

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

1ST SITTING

2.00PM

Thursday, 28 September 2006

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (69)

Speaker (1)

The Hon. Hari N Ramkarran, SC, MP. - *Speaker of the National Assembly*

Members of Government (40)

(i) People's Progressive Party/Civic (39)

(ii) The United Force (1)

The Hon Samuel AA Hinds, MP,

- (Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice), Minister of Public Works and Communications

The Hon Clement J Rohee, MP.

- Minister of Home Affairs

The Hon Shaik KZ Baksh, MP.

- Minister of Education

The Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey, MP.

- Minister of Foreign Trade and International Cooperation

The Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy, MP.

- (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne), Minister of Health

*The Hon Dr Ashni K Singh, MP.

- Minister of Finance

*The Hon S Rudolph Insanally, OR, CCH, MP.

- Minister of Foreign Affairs

The Hon Harry Narine Nawbatt, MP.

- Minister of Housing and Water

The Hon Robert M Persaud, MBA, MP.

- Minister of Agriculture

The Hon Dr Jennifer RA Westford, MP.

- (Region No. 7 – Cayuni Mazaruni), Minister of Public Service

The Hon Kellawan Lall, MP.

- Minister of Local Government and Regional Development

*The Hon Doodnauth Singh, SC, MP.

- Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

The Hon Dr Frank CS Anthony, MP.

- Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

The Hon Brindley HR Benn, MP.

- Minister of Transport and Hydraulics

**The Hon Manzoor Nadir, MP.

- Minister of Labour

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The Hon Priya D Manickchand, MP.	- (Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice), Minister of Human Services and Social Security
The Hon Dr Desrey Fox, MP.	- Minister in the Ministry of Education
The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran, MD, MP.	- Minister in the Ministry of Health
The Hon Jennifer I Webster, MP.	- Minister in the Ministry of Finance
The Hon Manniram Prashad, MP.	- Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce
Mr Donald R Ramotar, MP	
Ms Gail Teixeira, MP (Absent)	
Mr Harripersaud Nokta, MP	
Mrs Indranie Chandarpal, MP	
Ms Bibi S Shadick, LLB, MP.	- (Region No. 3 – Essequibo Island, West Demerara)
Mr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, MP	
Mr Albert Atkinson, JP, MP.	- (Region No. 8 – Potaro/Siparuni)
Mr Komal Chand, CCH, JP, MP.	- (Region No. 3 – Essequibo Island, West Demerara)
Mr Bernard C DeSantos, SC, MP.	- (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)
Mrs Shirley V Edwards, JP, MP.	- (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr Mohamed F Khan, MP.	- (Region No. 2 – Pameroon/Supenaam)
Mr Odinga N Lumumba, MP	
Mr Moses V Nagamootoo, MP	
Mr Mohabir A Nandlall, MP	
Mr Neendkumar, MP	
Mr Parmanand P Persaud, JP, MP	- (Region No. 20 Pameroon/Supenaam)
Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury, CCH, JP, MP	
Mr Dharamkumar Secraj, MP	
Mr Norman A Whittaker, MP.	- (Region No. 1 – Barima/Waini)

* Non-Elected Minister

** Elected Member from The United Force

Members of the Opposition (28)

(i) Members of People's National Congress Reform – One Guyana (22)

Mr Robert Corbin, MP	- (Absent)
Mr Winston S Murray, CCH, MP	- (Absent)
Mrs Clarissa S Riehl, MP,	- Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly(Absent)
Mr E Lance Carberry, MP	- (Absent)
Mrs Deborah J Backer, MP	
Mr Anthony Vicria, MP	- (Absent)
Mr Basil Williams, MP	- (Absent)
Dr George A Norton, MP	- (Absent)
Mrs Volda A Lawrence, MP	- (Absent)
Mr Keith Scott, MP	- (Absent)
Mr James K McAllister, MP	
Mr Dave D Danny, MP	- (Region No. 4 – Demerara/ Mahaica) (Absent)
Mr Aubrey C Norton, MP	- (Absent)
Mr Ernest B Elliot, MP	- (Region No. 4 – Demerara/ Mahaica) (Absent)
Mrs Judith David-Blair, MP	- (Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/ Mazaruni) (Absent)
Mr Mervyn Williams, MP	- (Region No. 3 – Essequibo Island/ West Demerara) (Absent)
Ms Africo Selman, MP	
Dr John Austin, MP	- (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/ Corentyne) (Absent)
Ms Vanessa Kissoon, MP	- (Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice) (Absent)
Mr Desmond Fernandes, MP	- (Region No. 1 – Barima/Waini) (Absent)

(ii) Alliance For Change (5)

Mr Raphael GC Trotman, MP	
Mr Khemraj Ramjattan, MP	
Mrs Sheila VA Holder, MP	
Ms Chantalle L Smith, MP	- (Region No. 4 – Demerara/ Mahaica)
Mr David Patterson, MP	

(iii) Guyana Action Party/Rise Organise and Rebuild (1)

Mr Everall N Franklyn, MP

OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Clerk of the National Assembly

Mrs Lilawtie Coonjah, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

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PROCLAMATION OF SUMMONING OF SESSION

Clerk of the National Assembly: Honourable Members, it is now time for the First Session of the Ninth Parliament of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana to begin.

