of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana holds a pre-eminent place in the governance of our country.

While we no longer have the power on the one extreme to summon the Head of State and demand his resignation, as the English Parliament did to Edward II in 1327, or on the other extreme, the right to be described as the most high, an absolute power in the realm, as a later English Parliament was described in 1589, we nev-

ertheless have a responsibility to the electorate to ensure that its interests are promoted and protected. In so doing we have to remember, at all times, that Guyana is a developing democracy, and while we have inherited many of our institutions we need to develop our own traditions of governance based on our special and unique circumstances.

This National Assembly by virtue of its constitutional responsibility is well placed to contribute, in a significant way, to the creation of a culture that is conducive to the resolution of differences by debate, discussion and compromise. The role and responsibility of the National Assembly have been increased by the recent amendments which have been made to the Constitution. A minimum of four standing committees have now been provided for. It is expected that these would lead to greater attention to the bases of the laws which we will debate, as well as to the policies of the executive. We should see a far greater interaction between the executives and the National Assembly than we have seen in the past.. It is necessary, therefore, that we prepare for these developments so that they can be managed efficiently and effectively, especially since we have little direct experience in the operations of standing committees in the manner in which, I believe, it is intended that they should function.

Hon. Members, the Speaker was initially a Petitioner to the King on behalf of the Parliament. Later he was regarded as a link between the King and the Parliament. Centuries of struggle eventually lead to the non-partisan Speaker wielding great power but in a judicial and impartial spirit.

There have been casualties along the way. Nine Speakers are known to have been executed in England. So far, none have suffered a similar fate in Guyana. I crave the indulgence of this Honourable House to ensure that the situation remains the same, at least during my tenure. And God help my successor!

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Hon. Member, Mrs

Clarissa Riehl, on my own behalf and on behalf of the National Assembly, on her election as Deputy Speaker. She can be assured that she will be called upon to play her full role in the post in which she has been elected.

The Hon. Mrs Riehl along with other distinguished women have been Members of the National Assembly for many years. However, I believe that this 8th Parliament has more women members than any before. *[Applause]* I believe that this is a product not only of the debates, the representations of women, and the changes to the law in the land following the Report of the Constitution Reform Commission, I believe also, it is a growing recognition of the role women can, and ought to play in our national life, that is to say, alongside and equal to their men folk.

Hon. Members, during my term of office as your Speaker I intend to hold the high traditions of this Office while promoting the role of this House in its contribution to peace, order and good governance. Thank you. *[Applause]*

CONGRATULATIONS TO SPEAKER AND DEPUTY SPEAKER

Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, allow me the opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Speaker of this National Assembly. I know you bring to the Office honour, integrity and experience. I share the conviction that with your distinguished career at the bar, you will easily assimilate your role in this Assembly and perform with competence and decisiveness.

We have, undoubtedly, entered a new parliamentary era. This Parliament has not been static, it is moving, and it has advanced considerably, in my own opinion. The current Parliament will not only increase its activities and place great emphasis on deliberation and involvement, as you quite rightly pointed out, in the use of

Standing Committees and Special Select Committees. Those avenues have proven to be extremely useful, and full use will be made of them.

It is true we are tied to the Westminster system and our Standing Orders are drawn largely from that system. We referred to Erskine Mae's as virtually the final source once it does not collide with our own Standing Orders. These volumes present the medium for the orderliness and the proper conduct of the affairs of the National Assembly. And I want to share your view that the honour, dignity and decorum of the National Assembly must be maintained.

Our country is facing extreme difficulties, if I did not confess that I am concerned I would not have been discharging my duty. And I would like to urge all Hon. Members of this House to rise to the occasion so that together we can work, sincerely and genuinely, for peace and stability in this land, and thus assure the population of Guyana that Parliament will earnestly and sincerely deliberate all issues and matters that affect the nation with the view that we can approach our differences and difficulties wisely and intelligently, so that we can reconcile and reach agreement as far as is humanly possible. I do not think this National Assembly is without men and women who have the intellectual acumen to contribute to, and answer the call. And I urge them to do so. I speak with some years of experience, my words are influenced by my heart, and I would love to see a return to unequivocal peace and stability in our land. I have always been forward looking. I have always been optimistic. I don't want to be a prophet of doom.

