

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE SECOND SESSION (2002-2005) OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT
OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER
PUBLIC BUILDINGS BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

Part I

69TH SITTING

2.00 PM

Thursday, 4 August 2005

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (68)

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.

- *Prime Minister and Minister
of Public Works and Communications*

The Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., J.P., M.P.

- *Minister of Parliamentary Affairs*

The Hon. Clement J. Rohee, M.P.

- *Minister of Foreign Trade and
International Co-operation (AOL)*

The Hon. Harripersaud Nokta, M.P.

- *Minister of Local Government
and Regional Development*

The Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.

- *Minister of Culture, Youth and
Sport*

The Hon. Dr. Henry B. Jeffrey, M.P.

- *Minister of Education (AOL)*

The Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, M.P.

- *Minister of Finance*

The Hon. Shaik K.Z. Baksh, M.P.

- *Minister of Housing and Water*

The Hon. Rev. Dr. Ramnauth D.A. Bisnauth, M.P.

- *Minister of Labour, Human
Services and Social Security*

The Hon. Clinton C. Collymore, M.P.

- *Minister in the Ministry of Local
Government and Regional Development*

The Hon. Satyadeow Sawh, M.P.

- *Minister of Fisheries, Other
Crops and Livestock
(Region No. 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)*

*The Hon. S. Rudolph Insanally, O.R. C.C.H., M.P.

- *Minister in the Office of the President
with responsibility for Foreign Affairs (AOL)*

*The Hon. Doodnauth Singh, S.C., M.P.

- *Attorney General and Minister
of Legal Affairs*

Thursday, 4 August 2005

The Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.	- Minister of the Public Service
The Hon. C. Anthony Xavier, M.P.	- Minister of Transport and Hydraulics (Absent)
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. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.	- Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce
The Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues, M.P.	- Minister of Amerindian Affairs
The Hon. Dr Leslie S. Ramsamy, M.P.	- Minister of Health
Mr S. Feroze Mohamed, M.P.	- Chief Whip
Mr Cyril C. Belgrave, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.	-(Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. Donald R. Ramotar, M.P.	
Mr J. Ronald Gajraj, 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, J.P., M.P.	-(Region No. 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)
Mr Ramesh C. Rajkumar, M.P.	-(Region No. 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)
Dr Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.D., M.P.	
Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury, C.C.H, J.P, M.P.	- Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Water (Region No. 1 - Barima/Waini)
Mrs Pauline R. Sukhai, M.P.	
Mr Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.	
Mr Neendkumar, M.P.	-(Region No. 4 - Demerara/ Mahaica)
Mr Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.	-(Region No. 6 - East Berbice/ Corentyne) (Absent)

* Non-Elected Minister

** Elected Member from The United Force

Members of the Opposition (30)

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

Mr. Robert H. O. Corbin, M.P.	- <i>Leader of the Opposition</i>
Mr. Winston S. Murray, C.C.H., M.P.	- (AOL)
Mrs Clarissa S. Riehl, M.P.	- <i>Deputy Speaker of the N.A</i>
Mr. E. Lance Carberry, M.P.	- <i>Chief Whip (AOL)</i>
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.	- (AOL)
Mr. Raphael G. C. Trotman, M.P.	- (AOL)
Mr. Vincent L. Alexander, M.P.	- (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. Basil Williams, M.P.	
Mrs. Volda A. Lawrence, M.P.	
Dr Dalgleish Joseph, M.D., M.P.	
Miss Amna Ally, M.P.	- (Region No.5-Mahaica/Berbice)
Miss Sandra M. Adams, M.P.	- (Region No.10-Upper Demerara/Berbice)(AOL)
Mr. Jerome Khan, M.P.	- (AOL)
Dr George A. Norton, M.P.	
Miss Myrna E. N. Peterkin, M.P.	- (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica) (AOL)
Mr. James K. McAllister, M.P.	- (Region No.3-Essequibo Islands West Demerara)
Dr Carl Max Hanoman, M.P.	
Miss Lurlene A. Nestor, M. P.	- (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica) (AOL)
Mr Abdul Kadir, J.P., M.P.	- (Region No.10-Upper Demerara/Berbice)
Mr Ricky Khan, M.P.	- (Region No.1-Barima/Waini)
Mrs. Rajcoomarie Bancroft, M.P.	- (Region No.8- Potaro/Siparuni)
Mr Nasir Ally, J.P., M.P.	- (Region No.6-East Berbice/Corentyne)
Miss Judith David, M.P.	- (Region No.7-Cuyuni/Mazaruni)
Miss Genevieve Allen, M.P.	- (Region No.4-Demerara/Mahaica)

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

Mrs Sheila V.A. Holder, M.P.	- (AOL)
Mrs Shirley J. Melville, M.P.	- (Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)

(iii) Rise, Organise and Rebuild Party (1)

Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P.

OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock Isaacs, *Clerk of the National Assembly*

Mrs Lilawatie Coonjah, *Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly*

PRAYER

The Clerk reads the Prayer

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Welcome to the CPA United Kingdom Delegation

The Speaker: Honourable Members, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome to our National Assembly United Kingdom Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I hope they enjoy these proceedings. No doubt, Honourable Members would want to be on their best behaviour today. *[Applause]*

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS, ETC.

(1) *By the Speaker:*

Honourable Members I present to the Assembly the Needs Assessment Report of the Guyana National Assembly Report of the Guyana National Assembly by the Commonwealth Senior Parliamentary Staff Adviser to the Guyana National Assembly.

(2) *By the Prime Minister:*

Defence Board Report pursuant to Resolution 50/2004, dated 21 October, 2004, of the National Assembly on the

Thursday, 4 August 2005

Deployment of GDF Troops overseas on a Humanitarian Mission in Grenada.

- (3) By the *Minister of Parliamentary Affairs*:

Memorandum of Understanding for the support of the next General Elections in Guyana between the Government of Guyana, the Guyana Elections Commission and Donors.

- (4) By the *Minister of Local Government and Regional Development*:

Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development Annual Report for 2004.

- (5) By the *Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security*:

Report of the Special Select Committee on the Age of Consent Bill 2004 - Bill No. 22/2004

- (6) By *Mr Abdul Kadir, MP (Chairman of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources)*:

First Periodic Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Presentation and First Readings

AMERIDIAN BILL 2005-BILL NO.13/2005

By the Minister of Amerindian Affairs on behalf of the Government

PUBLIC BUSINESS

MOTION

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF GUYANA, THE GUYANA ELECTIONS COMMISSION AND DONORS

WHEREAS the Government of Guyana is committed to democracy and to free, fair and transparent elections in Guyana;

AND WHEREAS the donor Governments and Agencies are willing to support Guyana in this democratic process;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Guyana and the Guyana Elections Commission and the Donors entered on Wednesday, 20th July, 2005, into a Memorandum of Understanding which constitutes the basis on which the Donors will support the democratic process in Guyana,

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana - affirms its commitment to the conduct of free, fair and well-managed general and regional elections; and takes note of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Guyana and the Donor Community and sees it as an integral part of fulfilling this commitment;

And that we, the Members of the National Assembly, comprising Representatives of the political parties herein, having received the text of the Memorandum: do hereby state our support of the Memorandum, our agreement with and support for the undertakings, obligations and commitments entered into by the parties that are signatories to the Memorandum which we endorse with its Annexes and our individual and collective agreement with its implementation; and pledge to work individually and collectively towards free, fair and transparent elections in 2006, by supporting the enactment of legislation in a timely manner, by taking action to maintain the desired electoral climate by contributing to confidence building measures.

The Speaker: We will now proceed with the Motion in the name of the Honourable Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, this Motion simply seeks to endorse the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Guyana, the Guyana Elections Commission and Donors.

The fact that this Memorandum has been brought here, gives testimony to the fact that the democratic process is at work.

If one reads the *Whereas Clauses* of the Memorandum, one would clearly find the commitment of the Government to a democratic process. Guyana acknowledges the willingness to help and the actual help and is committed to ensure that the country holds free, fair and transparent elections.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

Our history within the recent elections showed that the elections were transparent and they were certified to be so. Consequently, what we are saying this afternoon is not lip service, is what we believe in, what we are committed to and what we intend to do. If there is one thing that deserves sustenance and preservation in this country, it is a democracy which we have won.

I want to appeal to all Members of this House to approach this issue in a nationalistic way, in a broad way and it is one time that I am attempted to say one should not seek to score cheap political points rather one should move to ensure that those conditions which have been recorded in the Memorandum of Understanding are observed. These conditions have been clearly spelt out, if I read two and exclude for a couple of seconds the Preamble:

The Government of Guyana will provide full and sustained political commitment to the democratic process in Guyana and ensure that priority is given to smooth application, the holding of free and fair elections in accordance with the Constitution and other relevant laws in Guyana which embrace the UN standards detailed in ANNEXE I of the Memorandum of Understanding and that are opened to international and domestic observation throughout the elections process.

In that, the Government of Guyana has affixed its signature to a document which just simply committed to democracy, but to ensure that that democracy is preserved, sustained and in full force.

I think, we have come a far way in this country. I will be the last to say that we have reached the point of perfection because no country has. If you travel through the world and Guyana's development within the last decade, you would find that we have a proud record, our achievements have been commendable and it ought to be encouraged. But take politics for what it is, praise rarely comes to a Government, but rather everyone is ready and willing and have their hand on their waist to pull the

trigger, the triggers of attack and of criticism.

Mr Speaker, in the second *WHEREAS* Clause:

AND WHEREAS the donor Governments and Agencies are willing to support Guyana in this democratic process.

In that we are introducing this Motion we are seeking the power of the Memorandum which is in writing and in the hands of everyone, with the assurance from the donor countries and the major countries that they are ready and willing to support the process.

AND WHEREAS the Government of Guyana and the Guyana Elections Commission and the Donors entered on Wednesday, 20 July 2005, into a Memorandum of Understanding which constitutes the basis on which the donors will support the democratic process in Guyana

In that, they are not simply supporting the process but there are major conditions which have been enshrined in this document which the Government is compelled and more specifically the Elections Commission is compelled to honour and carry out strictly. We feel that ought to be carried out in the strictest possible sense. We do not want to compromise with any of the conditions and we will work tirelessly, scrupulously, diligently to ensure so that they are honoured and complied with so that once again, we can have an election that is not only free and fair, but it also free from fear.

The first *RESOLVED* Clause:

That this National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana -

- *affirms its commitment to the conduct of free, fair and well-managed general and regional elections; and*

I cannot see anybody finding any fault with that.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

- *takes note of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Guyana and the Donor community and sees it as an integral part of fulfilling this commitment;*
- *and that we, the members of the National Assembly, comprising representatives of the political parties herein, having received the text of the Memorandum;*
- *do hereby state our support of the Memorandum, our agreement with and support for the undertakings, obligations, and commitments entered into by the parties that are signatories to the Memorandum which we endorse with its Annexes, and our individual and collective agreement with its implementation:*

Mr Speaker, when all these Resolved clauses are perused and examined, you will find that the Motion has in fact taken into account all the factors that need to be ensured that what we are setting about to do today here in this National Assembly is achieved and realised.

Constitutional Elections are due I think if I am correct, in August of next year, from the day of dissolution, three months from the first day when the Parliament met after the last election. Whatever is the date, three months from that date and there is an intriguing provision in our Constitution - what is that provision? When the time is up, when the time in Parliament stands dissolved, so while that power of dissolution rests in the hands of the President, he can dissolve the Parliament. In the Constitution when the tenure expires, it is automatically dissolved. So whether he likes it or not, come the constitutional date the Parliament will stand dissolved and we are in support of that

We do not believe in staying in this government one minute longer than we are entitled to. We do not intend to stay in government and extend the life of Parliament.

The life of Parliament is five years and in five years we must have elections. One of the fundamental enshrined in the Constitution is peri-

Thursday, 4 August 2005

odical elections and I think that gives the signal of the democratic nature and character of the country as such. And we do subscribe to that provision and we are committed to ensure the democratic character of Guyana.

That being so, we have to ensure that the Memorandum of Understanding does address it, that the arrangements for election are not in any way inhibited or impeded, that no one ought to do anything to obstruct the process from flowing smoothly and run inhibitedly. The process ought to flow in such a manner that these conditions of the constitutional provisions to which we are all committed are honoured and upheld.

So Mr Speaker, this document has not been confined to the donor countries, to the Elections Commission to the Government it is brought to the entire National Assembly. I want this afternoon to call on all Members to give their support so that we can have this document unanimously endorsed, approved and accepted. Let us put our shoulders to the wheel in the spirit of true togetherness; in a spirit of objectivity to ensure that the elections are held in a healthy atmosphere.

Mr Speaker, we have to concede that election is important to the country. We have fought, and we have battled to ensure that the will of electorate is not in any way thwarted or restricted that their will should be expressed. We should provide a mechanism, statutory, legislative or what have you to ensure that the process is so organised, so arranged that elections can be conducted and yield the desired results. We have had debates on varying aspects on the elections before. I do not think we want to be repetitious of what has already been said that we deal with the matter before the House and that is the Memorandum of Understanding.