According to the Proclamation by His Excellency the President, which for the records I will read:

PROCLAMATION NO. 3 of 2006 bearing Seal No 179 of 2006 and signed by B Jagdeo, President.

WHEREAS by Proclamation dated 2 May 2006, issued under Article 72 of the Constitution, the Eighth Parliament of Guyana was dissolved on 2 May 2006;

AND WHEREAS it is provided by Article 69(1) of the Constitution that each session of Parliament shall be held at a place within Guyana and shall begin at the time that the President shall appoint by Proclamation;

NOW THEREFORE in pursuance of Article 169(1) of the Constitution, I do hereby appoint the Parliament Chamber, Public Buildings, Brickdam, Georgetown, Guyana as a place where a session of the Ninth Parliament shall be held at two o'clock in the afternoon on 28 September 2006 as the time when such session shall begin.

Given under my hand and the Seal of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana at the Office of the President, Georgetown, Guyana, this 12th day of September 2006 in the 37th year of the Republic by the President's command.

Honourable Members, I will call in order, declared by the Elections Commission the names of those persons who have to date become Members of the National Assembly following elections on 28 August 2006.

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Will Members kindly answer as their names are called?

(i) Declared Elected on 6 September 2006

Alliance for Change

Chantalle Louis Smith

Raphael Trotman

Khemraj Ramjattan

Sheila Holder

David Patterson

Guyana Action Party/Rise Organise and Rebuild

Everall Franklin

The United Force

Manzoor Nadir

(ii) Declared Elected on 12 September 2006

People's Progressive Party/Civic

Komal Chand

Bibi Safora Shadick

Neendkumar

Shirley Veronica Edwards

Bernard DeSantos

Priya D Manickchand

Robert Persaud

Leslie S Ramsammy

Jennifer RA Westford

Albert Atkinson

Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett

Samuel AA Hinds

(ii) Declared Elected on 13 September 2006

Norman Whittaker

Mohamed F Khan

Parmanand Persaud

Mohamed Irfaan Ali

Frank CS Anthony

Shaik KZ Baksh

Brindley HR Benn

Indranie Chandarpal

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Desrey Fox

Henry B Jeffrey

Khellawan Lall

Odinga N Lumumba

Moses V Nagamootoo

Mohabir A Nandalall

Harry Narine Nawbatt

Harripersaud Nokta

Manniram Prashad

Donald Rabindranauth Ramotar

Bheri S Ramsaran

Clement J Rohee

Philomena Sahoye-Shury

Dharamkumar Seeraj

Gail Teixeira

Jennifer I Webster

(iii) Declared Elected on 28 September 2006

People's National Congress - One Guyana

[They are not here]

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ELECTION OF SPEAKER

Honourable Members, my first duty this afternoon 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 Speaker of the National Assembly and I accordingly invite nominations.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Clerk, I propose Mr Hari Narayen Ralph Ramkarran SC, to be the Speaker of the National Assembly of this Ninth Parliament of Guyana.

Mr Donald R Ramotar: I beg to second the nomination of Mr Ramkarran

Clerk of the National Assembly: Are there any further nominations?
[Pause]

Mr Hari Narayen Ramkarran had been nominated by Mr Samuel Hinds. The nomination has been seconded by Mr Donald Ramotar.

There being no further nomination, I declare Mr Hari Narayen Ramkarran duly elected Speaker of the National Assembly. *[Applause]*

[Mr Hari Narayen Ramkarran who was present was escorted by his proposer and seconder to the Chair]

The Oath of Office was made and subscribed by Mr Hari Narayen Ramkarran

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

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

[PNCR-IG Members Mrs Deborah Backer, Mrs James McAllister and Ms Africo Selman enter the Chamber]

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Mrs Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, I move the nomination of Mrs Clarissa Riehl as Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly.

The Speaker: Honourable Member, have you ascertained that Mrs Riehl is willing to accept the nomination? She is not here.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Yes Sir, Mrs Riehl is besieged by reporters even as she tries to enter the door and I have spoken to her personally.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, I rise to second that nomination.

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

Honourable Members, Mrs Clarissa Riehl has been nominated by the Honourable Member, Mrs Deborah Backer. The nomination has been seconded by the Hon Samuel Hinds. There being no further nominations, *I declare Mrs Clarissa Riehl as duly elected to be Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. [Applause]*

Mrs Riehl not being here, she will have to subscribe on a later occasion.

OATHS

Honourable Members, it is now time for the oath to be administered to Members of the House by the Clerk of the National Assembly. In order to save time, it is my intention to move away from the normal practice of having the Clerk of the National Assembly moving from one member to another to administer the oath. If I am given your consent, the Clerk will call your names and, as your name is called, you will stand up, hold the religious book in your right hand, if you use one, read your oath form then sit and sign the form. As you are signing the Member beside you will stand and read his/her oath form.