As we enter this new and challenging era, let us all look forward to a better future for the Guyanese people and for Guyana as a whole, where all are respected, all are protected and all are defended.

Mr Speaker, I wish you an exciting term on the chair that you so competently hold. And I want to seize this opportunity to prom-

ise the support and co-operation, if I can, of Members of this the National Assembly, but more specifically and more precisely, those of us on this side of the House. Once again, sincere congratulations and best wishes. *[Applause]*. On the last occasion, on the nomination of Deputy Speaker, Mrs Clarissa Riehl. I know you will equally fill the chair with dignity, you have performed before. You have had in your previous tenure the honor and opportunity of presiding over the National Budget Presentation. I want to congratulate you too, and wish you well, and offer you our support. *[Applause]*

Mr. Robert Corbin: Mr Speaker, on behalf of the PNC/Reform Members of Parliament I wish to take this opportunity to extend words of congratulations on your election as Speaker of this Eight Parliament of Guyana. I know I speak on behalf of all Members of this Assembly when I say that much is expected of you and of us in this Assembly during this challenging period in the development of Guyana. I have no doubt that you will discharge your duties effectively.

I note that in your remarks, you gave us some history of the period of non-partisan speakers. I am sure that all of us in this House expect that you will discharge your duties dispassionately and objectively.

In my brief, twenty-four plus, years in this Assembly I have had the privilege of being here with several Members and Speakers in the past. But most important, I think, I have had the privilege of being here with your late father sitting in Parliament and enhancing it with humour. I see that you attempted today to follow that tradition. I hope it augurs well for the nature of the discussions we will have here and that the results of our deliberations will enable the people of Guyana who elected us here to feel satisfied that we have done our jobs properly. I have no doubt that there are very high expectations of the people of Guyana.

On this side of the House we look forward to the eager imple-

mentation of the constitutional reforms in the next few days and, therefore, I know we will have a very packed parliamentary agenda. We will give our full support to ensure that we discharge our duties as effectively and as efficiently as possible, and that this Parliament will not just become a talk shop. Because, I think that our people are so sophisticated today that words will not satisfy them. They are looking forward for tangible results from our deliberations in this Parliament.

I, therefore, wish to congratulate you on your election to office and hope that you will be able, and I do believe that you can, discharge your duties effectively.

May I also take this opportunity to congratulate the Deputy Speaker. She is not new to this role. I am sure that the manner in which she discharged her duties on the last occasion, she will also discharge her duties this time with the same level of distinction. I wish to congratulate you both on your appointments. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member.

Ms Sheila Holder: Mr Speaker, I rise to join the others in congratulating you on your appointment as Speaker of this National Assembly. May I also add that I am well aware of your professional expertise as an advocate of the law and express the hope and desire that such scholarship will be evident as you execute your office as Speaker of the National Assembly. May I also add Mr Speaker, that such qualities of character developed over the years of advocacy of the law, we hope to see exhibited as you execute your mandate. Indeed, I will add that I have great hope and expectations that such character will be continuously exhibited. I congratulate you heartily on behalf of the GAP/WPA. I also extend my congratulations to the Deputy Speaker who has also held that position admirably in the past. Thank you

The Speaker: Thank you, Hon Member.

Mr Manzoor Nadir: Mr Speaker, I stand to join in congratulating you on your election to Speaker of this National Assembly. Already you have heard glowing compliments paid to you for the distinguished career you held at the bar. Having worked with you in the last Parliament, I know that we can expect the same high level of speakership, if there is a word like that, coming from you in this current National Assembly.