I therefore want to conclude on the high note that the PPP/C Government is committed to election on the constitutionally due date. *[Applause]* We are committed to free and fair elections and will be responsive to ensure to the process is transparent and at the end of elections,

Thursday, 4 August 2005

we will have full satisfaction of the entire nation.

Mr Speaker, I therefore call upon all to support this simple Motion, which endorses the conditionalities set by of the donor countries and let us give the green light to the Elections Commission to move forward. I formally move the Motion in my name. *[Applause]*

The Question is proposed.

The Speaker: The Honourable Member Mr Corbin

Mr Robert H O Corbin: Mr Speaker, I welcome the remarks of the Leader of the House, Honourable Member Mr Reepu Daman Persaud that this debate be kept at a high level, entreating us to ensure that we give our adequate support to this Motion. I want agree with him that that can be achieved if the recommendations simple as they are, which will be made by this side of the House will be objectively considered in the same way as he has asked us to consider objectively the matters which are contained in the Motion. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, on the last occasion this National Assembly discussed an election issue, I think it was the Continuous Registration Bill. I made two points at the beginning of that debate, which I believe are worthy of repeating. Having regard to the preamble of the Memorandum of Understanding, which stated at the very beginning that the signatories are committed to fostering broad public confidence in the electoral process with the intention of promoting the acceptance by all of the results of the elections.

I pointed out in my last presentation here that I am not one of those who believe that the elections alone will solve the deep problems with which Guyana is presently confronting. I believe that unless we seriously address the issue of governance then we will not be really addressing permanent solutions to our problems.

Secondly, the passing of legislations and motions in this Parliament without dealing with issues of substance that are directly related to a

smooth, efficient, free, fair and transparent elections amounts to an illusion that progress is being made, but unless some fundamental issues are clarified and decided, we will be in no position to proceed and achieve the great desires of the Honourable Member who spoke before me.

For example, if I may just use the last Bill - the Continuous Registration Bill - which was before this House, it was passed after a very robust debate. I pointed out then that unless we had the Regulations and Rules to govern the process of national registration and that certain unsettled issues were clarified, the legislation was really void of any indication that time lines would have been met. We are still here; we are still waiting for these Regulations that will enable the legislation to be really activated.

So Mr Speaker, let me hasten to inform my colleagues in this House, that the Motion in its present form, cannot receive the support of the People's National Congress/Reform for several reasons.

First of all, the first Recital Clause to this Motion is questionable having regard to the actual performance of the Government as distinct from its declarations of intent.

The second point is that the MOU which we are asked to give our full support before the House incorporates Annexe II, what I refer to is the Hathaway Report Sir, which is the subject matter of serious disagreement among many stakeholders and the blankets of approval and support of what is referred to in Item (4) in this Memorandum:

Mutually agreed recommendations without knowledge on our part of those recommendations that are not mutually agreed will amount to a blanket approval of something that we know nothing about.

Thirdly, the absence of any information about time-bound implementation plan for GECOM is unsatisfactory and I believe that this should also be a matter of grave concern to the stakeholders and the donors in particular, who are making available to the Guyana Elections Commission and the people of Guyana huge sums of money.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

Mr Speaker, indeed such a plan should have been included as an Annexe to this Memorandum of Understanding. I believe one was included in the last MOU that was agreed upon for the 2001 elections. But this document incorporates no time-bound plan telling us of any specific timeframes when many things will be completed. As you will note, when you look at the document, it says, to be updated with the help of GECOM, so really what we have included here is not a current time-bound plan and therefore it cannot be considered an adequate document for this Parliament to approve.

Fourthly, Mr Speaker, this Motion seeks to have us endorse and give full support to this Memorandum of Understanding, when indeed the broad commitments of the parties to the agreement is insufficient to convince us that the commitments given in this Memorandum will be matched by action and so if we are to indeed assess that the benchmarks will be met there should be great details given - and I hope we hear them from the Government side this afternoon - of this various commitments in an itemised way that will enable the promotion of stakeholder confidence in the electoral process and that when we give blanket approval for JITA or the representative of the donor community to monitor the election and the preparations for those elections there are identifiable benchmarks that everyone in Guyana will know that are being used to access whether progress is being made. We have no such identifiable benchmarks in this Memorandum.

Fifthly, I believe that essential prerequisites for the timely holding of elections are yet to be satisfied particularly if the objective of fostering broad public confidence in the electoral process is to be achieved. Therefore to participate in approving this Memorandum of Understanding and to give full support for it without details being provided to this Parliament, will amount to, I believe, some kind of deception to the electorate that we are moving very quickly in the cause for free, fair and transparent elections in Guyana.

Mr Speaker, I could possibly take my seat now after giving five good reasons why we cannot support this Motion and just simply goes

Thursday, 4 August 2005

against it, but I believe that that will be very irresponsible of me, because the electorate will be unable to appreciate the depth of the points that I have made and I need to clarify them so that they will understand.

Further, I have proposed some amendments which I have forwarded to the Clerk of the National Assembly not so long ago, in the hope that having pointed out these deficiencies in the present Motion, the Honourable Members on the other side be willing in a very objective manner (to use the words of my colleague) to assess these adjustments and indeed ensure that we have a Motion that is capable of receiving a full support of this House here today.

Now, Mr Speaker, if one looks at the Motion before this House the first recital clause states that *WHEREAS the Government of Guyana is committed to democracy and to free, fair and transparent elections in Guyana*. This is a broad statement with which we cannot yet agree to, because of the kind of obstruction that we are witnessing at the level of the Commission and statements coming from the hierarchy of the governing party bring into question this commitment that is stated in the recital clause. So this is insufficient for this Parliament to endorse that this Government of Guyana is committed to this democracy of free, fair and transparent elections. It is a very contentious clause.

For example, if indeed the PPP/C was concerned about free, fair and transparent elections in this country, one would have expected that the issue of having a clean voters' list and methods to ensure that we have a clean and verified voters' list would never have been a subject of serious disagreement among the parties. *[Applause]*

Indeed, every time we have a debate in this Parliament about elections and democracy, we are regaled about the long struggle of the PPP for democracy and free and fair elections and I have no doubt that we will hear a repetition of that this afternoon.

We will hear how they fought for years to have a clean voters' list, to remove all the padding from this list, allegations of multiple registra-

Thursday, 4 August 2005

tions ... *[Interruption: 'of horses]* ... yes, of horses on the voters' list, of names and addresses relating to the cemetery. We have been regaled with all of those things and it was only because of this powerful struggle of the PPP to clean this voters' list that we have democracy in Guyana. Of course, they have forgotten that equation, Mr Speaker, that it was the People's National Congress that passed all the legislation that made free, fair and transparent election possible. *[Applause]* But having regaled us with all of this debate, a fundamental issue which could affect voters' confidence in the present electoral arrangement is the question of what procedures will be put in place to ensure that there is an acceptable voters' list in this country.

Now one would think that that is so elementary that the Government and the PPP/C would be happy to eliminate an issue that has been a contentious subject in several elections.

What was being requested very simply? I do not want to rehash all the arguments with the points which had been raised over and over again, is that if we are going to elections particularly we are going to include continuous registration we need to verify a list. I have searched my mind, I have tried to examine the logic and I cannot understand what could be the logic of the PPP/C in opposing measures designed to clean and make an acceptable voters' list which they claimed they have fought for all these years. What could be the problem? I would think that if any party wants to be in the forefront of shouting for democracy, one of the first issues they will be happy to remove is the controversy over the voters' list.

Since November 2003, this issue has festered on the table of the Elections Commission and while we may very well say that the Elections Commission has been dilatory in settling this matter, it is not a secret that great influence could be exercised over the commissioners themselves and that the positions which some of them adopt at the level of the Commission are not dissimilar from public positions stated by the PPP/C. So we are not deluded that the delays which are caused in settling an important issue like this at the level of the Elections Commission is only a

matter which rests within the ambit of the Elections Commission itself.

So Mr Speaker, I can go on to list a number of other matters but still this issue of democracy related to free, fair and transparent elections and I would think that this Clause is very contentious. I think it was you Mr Speaker, who wrote me some time ago, when I attempted to introduce a motion with several recitals and in your letter to me, you said that the recitals should try to avoid contentious issues. I think that would be to quote your words exactly Mr Speaker. In your letter to me you said that we should avoid contentious issues that are likely not to receive the full support of the House.

And Sir, I strong recommend to the Honourable Member that he agrees to the amendment that this Clause be deleted completely from this Motion, because we are not convinced about it. If we are to be convinced about it and not agree with this amendment, let us hear from you this afternoon that -

- you have agreed fully with the house-to-house verification and that your supporters on the Commission will endorse it.
- you will actively pursue the question of biometrics - electronic finger printing - to avoid multiple registration;
- you will support the speedy bringing into this Parliament the Regulations to guide continuous registration;
- the issue of equitable access to the State media will be immediately settled because it is an essential part of democracy. *[Applause]*

We speak about access to the media which is dominated by the State and it is part of a commitment given in the Memorandum of Understanding. When I speak on a point a little later, I will show that if an agreement and a commitment have been given and the signature of the highest official in this land is enshrined in that document, which gave a commitment

Thursday, 4 August 2005

that the Parliamentary parties will have equitable access to State media and we are now in the month of August 2005 and there is absolutely no evidence of intention to implement that commitment given since 6 May 2003. How are we to accept that empty commitments given in a Memorandum of Understanding that equitable access to contesting parties in the election process will be given.

So if we are speaking about this preamble clause to the Motion, about the Government being committed to democracy, let us hear the commitments that there will be the involvement of all parties in the Parliament and later the contesting parties in decision making that affects the elections. Let us hear that there will be no objections to inviting the smaller parties in this Parliament to discuss issues affecting the elections, because you agreed to stakeholder participation and so if another meeting is called by the donor community for the Government and the Elections Commission to discuss whether it is the Hathaway Report or any other report that there will be no objections by the Government to the participation of the other Parliamentary parties in Parliament. That will be a demonstration of commitment to democracy *[Applause]*

So there is no point rising to your feet and using as a standard happened ten years ago and what happened twenty years ago and the usual hogwash of twenty-eight years of PNC in Government. This is 2005 and we are in the twenty-first century and you have set standards and given commitment by which you should be judged and you cannot look backward and guide yourself going forward. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the MOU incorporates what we refer to as the Hathaway Report. I think its correct name, if I am to look at Page 5 of 38 in the Report, is described as the Needs Assessment Report Annex II of the Memorandum of Understanding in order to support the Guyana Elections Commission done by one Mr Hathaway with the support of the Commonwealth.

Now this report which was very delayed in its presentation is being incorporated as an Annex to this Memorandum and according to the

Thursday, 4 August 2005

Motion particularly the Resolved Clause No.3, we are expected to state our support of the Memorandum, our agreement with and support for the undertakings, obligations and commitments entered into by the parties and signatories. But if you look carefully at Page 4, you will see that that despite the Hathaway Report or the Needs Assessment Report as is stated there, you will see that the undersigned donors will make their assistance available in a coordinated fashion and with certain individual agreements. So are really agreeing to agree on future agreements which are not here. But these agreements or future agreements are going to be based upon mutually agreed recommendations of the Needs Assessment Report. So we are being asked to give blanket approval to future agreements which we know not about and which relate to mutually agreed recommendations of this report. The parties in question ... and I speak here of all the parties to this agreement ... the donor community, the Elections Commission and the Government are all aware of serious concerns about the recommendations of this Needs Assessment Report - a very interesting document. I had the privilege of having a copy sent to me by no other person than the Head of the Presidential Secretariat. This was during the period when we were being invited to the Office of the President to discuss the recommendations of this Report and to indicate whether we accept this Report or not.

With the Donor community, the Elections Commission and of course the Office of the President, but it is ironic that the only existence we had on this report was first of all that we should have had some kind of input from the Elections Commission that was responsible for implementing their recommendations so they can bring to that forum their views and their intentions as it related to their recommendations.

The second request that we made was that all the Parliamentary parties which are involved in this Parliament should be invited to participate in this meeting and have some input and interest in this document.

Mr Speaker, you might be surprised to know that despite four valiant attempts, there was a blatant refusal to involve the other Parliamentary parties in a discussion of this report. I cannot speak with them, but

Thursday, 4 August 2005

they are been brought here and now and asked to give a blanket approval. I cannot speak with them, but I am saying as Leader of the Opposition, I have a right to represent the concerns of other opposition parties here and so when there was a valiant attempt to divide the opposition and sort of fob-off the PNC/R to work a private deal with the PPP/C, we refused and we said this is a Parliamentary matter that should involve all the Parliamentary parties. We could not speak for the other contesting parties, because this is a matter in which each party ought to have their own position clear.