The oath of office was made and subscribed by the following Members:

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Mr Samuel Archibald Anthony Hinds

Clement James Rohee

Shaik Kamrul Zaman Baksh

Henry Benfield Jeffrey

Leslie Satruken Ramsammy

Carolyn Rodrigues

Ashni Kumar Singh

S Rudolph Insanally

14:15H

[The three Members from the PNCR-1G withdraw from the Chamber]

Harry Narine Nawbatt

Robert Montgomery Persaud

Jennifer Reginalda Ann Westford

Khellawan Lall

Doodnauth Singh

Frank Christopher Stanislaus Anthony

Brindley Horatio Robeson Benn

Manzoor Nadir

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Priya Devi Manickchand

Desrey Clementine S Fox

Bheri Sygmond Ramsaran

Jennifer Ingrid Marie Webster

Manniram Prashad

Donald Rabindranauth Ramotar

Harripersaud Nokta

Indranie Chandarpal

Bibi Safora Shadick

Mohamed Irfaan Ali

Albert Atkinson

Komal Chand

Bernard Celestino DeSantos

Shirley Veronica Edwards

Mohamed Farouk Khan

Odinga N Lumumba

Moses Verasammy Nagamootoo

Mohabir Anil Nandlall

Neendkumar

Parmanand Persaud

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Philomena Sahoye-Shury

Dharamkumar Seeraj

Norman Whittaker

Raphael Gregory Conwright Trotman

Khemraj Ramjattan

Sheila Veronica Agnes Holder

Chantalle Louis Smith

David Patterson

Everall Franklin

The Speaker: Thank you Mr Clerk. Thank you Honourable Members.

PRAYERS

The Clerk **reads the** Prayer

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Honourable Members, distinguished guests, I am honoured by and thankful for the support you have given to me in electing me to serve the National Assembly for a second term as Speaker.

I should like to congratulate the Members of the National Assembly on their election and welcome new members to the House. I hope that the members who were here in the last Parliament would continue their hard work and distinguished service and that the new members would enjoy their stay and have a fruitful and productive period of service to the people of Guyana. To those members of the Eighth Parliament who have not been returned, I wish them well in their future endeavours.

On the occasion on my election as Speaker at the first sitting of the Eighth Parliament in May 2001, I pointed out that as far as I could have ascertained nine speakers have been executed in British history. I expressed the hope then that I would survive my own term of office. I had no idea of what fate awaited me. It turned out that the period was tumultuous, energetic, dramatic, tense, disappointing and frustrating at times. Fortunately the period was also characterised by co-operation, compromise and remarkable achievements which overwhelmingly outweighed any negative consequences of political disagreements.

The Eighth Parliament gave more than a hint of what is possible in Guyana. I survived the Eighth Parliament while participating in the events leading to the National Assembly beginning to gradually acquire the tools to play its full role as a separate, but equal and independent arm of government as envisaged by the Constitution. Therefore, I begin this term not with the same trepidation as I began the last.

Today is the first sitting of the National Assembly under extensively revised Standing Orders.

The Eighth Parliament approved its amendments at its last sitting in May this year. It is my view that these revised Standing Orders offer new and innovative tools to enable members to deal with the increasingly complex issues and procedures which are confronting them.

The enhanced structure of the Committee System and rules which apply to them hitherto defined by Resolution of the National Assembly have now been included in the Standing Orders. The revised Standing

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Orders came at the end of a period of a series of reforms recommended by the Constitution Reform Commission in 1999 and otherwise agreed to by members of the Eighth Parliament.

These reforms could not be accomplished without the exercise of an extraordinary amount of patience and goodwill by members, because composition of committees had to be agreed; terms of reference had to be drafted and a variety of initial problems had to be resolved. These reforms resulted in an additional seventy-one meetings of sectoral committees, most of which had the specific purpose of monitoring the development and implementation of government policies and were generally productive. This activity which is a vital aspect of any democratic culture has now begun in Guyana and has enormous potential to improve governance in our country.

The reforms have also provided the incentive for further developments. For the last full year of activity - 2005 - fifty percent of Bills were referred to Special Select Committees. Motions including private members' motions as well as regulations, for the first time with an innovative interpretation of the old Standing Orders were referred to Special Select Committees. A total of forty-nine meetings of Special Select Committees were held in 2005, an unprecedented development. In this detailed work lies the potential for improving governance. Much of the business of the National Assembly occurs during sittings. However, as we advance, an increasingly large volume of activity will be conducted in committees which provide a more conducive atmosphere for compromise. Sittings would eventually become the place where the political parties debate major and important issues of policy.

Unfortunately the media has not yet discovered the journalistic riches which are offered by the work of Committees and give them little publicity. I intend to do my best to ensure that the public becomes aware of the quality of effort, the investment in time and the commitment of members to everyday work of the National Assembly.

During the last two years of the last Parliament eight new perma-

ment committees functioned regularly as a daily part of the business of the National Assembly. Previous to that there was only one.

I take this opportunity to advise Members of the Ninth Parliament that as we perfect our systems and improve our capacity, much more will be demanded of them than of the Members of the Eighth Parliament, because we will be able to accomplish much more.

We have plans to further improve the facilities, to enhance our capacity in various areas and to implement training programmes for members and staff. I firmly believe in the capacity of members to co-operate and compromise. I have seen it in practice. I have come away with the firm conviction that an enormous amount of goodwill exists for compromise on both sides of the House. In this Parliament, I would continue to urge members to exploit that goodwill. I undertake that all my energies will be fully committed to further improving the capacity of the National Assembly, to enable you - the members - to fully exercise your mandate to serve the people of Guyana - a mandate of which I am and we are all fully committed. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

(ii) Appointment of Ministers

Honourable Members, I wish, for the records, to inform you of the names of persons who were appointed by the President to be Ministers and Members of the Cabinet. They are as follows:

Mr Samuel Archibald Anthony Hinds,

Minister of Public Works and Communications.