Mr Speaker, the leader of government's business promised you exciting times during your tenure so as not to lose your head. On this side of the House, while The United Force is on its way out, there are new rumblings on this side, and I want to recognize the contributions and offer my congratulations to GAP/WPA and ROAR, as new parties entering Parliament. It is the most significant achievement in the last twenty-five years' history of this National Assembly that two new parties have joined the National Assembly. I think that is significant and it will certainly make your tenure very exciting.

I also join in extending congratulations to the Deputy Speaker, the Hon Member, Mrs Clarissa Riehl, and to all the other Members of the National Assembly, especially those who are here for the first time. Thank you.

Mr Ravindra Dev: Mr Speaker, I rise to offer congratulations to the Speaker on being elected to this august Office and expect that the office will be executed in a professional manner. Your reputation has preceded you and I am sure that you will carry out your tasks very professionally. We would also like to offer our congratulations to the Deputy Speaker on her election to office.

With all of the changes that have been promised for this coming Parliament, it is obvious that we are in the time of transition. In such times, it is important that those who are elected to offices, that they have a very clear vision as to what needs to be done or chaos can result. We hope and we expect that these two individuals who

have been elected, who have great experience, would bring that experience to bear on behalf of the Guyanese people. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you Hon. Members.

Mrs Clarissa Riehl: Mr Speaker, I rise to add my little bit, that is, to congratulate you on your elevation to that beautiful chair. I know you will fill it with the same distinction as your predecessor, as all the predecessors, who have sat on that chair. I wish also to be very brief and to thank all sides of this Honourable House for their encouragement and for the good words said this afternoon. I also hope to do my best. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Appointment of Ministers

The Speaker: Hon Members, I wish for the record to inform you of the names of persons who were, with effect from the 12th April 2001, appointed by the President to be Ministers and Members of the Cabinet. They are:

Samuel Archibald Anthony Hinds, Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications.

Mr Reepu Daman Persaud, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

Miss Gail Teixeira, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport.

Mr Clement J. Rohee, Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation.

Mr Harripersaud Nokta, Minister of Local Government and Regional Development.

Mr Navindranauth O. Chandarpal, Minister of Agriculture.

May 04, 2001

Dr Henry Benfield Jeffrey, Minister of Education.

Dr Ramnauth Bisnauth, Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security.

Mr Shaik K. Z. Baksh, Minister of Housing and Water.

Mr Ronald Gajraj, Minister of Home Affairs.

Mr Carl Anthony Xavier, Minister of Transport and Hydraulics.

Mr Saisnarine Kowlessar, Minister of Finance.

Mr Satyadeow Sawh, Minister of Fisheries, Other Crops and Live-stock.

Dr Leslie Ramsammy, Minister of Health.

Mr Clinton Collymore, Minister in the Ministry of Local Govern-ment and Regional Development.

Dr Jennifer Reginalda Ann Westford, Minister of Public Serv-ice.

Miss Carolyn Rodrigues, Minister of Amerindian Affairs.

Miss Bibi Shadick, Minister in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security.

I have been advised that **Mr Hugh Desmond Hoyte** contin-ues to be the **Leader of the Opposition**.

Hon. Members, this completes this part of our proceedings for today. We now have to await the arrival of His Excellency the President. When his Excellency arrives he will inspect the Guard of Honour in the compound and, thereafter, would be escorted up-stairs.

Members of the Assembly and other invitees and guests who wish to go to the corridor may do so while the Guard of Honour is being inspected. We expect Members and invitees to be back in the Chamber before His Excellency arrives in the Chamber.

This sitting of the Assembly will, therefore, now be suspended.

Suspension of Sitting 3. 25 p.m.

Resumption of Sitting 4. 05 p.m.

ARRIVAL OF THE PRESIDENT

His Excellency, The President of the Co-operative republic of Guyana, Mr Bharrat Jagdeo, was announced. His Excellency entered the chamber. (Fanfare)

Welcome to the President and Invitees

The Speaker: Your Excellency, President Bharrat Jagdeo, Hon Prime Ministers of the Caribbean and of Guyana, Chancellor of the Judiciary, Your Excellencies, distinguished invitees, I welcome you to the Ceremonial Opening of the Eight Parliament.