Mr Speaker, this report fell by the way side, because of a refusal of the Government at that very early stage to have all the stakeholders involved in constructive dialogue that could have resolved the issues that are confronting the Elections Commission and on which there appears to be a dead lock.

Mr Speaker, this Annexe speaks about issues that are of concern to us in 2005, being recommended as important, but should be considered for 2011. Recognised as important for instilling voter confidence, but recommended that it be implemented in 2011. What are we going to do in 2006? Are we going to elections as a sham or are we going seriously to ensure that we have free, fair and transparent elections.

Mr Speaker, not only did we accept that these recommendations were unsatisfactory, but we proceeded to write the Elections Commission. We wrote the Elections Commission, we pointed out our concern about these matters. I have here all the documents (I know you have a function later and I do not propose to read all of them) of the dialogue which took place between the Elections Commission and the political parties, not only the Peoples National Congress/Reform, but all the Parliamentary opposition parties. I cannot speak with the PPP/C though I do believe that they too were involved in some consultation. Not only did we make our points very clear to the Elections Commission, but we also wrote to the donor community and sought to involve them in this matter by a letter dated 23 March 2005, inviting the donor community to meet with the Parliamentary opposition parties since it was obvi-

Thursday, 4 August 2005

ous that that meeting was not going to be possible with the Government present, because they had adamantly refused to have the other Parliamentary opposition parties while they were present. So we sought to have a meeting with the donor communities with a letter dated March 23, 2005 copied to the major members of the donor community in Guyana. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: You time is up Mr Corbin

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: Mr Speaker, I rise to ask for the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to be given fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: You may proceed

Mr Robert H O Corbin: Thank you. Mr Speaker, subsequent to the request to the donor community, we got a reply from them although we told them very clearly that we were very concerned and I repeat ... maybe I should read just a section of this letter:

The Parliamentary Opposition Parties are requesting a meeting at the earliest mutually convenient time to discuss the Report of the Commonwealth Assessment Mission recently submitted to the Guyana Elections Commission, since it is our understanding that much reliance may be placed on this Report by the donor community. We believe that you should be made aware of our parties' considered opinions of it. We also expect to use the occasion to bring to your attention other matters that are considered critical to the holding of free, fair and transparent elections in 2006.

The end results of our valiant efforts, Mr Speaker, is that I believe the donor community quite in their own deliberate judgement probably did not want to get involved in this matter. They suggested to us by letter that we should raise those matters with the Guyana Elections Commission, so I assumed that they would have put in place some mechanism to

Thursday, 4 August 2005

understand the strong views of all the Parliamentary opposition parties about some of the recommendations which are contained in this Report.

But what is more, Mr Speaker, the Guyana Elections Commission itself has to date not settled many of the issues which are raised in this Report and that is why we note that in the Memorandum of Understanding ... there is a Clause in Section 4 of this Report which speaks of mutually agreed recommendations. What are those recommendations? Is the Government in a position to tell us what they will be?

What we do know, is that there were commitments given by GECOM itself that there will be a process of verification, if a complete house-to-house registration was not done by the use of the list plus a verification exercise. I can recite all the meetings that were held with GECOM and the minutes which I have here, but yet when we take to the Parliament to pass the Bill on Continuous Registration, we had to make a last-ditch effort before we finally got squeezed into that Bill, an obligation for the Commission itself to include a verification process before they started continuous registration.

Now we are speaking of building confidence, indeed the Memorandum starts off by stating that that is essential for free, fair and transparent election - fostering of broad public confidence. But if we start off a process in which we have the experience of commitments being given and then not being honoured when the legislation is passed I do not see how you could reasonably ask Members ... (at least at this side of the House) ... to give blanket endorsement to agreements for which they are unaware of.

What is the position with the house-to-house verification? It is not an issue that is complex. Page 18 of the report ... let me not read it, I will divert it. My good friend is basking in relaxation after this congress. Let me allow him to enjoy it.

The absence of information about a time-bound implementation plan - If you look at this document, you will note that we have a veiled sched-

Thursday, 4 August 2005

ule speaking about seventy weeks, sixty weeks, two weeks and so on, but all of these things are meaningless unless key decisions to commence the very first exercise are made by the Guyana Elections Commission. So what we need as an important Annex to this Report is a realistic time-bound implementation plan. We were told that the registration exercise will start on 1 September. I do not know that we have seen anything which will indicate that this matter will be settled.

Mr Speaker, this demand that we are making is not a new one. In fact, throughout this period, we have been giving full support to the Guyana Elections Commission, responding promptly to every request that they have made to ensure that this exercise is expedited. Again, we have been rewarded with not much decision making. But we are not now making the demand for an early time, as early as 18. November 2003 not 2004, in a letter to GECOM signed by the General Secretary of the People's National Congress/Reform in response to a request from GECOM that we give our indication on the question of the database and so on ... we again, and I quote a section of that letter Mr Speaker:

On a more positive note, the PNC/R is in support of GECOM's stated intention to move to a system of continuous registration incorporating biometric features. We are therefore of the view that urgent steps should now be taken to embark as soon as possible on a new national registration process in time for 2006.

Mr Speaker, this is August 2005 and I do not know that we have progressed very much beyond that point of the commitment by all parties.

So we could pass the Memorandum of Understanding, we can agree to a timeframe and for the next three years we can be here and still not having achieved any progress on this matter.

Mr Speaker, we met the Guyana Elections Commission on several issues and in August of last year, in an attempt to advance this process, we proposed a meeting to discuss a number of matters including the

Thursday, 4 August 2005

monitoring mechanisms. I do not want to get into that, the various changes that should be made to the database and I am not speaking here of names, my good friend Mr Ramotar always get confused when he speaks about database. But the database is a complex set of matters which deals with the programmes, et cetera and if he reads the Mc Dermott Report and other reports, he will understand that when we speak of the database we are not only speaking of the content of the database which refer to the voters' names and so on, but a number of other matters that are related to that - the software and the hardware environment - to which there have been several recommendations made with respect to improving the security features of GECOM. We are yet to get a timeframe for that. That is distinct from the house-to-house verification. As I said, we wrote again since August of last year, expressing that we need to get a time-bound plan for that, because you can go and do continuous registration, you can collect all the names and if you again place in a software or hardware environment which is suspect, you are going to repeat the errors that were made in 2001 and some that were there since 1997.

The next point which ought to be noted in this Memorandum, is the fact that the broad commitments given by the Government under Section 2 of the Memorandum of Understanding to ensure that the recognition of the right to a participatory role of all Guyanese individually and through their organisations in the entire electoral process in accordance with Article 149C in the Constitution in Guyana.

What does that mean? We want to have these commitments spelt out; we want to know what is it the Government is going to do in recognition of these right, not just broad statements. I could list a number of other commitments given broadly, like the procurement legislation. I could go on listing many other things that remain just broad statements even decisions that are still waiting proper recognition and implementation.

The timely enactments of identified legislation - Well already, I have pointed out that if we were serious with continuous registration - one timely piece of legislation is a subsidiary legislation to deal with continuous registration. Will the Government tell us how soon they will bring

Thursday, 4 August 2005

into the Parliament; will it be next week, next month? The truth is, the Government cannot give us a proper answer, because the Commissioners on the Elections Commissions, perhaps still have to make a determination of important matters that must be put in that legislation. Therefore if we are to support this timely enactment of legislation, there has to be a simultaneous commitment towards a positive approach to settling those outstanding issues. I would be unprepared to just support a broad Memorandum without some definitive commitments given by the Government here this afternoon.

Mr Speaker, essential prerequisites for the timely holding of elections are yet to be satisfied. What are those prerequisites? I have already referred to some of them and so to come here this afternoon and suggest that we should approve this document would be very irresponsible of us.

I want to make a final point on this issue and that is, there is abroad a view that the People's National Congress/Reform and other opposition parties - a view which must be seriously considered too - because of the source of expression of those views that we are making unnecessary fuss to create problems for the Elections Commission and to ensure that no decisions are made, that no progress is achieved and to create the foundation for unrest and disturbances in this country.

Mr Speaker, I mentioned it in this Parliament, because it is a serious view which has found credence in several quarters and it is only because of certain ethical standards that I would not quote where some of those views are being expressed and indeed, it is the source of some of those views that caused me in my last presentation in this Parliament to say I stop short of saying that we have lost confidence in the Guyana Elections Commission, but I say this, that there is a paper trail which I read in the first letter since November 2003 where we have consistently made representation to the Guyana Elections Commission, participated in a series of meetings, minutes of all those are here and to ensure that we cooperate fully with the Guyana Elections Commission.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

Mr Speaker, these issues that we are raising now are not issues that we have just raised. As early as 23 November 2004, this was what we wrote to the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission... [*Interruption*]

The Speaker: Before you proceed Mr Corbin, your time is up. [*Noisy Interruption*]

Honourable Members, let us have some order and allow the Honourable Member to conclude his presentation.

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: I ask that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: It might be boring, but is important that records in this House reflect the facts. We pointed out to GECOM and its Chairman in a letter of November 23, 2004 under the hand of the General Secretary, of immediate concern to the People's National Congress/Reform is the apparent piece meal approach to matters pertaining to GECOM and its preparation for the upcoming national elections. We have had wide ranging and indepth discussions with the Commission in addition to written submissions and matters pertaining to GECOM, we expect a comprehensive plan from GECOM with regard to its preparations for and holding of elections of an acceptable standard. We therefore look forward to GECOM proposing the comprehensive plan for its finalization and implementation. The minutes of several meetings with GECOM will show that we have been given commitments over this period of time as late as a meeting held on 15 October that within two weeks we would have had a decision on those outstanding matters. So that to suggest that the People's National Congress/Reform as a party is raising these issues now as new issues are not matters which would be even be entertained.

These matters biometrics and verification of the voters' list are not matters that came from the People's National Congress Reform at all.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

These are proposals that were made by the Elections Commission itself to the political parties asking us to exercise an option that we would want to implement and with good reason we pointed out some of those options that we would choose. Documents emanating from the Technical Officers in the Commission including the rules for the conduct of continuous registration this is dated 13 October 2004 and signed by the Chief Elections Officer Mr Gocool Budhoo were submitted.

In this document, they have taken account of the important issues that are of concern to the parties and have in fact expressed their capability of implementing them. So there is no doubt that the administrative machinery of the Elections Commission is competent and capable of implementing many of these recommendations. So why is it since October 2004, we cannot have decisions? Then to find within the Commission itself, we can have views being expressed that the reason for this persistence by the opposition parties is that we will try to create an unhealthy climate in this country and are not only irresponsible, but dangerous - dangerous in the sense that they are not going to help to promote the kind of confidence which we are expecting to have in an efficient, effective and independent Guyana Elections Commission.

Mr Speaker, I urge that the amendments which I have submitted will be accepted. In the first instance that we delete the first clause and replace it with a very simple clause that could not be objectionable and that clause that I have suggested and stated: *whereas there is general stakeholders concern over the arrangements and preparations of general elections in 2006* - It is very simple and I think that there can be no doubt that the stakeholders in Guyana have all expressed concern. We are aware of meetings between the Elections Commission and the Private Sector Commission and several stakeholders in this country. We are aware that several independent stakeholders have sought meetings with various political parties and have expressed their concerns about the pace at which we are proceeding and the fact that decisions are yet to be made, so that there is in Guyana serious concerns about the arrangements for the general elections in 2006.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

I have suggested that they insert a new resolution clause ... (I think the proposed amendments have been circulated) ... then I would not go through the details, I think members are able to see those recommendations. But in substance, I am suggesting that this National Assembly delay any unanimous support for this Memorandum of Understanding so that we can force the Elections Commission and those responsible to bring to this forum Annexes which convince us that progress is being made in relation to preparation for elections. For like the Elections Bill, the mere passage of this Memorandum and full support thereof will not give us the confidence that there will be any acceleration of the preparation in time for 2006 elections. However, let me repeat that the People's National Congress/Reform has always been committed to free, fair and transparent elections.

If that was not so, Mr Speaker ... *[Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Let us have some order Honourable Members

Mr Robert H O Corbin: ... my goodly friends would not have been privileged to be sitting on the other side of the House *[Applause]* Their mere presence on that side of the House today is evidence that the People's National Congress/Reform made the necessary electoral changes in response to representation including counting at the place of pole. So are you suggesting that we should put on some other kinds of pressure for you now? We could. Is that the route you would like us to go? Let us be practical. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Let us have some order please

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Mr Speaker, there is evidence that the Peoples National Congress Reform has demonstrated that commitment to free, fair and transparent elections *[Applause]*

I trust that we will see this declared commitment in action now. Now is the moment of truth, not words. We will continue to work vigorously to ensure that there are free, fair and transparent elections in this country. On that you can rely on our commitment, but we will not be party of

Thursday, 4 August 2005

what we call *buying a pig in bag*. We must have details before us, before we give blanket support to this Memorandum before us. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Honourable Member Mr Ravindra Dev

Mr Ravindra Dev: Mr Speaker, I rise to state my party's position on the Motion before the Honourable House on the Memorandum of Understanding for the support of the next general elections in Guyana between the Government of Guyana, the Guyana Elections Commission and the Donors.