Mr Clement James Rohee,

Minister of Home Affairs

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Dr Henry Benfield Jeffrey,

Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation

Mr Shaik Kamrul Zaman Baksh,

Minister of Education

Dr Ashni Kumar Singh,

Minister of Finance

Mr S Rudolph Insanally,

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr Doodnauth Singh,

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

Dr Jennifer Reginalda Ann Westford,

Minister of Public Service

Ms Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett

Minister of Amerindian Affairs

Dr Leslie Satruken Ramsammy,

Minister of Health

Mr Harry Narine Nawbatt,

Minister of Housing and Water

Dr Frank CS Anthony,

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

Mr Kellawan Lall

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development

Ms Priya D Manickchand,

Minister of Human Services and Social Security

Mr Robert M Persaud,

Minister of Agriculture

Mr Manniram Prashad

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

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Dr Bheri Sygmond Ramsaran,

Minister in the Ministry of Health

Dr Desrey Fox,

Minister in the Ministry of Education

Ms Jennifer IM Webster,

Minister in the Ministry of Finance

Honourable Members, among the aforementioned Ministers, the following are non-elected:

- Hon Dr Ashni Kumar Singh
- Hon S Rudolph Insanally
- Hon Doodnauth Singh

Honourable Members, this completes our part of the proceedings for today. We have to await the arrival of His Excellency the President. When the President arrives, He will inspect the Guard of Honour in the compound and thereafter will be escorted upstairs. 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. *[Interruption]*

Yes, Honourable Prime Minister

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Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, before you move on to the next item, I want to take this opportunity to commend you and wish you well as you return to be our Speaker of this National Assembly for this Ninth Parliament of Guyana. I want to assure you that we of the PPP/C will give all our support to your programme to make this National Assembly truly one of the three arms of the Government of Guyana. I thank you.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, the Sitting of the Assembly will now therefore be suspended.

14:50H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

16:18H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

16:20H

ARRIVAL OF HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

ROLL OF DRUMS

FANFARE

REMARKS BY THE SPEAKER

Your Excellency, distinguished guests, I welcome you to the Parlia-

ment of Guyana on this the First Sitting of the Ninth Parliament.

It is customary on this ceremonial occasion for Your Excellency to deliver an address to the Parliament outlining your government's policies for the coming period. Lest it be assumed some time in the future by any Speaker of the National Assembly who wishes to take the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers too far and deny a future President of our Republic the right which Your Excellency enjoys, we have enshrined in our new Standing Orders Your Excellency's right to address the Parliament.

We hope and look forward to Your Excellency exercising that right more often in the future and we would welcome Your Excellency to our fully refurbished Chambers if you choose to do so.

Your Excellency, the tasks facing our country are daunting. You have said on many occasions that these challenges can only be resolved by discussions. I would recommend that the Members of the National Assembly are experts in the business of talking and discussions. We stand resolved, therefore, to examine your government's policies with great attention and, by the views expressed by Members, we hope that your government will be suitably advised.

Members of both sides of the House will expect their views to be taken into consideration in the formulation of government policy and I am sure that once given the opportunity, Members will participate fully in the task of nation building both on the floor of the House and in Committees.

Your Excellency, I invite you to address the Ninth Parliament. [*Applause*]

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ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

Mr Speaker, Clerk of the National Assembly, Members of Parliament, Special Invitees, I am extremely pleased to be addressing the Ninth Parliament of Guyana. I join in welcoming all who are sitting for the first time in this august body.

Not only does your office bestow great prestige, but it also carries enormous responsibilities. I encourage all of you to be faithful to the timeless principle of service and to be detached from the ambitions of power and the trappings of office. I urge you to execute your duties with pride, simplicity and integrity and to find in this service a higher calling. There can be no greater honour than to be called to the service of one's country. This privilege is magnified when elected to the nation's highest deliberative and decision making forum. I am confident that through your conduct and deportment in this Chamber, you will bring dignity and respect not only to your office, but also by extension to this the Ninth Parliament of Guyana.

I also take this opportunity to thank those who have not returned from the previous Parliament.

I wish to pay tribute to the outstanding contribution of Mr Reepu Daman Persaud, who gave distinguished service in this Assembly for forty-one years. *[Applause]* Mr Persaud, your service in promoting the welfare of our people is highly valued.

The General and Regional Elections are behind us. Let me once again congratulate all those who made it possible, not least of whom were the people of Guyana. It was their resolve and maturity that ensured that peace prevailed.

The political campaigns are over and we must now return to the task of building this nation, united as one people with a common destiny.

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I interpret the results of the last elections as a mandate from the people for continuity of my government's policies and programmes. Since the return to democracy, Guyana has emerged from a pariah-state to one that is firmly on the road to realising its true potential. The society is now free and open and is underpinned by democratic principles and ethos.

Our people have seen their standard of living improved dramatically. Thanks to unprecedented advances that have been made in areas such as education, health, potable water supply, housing and public infrastructure. While these are important strides in the right direction, continuing to move the nation forward would require more than a set of sound and well-intentioned policies. In fact, it will require a climate of institutional and political thrust as well as a strong capacity for hard work and excellence.