I am particularly honoured to welcome to Guyana the Hon Mr. Owen Arthur and the Hon Mr. Hubert Ingraham, Prime Ministers of Barbados and Bahamas, respectively, and I express the hope that they enjoy their stay here in Guyana.

I take pleasure in introducing His Excellency, President Bharrat Jagdeo, to address this Eight Parliament. It is part of our tradition, inherited though it might be, but now enshrined in our Constitution, for the Head of State to address Parliament on the occasion of its Ceremonial Opening. Despite the changing and challenging times this tradition has survived and still continues to focus the nation

May 04, 2001

and the National Assembly on the tasks ahead as envisioned by the Head of State and his administration and as subsequently pronounced upon by this House.

Our modern political era is said to have begun with the introduction of universal adult suffrage in 1950. Although this is a short time in historical terms, in President Jagdeo we have already begun the movement to the second generation of political leadership. No doubt His Excellency may wish to consider that his address will constitute the first formal adumbration of principles of the first post-independence leadership.

Your Excellency, we expect that your address will enable the National Assembly to be guided as to the policies of your administration and as to its goal for the growth and the development of our country and its democracy. They will assist us in measuring the success of your policies and assessing the extent to which the administration's objectives have been achieved.

I welcome Your Excellency, and invite you to deliver your address.

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT

His Excellency the President: The Speaker of the National Assembly, Members of Parliament, Madam Chancellor, special invitees, the Hon Owen Arthur, Prime Minister of Barbados and the Hon Hubert Ingraham, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

Today, mine is a distinct honour to address this distinguished body, on the opening of this the Eight Parliament. I wish to congratulate the new Speaker of the National Assembly. Upon him is laid the extraordinary responsibility of preserving the noble traditions of this House. He bears the obligation of insuring legislative progress without diminishing the robust debates and productive inter-

ventions that have been the hallmark of our National Assembly.

It is my pleasant duty to congratulate the people of our great country for their confidence in the democratic process. They have demonstrated this by their ardent participation in the recently concluded Regional and General Elections. Our political competition was passionate. Each political party contended for its program and resolutely defended its platform. And our people have answered and expressed their wishes. They have given us the mandate to govern in their interest and the charge to engage our collective wisdom for their good, and for the advancement of our country.

Mr Speaker, whatever stirred us to stand for election must have included the conviction that we possess the commitment and purpose to devise ways of improving the well-being of our people. To infuse hope, and to ensure that their lives are better at the completion of our term than when we commenced. I believe that there can be no higher purpose, no greater call and, certainly no worthier occupation than service to our nation. I believe that it was for this single purpose we were elected, and for this reason we are here.

Our people expect that we, who enter this Chamber, are seized with the urgency of the tasks that confront us. We must measure up to the requirements that history and this moment lay on our willing shoulders. They are observing us and will respect us if courageously we place the national good above partisan interests, and country above self. Let history speak well of us.

Mr. Speaker, this Eight Parliament of the Republic is new, both in time and quality. It comes after the deliberate decision to reform our Constitution and consolidate our democratic institutions and practices. It is true that the process is incomplete, but already we have benefitted from Constitutional changes.

We give expression to the meaning of representative democracy by the constitutional amendment, which today brings twenty-

five (25) Members, elected directly by constituencies, to the National Assembly. In this act, we hear the voices of ordinary citizens from across the land. This progressive change, by all calculations, is of major proportion. Additionally, our Parliament is poised to participate in greater measures in the governance of our country.

Mr. Speaker, our society faces many challenges and the legislative agenda that comes before this National Assembly will have to take these into account. The agenda must include the completion of constitutional reform. In this process the profound hopes of people are placed. They expect that at the end of the process many of the ills that beset and retard us will be removed.