Mr Speaker, for the second time in the last month or so, we are discussing the whole nature of the electoral system; the electoral arrangements that are going to be put into place for the next general elections.

As I said at the last sitting of this House, elections are flash points in this country's history and it therefore behoves us, the representatives of the people of this country to be very careful, to be very cognisant of that history and not to rush into making decisions that will back fire not on us the representatives in this House, but on the people of Guyana.

Mr Speaker, we have created an Elections Commission which is a permanent institution in this country now. It is an example of an institutional change to respond to problems that we had in the conduct of elections in this country. The Government is to be applauded for doing that, but a document was placed from my desk that we will consider in the near future and it has to do with some people on the Government's Commission to advise them on the matters of governance and I quote from this report:

Institutional change alone is insufficient, the roles and attitudes of the participants must change as well.

And it is in this context that I want to put my comments that ROAR wants to go on record to say that it took umbrage at the deliberate

Thursday, 4 August 2005

exclusion all of our party from all of the meetings that the Government convened to discuss electoral matters with the donor community. This Government that boasts about democracy which talks about the heart of democracy says that the people must be involved in the decisions on problems that affect them. Here is a government that denied our party our democratic right to participate in the discussion of our electoral situation with whom? With the donor community and with individuals from outside. Why is it, because they are more important or because they gave us some money? Are we to sell our souls for thirty pieces of silver?

Mr Speaker, democracy is not something that will come by mere words, it will not come just to string words and to say we are democratic, it can only come by concrete action and the lead in those actions has to come from the Government of the day.

Mr Speaker, we now come again to this Memorandum of Understanding and it has to do with elections, it has to do with the problematic nature of elections in the past and a great segment of those problems emanated from ambiguities in the legislation' ambiguities needed in some instances for the court to interpret and those ambiguities were then taken by the people as denial of fundamental rights and we had problems in this country, problems that escalated into violence.

We must do all we can within our powers so as not to duplicate that eventuality again in this country. Therefore if we are to sign on to a Memorandum that not only has semantic ambiguities, contextual ambiguities, but has great gaping silences on matters that go to the very heart of what we can adjudge to be a proper or an improper election.

Mr Speaker, I come to this whole matter of the timetable - That in this modern day and age of modern management ... how will we ever ... would we ever employ... I notice that the Honourable Member from the other side, having drunk very deep again from the elixir of Marx, Lenin and Stalin at Cotton Tree has come back enervated and I welcome him back. *[Applause]* I am encouraging him to make his interruptions.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

So I come back to something that Stalin did not know of. Stalin used forced labour. But Mr Speaker, in the modern world, we use management techniques to ensure that processes flow in a smooth manner. Any Junior Manager, who goes to his boss with a plan that does not have a timeline will be fired and would probably have to give back his salary.

Mr Speaker, we have a Memorandum of Understanding that this Government signed on to. It talks about the project plan which begins *E-seventy weeks* meaning *seventy weeks before elections*. The Honourable Minister of Parliamentary Affairs has just assured us that the elections will be within the constitution time frame which is fifty- two weeks away, so you have already violated the plan. It is either the Parliamentary Minister does not know of which he speaks or this thing needs to be jettisoned. Mr Speaker, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs is the most experienced person in the House and we cannot jettison him so we have to jettison this.

Mr Speaker, the point I am making is that this is not just an ambiguity. This is having us signed on to a document which is already irrelevant. It is an indication of what the opposition is calling for. How could it hurt us, if at this juncture of our history GECOM which is mandated to do this, is now asked to give us a timetable, one that we can hold them accountable for as the Government has chaired, they set up that body to do precisely that. Why is this government not allowing that body to do its job now? Why are we rushing matters for a mere thirty pieces of silver? It does not speak well of us. There are principles that underlie the processes of democracy and one of them is that they must be some degree of certitude of what we are about to embark on.

Mr Speaker, on the matter of elections, I can see the cause, we are out there not only around congress time, we are out there everyday among the people and the Guyanese people are very concerned about when and how elections will occur for the next general elections. We cannot let them hang in ambiguity. We must be able to give them some framework. This will give them some degree or level of comfort to

Thursday, 4 August 2005

know that if for example month one passes and what GECOM promised did not occur, then we can say either we amend, adjust or change our timetable or we accept that the election will be late, but at least we have something to gauge our decision-making not this vague latitude that we are allowed to flounder in to wonder as to what will happen next, when would the next foot drop

So Mr Speaker, I say that if we to give consent, it is accepted in law, it is a matter of trite law that consent should be informed. We should give informed consent. How can we consent to matters about which there are not even an inkling as to what will be contained within this future agreement. It cannot lie.

I come back to the other point about the conduct of continuous registration. At the last sitting of this Parliament where we discussed that matter, we crafted a compromise and the compromise said that okay, we are going to have continuous registration in this country, that at a minimum, you must know what your starting point is. We decided that it will be the OLE. We then decided that there must be some methodology of checking that list; that the integrity of any starting point at least there must be some external checks as to its validity; as to its integrity. We agreed on all those matters. The opposition also agreed and it was then said that GECOM will choose that methodology.

Mr Speaker, I do not believe that it is too much. Again in the interest of getting rid of problematic ambiguities for such an understanding as to the methodology of the checking to be included in this Memorandum. I do not believe it is asking too much, again it will remove possible flash points.

Our party's position is this: that the government of Guyana and I want to acknowledge their role (the present government of Guyana) played in having struggled long for free and fair elections in this country. They were joined by many people, my group was included when we were abroad to struggle for those free and fair elections.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

Mr Speaker, I hope they understand that not because some things have been achieved, you have to stop there, you have to go forward you have to entrench it, as I have said before, it is not only the setting up of institutions. It is a change in the attitude.

Free and fair elections the struggle was how you engage all of the people of Guyana to agree on the rules of the game to choose who will govern this land. At this stage in the development of our democracy, I think it is a retrograde step for the government of the day not to take on board the concerns of the opposition. We do not know what steps the Government did in making its decisions to take the stand that it did on this Memorandum of Understanding, but again knowing the tenets of Marxist, Leninism, Stalinism, I think once the leadership knows best and they know the truth, the decision was made. But what the opposition did in the last six months was to hold a series of meetings with all the stakeholders in this country:

- the Bar Association;
- the Human Rights Association;
- the Business Associations;
- the common people;
- the church; and even
- the People's Progressive Party/Civic

to some of these meetings for all of us to discuss this most crucial matter before us so when I speak, I speak as an individual who has participated in these discourses with all the people of this country as is now compelled by the Constitution of this land that all decisions must include civil society, must include all the people of Guyana. We have tried again going from the institution of the Constitution to put that into practice to actually go out and consult. So when I speak, again I speak out of the knowledge gleaned from those meetings and what it is, is this that the

Thursday, 4 August 2005

people of Guyana are very concerned as to the processes that will precede these elections. Therefore, these ambiguities are now left hanging like the sword of Damocles over our heads.

Mr Speaker, I would like to suggest to this Government that on the substantive issues on which I speak, because this is what the Motion ultimately will be about - the substantive of issues of the resolution clauses - that it does no harm to this country to defer the passage of Memorandum of Understanding for those two pieces of information to be given by GECOM which they have promised to do and we just have to ensure that they do it. It does not hold up any process, it does not hold up any matters relating to the elections, because those are matters that we cannot get into the elections unless you agree on them.

With those words Mr Speaker, again I urge the Government of the day to reconsider its position on this Motion. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honourable Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Hon Manzoor Nadir: Mr Speaker, I stand to lend the support of The United Force and my own support in the adoption of this Memorandum of Understanding, signed between the Government of Guyana, the Guyana Elections Commission and the Donor Community.

Mr Speaker, I thought it would have been sufficient for me to stand and lay the support of my party, which will shortly have its congress and those interested in supporting other persons for the leadership can so do.

But Mr Speaker, I thought it was going to be a very simple presentation of mine this afternoon to stand and give support to the document before us. A very informed position and one which I alluded to when I last spoke in the National Assembly, when I thanked the donor Community for having patience with us and for extending not only their moral support, but the deep pockets that they seem to have in terms of assist-

Thursday, 4 August 2005

ing the democratic process in Guyana. And so I was disturbed to hear the last speaker spoke of thirty pieces of silver.

Mr Speaker, we need to put our minds back to a decade and a half ago, when the donor community came forward as the PNC then said that they were going to move to have a proper voters' list and to allow counting of the votes at the place of pole, so that we can have transparency and the donors reached out. In spite of efforts at beating up politicians who contested and in spite of trying to sabotage the voters' list in 1992, we had an election of change and then President Carter stood up and said (to paraphrase him) those who would not accept the elections, he knew how they fared in the elections.

What happened in 1992? The donors poured out millions of US dollars to assist the democratic process in Guyana. Then two years later, we came to the local government elections and we went through the entire cycle all over again with a willing donor community that reached again into its deep pockets and helped finance those elections for us. *[Interruption: 'Well, if you all are obligated']* ... Yes, it is the government's obligation; it is also concerned donor community. A concerned donor community that wants to see... *[Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Please Honourable Members, let us have some order

Hon Manzoor Nadir: ... the second country in the Caribbean move ... the countries Haiti and Guyana were two basket cases. The donor community reached out as they were doing in Haiti and so they helped substantially with the 1997 elections. Somebody talked about the elections being flash points or not being flash points. I agree with him as not being flash points. This support from the donor community, the MOU which we have signed, not only dealt with the elections, it also dealt with the Constitutional reform process which yourself, Mr Speaker, played an integral role in. You can remember the different generations of that process. I think we had three types, all funded substantially by the donor community and in part with the resources which the Government could afford.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

And so we moved to 1997 elections and we had the ensuing problems. Again, substantial, not thirty pieces of silver, but if we add them up, they might be over \$3 billion of support coming to our country Honourable Member Mr Dev. Once again, we have a willing donor community stepping forward, because I feel strongly that the donor community cares significantly for our country. They have demonstrated immense patience with us and in particular wants to see that Guyana, this country of ours, can have a system that will produce elections that are acceptable to all.

Mr Speaker, there is talk about the government's commitment to the MOU and this is nothing new coming from the other side. I was on the other side when this issue was raised and prior to this election the Joint International Technical Assessor Team was established. That team was going to advise an independent team of external experts on the implementation of this. This is not an invention of these elections or for this election. This team here ... and in fact there is an improvement today. We never had that MOU in this form. That team has a responsibility to inform the donor community and we talk about benchmarks, this MOU speaks about international standards for the conduct of the elections, that is the benchmark - international standards for the conduct of elections done by an independent assessor.

Mr Speaker, the opposition is famous for taking things out of context. One thing I said while I sat on the opposition benches, you have to give the government full marks for its commitment to democracy. *[Applause]* The Hansard could reflect that, because as I sat on the opposition, the commitment to opening up the media so that today we have over twenty television stations that can say whatever they want and we have two independent newspapers.

Mr Speaker, when the PNC/R was in power, licences were given only to certain people. There is in this document the provisions for monitoring the preparations for elections ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Just one moment please, Honourable Member, if you

Thursday, 4 August 2005

are forced to speak, would you please keep your voice down. It is disturbing even me much less the speaker.

Hon Manzoor Nadir: ...and so we come back to Page 31 of the document before us that speaks to an estimated timetable not provided by the Elections Commission, but by the assessor team which is being used as the timeline. And it clearly says Annexe B is to be updated with the help of the Guyana Elections Commission. What the argument centres around today, Mr Speaker, is trying to move the preparation and the conduct of elections from the Elections Commission and to put it in the National Assembly. That is what they are trying to do and clearly in the MOU with the Donor Community and the Elections Commission, the recommendations are to move the politicians away from the Elections Commission. I think if we go to Page 26, the long term vision is for the independence of the Elections Commission in the context of a review of the overall role, the National Assembly should change the composition of the Commission so that in the future it consists of independent persons who commands the confidence of the political parties rather than the persons nominated by them.

Mr Speaker, this is the crux of the matter, because those who are representing political parties on the Commission and a formula that has produced good elections so far is still now inadequate.

Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition said that he stopped short in his past presentation of condemning the Elections Commission - an issue of vale threat - that he can use other means to put pressure on the State, on the Government and on the citizenry so that the PNC/R can have its way... *[Interruption]*

Mr Robert H O Corbin: I am not conscious that I issued any threats in this Parliament

Hon Manzoor Nadir: Mr Speaker, and so we hear of other means could be employed if the National Assembly cannot give some consideration to this amendment being proposed by the Leader of the Oppo-

sition.

Mr Speaker, what we have before us is another document which has had the input of the Elections Commission. A Commission which is comprised of;

- three members nominated by the opposition;
- three members nominated by the government; and
- a Chairman.