My Government is committed to entrenching the integrity of our public institutions. This will involve continuing the relentless fight against corruption and an unequivocal subscription to transparency and accountability in the affairs of Government.

We will institute a process of change at all levels of society so as to achieve greater progress, including the way in which we engage each other, in which we do business, indeed, in the way in which we produce and deliver goods and services.

We will take all necessary measures to create a society where there are opportunities for all to build a more inclusive society in which there is equal treatment before the law and by all agencies whether public or private.

Mr Speaker, in the next five years, my government will work towards the political, economic and social transformation of our country in which all of our people will have equal access to resources and benefit from economic development and improvements in social conditions.

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Given the development over the past decade and a half, Guyana has been propelled to a new threshold that will see us emerge as a modern democratic and united country, prepared and equipped to transform our natural and human resources for the creation of wealth.

The core elements of the task towards political transformation will include constitutional and legislative reforms that will involve all political parties represented in Parliament and the wider civil society.

The underlying pillars of the new political framework will include meaningful engagements with all political parties, reforms of the legislative and judicial branches of the government and continuous engagements of the progressive civil society in the governance of this country.

In the economic sphere, it is my government's commitment to re-structure and re-orient the economy to achieve greater qualitative output.

It is in this context that we will continue to facilitate the strengthening of the traditional sectors, support new and growing sectors such as information technology, aqua-culture and eco-tourism and redouble our efforts to improve and sustain a business friendly environment that will make Guyana a choice investment destination. Underpinning these strategic initiatives will be a sustained emphasis on infrastructure development.

Within the social sector, my Government will continue to expand access and quality of basic social services to all Guyanese and work towards the upliftment of the physically challenged and socially disadvantaged in our society.

Guyana is a beautiful tapestry of many cultures, cultures that define our uniqueness as a nation. Our cultures should bring us together and not divide us. Every Guyanese owes it as a duty to learn and to understand these cultures and the best places to start this renaissance are in the educational system and in our homes.

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My Government is committed to bringing about changes in our education curricula to take account of this, but parents, the churches, the mosques and the temples also have a role to play.

Mr Speaker, central to our vision is the fashioning of an inclusive democracy where the rule of law is paramount, where the rights of our people are respected and where all stakeholders feel involved, valued and respected.

Our economy must be one capable of generating wealth, leading to higher standards of living for our people; one that ensures that every home has access to potable water, electricity and telephones, guaranteed first-rate public health care, secure education, sporting, recreational opportunities for our children that would allow them to fulfil their potential and one that provides greater personal security and assures that our elderly and indigent are treated with dignity and fairness.

Mr Speaker, to achieve these objectives, we will have to build trust at the political level and create political space for all. Violence and threats must give way to dialogue, and the development of our country should remain paramount in all our political discourse.

At the economic level, we must continue to embrace an economic system that is open and driven by an aggressive entrepreneurial ethic. We must recapture that spirit of enterprise and innovation for which our country was known.

Our investors while primarily driven by the profit motive must also demonstrate civic and moral responsibility towards the society and the protection of the environment. As Guyanese we must be compassionate to one another and rise to the defence of justice.

In the course of building such a society there will be challenges both domestic and external that we would have to confront. On the domestic side, the constant political wrangling and violent crimes in all of its manifestations are not conducive to the retention of our professional

and entrepreneurial skills and the economic well-being of our country. On the external side, the removal of access to preferential markets, high oil prices and natural disasters present clear and fore-boding signals of factors that could undermine our competitiveness in the global marketplace and threaten our way of life. We are convinced, nevertheless that the effective management of these challenges will widely open the door of opportunities and create a momentum of renewed optimism in our country.

Today, we are provided with an opportunity to move resolutely forward with the deepening of the regional integration process especially as it relates to the complete realisation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy. However, to take full advantage of the CSME and other global markets, our industries must become competitive. This is why we have developed a comprehensive national competitiveness strategy, which seeks to address issues relating to both the macro economic environment as well as productivity in fostering global competitiveness. We have since cemented an ongoing partnership with the private sector aimed at furthering the elements of this strategy.

Mr Speaker, my Government's policy agenda over the next five years is rooted in the primacy of our people forged by our previous experiences, tempered by the challenges we faced and fortified in our belief that our policies are sound for our generation and for generations to come. In pursuit of this, my Government intends over the next five years to advance its policy agenda in several areas. My Government will continue to implement policies that are aimed at maintaining macro economic stability, a vital ingredient for promoting investor confidence and reducing poverty. Prudent fiscal and monetary policies combined with debt relief have served us well. They have ensured fiscal and debt sustainability, contributed to the reduction of inflation and ensures the stability of our exchange rate. Importantly they have provided us with the flexibility of increasing spending in the social sectors and improving access and quality of basic services.

The Government will in the next five years continue to pay attention

to the fiscal deficit and money supply recognising the importance of these variables to price and exchange rates stability and interest rates.

We will continue to expand the revenue base of the country by growing the economy through greater tax efficiency. We hope to increasingly fund our expenditures from revenue, but we will continue to seek debt relief and other development assistance from our external partners. We are mindful of not returning the country to the unsustainable borrowing of the past, therefore we will pursue a careful sustainable borrowing strategy to mobilise additional resources for developmental purposes. In line with our goal of improving the living standards of our people, my government will enhance the environment in which the private sector operates. To this end we will introduce the Value-added Tax and begin the revision of corporate and personal income taxes over the medium term with a view to making Guyana a more attractive destination for investors.