Mr. Speaker, the Guyana I envisage and for which I dedicate my energies, is one of accelerated progress, expanded opportunities and rapid social development. It is a place where fairness and justice dwell and from which fear, prejudice and discrimination are banished. The country that would be more dear to me than all the world, is a land where each citizen, barring none, is free to think bold thoughts, and dream new dreams, and all have the capacity to realise their potential. A country where natural resources are tapped for the benefit of all our people and the proceeds equitably shared.

The future, that we will build together, must position Guyana to rise to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Dwelling within secured borders, and living in peace and harmony, will allow our people to unleash their creative energies and to utilise new and changing technologies to accelerate the creation of wealth and improve their welfare. Ours must be a future that affords all our people the right and opportunity to earn a decent livelihood. It must, like a swelling tide, lift those who are in the grasp of poverty and the dungeons of deprivation and despair, and transport them to the shore of safety and security. It must be a place of caring for all, where the poor, the weak and the aged are not trampled upon by the rich and powerful, where capital and labour form partnerships to create wealth, and where there is no eruption of enmity.

May 04, 2001

Mr. Speaker, the world in which we live is challenging in ways never before experienced. Globalisation and trade liberalisation affect economies in unpredictable ways. While we acknowledge the potential benefits of free trade, the size and structure of our economy and the cost of capital, among other factors militate against our smooth integration into the global economy. This can lead to our marginalisation as a nation and as a region. We must display the political will to adjust quickly. Advocate in favour of regional proposals which will give us time and assist us to adjust.

We must combine diplomatic and technical resources at the regional level, build solidarity with other developing states and thereby increase our bargaining power. In that way, we can create structures and systems that will cushion us from being further impoverished. Already the work of the Regional Negotiating Machinery is proof that uniting our voices and pooling our expertise increase our effectiveness, deepen our advocacy and improve our negotiations.

As you are well aware, we in Caricom are labouring to establish a Single Market and Economy, and permit me to acknowledge the guidance from my colleague, Prime Minister Owen Arthur, that he is providing to the Community in this area. Additionally, we are working toward the establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice, which is an institution indispensable to the realisation of a Single Market and Economy. Guyana fully supports these necessary regional efforts and calls for their speedy implementation.

Mr Speaker, globalised and unrestricted removal of capital is not the only threat to our sovereignty. The plague of narcotic-trafficking is as ominous as economic factors. Today, drug cartel with significant earnings are capable of subverting governments, compromising judiciaries and forcing treasuries to divert scarce resources to fight the drug war. We cannot and we will not stand helplessly by and allow this illicit trade to gain a foothold in our society. We will continue to collaborate and coordinate our drug

interdiction program with friendly governments.

Mr Speaker, we must aggressively pursue the recapitalisation of the Guyana Defence Force. A recapitalised Guyana Defence Force will secure our national borders and safeguard our exclusive economic zone so that our marine resources and wealth hidden beneath the waters of the Atlantic will accrue to the nation.

Our diplomatic efforts must result in peace on our borders and I am hopeful that when Parliament establishes the Committee for National Defence and Borders our best brains will be brought together to advance our cause. We have never harboured thoughts of aggression. Our genuine desire is to deepen our relations and strengthen economic ties with our neighbors while through diplomatic means we seek to resolve contentious issues.

Mr Speaker, on the domestic front we have urgent unfinished business which this Eight Parliament cannot ignore and which it must not delay. I am pleased to inform this National Assembly that the Leader of the Opposition and I have met in a number of highly productive sessions. I hope that these sessions have set the basis for meaningful collaboration in the next five years. My Government was elected to represent the interest of all Guyanese and I will not shirk this responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, I am heartened by the maturity of our people. They have rebuffed the hate mongers and those who foment strife in our community. They have rejected attempts to divide our people along ethnic lines. It is now time for us to allow the structures and institutions which we have established to function for the good of our people. We must utilise the institutions established for the resolution of differences rather than descend to risky and destructive means. As a people our lives are interwoven to the extent that violation of any, does harm to all. We are all demeaned in our own land when any of us are targeted because of our ethnicity. We must all, therefore, condemn criminal acts and violence perpetrated against

May 04, 2001

Guyanese because of their ethnicity. Beating and robbing of innocent citizens is not legitimate political protest.