I think, we need to repeat this, a Chairman not elected or selected by the President, but a Chairman who comes out from a list of five names that originates from the leader of the opposition. The Chairman of the Elections Commission is selected by the President from a list of five names that originates from the opposition and that formula which we call the *Carter formula* is still what we have. And here we have Sir, this Elections Commission comprised primarily of representatives of the political parties in Parliament and what happens there is that now we are seeing a discord between what the representatives of those parties and the Commission are doing and what the party is saying here. That is what is happening, very unprincipled and if I was part of the donor community and listening to the members of the opposition at this time, I would be worried. I will be very, very worried, because it only speaks to obstruction and obstacles to holding free, fair and transparent elections by the time it is due. That it all it speaks to.

Mr Speaker, if the parties in this House are serious about having elected government and not selected, having a form of government that speaks of democracy, where people have at definite intervals, an opportunity to exercise their franchise in free, fair and transparent elections, if we are serious about that they will be no hesitation in supporting this Motion here today - none whatsoever. All that is being raised are operational issues which are best handled in High Street by the Elections Commission. I wonder if we are getting different briefing papers from

Elections Commission, because with credit to them, they have been at pains to update all the political parties on all the issues and the work of the Elections Commission, even inviting parties to sit with the Commission not collectively but individually. And so we are very informed the Elections Commission feel confident that if we proceed with this MOU at the timetable that they have they can have elections when they are due. They are confident.

Mr Speaker, your members deal with them everyday and what is happening here is a proverbial storm being whipped up in the National Assembly for the PR.

Mr Speaker, operational issues, when we talk about verification of the list, that was dealt with and I know you have a rule about going back about what was said but those operational issues lie within the purview of the Guyana Elections Commission right now. Now we are hearing talk of why they did not send us before. The Peoples National Congress/Reform and their representatives are integral in all that is happening. What they are saying here today is a flashpoint. This is the flashpoint, but they are integral in it. They have two bees in their bonnets because they want to leave the option open, that if they cannot win a free and fair election, then they can have something to fall back on - to do the alternative. That is exactly what is happening, to do the alternative and so two things are being set up. *[Interruption: 'So why don't you deal with verification?']* Mr Speaker, we dealt with that last week, I do not have to deal with that again. I know that there is a rule about repetition.

So Mr Speaker, with great confidence, my party and I would support this Motion. *[Interruption: 'Which party?']* The United Force and I would support this Motion with great confidence. We have been integral in sharing our views with the Elections Commission and we thank the Elections Commission for sharing all the data that is amass with us including those of the deaths which has been submitted by the GRO's Office, so when the time comes, we will have the content of the database to go back and do some of our own verification, because each political party has the responsibility to do its own verification.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

The last time, we had mentioned scrutineers and all of that. There is a significant process.

Finally, before I sit sir, again the issue of the commitment to the agreement and whether this government backslides on commitment. I want to refer to a commitment made by the Minister of Finance in the budget debate when he said Treasury Memoranda will be issued and I am happy to see today for the first time in twelve years I am in Parliament that we have today a Treasury Memorandum issued. That is commitment; that is putting your actions where your words are. I want to commend the Honourable Minister of Finance for so doing. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

It is now 15:55h and I think this is a convenient time to take the suspension.

15:51H THE SITTING IS SUSPENDED

16:32H THE SITTING IS RESUMED

The Honourable Member Mr Alexander, is it your turn?

Mr Vincent L Alexander: I recognised that Hon Member Dr Ramsammy is ahead of me.

The Speaker: We try to alternate. Please go ahead.

Mr Vincent L Alexander: Mr Speaker and Honourable Members of this House, I stand to add my voice to the debate on this Motion to accept the Memorandum which is before us. In so doing, I would wish to express appreciation to the Donors for the interest which they have shown and for the contributions they are willing to make.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

However, in so doing, I do recognise the problems that the donors are faced with. They are interested in the process, they are willing to make a contribution, but they have to operate within certain constraints. I think, it is those constraints which from time to time cause them to be involved in Memoranda such as this, which, in some regards fall short of the mark and there are some evidence which the donors are faced with.

For example, if one looks at the draft Memorandum, one would see that the draft Memorandum there more donors involved in the process than those who finally appended their signature.

For example, one would see that the Inter American Development Bank was previously involved in the process. One would see that the Organisation of American States was also previously involved in the process. One would see clearly that in the draft document, Page 9 of 44 that the organisations names as stated there are the nine signed as the original signatories. So one is left to wonder as to why some of the donors are no longer a part of the process. Why is it they have been excluded? Well, I have a sneaking suspicion that some of the problems associated with the way in which constraints are placed on the donors may have contributed to the withdrawal of the Inter American Development Bank and the Organisation of American States..

Mr Speaker, when one looks at the draft document again, there are some other observations which one could make.

The first such observation which I would like to make is on 244 of the draft document. Under 244 of the draft document, three political commitments are cited:

1. Indicated here, specifically that the government of Guyana shall assure that (and there is a space there for the insertion of a date) 2005, agreement on the database and on the IT systems to be used for the updating and generation of the official list of voters has been achieved.
2. By (and the date to be inserted) 2005, the electoral system

Thursday, 4 August 2005

to be used for the general elections has been agreed.

3. By (and a date to be inserted) 2004, legislation identifying the GECOM Needs Assessment has been inactive.
4. By (and a date to be inserted) all parties signing up to a code of conduct.

It is clear that when these donors set out on this journey, it was a clear intention that certain deadlines would have been placed in the Memorandum. Deadlines as outlined here pertain to the issue of:

- the database;
- IT systems;
- the electoral system
- legislation; and
- a code of conduct.

But here we are today, with what I must now describe as a watered-down version which has omitted those fundamental deadlines. One has to ask the question, what has led to the omission of those deadlines? What process? Earlier today, the word *pressure* was used. I wonder if the same kind of pressures referred to about the achievements of 1992 and the same kind of pressures which have caused those significant, important, essential and critical deadlines to be omitted from the same document. It makes it even easier to understand why some of the donors may not have proceeded to be party to what is essentially a watered-down document.

Mr Speaker, that is not the only regard in which the document is watered-down and much of the watering-down is centered around this question of timelines, because if one turns again to the draft document, one would see that in the draft document, the timelines, as inadequate as

Thursday, 4 August 2005

they may have been, which were included in the Hathaway Report were extracted and placed in the draft at Annexe II in their own right under a specific heading *Timetable and Benchmarks*. There was a clear thinking running through the donors at that time that timelines, deadlines were critical and important. So not only did they single out the first four that I have referred to, but they also sought to include the Hathaway deadlines in the text of the document outside of the Hathaway report which they also appended.

So Mr Speaker, I want to make the point that outside of these deadlines being present in the memorandum much is left to be desired, because you cannot talk about an election on due date unless you have a concrete plan identifying what is to be done and when to arrive at that date. You cannot just get up and tell us elections will be held. This is not Houdini. This is a management process, it requires a programme of work and one of the difficulties which we have, is that here we are discussing the memorandum, when in fact we do not know the programme of work from two perspectives. From the perspectives of what are the actual activities that will be funded by these donors, we do not know because we do not have a programme of work and we do not know the timeframe in which these activities will be funded. So, I must confess that the absence of that takes away from this document in a very significant way and as the Leader of the Opposition said earlier that to a large extent, it makes the document an agreement to agree, but we are not quite sure what is it we are going to agree to. What is it the agreement will be about - an agreement to agree?

Mr Speaker, if you turn to page 5 of 38 of the actual document under donor commitment, you will see this issue of agreeing to agree being spelt out there, because what does it say? It says, the undersigned donors will make their assistance available in a co-ordinated fashion and in accordance with the terms of such individual agreements as may be necessary. It is still to be determined what these agreements will be? Who will give what for what? But here we are saying that we are advancing the process when in fact there is a tremendous void in terms of

Thursday, 4 August 2005

the required information that would tell you what is it that is actually going to happen? What is it they are actually going to finance?

But Mr Speaker, they make another statement on the same page. They say, this assistance will be based on a costed action plan - will be - suggesting that they recognised that that costed plan is still not yet available. Mr Speaker, this costed plan is a plan which GECOM has promised us on numerous occasions and as we stand here today, it is obvious they have still not yet produced. The last time we met with GECOM, they showed us a plan. In fact, they offered us that plan as the plan a moments before our departure they withdrew it and said that there were some things they had to do to bring it up to scratch. It is approximately two months now that they are scratching and that plan is still unavailable to us.

So Mr Speaker, we cannot support a Memorandum of Understanding which introduces a greater lack of understanding, it does not lend clarity to anything, it does not create greater understanding. What it does, is to create greater uncertainty and unpredictability in relation to what GECOM is going to do. When one looks at the Motion, in the first Whereas Clause, one sees it is stated:

Whereas the Government is committed to democracy and to free, fair and transparent elections; and the first question arises eight there on the key, the word democracy. An integral part of any democracy is the rule of law and fundamental to the rule of law and to the law itself is certainty and predictability. The citizens must be certain about they would be treated in the face of the law. The citizens must be able to predict an outcome based on the law. But what do we have here? A Motion which talks about democracy and a Memorandum which gives us no scope for certainty and predictability, a contradiction, a clear evidence that the document referred to as the memorandum is as distant from democracy as the acts of those who speak about it is from what they say. There is a clear parallel

Thursday, 4 August 2005

between the talk we hear about democracy and the lack of democratic action and again, the Motion on democracy and the absence of democratic realisation in terms of the absence of predictability and certainty in what is included in the Memorandum.

Mr Speaker, in the Resolved Clauses, the Motion goes on to talk about the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana affirms its commitment to the conduct of free, fair, well managed general and regional elections. How are we going to have free, fair and more so, well managed elections in the face of a situation where on one hand there are deadlines that are long past in terms of time, but that the things which are supposed to be done within those deadlines have not yet been done. The Memorandum is riddled with those deadlines in the Annex of the Hathaway Report. For example, if one looks at the Report carefully, one would see that the access to the media should have started now as I stand here - forty-five weeks before - and here we are standing, forgetting about the fact that the State media is totally monopolised, even in terms of the elections, the period prescribed is passing by and the actualisation of what is prescribed is nowhere within hand-reach, but still we get statements about commitments to making sure that these things happen. To make sure what happens? What already has not happened in the prescribed deadlines?

Mr Speaker, in that regard, I wish to draw your attention to Page 4 of 38 of the Memorandum and what does it say? It says:

The role of GECOM is to facilitate agreement on appropriate arrangements for equitable and free access to the State media by the political parties during the campaign.

Now there are two problems here, the campaign for all intense and purposes has been going on for the longest while. There was a campaign budget, now there are campaign handouts, the latest being to the young people who were going to Venezuela. They do not want to meet them in Committees. They want to meet them in a big forum, where pictures are

Thursday, 4 August 2005

taken when they are given US\$250 each. There is nothing new about sending young people to festivals. The late Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham (God rest the dead) twenty years ago he died. In 1978, he facilitated all the parties, PYO, YSM and everybody to go to Cuba. It is nothing new. What is so historic about the President giving money for youth festivals? It is a precedent, in 1978 under the late Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham. If we want to walk in Burnham's footsteps you must acknowledge the man. Do not pretend that you are the originator. That is campaign money - so the campaign has long started and now you are telling us that we must wait until you prescribe when the campaign should start to get access to the press.

There is more than that. You are putting the onus on GECOM to facilitate our access to the media. A meeting with GINA under the highest office tightly controlled - as you are telling us that GECOM must work out, how is this going to happen? You are telling us that GECOM must do it, when on the issue of biometrics, the Chairman said, you all have to work it out in Parliament and that we are in Parliament, you are telling us to work it out with GECOM. Is this bumper ball cricket or what? Is it bumper ball cricket you want us to play? Well, we are not a rubber ball. If we are going to play cricket at all, it will be hard ball cricket. You may interpret that in the various ways you interpret the things that we say. I expect you to say that it is threat. That is your election campaign, not what you must do for the nation (without the PNC/R threatening) that is your campaign. The campaign has already started and we do not have access to the media and you are telling us to go to GECOM.

The Hathaway Report - As indeed the opposition correctly said that in the text of the Memorandum, we are referred to this Report, so the Report is an integral part of what we are supposed to be accepting today. Then there is a little jig which says, the mutually accepted aspect of the Report. Well tell us, which are the part of this Report are the mutually acceptable parts. You have a chance in this House today to tell us, rather than talking about the twenty-eight years that gone by, talk

about the specifics that we are trying to achieve for 2006. You have that chance. So Mr Speaker, the question is a begging, which are the elements of the Hathaway Report are being referred to.

Mr Speaker, there has been much talk on the other side. For example, in the contributions, there is this argument that we want to move Elections Commission sway from the politicians. Well, that is desirable, that is what the Constitution intended, but that is not what happened, when the Office of the President re-imposed itself on the Elections Commission in terms of financial matters. Where is the removal in action? Where is the removal, when the Elections Commission has to go cap-in-hand to get its resources? Where is that removal? That is why we say, we do not want talk, talk is cheap; actions speak louder than voice and the actions are yet to be seen.