We will also continue to review the incentives framework and complete reforms in the Deeds Registry, Guyana Office for Investment and the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. These reforms will eliminate red tape thus reducing the cost of conducting business in our country.

Mr Speaker, the traditional sectors have served us well. In the past the agricultural and mining sectors have contributed significantly to GDP growth and offered employment opportunities for many Guyanese. In response to global competition, my Government has begun the restructuring and modernisation of the sugar and bauxite sectors. I am happy to say that in the past few years, the private sector has invested more than US \$150 million in revitalising the bauxite industry. Over the next five years, my Government will work together with private investors to develop an integrated bauxite-alumina complex. These investments will open up job opportunities for people in Regions 10 and 6 and rejuvenate the economies of Linden and its environs. In the sugar sector, the Government has already responded to the EU sugar price cuts by taking measures that will improve the competitiveness of sugar production. For

a sector that contributes about sixteen percent of GDP and provides about twenty-five percent of our foreign exchange, the strategic decision of forging ahead with the modernisation and restructuring programme may have saved our economy from severe shocks and loss to welfare. The \$169 million Skeldon Sugar and Co-generation Project will be completed early in 2008. This project will ensure the continuity and viability of the sugar industry, support value-added activities and secure and expand employment opportunities in the Berbice region. This investment will also ensure a continuous supply of electricity in the area, which will provide an added incentive for investing in that region.

Mr Speaker, Guyana has always been a primary commodity exporter. More than ninety percent of our exports comprise depletable resources - forest products and food items. These commodities are subject to the volatility of the international marketplace and have contributed significantly to Guyana suffering adverse terms of trade when commodity prices fell. This trend will have to be reversed and this can be done by our private sector engaging in value-added activities. We have started this process. A visit to GUYEXPO will demonstrate that we are producers of high quality value-added products that will compete well in regional and international markets. My Government stands ready to provide every assistance in this regard.

It is also in this light that I welcome the emerging sectors of agro-processing, eco-tourism, information technology and aqua culture. These sectors hold a lot of promise for job creation and in the next five years my government will work to ensure that they take root and become the driving force of economic growth and prosperity.

Mr Speaker, I see exciting opportunities in our infrastructure development. Not only will this complement private sector development but also begin the integration of our country with others in South America. Consistent with the National Development Strategy, our goal of developing an integrated Core Infrastructure Project that provides a deep water harbour, a possible rail-link especially in the mining-rich areas, and a highway to Brazil will be advanced in the next five years. The cost

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of such a project is prohibitive, so careful cost benefit analyses will have to be done. This project, however, holds bright prospects for transforming Guyana, increasing national income and lifting living standards. The completion of this project will expand markets and increase the competitiveness of Guyanese products, provide jobs and open up the interior of Guyana. My Government will seek private/public partnerships in advancing this important project.

We will also continue to invest heavily in the expansion of the physical infrastructure. To this end we will further rehabilitate and expand the national road and bridge network, the drainage and irrigation system including major conservancies and the sea and river defence system.

My Government will liberalise the telecommunication sector. This will ensure a more reliable competitive service, which is required for Guyana to develop a competitive IT-related services industry employing thousands of young people. We will work to connect some eighty per cent of our household to the internet and to make every Guyanese computer literate. I know that this sounds ambitious, but I strongly believe that it is possible. If we succeed, we may see a revolution in learning and access to information in our country and we will open up a whole new world to our people.

GPL will continue to improve the electricity services. In the short term their focus will be on expanding services to those who still do not have access and through investments in generating, transmission and distribution systems improve the reliability of electricity supply. GPL has also signed a power-purchase agreement with a private company to buy 100 megawatts of power from a hydro electric power plant from 2010. The completion of this project will ensure the reduction of energy prices to households and the private sector and would lead to the improved competitiveness of our economy.

Mr Speaker, my Government will continue to increase resource allocation for social sector development over the next five years. We recognise that an educated and healthy workforce is a productive

workforce. Apart from the social benefits, there is also a contribution to growth and development from social investments in health and education.

In the education sector, the focus will be on improving access to and quality of education through the resolute implementation of the education plan. Key elements of this plan include equipping our children with adequate life skills to function in a productive society; to increase the functional literacy rate incorporating strategies such as new teaching methods and improved curricula and utilising tools such as computer-assisted programmes and computer laboratories and making computer literacy part of primary level education. Teacher training is a priority of the plan and in this regard we will increase the number of resource centres and expand distance learning. Technical and vocational education will be expanded and parent and community involvement in schools' management will be increased.

We would like every Guyanese to have equal access to proper health care. My Government is committed to fully implementing the various sector strategies. Our goal is to improve and expand primary health care and work together with the private sector to provide affordable tertiary care including the provision of cardiac surgery, cancer treatment, advanced eye care and dialysis services. Among the highlights of our plans are the improvement and expansion of the physical infrastructure, the increase training of health care professionals and the establishment of the regulatory framework to ensure the delivery of modern reliable health services whilst holding our institutions accountable.

