



Motion carried.

The Motion will, therefore, in accordance with the Standing Orders, stand down until the resumption after the suspension.

I will allow two speakers on each side, and, since it is a Motion which criticises the Government, the lead speaker on the Government side will have the power to respond, in accordance with the appropriate Standing Order.

Announcements by the Speaker

98th Sitting dated October 15, 2009

HARI N. RAMKARRAN'S, SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S, RESPONSE TO THE HON. PRIME MINISTER'S LETTER CONCERN -ING ISSUES WHICH AROSE IN THE DEBATE ON THE SALE OF GT&T'S SHARES

I am in receipt of your letter dated 21st October, 2009.

Your letter concerns the issues which arose in the debate on the sale of GT&T's shares which you said have not gone "unnoticed." One of these was the alleged "sleight of hand" by Hon. Member Robert Corbin who "gave the closing" to Hon. Member Winston Murray, who was insisting that he speak after Hon. Member Ashni Singh and "who did not confine himself to a reply. You said that this "sleight of hand" has been noted "and it is hoped that it will not become a practice."

You also "noted" my ruling which supported the objection by Hon. Member Robert Corbin of accusations by Hon. Member Odinga Lumumba about a certain course of conduct by Hon. Member Robert Corbin without evidence that I deemed inadequate.

You anticipate that this ruling will be upheld on future occasions. I presume that you mean when the Government objects and I further presume that you imply that I have been inconsistent in the past. You pointed to no examples of my inconsistency.



As a general comment, I recommend that you take enlightened advice on the meaning and interpretation of the Standing Orders and on the discretion of a Speaker before you attempt to rely on them to criticise me. Read only literally or without context, much is missed and misunderstood.

Hon. Member Winston Murray was on a list of speakers given to me by your Chief Whip. His name was in the same position in which I called him. I was told that there was a dispute as to who should speak last. The normal practice is that the side which moves the motion or the Second Reading of a Bill speaks last and the mover concludes.

Following this practice, a representative of the PNCR-1G, other than the mover of the motion, should have spoken last. I allowed Hon. Member Winston Murray to do so. Had there been agreement that Hon. Member Ashni Singh would speak last, I would have given effect to the wished of the parties. There was no such agreement. So I followed the normal practice.

It is not the Leader of the Opposition or the Government who determines the order of speakers in debates. And the only hard and fast rule is that speakers generally, though not necessarily, alternate.

Therefore, while Hon. Member Robert Corbin can give up his right to reply, he cannot do so in favour of someone else, especially from his own side of the House. He can only give up his right to speak, period. After purporting to do so in favour of Hon. Member Murray, I called on Hon. Member Murray to speak, not because Hon. Member Robert Corbin had given up his right but because he was on a list given to me by your Chief Whip in the exact position in which I called him and because the matter as to who would speak last had not been resolved. I did momentarily attempt to confine him to replying to what had been raised in view of what Hon. Member Corbin had intimated but did not insist and allowed him to proceed as he was a speaker in his own right.

I then gave you the floor as provided for in the Standing Orders. This is precisely the reason for the Standing Order - allowing the Government to have the last word when a debate is critical of the Government. You had the full opportunity to respond. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, could have replied if he wanted to. He did not. You did instead and fully utilised the opportunity. I cannot understand what your complaint is about.



I interpreted the Standing Order some time ago, giving the Government the last word in a debate critical of the Government, against intense and vigorous objection by the Opposition. Having done so and having applied the Standing Order in your favour on this and on at least one previous occasion, you are still not satisfied! What more should I do?

You mentioned my decision in relation to Hon. Member Odinga Lumumba and expressed your expectation that it will be upheld in the future. I note that you made no apology on behalf of, or even a reference to, the Hon. Member's disrespectful conduct in the National Assembly on the last and on a previous occasion immediately prior to the recess. On the most recent occasion, before the incident, I complained to you once and to you and some of your colleagues, again, about this Member before disallowing him to proceed. Yet you complain to me about my conduct and blithely ignore this. What am I to assume from this?

Specific accusations against individual Members of the National Assembly, or even a member of the public, are grave and serious matters especially when they consist of verbal hearsay made by someone who is not present, are unsubstantiated by any documentary support, and are denied. They are of a different nature to breed accusations against, say, "the Government," or the "Opposition," or "the PNC/R," or "the PNC-1-G," or "AFC" or the "PPP/C" and so on. These I will allow and normally do, with no evidence at all where they derive from broad political issues or debates. Parliamentary convention allows it. This, perhaps, is the alleged "inconsistency" to which you might be hinting or implying. There is none. The circumstances are not the same.