So another contributor said that look this Memorandum has what is to be implemented. If you read the Memorandum carefully and if you read the Motion carefully, the Motion itself said that this is the basis, it does not say that this is the content of what is implemented. So when you stand there and tell me that this Memorandum has what is to be implemented, it means that you have not even read it, because the Memorandum itself says that this is the basis for implementation of the agreements to be made, but you have this glib talk about the Memorandum mean what is to be implemented, not even understanding. Do you hear what the Memorandum is now about? You said that it is about implementation. You said that. Now you are trying to tell me what the Memorandum is all about.

Mr Speaker, we participated in the establishment of the Elections Commission. There is no doubt about we participated. That does not mean that if the Commission is slothful, if it makes mistakes that by virtue of participating, we will kowtow and say, well, since we put them there, whatever they do, that is it. No, Mr Speaker, we established them, they have a mandate, they have to have a programme and I say here unequivocally if the Commission does not do the work it has been there to do, we will criticise the Commission. It is a matter of issues. It is not a

matter of personalities. It does not make us enemies of the individuals, but they have to produce and if they do not produce the People's National Congress/Reform will criticise them. The same way how you said at one time that they were slothful and you helped to appoint them too. You are on record as saying that they are slothful, so you have done the same thing. So who are you? A greater being than we are that you can criticise and we cannot criticise.

Mr Speaker, there is this ongoing argument about the confusion that the People's National Congress/Reform wants to cause and so all that we say and do is to cause confusion.. Now the People's Progressive Party/Civic, in the public domain has identified specifically what we want to do. It is not a matter of guessing as far as they are concerned, they know exactly what we want to do, but notwithstanding that knowledge, they refuse to pull the rug. They are not pulling the rug, because they want this rug to run around with as a part of that campaign I talked about earlier. We are saying, if you know that we want to cause confusion by falling back on the issue of the list, then what is problem do you have with a verification which will pull the rug from under our feet. What can the problem be? The only problem that there could be is that if you do that, you will be pulling the rug from under your own feet, because your intention is to use that from now to doomsday to try to vilify the People's National Congress/Reform, but we will deterred from the trail which we blazed when we did all that we did for the 1992 elections, we will not depart from that trail. It must only get better. Not only now that you are in government, you will stick the clock so as to enjoy the flaws and the deficiencies that are still in the system. Let us get the verification and in similar manner, let us have biometrics; let us ensure that we have the new biometric features in the mode of modern technology (are you listening carefully) which allows for electronic cross-referencing and ensures that people will not have two ID cards. The verification will ensure that those who gone away do not remain in the list and come to vote and the biometrics will ensure that those who would wish to use their multiple birth certificates ... and multiple birth certificates they do have ... to go and do multiple registration which will result in multiple voting. We must

accept the state of things in this country. There are numerous people with multiple birth certificates. Only today a young man came to me with two birth certificates, one spelt with 'o' and one more recently acquired spelt with 'e'. It is only today, I saw one like that. I give him today - dutiful - I am in government. So we know that we have multiple birth certificates, we know that we have multiple registration, we know that during the flood Singh and Narine was the same person at the Office of the President trying to get flood money. We know that. So let us get the biometrics to deal with the problem. What are you afraid of? You are just telling us that a particular date is what must suffice. So Mr Speaker, the People's National Congress/Reform finds it extremely difficult to support this Memorandum in its present form. I had circulated amendments and will at the appropriate time move those amendments, because we are not going to rely on a questionable Hathaway Report.

They have been touting the name *Parris* here. That is the latest name to tout. I will tout it too - your favourite *Parris* - Parris in his initial comments of February 7 on the Hathaway Report, what did he say? He said that the first paragraph like the tables of Moses contains no attempt to justify if any of its three recommendations and he goes on.

The second paragraph is based on the inaccuracy that the current voter's ID includes a thumb print. Accordingly the recommendation to retain the practice for the election 2006 is meaningless based on a false premise. What is required is a proposal to entrench designed:

- (i) to thwart double registration; and
- (ii) double voting for the next elections.

This may involve the use of biometrics. Your Haslyn Parris; you keep touting him. Not only has Haslyn Parris made this kind of comment ...
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Your time is up Honourable Member.

Mrs Clarissa S Riehi: Mr Speaker, I rise that the Honourable Mem-

ber be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Vincent L Alexander: Thank you very much Mr Speaker. I am now advised that we have a GITA in the country. I am sure that Mr Nadir knows about that, because he has all of the latest reports of what happened of what happens at GECOM. That GITA, I am advised by name is one Mr Yhann - a Kwan duo - a fiery grand. What did he say when he came here previously? What did he say in his report? In our interactions, I urge both the GECOM and the political parties to reach agreement on whatever problem there is. This requires round-table discussions between GECOM and the political parties represented in Parliament, but as a starting point GECOM itself has to be candid about the deficiencies of the roll. In my view it is only when a consensus has been reached on its nature and the problem will be amenable to technical fixing. We have it here clearly before us. The guy identified the process which must be followed. Rather than following that process, we now have the Memorandum which seeks to tell us, forget about that and get on with all the flaws.

The People's National Congress/Reform has been plugging this issue for the longest while. In January 2005 when we wrote the Elections Commission, we made the point then, it must be noted that in the absence of a comprehensive plan from GECOM, the PNC/R's response is couched in the context of its own expectations, which has been informed by its meetings with GECOM and the documentation which GECOM has unveiled during those meetings. That was this year, but on 23 November last year, what did we say in another letter to GECOM? We had wide ranging and indepth discussions with the Commission. In addition to written submissions on matters pertaining to GECOM, we expect a comprehensive plan from GECOM with regard to its preparation for and holding of elections of an acceptable standard. We are not bringing up anything new. How could you have a memorandum and you do not know the plan that you apply for the donor aid. Ho is that possible? And of some interest to us, is the fact that this year, May, the

Thursday, 4 August 2005

United Nations Development Programme brought to Guyana a Needs Assessment Mission. We have heard nothing about the outcome of that mission - absolutely nothing - we do not see the UN signing on this Memorandum. In the past they were the co-ordinators of the donor agency. Another interesting question: why are they out there in the cold now? They brought someone to do an assessment. We do not know the outcome of that, but there are attempts to tie us to a Hathaway Report, which we know is riddled with inaccuracies, deficiencies and in fact is also dated, because much of the timelines have gone by without any implementation of what was proposed. So we posed the question, what is the content of the UN Report? Why it has not informed the process? When will it be made available to the stakeholders so we may understand in no uncertain terms what the UN came up with out of the most recent assessment? The People's National Congress/Reform did not call for this assessment. They like to blame us for everything. We did not call for it. GECOM must have been involved in having this assessment, but to date we do not have anything forthcoming, but we have a memorandum which probably seeks to tiptoe around that assessment.

Mr Speaker, as I come close to the end, I want to refer to the draft report of Mr Jan Morgan entitled *Support for the Guyana Elections - Analysis for Recommendations*. On Page 17 of that report Mr Morgan says:

It would appear that GECOM suffers the same fate as other electoral administrations in developing countries. That their problems are only seen as important and urgent just prior to and immediately after election, but unless the reforms are started soon ...

He is speaking about GECOM, this report is dated October 2004
- Mr Jan Morgan told GECOM.

... the administrative weaknesses of the 2001 elections are likely to be repeated in 2006.

That warning was given in 2004 and here we are today, in many regards, trying to force down the throat of this House, those deficiencies which were identified and warned about. And Mr Yhann's report is rather comprehensive in terms of showing all that needs to be done. That is what his report is about. It pulls together all the deficiencies identified in all the reports, some of which are often talked about - the Vic Dobe Report, the IDEA Report - it pulls together all of those and say, here are the problems, work on them. Today, we have to talk to a Memorandum and still do not know how the list will be verified and we still do not know if we will have biometrics, but be dragged into this situation where you do not do anything, time is nigh and then you say that it is too late. That is the second leg of the trick. Apart from saying that the PNC/R wants to cause confusion, you create a delay and then when time is no longer available, you say that you do not have time. And so those who are asking for the thing to be done are unreasonable. Well, the evidence is here. In 2004 recommendations were made. The PNC/R has shown you documents, they made recommendations in 2004 and 2005. On the last occasion, we showed that GECOM itself had embarked in 2003 and so we will not bear responsibility for a situation where we are told that time is insufficient, because there was enough time and GECOM has a responsibility to do a comprehensive job.

The elections of 2006 presents a glorious opportunity for Guyana to remove from the problems of the past into a new era, but will not do that if confidence is not restored in the electorate. That confidence has to be restored by an electoral roll:

- that is acceptable;
- that goes through a verification;
- that puts new features to ensure that elections are not said to be, but are in fact free, fair and transparent and free from fear.

Any such election, the People's National Congress/Reform will

accept its results, irrespective of the confidence that we have that we will win any such election. Irrespective of that, I say to that an election held under acceptable standards, verifying the list, biometrics, those results will be accepted by the People's National Congress/Reform.

We are yet to see if those on the other side are committed to a process that can restore confidence and put this country on the path of development and take it off from the downward path it has been going over the last twelve/thirteen years.

Mr. Speaker, I rest my case. We wait to hear the response from the nation to our reasonable amendments, because we are here to make a contribution to moving the process forward. We identified the faults and we made recommendations. The ball is in the court of the other side and may I remind them that we are not playing bumper ball cricket, it is hardball. I thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Health.

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, I stand in support of the Motion which was introduced by my colleague the Honourable Member Minister Reepu Daman Persaud.

First of all, I want to start off making a reference to a statement that was made earlier in the House by my friend, the Hon Ravindra Dev, where he talked about thirty pieces of silver. Those of us who are familiar with that story, and I know that many of my colleagues on the other side are very familiar with that story. It is a story of bribery. It is a story of betrayal. I am not going to ask the Honourable Member to apologise to the donors - our international partners - but I feel compelled, as a Guyanese citizen; as a Member of the Cabinet; as a Member of the Government and as a member of this Honourable House - the National Assembly - on behalf of the people of Guyana; on behalf of the Government of Guyana; and indeed, on behalf of all of us who sit in this House, to apologise to our partners from the international community who stood with us through thick and thin, who have enabled us to move forward, to

Thursday, 4 August 2005

build and to forge a democratic society.

I know that the Honourable Member has some integrity and I am sure that on reflection, at some other time, he might also want to, in meeting with some of our friends who have been working with us, to himself apologise to our donors for that thirty pieces of silver statement.

The Motion before us, the Memorandum of Understanding is an understanding... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: I am unable to hear you, Honourable Member, because there is a lot of noise on the floor.

Mr Ravindra Dev: Yes, I wish to be advised as to how I can proceed to clarify the misconception that the Honourable Member has made of my statement. Can I proceed?

The Speaker: I have no idea, Honourable Member.

Mr Ravindra Dev: Mr Speaker, the statement was very clear ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: I will give you a minute after the Honourable Member finished his presentation.

Mr Ravindra Dev: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: I hope that everyone understands my side of it too. Thirty pieces of silver is a well known story of bribery and betrayal and the Member was very clear in saying that for thirty pieces of silver, this Government has sold our souls. Let us check the language that the Member used. For thirty pieces of silver, we sold our souls, we did not. We have worked with our international partners. We have restored democracy and we continue to strengthen democracy in this country. *[Applause]*

The Memorandum of Understanding that we have brought to the

Thursday, 4 August 2005

House is exactly, almost word for word, a Memorandum of Understanding that this House unanimously approved as Resolution No. 41 of 2000. It is exactly the same Memorandum of Understanding that we have brought to this House again.

I want to refer to this issue about some of our partners disowning the process and walking away. The Honourable Member Mr Alexander seems to have information that we do not have, but we have been working with international partners, who have established their own coordinating mechanism and the governments who have signed this Memorandum of Understanding, represents the coordination of the international donors working with the Guyana Government, working with GECOM to ensure that we have a free and fair election.

The adoption of the Memorandum of Understanding before us is indeed a consolidation, the strengthening of the process for conducting elections in our country. We have clear roles that are defined in terms of stakeholders and this MOU ensures that our donors continue to play a pivotal role:

- working with us;
- working with the Guyana Elections Commission;
- working with the Government; and
- working with the people of Guyana,

to ensure that Guyana's elections continue to be strengthened and the efficacy of the process continues to be beyond reproach.