It is my hope, no, my expectation, that agreement could be reached so that the Ethnic Relations Commission would begin to do its work. It is also my hope that from the churches, the mosques and temples, the clear teachings of our common humanity and brotherhood will be heard. I hope that in our schools and in our communities tolerance and respect of each other will be taught and learned.

Mr Speaker, for us to build a nation secured in its borders, and content with itself, we must join hands and work together as one people. The creation of a new society must begin in our minds. The preoccupation must cease to be about preventing, restricting and depriving and become about liberating and expanding jobs, social opportunities, resources, etcetera.

Mr Speaker, my party sought and has been granted the mandate to pursue this journey and to lead this process. This is a great honour as it is a profound responsibility. It is, however, a journey that none, in spite of capabilities and experience, must or dare undertake alone. Nation building demands the involvement of all of us. Let us not refrain or delay from embarking upon this task so that future generations will have kind words to say about us.

My government is committed to creating opportunities for all Guyanese. We believe that creating remunerative employment is a sacred objective of the undertaking of national economic development. Worthwhile jobs are the basis for sustaining a dignified life and a healthy family environment. And viewed from a national standpoint, employment growth is the most effective way to reduce poverty.

To meet this challenge we are embarking on simultaneous actions on two fronts. First, greater levels of investment and production need to be encouraged, since they are the engines of employ-

ment creation. Second, intensified efforts are required to upgrade the labour force to increase our workers' skill levels so that they can seize new employment opportunities.

To increase the demands for labour, fast economic growth is required and, that means shifting the economy toward those products and sectors that have the brightest future prospects. Innovation, new product lines and new levels of product quality are needed urgently. Rapid growth requires greater competitiveness on international markets. Export growth is essential for employment creation. Our economy is too small for domestic demands to be the main driving force of economic growth, so, we have to look outward, just as many successful economies around the world have done.

My Government's strategy for stimulating investment and therefore job creation, includes creating a more favorable business environment, developing adequate infrastructure, good governance and implementing appropriate economic policies in all domains. We are moving forward vigorously in all these areas.

Businesses, urban as well as rural, need access to land. A bold new programme of access to land will be implemented. Priority will be given to market access to land through freehold and long-term leases, and procedures for private access to government-held land will be simplified and made more transparent.

Mr. Speaker, production expanding-investments will not occur on the scale we wish to make without the necessary infrastructure. An extensive national road and bridge network will be laid out consisting of both north to south and east to west routes. In addition, we have to improve shipping and air links and accelerate the pace of development of industrial estates.

In the light of the urgency of expanding and diversifying our exports, my Government will support this effort through our reorganised Export Promotion and Investment Agency. Procedures for

exporting will be revised and simplified, and through our diplomatic efforts, we will work to remove any remaining barriers to our exports.

The cornerstones of a successful economic strategy are good governance and a sound macroeconomic framework. Good governance flows from demystifying bureaucracy, making fair and transparent decisions, strengthening the judicial system and improving tendering and procurement. My Government will work with Parliament on these important issues.

On the macroeconomic framework, my government will pursue policies that include the reduction of the fiscal and balance of payment deficits, which would impact positively on the exchange rate, inflation and interest rates. We would also continue to raise our voices on debt reduction so that much more of our financial resources could be used for development. The success of our economic program will depend on the rapidity with which our private sector takes advantage of economic opportunities and the speed in which we advertise our abundant natural resources to the rest of the world. I challenge the private sector to play its rightful role in the development and growth process.

On the social front, my government will continue to put greater emphasis on the development of our children. They will be provided the tools to ascend to the highest summits of academic excellence, recording achievements in science and the arts. We must have an education system that prepares our young people to compete successfully in the global economy, to improve tolerance for each other, and to develop love for country.