Mr Speaker, as a nation our success will be judged by many things, but the true measure of our development will be graded by the manner in which we treat the weaker members of our society. I am pained at times at the stories of indifference meted out to the poor and needy in our society. I am disturbed by the knowledge that some of our citizens still sleep on our streets. I am troubled by the neglect of the elderly, many of whom are forced to spend their golden years without adequate love and support. We therefore have to ensure that within the next five years, we

remove those who sleep on our streets to a more satisfactory place of abode; that our poor, destitute and needy receive our support; that we take better care of our elderly. The abuse of our women is strongly deterred and that struggling single mothers receive some form of support from the State including access to micro-credit for income generating activities.

Mr Speaker, our objectives in the housing sector is to ensure that every Guyanese owns his or her own home. To this end my Government will allocate more house lots, ensure that mortgage rates are affordable and develop better infrastructure in housing schemes. We will continue to invest large sums of money in the water sector so as to ensure a safe and adequate delivery of potable water supply to a greater number of citizenry.

Mr Speaker, with a view to enabling the development and general welfare of the youth who constitute the pillar upon which this nation is built, youth policies will be constantly reviews. Emphasis will be placed on the social integration and empowerment of our young people including skills training and opportunity for their personal growth. Over the next five years, my Government will spend in excess of \$1.5 billion to train some 25,000 young persons in various skills as part of our plan to rebuild the entrepreneurial class in Guyana. We will also be working with others to develop a wide range of recreational opportunities; to develop more sport facilities; to provide direct support to sporting bodies and to introduce comprehensive programmes for sports and physical education in schools.

In order to promote the rich cultural diversity of our country, my Government will create a national endowment for the arts; provide opportunities for our writers, musicians, artists, dancers and others to develop their talents and provide assistance to research and document various aspects of our culture and history. In the latter aspect, the completion of the reconstruction of the National Archives will provide added impetus.

We must also, Mr Speaker, take pride in our immediate environs. It is appalling to note the ease with which we litter our surroundings; engage in the indiscriminate dumping of garbage and how delinquent we have become in allowing our neighbourhoods to be overgrown by weeds and our drains clogged by debris. With the impetus from the hosting World Cup 2007 in Guyana, I am urging that a concerted, determined national effort be made to enhance communities. This issue is not just about aesthetics; it is also about good hygiene and pride in our country and we intend to pursue these goals through public education, tougher laws and penalties.

Mr Speaker, the strengthening of security and public safety will be given a high priority in my administration. There have been few areas that have emotively captured the attention of the Guyanese people as the way in which crime and issues of security have. It is not difficult to comprehend why this is so. Our Constitution provides for respect for life, limb and private property. The daily account of abuses of these rights has indeed led to strident calls for sustained action to be taken to uphold them. Currently Guyanese are troubled by criminal activity in its various forms and manifestations, be they crimes involving arms and other weapons, narco trafficking, economic crimes, traffic offences and domestic violence. All of them have played a role in generating tensions in our society. Lives have been shattered and the future of many families of innocent victims of crime have been terribly affected.

The cost on our economy is tremendous and our image abroad has suffered. In the last two years we have started discussions with the Inter American Development Bank for the resources to support our plans for the reform of the criminal justice system. We have secured a significant sum of money to support police reform and the reform of the judiciary. We have also secured commitments from a number of bilateral donors. Work has started. We have a clear idea of what changes are needed. We now have to urgently move forward. I have asked the Minister of Home Affairs to work with the Police Force in pursuit of this matter with a single-minded focus. Reforms will focus on strengthening the crime fighting capabilities of the Police Force and will include better intelli-

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gence gathering, provision of hardware, improving forensic and investigative capabilities, improve the training of special units to deal with serious crimes and the best international advice.

On the prevention side, we will work with communities and vulnerable groups that are preyed upon by the criminal enterprise in their recruitment drive to provide them with support and other options.

Mr Speaker, another broad area of our policy agenda is increased international co-operation and the improvement of our image abroad. The focus of our foreign policy will continue to be the promotion and protection of our national interest. My Government is committed to the principles of CARICOM, the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Nations and will work with these bodies to enhance our economic and social well-being as well as to secure global peace and development.

The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals particularly the eradication of poverty and support for our national development plan will guide our policy advocacy in our interaction with our development partners.

Economic diplomacy will continue to feature highly in the foreign policy agenda of Guyana both at the WTO and at the level of the ACP/EU relations. My Government will spare no effort in defending our fundamental economic interest on which the livelihood and survival of thousands of Guyanese depend. My Government will also strengthen its engagement with Latin America and our neighbouring countries in order to promote and resolve long-standing border issues.

Mr Speaker, on governance my Government will pursue approaches that are predicated on respect for the rule of law, the fair allocation of resources, protection of political, civil and human rights and accountability and transparency. I believe that we have to make a more concerted effort to overcome our political divisions so that we can create the sort of environment that will allow for the creation of wealth and consequently for addressing the social concerns of our people. This I

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believe will strengthen the cohesive fabric of the society and provide the adhesive glue for long-term peace and stability in the country. It would also lessen opportunities for those in our midst who use buzz-words such as *alienation* and *marginalisation* to advance their own agendas of dividing and exploiting our people. Consistent with this thrust towards inclusive governance will be the fashioning of a new political culture, one which I have cautioned cannot be contrived or rushed, but must be allowed to find its natural fit within our body politic.