Elections in Guyana are real elections today. I know how several members on the other side ... and this time I will acknowledge that the Honourable Member Ravindra Dev did say, because he knows where we came from. But you have noticed that the other members on the opposition do not want to go back to those and if I was them, I too would not want to go back, because elections are elections today; elec-

tions in a previous era in this country was something else. They were stolen elections and rigged elections. We must not play games with those things. We know those things. And this thing about 1992, that the PNC brought and restored democracy, they came along kicking and screaming. The people of this country worked together the diaspora and the governments around this world joined together and forced them. Those are the cold, hard facts that you have to face. *[Interruption: 'Where was the URP then?']* I am the URP. We have all worked together to ensure that we have free and fair elections in this country. From 1992 to now, at each election, we have been strengthening and adding new provisions to reduce some of the weaknesses and so on.

Maybe I could probably take a few seconds here to congratulate and thank the President of Guyana for coming forward to assist 250 young people from across the political spectrum, from all cultural backgrounds to attend the youth festival in Venezuela. I have heard so many times in this House, not just today, because as I listened to the members, it is a repetition of exactly what they said a few weeks ago, but I have heard, both in and out of this House that free and fair elections cannot guarantee a free and democratic society. And I have no doubt that free and fair elections by themselves cannot guarantee a robust democracy, but equally important and indisputably so, is that without free and fair elections, there could never be a true democracy. Without a transparent and fair election, there could never be a process that would guarantee that people would have a say that people could make a judgement and that governments can change. I am so happy that Mr Alexander and several members on the other side, on previous occasions, have talked about when they form the next government. Tacitly acknowledging that we do have elections now and that the people have a free choice and any political party can participate and win. And so I encouraged them to go to the people. Of course the problem that they have is:

- because of free and fair elections in this country;
- because of a strengthened democratic tradition in our country;

Thursday, 4 August 2005

- because of improved governance in this country; and
- because of more accountable governance in this country,

I have absolutely no doubt that when we go to the 2006 elections, the PPP/C will return to power.

We look forward to this continuing engagement, sometimes constructive engagement so that together we will make the people's lives better. We will make Guyana a better country. We do not have to threaten people about hardball politics. We know what it means. In this country, we are used to *slow fire and more fire*. We know what the words are. We are going to continue to work to ensure that the process is strengthened in terms of its integrity that the people of Guyana will continue to have a free choice. In building a robust, democratic environment and enabling democracy in this country, we must have elections that are held within stipulated times, within agreed to rules, elections that are free and fair under the Constitution. When this condition is given lip service, is not met and is deliberately breached, as we know has happened in a previous era, what invariably follows, is a lack of democracy and a consolidation of dictatorship. In each instance, the consequences are dire. In each instance, where this condition prevails, the consequences are that the country begins a path of underdevelopment. We see this manifestation everyday in some parts of the world. We saw this situation in the past. We see it today. We are likely to see it in the future. Cheddi Jagan made this a lifelong mission and always said that without free and fair elections, we cannot build a democratic society; one that could freely choose a government, one that could pass judgement on the government's performance and change its government from time to time. And in looking at the consequences of an undemocratic governance model, we in Guyana do not have to look too far. We have an example right here. We know what happened for almost three decades in this country, when democracy was destroyed and people's rights were trampled upon. We saw how our country became underdeveloped. We saw how our infrastructure was destroyed. We saw how our people sunk into poverty. We saw that by 1990 ... depending on which reports you accept,

between 66 and 86 percent of the people lived in poverty. Those are the consequences of those actions. For almost 30 years, we sunk further into underdevelopment, not just remained undeveloped. The change in 1992 ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: How does all of these things relate to our Memorandum of Understanding?

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, they have a direct bearing.

The Speaker: I cannot see it myself. I am listening to you, but I cannot see any bearing myself on these matters. I am sorry to interrupt you, but I just want to mention that I had made an appeal to the Management Committee that I have a function this evening to which all MPs are invited. And I appeal to members on both sides (Government and Opposition) to get together so that this debate can be finished in time. Fifty percent of this debate concerns matters that we have debated only a week or two ago. This is just a repetition of what we have talked about only one week ago. I just want members to note what is going on. Proceed Honourable Member.

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Thank you, Mr Speaker. As we look forward to the 2006, the elections beckon. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: I am sorry, but if the debate continues in this manner, I will have to impose time limits.

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: We must be faithful to our Constitution. We must ensure that we work together with GECOM. All of the political parties must work together and resolve some of the differences that we have today. We have done it before. We have had elections in the past. We have had major differences of opinion. We have had major disagreements but coming together, we have been able to resolve the issues and we have been able to obtain elections, which have been judged to be free and fair, not only by us, but by all of the international observer teams that have come to this country. We are grateful that our partners

Thursday, 4 August 2005

have stayed with us. The consequences of the elections since 1992 have been able to produce governments that are of the people's choice. We, in the PPP/C have worked with our international donors and with GECOM. We ask that all the political parties do the same. Guyana's elections have benefited from the technical and financial inputs from our donor partners. We have had several assessments done. We have had recommendations and incrementally, we have introduced these. Right now, we have the beginning of the continuous registration. The Honourable Member Mr Alexander and others have talked about voters' verification and biometrics. The PPP/C and the Government of Guyana are not opposed to verification. We are not opposed to biometrics. We have always done so, but it depends on what kind of verification and biometrics you are talking about. There are different forms of it. We have to work together to ensure that we retain the integrity of the election process. It is not because the PNC/R comes up with one proposal that that is the only proposal. There are several other proposals and the fact of the matter is that we have always worked together with GECOM. There is a lot of talk about GECOM, its workings, its time plan and its agenda. We know that GECOM has been working. We have also gone to GECOM and they have shown us work plans which changes all the time as we go on. While we sometimes have our own differences with GECOM, we ourselves are supportive of GECOM. We encourage them and we work along with them in spite of some strong disagreements. There is a lot of talk about GECOM's independence. GECOM runs the election. We pass the laws in this House on the electoral systems and GECOM executes and conducts the election. That is what they are doing. We, on this side of the House work along with GECOM. We are not going to dictate to them: We have an equal say. We do not have more say than the opposition parties. There is talk about GECOM and its budget. All of us answer to somebody. GECOM cannot say that in its request for releases, money is not released for them to do their work. It has never been short of money to do its work.

The Government of Guyana is convinced that the presence of the international donor partners, the assessors, the observers, et cetera, there are provisions that will enable us to have an election that can again be

Thursday, 4 August 2005

judged as free and fair and with fewer weaknesses and deficiencies.

Mr Speaker, as we stand here this afternoon, I want to appeal to all my colleagues that we must give the process a chance. This Memorandum of Understanding has set the stage again for us to work together for the Government, GECOM, our international partners and all stakeholders so that we can have an election in which the people can freely participate and one which will continue to consolidate our democratic tradition. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Honourable Member Mr Dev

Mr Ravindra Dev: I am saddened to say that a sitting Minister of this Government, after having read the transcripts in the Stabroek News as to how President Kennedy of America defined aid by refusing Dr Jagan's aid request in 1962, could reflexively play to the gallery by giving carte blanche as to the motives of the donor community. Mr Speaker, it is possible that their intentions may be good, but it is a stated point that donor aid is premised on their interest.

Secondly, it is also possible that they have good intentions, but we know that the same book that the story about the thirty pieces of silver came from, the path to hell is paved with good intentions.

Thirdly, this is what I said in its intent that the flagitious haste ... I will repeat the word, let them look it up ... the flagitious haste in which this Government signed this memorandum showed a betrayal to the people of this country for not taking the time to avoid buying a pig in a poke. I thank you. *[Applause]*

continued in Pt II

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE SECOND SESSION (2002-2005) OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT
OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER
PUBLIC BUILDINGS BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

Part II

69TH SITTING

2.00 PM

Thursday, 4 August 2005

cont'd fr. Pt 1

The Speaker: Honourable Mrs Melville.

Mrs Shirley J Melville: Mr Speaker, I rise to give my contribution to this Memorandum of Understanding before the House. It is heartening to hear that we are all concentrating on the stakeholders and that is why it is very important that we have and we are committed to the citizens of Guyana in giving them the confidence that we here in this Honourable House are in a position to give them the confidence that the 2006 elections will be free and fair. Time is against us and I think we need to acknowledge that. We do appreciate the contribution from the donor community, but we need to have a plan in order to be able to execute that plan and to build the confidence of the citizens of Guyana so that they can go to the polls knowing that they are going to have a free and fair election.

Mr Speaker, we in this Honourable House are fully aware of the loopholes and what has happened to elections in the past. Certainly we are all thinking about development and thereby would like to ensure that come 2006, we have our acts together and that indeed, the citizens of Guyana will be contented that they have been given that right to exercise at the upcoming election.

I hope for 2006, that many of my colleagues across Guyana, in particular the people of the Hinterland, would be in possession of some form of identification. Therefore we are compelled; we are committed to

Thursday, 4 August 2005

the citizens of Guyana to ensure that we have a plan that could be properly executed come 2006. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member Mr McAllister

Mr James K McAllister: Mr Speaker, before I proceed to treating with the matters that I came here to treat with, I just wish to seek your indulgence to briefly comment on some issues raised by the Honourable Member Dr Ramsammy.

In Dr Ramsammy's presentation, he referred to this Memorandum of Understanding and claimed that this is the exact Memorandum of Understanding that was signed for the 2001 elections. Well I want Dr Ramsammy to take note that there were problems in 2001. A lot of deficiencies were identified. A number of things were supposed to be addressed ... and for us to come five years after with the same Memorandum of Understanding, when nothing has been fixed and try to say that it is an acceptable document that in itself is totally unacceptable.

The Honourable Member Dr Ramsammy spoke about stolen and rigged elections, but I am wondering if he was referring to the 1997 elections which were the only elections in this country that was vitiated by the courts and you are telling us about rigged elections. You sirs, on the other side of the House, must be the masters of this art.

The Honourable Dr Ramsammy also mentioned about monies for 250 young people and having placed it on the records of the House, we must take note of the timing of the announcement. While one set of participants were fully aware that the Government was going to sponsor their travel others declared themselves unavailable, because they could not find the money and at the last minute, when you would have taken up all the spaces, you come up with public money and announce that you are going to pay. And the trickery and the young people cannot... *[Interruption]*

Thursday, 4 August 2005

The Speaker: Honourable Member, please move off of this subject. It has no relevance to our debate.

Mr James K McAllister: I was responding, sir ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Mr Alexander mentioned it. Dr Ramsammy replied to it. Forget it now and please move on.

Mr James K McAllister: Thank you sir, I can move. I hope that I am not treading on dangerous grounds here now, because I am still responding to Dr Ramsammy, when he spoke about undemocratic societies and referring to how things were in Guyana under the PNC. I want to place on the record here that the only difference between then and now is the fact that the People's Progressive Party/Civic is proclaiming that a democratic government is in place. But the same fear that you talked about, the same fear exists now and it is even worse. Corruption has not been as bad as it ever was in the history of this country. Let us understand that.

Mr Speaker, if I am to move on ... and before I get into my presentation, the Honourable Member Mr Donald Ramotar, speaking at the annual congress of the People's Progressive Party/Civic made some comments in relation to the People's National Congress/Reform on the demands and requests that was made in relation to the verification of the voters' list. He said that the PNC/R wants to remove half of the names from the list. I would like to know how the Honourable Member Mr Donald Ramotar knows that if we have verification and biometrics, half of the names will come off. How does he know that? He obviously knows something that the rest of this country does not know and he has basically let the secret out of the bag. That is why we are seeing the resistance, because the Honourable Member obviously knows that many of the names on the list should not be there. So we are having a particular resistance coming from the Government's side.

Mr Speaker, it is quite possible that this afternoon, the Government will use its majority and pass this Motion. It is quite possible and you will

Thursday, 4 August 2005

go to the State media that you are dominating and controlling and proclaim victory. But will it be a real victory? Will it be a victory for the people of Guyana? This is what we must ask ourselves. Just yesterday, I was in consultation, you heard us talk about consultation where documents were circulated late and so on, but the very document that was circulated - the Poverty Reduction Strategy Progress Report of 2005. If we go to that document, on Page 2, it says:

The political impasse that continues is counterproductive to making Guyana attractive for investment on creating the peace and stability critical for development.

Therefore, to what benefit is it for the people of this country, when the PRSP progress report says clearly for us to create the environment to ensure development for the elimination of poverty, we need to have a situation where there can be stability. And therefore to come here with a document that is so weak; to come here with a Memorandum of Understanding with so many gaping holes; to call upon us and to call upon this House to support is more or less against exactly what the PRSP is saying. We need to create an environment. So therefore, I would like to call upon the Government, The People's Progressive Party/Civic to do the right thing; to think about the people of this country and to ensure that we give ourselves more time to improve on the document so that in the final analysis, we can have an elections where the results can be acceptable to all and where we can have the kind of stability that will ensure that we have development and elimination of poverty. That is what we are here for. We are not here to score cheap points and to use numbers to pass motions and then in the final analysis, the people of the country are in the same place. We have to ensure that we adopt the amendments as proposed by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition so that we can have a motion that is acceptable to ensure that the situation is transparent.