Mr. Speaker, a healthy and well-nourished population enters the global economy with many advantages. This rationale lies at the core of my Government's health policy. We will therefore improve health services and increase access especially to the poor. We will redouble our efforts to further reduce infant and maternal mortality

May 04, 2001

rates. More resources will be made available to combat HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases.

Mr. Speaker, decent and affordable housing is a most basic human need. Strong efforts have been made in recent years to satisfy this need principally through allocation of house lots. It is evident that efforts will have to be redoubled and extended to secure affordable mortgages.

Mr Speaker, it is my hope that the deliberations of this Parliament will be of a remarkably high standard and that benefits will accrue to the nation. It is my view that it can no longer be an asset to be extemporaneous and uninformed. Therefore, efforts for providing research facilities for Members of Parliament must be hastened. Consideration will also be given to Parliamentary staffing and the urgent establishment of a parliamentary resource centre.

I support fully the intention to task Special Standing Committees and Select Committees with the work of Parliament. I am appreciative that the affairs of the nation would require longer and more regular Parliamentary sittings.

I am sure that one of your major responsibilities will be the completion of the Constitution Reform process, which includes constitutional changes for the appointment of the Members of the Judiciary, state procurement and the work of the Auditor General. These are serious issues requiring your full attention. They have implications for accountability and good governance and must become part of the efforts to root out corruption in our society.

Mr. Speaker, modern communications technologies should be employed in our battle to breakdown cultural barriers, root out illiteracy and backwardness and expand the horizons of our people. They should ensure that we remain an open society, be critical of excesses, ensure accountability and that the affairs of the State are conducted transparently. Our mass media must be used to break-

down impeding walls and build empathy so that our people assimilate, change and innovate, and not to promote ethnic divisions. Toward this objective we will have to enact Broadcast Legislation.

We cannot remain unmoved at the unnecessary human suffering that the abuse of our roads imposes on families. It is time to introduce tougher Road Safety Legislation.

The maintenance of law and order is essential lest our society slide irredeemably into anarchy. Where our laws have lagged behind developments, and where punishment ceases to act as a deterrent to crime and unsocial behaviour, we must act to ensure that our society does not reward lawlessness.

We need to revise, where applicable, and enact, where necessary, laws that will allow for the modernisation of our financial sector. The business sector will not experience rapid growth in the absence of an enabling legal environment. Laws that are relevant to our social situation including our children, and a judicial system that does not tie up cases indefinitely and delay judgement unnecessarily is needed.

Mr. Speaker, I have an abiding faith in our people. I am confident that you, their representatives, will meet the challenges of our time. We are a proud and resolute people. We are a resilient and strong nation. Our historical records show our indomitable spirits have soared after horrible hardships.

In the face of unprecedented change and challenges we must not falter. We must be courageous and stay the course to realise our national objectives. I am convinced that by working assiduously together we can achieve our vision for the Guyanese people. Let us nurture courage to act in the national interests.

I am persuaded that there is no power on earth that can sub-

hope that are uniquely Guyanese.

I wish you all a productive session that advances the welfare of our country and our people.

I now declare open this Eight Parliament of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, on this the 4th day of May, in the year 2001. Thank you.

THANKS TO THE PRESIDENT

The Speaker: I would like to thank His Excellency for his address to the Eight Parliament, on the occasion of its ceremonial opening. Your Excellency's elaboration of the principles, policies, plans and objectives of his administration has been carefully noted by this Assembly. Your address will, in due course, engage the attention of the National Assembly so that Members will have the opportunity to pronounce upon the ideas for the development of our country. I can assure Your Excellency that Hon Members will continually draw attention to your plans and will insist on reminding you of them if, perchance, at any time in the future, your onerous duties may cause you to momentarily pause in their implementation.

Your Excellency it was a pleasure and an honour to welcome you to the National Assembly and to attend on your address. On my own behalf and on behalf of the Honourable Members of the National Assembly, I thank you.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Be it resolved that the National Assembly is now adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 16:35H

May 04, 2001