My Government will pursue parliamentary and constitutional reforms aimed at giving effect to outstanding decisions. I do not believe that at this juncture in our country's modernisation quest, we can lose any opportunity to ensure that these outstanding reforms are tabled and settled. In addition, I have already signalled my intention to join forces with the political opposition and find innovative ways to work together to solve our problems. This will be pursued within an enhanced framework for political co-operation encompassing the principles of increased meaningful contacts, the identification and implementation of an agreed agenda of national issues and greater scope for the participation of civil society in the decision making process. I would hope to soon meet with all the parliamentary parties so that we can hammer out the modalities of this framework of co-operation.

At the level of my government, I have already signalled to the Cabinet my intention to hold them to high standards of performance and delivery. It is also expected that while in each Ministry there will be a strategic focus and accompanying work programmes, attention must, as a priority, be given immediately to attending to the irritants endured by our people on a daily basis in their interaction with the government institutions. Some of these irritants include the frustrations in school placements, obtaining birth certificates and passports, inordinate delays at our hospitals, the hassles that our aged sometimes encounter in receiving their pensions, the problems of non-working traffic lights and unscheduled interruption of water supply. I believe that addressing these difficulties and putting in place measures to ensure that they do not re-occur will bring a fair measure of gratification to the public.

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Mr Speaker, I encourage all who sit in this House to give credence to this the highest institution in our land. Not only is it a creature of the Constitution, but also an expression of the will of the people who by exercising their democratic franchise on 28 August last allowed for the election of Members to this House.

It is my hope that this Ninth Parliament will be defined and given greater moral legitimacy by its representative character, your openness and candour, the vigorous debates, the degree to which you seek common ground and your reception towards divergent opinions. You have an important role to play in ensuring scrutiny of my government. I see such a role as integral to promoting a vibrant democracy and to ensuring transparency and accountability. I expect the opposition in particular to be robust in offering constructive criticisms and alternatives to our legislative and policy agenda. It is not the intention of my Government to retard the deliberative nature of the National Assembly or to dominate the proceedings in this House. We believe that through the exchange of ideas, discussion and respectful debate, there can emerge ideas and suggestions that will further the well-being of our people.

Therefore, no matter from which side of the House these suggestions emanate, the Government will be receptive towards them. I believe that there exists the need to deepen the cordial contacts, the spirit of compromise, the exchange of ideas and increase co-operation between members on both sides of the floor. Members of Parliament on both sides of the House have traditionally enjoyed cordial relationships both inside and outside of this Assembly. I expect the Ninth Parliament to be no different and that while there will be the occasional heckling and healthy repartee across the table, these will neither diminish the consecrated relationships between Parliamentarians and the parties represented in the House. I am confident that the existing parliamentary mechanisms that allow for the finding of common grounds and the meeting of minds will, where necessary, be fully utilised. I implore both sides of the National Assembly to work together in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.

This is my charge to you. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you very much Your Excellency, Honourable Members and distinguished guests.

Your Excellency, please accept on my own behalf and on behalf of the Members of this House my warmest thanks for your address outlining your government's wide ranging analyses, plans, policies and projections in the coming period. I should like to congratulate Your Excellency on your ambitious programme and your bold vision. I also welcome the encouraging words and guidance in connection with the deliberations in the Assembly, your support for vigorous debate and your welcome words about the building of private relations.

I would like to thank Your Excellency particularly and your government for the resources which were made available to us to establish our lounge which I hope at the end of these proceedings, Your Excellency will visit with us for some mild and moderate refreshments.

Quite by accident, the construction of that lounge, because of space and other factors resulted in the installation of some tables and chairs, not knowing a simple programme such as this would result in such a bold process of engagement among our Members. Your Excellency, at tea time Members of both sides of the House rush for the tables and chairs where they can have their tea in comfort. As a result we have a generous mixture of Government and Opposition Members and I can assure you Sir that if that progresses further, the problems of this country will be resolved right here in the National Assembly. *[Applause]*

Your Excellency, I should therefore expect with these words that Your Excellency will provide even more resources so that we can construct more of these facilities. Your Excellency, the Members of the National Assembly will look forward to the opportunity to give their views on your address as soon as the appropriate motion is tabled. They will expect that as your Excellency begins the task of corporatising and implementing the policies you have enunciated that they have the oppor-

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tunity to share their views not only on the details, but will be able to effectively monitor the implementation of those policies through their respective sectoral committees. Your Excellency, the National Assembly looks forward to a period of fruitful co-operation.

Your Excellency, Members, distinguished guests, please allow me to invite you to tarry with us a while after the adjournment.

This brings us to end of our proceedings for the day.

The Honourable Minister of Public Works and Communications

Hon Samuel AA Hinds: Mr Speaker, before I move the formal adjournment, allow me to express from the floor our thanks to the President for a thoughtful, reflective and comprehensive presentation of his programme for the next five years of this Ninth Parliament, all for the development of the people of Guyana. I want to assure him that he has ready, willing, able partners in all of us in this House to improve the livelihood of our people and to work towards the greater cohesion of our people.

I now formally move that this National Assembly be adjourned to a date to be fixed..

The Speaker: Honourable Members, the National Assembly is adjourned to a date to be fixed. I would like to invite Honourable Members, guests and His Excellency to some light refreshments immediately after. Thank you very much.

Adjourned Accordingly at 17:06h