The Memorandum of Understanding itself speaks of the entry into effect on Page 7 and basically here, it is calling for a motion to bring this MOU to the Parliament for there to be the support of the participants of

Thursday, 4 August 2005

the Parliament. One would have thought that the Government would have been trying to have a situation where all parties can sign on to whatever motion is passed here today. But maybe that is not the interest here. The interest here is to have one's own way. To have one's own outcome in the final analysis in the elections and we have to understand this.

Again, if we go to the MOU, this is what we have to be careful about. Again on Page 7 it speaks about the suspension of the MOU if the electoral environment is not amenable to elections being held in accordance with international standards. When we bring this MOU to the Parliament, we have a situation where the environment right now is not conducive to proper elections. We have a situation right now where the Government is totally dominating the State media, where there is no transparency. Therefore we need to address all of these issues if in fact that we are saying that we are trying to create an environment for free, fair and transparent elections.

The Honourable Member Mr Manzoor Nadir spoke about the donors and that the donors have come forward with \$2 billion to ensure free, fair and transparent elections in 1992.

Given the shortcomings outlined by my colleagues, Mr Alexander and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition that this MOU has significant omissions that renders the entire process non-transparent. One must ask the question, is the Honourable Member, Mr Nadir urging the donors to come forward to support a process right now that is non-transparent? Because we have a MOU before us that does not address a number of critical issues and therefore what is the transparency in this process?

Mr Speaker, in the interest of the people of our country, in order for us to ensure that they create the environment for free, fair and transparent elections, we have to revisit the MOU. We have to ensure that we engage all the stakeholders and all the people, who are interested in

Thursday, 4 August 2005

the welfare of the people of Guyana, be it the Government, be it GECOM, be it the donors, they must now step back and allow a process that is proper and allow a process that finally will be transparent so that in 2006, when we have the elections, it can be free, fair and transparent. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

The Honourable Member Mr Ramotar

Mr Donald R Ramotar: Mr Speaker, I thought that this would have been a simple exercise for us to pass this Memorandum of Understanding - this Motion to the Parliament, because it is a natural progression in the direction of us working towards elections. I want to point out that the opposition in expressing their disagreement with this motion, is once again exposed their real intentions to be disruptive and not to have proper elections in this society. Because what we are talking about here is a Memorandum of Understanding. We are not speaking here about agreements. In a Memorandum of Understanding there are no timelines. This is not a place to have GECOM's plan. This is a Memorandum of Understanding containing broad principles. It is not a detailed agreement. All that we are having here from our colleagues on the other side is really a storm in a teacup, working themselves up to all kinds of frenzy and seeing all kinds of red under the bed. All over the place, they are shouting when in fact, we are debating or discussing a document - a Memorandum of Understanding.

On the other side there are prominent lawyers, there are experienced people, there are experienced electioneering people as well. They are aware that this is a Memorandum of Understanding so all I am saying is that they are trying to score cheap points and trying to find problems where problems actually do not exist. So that is the first point I would like to make about this document. It is a Memorandum of Understanding.

The other point that I would like to make relates to some of the

issues relating to GECCOM that were made by my colleague Mr Alexander. He is always finding himself in trouble by misquoting and misrepresenting things and today was no different. He spoke about the Elections Commission not having independence. As far as I know, at a meeting at the Office of the President, Mr Alexander and I heard the Chairman of the Elections Commission saying the same thing. The Elections Commission has a budget and they do not have to ask anyone to spend the money that is budgeted for them. They are actively involved in the planning of their own budget, but if they want extra budgetary funds, certainly have to undergo a procedure to acquire extra budgetary funds. Or is the PNC telling us that they want to go back to the days when there was paramouncy all over the place, that the Elections Commission should walk with a bag and go into the Consolidated Fund, pack up money and no accountability. That is why they could not publish the Auditor General's Report for all those years when they were there. Is that what they are telling us they want to do?

Mr Speaker, unfortunately because of the fact that the opposition has raised some of the same points that they have raised again, I must answer them again and at times in the same manner. They talk again about biometrics. They have all the latest reports in their hands and they are talking about them. Here again, they are warned by both reports that the Honourable Member Mr Alexander read just now, he did not read that part about biometrics, but again there is another one here from JITA on Page 19 of 38 of the MOU, there is a part speaking about the technology and they are warning that it must not be assumed. It says:

It is not necessary the case of biometric methods will represent an improvement on the present arrangement, but this should not be assumed. It needs to be established, as a result of rigorous investigation about the advantages and disadvantages.

A lot of people, even the Jamaican experience that they speak about, took five years to reach the stage that Jamaica has reached, but our friends want us to do these things overnight.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

As far as the database is concerned, for continuous registration, based on all the investigations that were done ... I must repeat this point, because it does not seem to be penetrating - all the experts said that the database is the best basis to begin the continuous registration. They said that.

Mr Corbin who was the same representative of the PNC on the Elections Commission at the last elections, fought tooth and nail to have new photographs taken and you knocked out a whole set of people from the list, disenfranchised a lot of people. As I said, right now it is being exposed of what was being done there. That was a complete new registration process. All the experts have said that. I do not want to re-read the passage again, but all the experts have said that.

I want to point out ... and I will read it again:

The new continuous registration system should build on the existing master registration database. It would be a waste of resources ...

And that seems to be the main point. The opposition seems to want the Government to be wasting resources to create more problems within the society.

It would be a waste of resources to start all over again when there is such a good base to begin from.

That is what we are arguing, that we cannot use this basis to begin the continuous registration process. We have never said that you should go to the elections without verifying the list. But you have to generate the list first and the continuous registration is the place where we have to begin to generate that list and when that list is generated, then we will have verification before we go to the elections. We do not want to take you up to elections without verification of the list. But how can you verify what you do not have? [Interruption: 'The OLE'] The OLE has already been verified.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

The Speaker: Just a minute Honourable Member.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: I do not want to be an unnecessary obstructionist, but I am just curious as to the source of the last quotation where you said that the experts recommended that the database will be the fastest or the earliest or something like that. I would like to get the source.

Mr Donald R Ramotar: That was an international IDEA recommendation sir. It was the audit of the 2001 elections - the International IDEA Report of the Audit and Systems Review of the 2001 elections process in Guyana by the international IDEA. That is the source. It is the same base that we are talking about.

Mr Speaker, our colleagues on the other side seem desperate to want to disrupt. I just want to set some other matters straight before I take my seat.

For the second time in less than a month, Mr. Corbin stood here and said to the people that the PNC returned democracy to the country. Now obviously, as the leader of a discredited party, I sympathise with him. He is obviously trying to give some type of credibility to the People's National Congress/Reform, but the fact is, up to 1964, we had free and fair elections. It was the People's National Congress who undermined what the PPP fought for over the years - *Universal Adult Suffrage*. They undermined that and we had rigged elections all over the place. You are talking about observers; these are the same people who arrested Lord Eric Ainsbury, when came here in 1980 to observe the elections. These same people arrested the man, because he was observing the elections in this society. So obviously, if in 1992, we had free and fair elections, it is not because of the PNC, but despite the PNC.

Let me touch on the 1997 elections. My good friend talked about the vitiation of the elections, but either the Honourable Member Mr McAllister is too young to understand what went on or he is still wet behind the ears or something. The decision of the court to vitiate the

Thursday, 4 August 2005

1997 elections was based on the voters' ID card. This shows the unreliability of some of my colleagues. These are the same people who sat with us and agreed to have a voters' ID card. That came here to the National Assembly. They sat with us and agreed to a voters' ID card. They came to this National Assembly and voted for it unanimously and yet some of them went on Nation Watch for the whole night, talking a lot on these things. All night they spoke and distorted and misrepresented these issues. Mr Speaker, to call that a victory on the part of the PNC/R is really clutching at straw; you are really becoming wishy-washy in that regard.

I think that these are the main points that I want to make. That this is a Memorandum of Understanding, it is an understanding on how you proceed with plans of other agreements. I think that it was a simple matter for the opposition to support this. If they oppose this as they say they will do, it shows clearly their intention to be disruptive and non-cooperative in the electoral process. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Are there any other persons? *[Pause]* Mrs Backer, I have your name.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: Mr Speaker, I wish to ask that the Motion be put.

Mr Robert HO Crobin: There are some amendments in my name.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, I will now put the motion to the House.

First, I will go through the amendment, and then put the amendments first and then it depends on what the outcome is. I believe you have the amendments to the motion before you.

First Recital Clause

The first amendment is to delete the first Recital Clause and replace it with the words which are stated there.

Thursday, 4 August 2005

Amendment that -

1. *WHEREAS there is general stakeholders concern over the arrangements and preparation for General Elections in 2006.*

Question -

That the amendment shall replace the first Recital Clause.

Amendment put and negatived

[First Recital Clause, as printed, stands part of the Motion]

Second Recital Clause

I move now to the second amendment.

Amendment that -

2. In the second Recital Clause delete the word *this* and replace it by the word *the*.

Amendment put and negatived

..[Second Recital Clause, as printed, stands part of the Motion]

Third Recital Clause

The proposed amendment to the third Recital Clause states:

Amendment that -

3. Insert after the third Recital Clause, the following:

Thursday, 4 August 2005

AND WHEREAS THE SAID Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) incorporates Annex 2: Report of the Commonwealth Assessment Mission which is the Subject of Serious disagreement by some stakeholders.

There is a second limb of that amendment which I have not yet put. I will have to go over the Clause depending on what comes out on the vote on this one. There is a second paragraph to the amendment of the third Recital Clause to add another clause.

AND WHEREAS the MOU does not include an annex dealing with a time bound implementation plan of GECOM for securing free, fair, and transparent elections by 2006.

Amendment put and negatived

[Third Recital Clause, as printed, stands part of the Motion]

These Resolutions are not numbered, so since there are amendments to various Resolutions, I will have to put each one and describe it the best way I can.

Second Resolved Clause

There is a proposed amendment.

Amendment that -

A full stop be inserted after the word Community and all the words thereafter be deleted.

So the Clause would read:

Take note of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Guyana and the Donor Community.

And the following words will be deleted:

and sees it as part of an integral part of fulfilling this commitment.

Amendment put and negatived

[Second Resolved Clause, as printed, stands part of the Motion]

Third Resolved Clause

Amendment that -

The third Resolved Clause be deleted and replaced with the following:

Suspend support of the Memorandum until the GECOM attaches to the said memorandum the following:

- (a) An annex dealing with GECOM's time bound implementation plan and for the holding of free, fair and transparent elections;*
- (b) A list of the recommendations contained in the Needs Assessment Annex 2 of the MOU that have been "mutually agreed."*
- (c) The Submission to the National Assembly subsidiary legislation of the rules and regulations for the conduct of continuous registration in Guyana.*

Thursday, 4 August 2005

Amendment put and negatived

[Third Resolved Clause, as printed, stands part of the Motion]

Resolved Clauses 1 and 4

There are no proposed amendments to the First and Fourth Resolved Clauses, so I will just put the Clauses as printed in the Motion.

Question put and agreed to.

[Resolved Clauses 1 and 4, as printed, stand part of the Motion]

Motion, as printed, put and carried

A PRODUCTIVE RECESS TO ALL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

The Speaker: Honourable Members, this brings us to the end of our business for today. Before we rise I have had no indication that there is likely to be another sitting of the National Assembly before 10 August 2005. In that event I would like to take this opportunity to wish all Members and their families a productive recess. I know this is a period, traditionally, when Members of National Assembly take the opportunity to spend a little extra time for themselves and their families. I would therefore like wish you all the best during this period of recess and hope that you return in October refreshed. I would like to say, however, that I would like to see, in the new period ... it will be, I expect, a shorter period than the one we have just passed, because of the impending elections during next year, nevertheless, I would like to see a bit more cooperation between the Government and the Opposition in organising and managing our debates. From what I have witnessed, there is very little

Thursday, 4 August 2005

communication in that, and as a result of that our debates to date are not managed as well as they can be. All that is required is a simple phone call and some simple courtesies. And I hope that during the next period we will see that. I raised the issue at the Management Committee and absolutely nothing was done about it and I was not happy about the situation today. I am sure if there was communication between the two sides this situation would not have occurred. I hope and look forward to continued cooperation of Members of the Assembly.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: We will work towards achieving those noble items to which you have referred. They are worth considering and worth putting into action.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Mr Speaker, I just want to reciprocate those wishes to you and your family as well and to assure you that the PNC/R remains committed to the efficient and effective workings of this Parliament.

We hope that in the new term, after the recess, that indeed the Parliamentary Management Committee will function and that we will have a legislative agenda which will facilitate the kind of development which you so rightfully request should exist.

I wish you and other Members on that side of the House a very warm and successful vacation. Thank you very much.

Hon Reepu Daman Persaud: I am sure, Mr Speaker that all of us are committed to those suggestions and we will have a better Parliament as we meet again.

I move that the National Assembly stands adjourned to a date to be fixed.

The Speaker: Thank you very much Honourable Members.

Adjourned accordingly at 18:20H