Even if a specific and unacceptable allegation is made against the Government and I do not intervene, it is the Government's responsibility to object, as Hon. Member Corbin did when the allegation was made against him. If you fail to do so, the blame lies with yourself, not with me. These are not matters that I should be explaining to a person who has been Leader of the Government Business since 1992.

Your noting of my ruling and anticipation that it will be upheld are matters entirely for your own expectation. I will follow the conduct that the rules and my understanding of them dictate and not that which you seek to confine me to or what your expectations are. As I have demonstrated above, the Standing Orders are complex, full of nuances and require a comprehensive understanding about the



nature of Parliament and its functioning. All situations are different. Each issue requires different perspectives. It poses tremendous difficulty from time to time, especially when decisions have to be made with no time for reflection. I recommend that you take full and comprehensive guidance of their meaning and implications before committing yourself and display some sympathy for the circumstances in which I am sometimes called upon to interpret a rule or exercise discretion.

Above all, I recommend that you accept the rulings of the Speaker, as other Parliaments do, seek to follow them, not to second guess, and raise your concerns in more appropriate forms. You must recognise that not every ruling will be in accord with your wishes even if I am sometimes wrong, human that I am. You must also use your good offices to end the sniping against me, and strive to do so yourself by refraining from writing me letters such as this one and allow me to bring my term as Speaker to an end in peace.

I cannot help but note that on almost every single occasion, rare though it is, I am forced to stop a Member of the Government side from making a particular reference, it becomes a matter of State importance. These matters will eventually fade away and be forgotten as they are of no lasting consequence and are not the issues on which the Government and Parliament will ultimately be judged. No one talks about them in elections' campaigns. It will be on the Government's legislative accomplishments, Parliament's oversight capacity and activity for which the Government will get the credit, management of the business of the National Assembly in relation to bills, motions, questions, committees and other aspects, again for which the Government will get the credit. I am gratified that I have not yet heard any complaints on our delivery of the necessary services to effectuate these vital matters. We, at the Parliament Office and SPEAKERS' Office, must at least be doing a few things right.

The matters you raise are entirely within the discretion of the Speaker. Decisions on these types of matters are routine and are routinely accepted. I know of no Parliament matters such as these which elicit letters such as yours or where a Speaker is subjected to such humiliating "noting" and "exceptions."

The impression that I have from your letter, and this has been openly suggested or implied by Members of the Government side, is that I favour the Opposition, especially when a ruling goes against the Government side. No letter is ever written,



no mention is ever made, no recollection is ever enumerated or no “note” is ever taken of the countless rulings I have made in favour of the Government or the numerous times I have stopped Members of the Opposition for various reasons. I do get the impression from your letter that it consists of a snide and implicit agreement with the notion that I am biased in favour of the Opposition. I am deeply distressed by it.

The views I express herein are not intended to convey any position I might adopt on any issue in the National Assembly and I will not allow this letter to be used as evidence of any undertaking or otherwise on my part.

Questions on Notice

99th Sitting dated October 22, 2009

A STATEMENT MADE BY HON. MEMBER DEBORAH BACKER ON THE MOTION DEPLOYMENT OF GDF PERSONNEL

Preamble

Dr. Ashni Singh moved a motion of privilege with respect to a statement made by Mrs. Deborah Backer during the Sitting of the 15th October, 2009 about soldiers going to Trinidad to torture people.

Verbatim

Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh: Mr. Speaker, it would be recalled that at last week’s Sitting of this Honourable House, during and in the course of the debate of the deployment of our Forces, of our disciplined services, specifically to Trinidad and Tobago for the purposes of the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, the Hon. Member, Mrs. Deborah Backer, on the other side of the House made certain statements in relation to the professionalism of our armed Forces and, in particular, certain statements that cast aspersions on the professionalism of the hundreds, indeed thousands, of hardworking Guyanese men and women who serve the people of this country everyday in uniform, and, indeed, who have served the people of this region with distinction in uniform, most recently during the Summit of the Americas.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Speaker, specifically sought to suggest...in fact, more than sought to suggest...very explicitly said, “It is soldiers who we are worried about