



**Address of His Excellency Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces at the Ceremonial Opening of the 12<sup>th</sup> Parliament.**

**February 11, 2021**

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly

Chancellor

Honourable Prime Minister and Leader of Government Business

Honourable Vice President

Honourable Members of the National Assembly

Your Excellencies of the Diplomatic Community

The Hon. Chief Justice

Chief of Staff

Commissioner of Police

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

The eyes of the people of Guyana are upon us.

All of us.

Me, as President,

Ministers of the Government,

and you, the members of the National Assembly, from every political party, here represented.

The people of Guyana are waiting to see what we will do with their affairs.

Will we serve their interests faithfully – every one of them, regardless of race or creed?

Will we deliver the good governance and accountability each of us, each political parties promised?

Will we strive to make their lives better, as all of us pledged to do?

For me, our nation stands at a crossroads in its history, particularly after we endured an alarming period of uncertainty when our democracy was threatened at home, and our place of respect was imperilled abroad.

The paths before us, as already embraced by my Government, is to lead to a better Guyana where its bountiful potential will be realised and from whose bounty, we ensure every Guyanese benefit.

For me, as the Ninth Executive President of our beloved nation, there is no doubt of the path my Government and I have chosen. It is a path that celebrates the collective wisdom, strength and character of our Guyanese people, the very people who stood up fearlessly in defence of democracy, the very people who have sacrificed much in bringing our country together, regardless of race or political persuasion.

For those who choose an alternate path, you too will be held accountable, but I assure you, such a path brings nothing or adds nothing to the Guyana we want to build.

All of us gathered here today have been summoned by the spirits of our ancestors who laboured in its cause.

Their voices have called us from the depths of our nation's past to govern this land at an extraordinary time of our people's history.

And those summons - those calls - have not been made to the government representatives alone.

They have been made to all who serve in the National Assembly as representatives of the people, regardless of their party-political support.

The people of this nation elected the parties represented in the Assembly.

They want us to be partners in serving the country, not adversaries in pulling it apart.

That is not to say that they did not expect us to disagree, or that they did not anticipate that we would differ.

But they do not expect us to differ at their expense, or to disagree to their detriment.

They put us all here in the same ship of state.

They expect us to navigate it through calm seas and turbulent waters alike, and to take them to a haven of progress, prosperity and peace.

To do so, calls for political maturity that puts, at all times, the national interest and the people's welfare above all else.

The success of our nation depends on it.

None of us should let our nation down.

In the words of our national Poet, Martin Carter:

*"Like a jig shakes a loom;*

*like a web is spun the pattern.*

*All are involved;*

*All are consumed”.*

ooOoo

Our most acute challenge is the national emergency we face - tackling the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Coronavirus has taken a toll on our economy, substantially reducing the projected growth in our gross domestic product (GDP), forecast by the International Financial Institutions for this year.

In human terms, the immediate economic impact of the pandemic, which necessitated the closure of our borders and the shuttering of many businesses, is the hardship that has been visited on the most vulnerable in our society.

The elderly, single mothers and children are the worst affected.

Their situation demands our immediate and intense attention.

They have suffered far too long already.

And my Government is determined to move decisively to improve their condition. I assure you, no resources will be spared in this effort.

But it is as a public health emergency that the silent cruelty of this fearsome disease has been most brutal.

The consequence is that, so far, we have endured the anguish of 8023 confirmed cases and suffered the loss of 181 lives.

All of those lives mattered.

Some of them would have been the sole breadwinners in families now left to struggle, not only with the pain of their loss, but with the strain of no livelihood.

And that is why tackling COVID-19 is my Government's most pressing priority.

Safeguarding the health of all must be our highest priority.

Amongst the actions we took is the mobilisation of regional, national and international support whilst supporting the livelihoods of families with direct cash and food transfers.

We also implemented various measures through the Central Bank to help small and medium sized businesses in particular, to cope with the economic fallout of the pandemic.

We have supported frontline workers, our children's education and created an innovative environment for our economy and governance systems to continue.

Whilst we continue our fight to contain the virus, we are aggressively pursuing every avenue that will lead to the complete vaccination of our population by the end of the year.

I assure you; no resource will be spared in this effort.

ooOoo

I remind this Parliament that our nation suffered five long months of fear, anxiety, and nervousness waiting for the results of general elections; a circumstance caused by those who put themselves above the law and their political greed over the wellbeing of the people.

In all that time, no Budget was presented for consent, no borrowing was authorised, and no spending approved.

In defiance of the law and the rulings of the highest Courts of this land, the previous administration arrogated power unto itself, spending the taxpayers' money with no authority and no legitimacy.

This must never occur in Guyana again.

That is why constitutional reform to guarantee a democratic Guyana will receive priority attention, based on a national consultative process.

My Government will introduce, in the National Assembly, a Bill to authorise such a consultative process by an independent body.

Lawlessness must never be tolerated in Guyana again.

Contempt for the people must never, ever, be allowed in Guyana again.

ooOoo

Over the last months, feverish and difficult work has been undertaken to put before the National Assembly, a full Budget to address the myriad challenges that confront the nation.

Since its installation, my Government has encountered huge issues of transparency and accountability; of cronyism; of waste; and of fraud.

Unemployment is much higher than the nation was led to believe.

To fix this grim situation, we need to move now, and we need to move swiftly.

We are faced with what Barack Obama described as “the urgency of now”.

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We want our factories humming with production;

We want our people back at work;

We want our businesses turning profits and investing in new and expanded enterprises;

We want a Guyana that rises like the fabled phoenix from the ashes of neglect, spreading its wings and soaring proudly to the heights that should, long ago, have been its perch.

And we want every Guyanese to be part of that rising, sharing in its transformation and in its resultant benefits.

This is no young man's dream, nor is it an old man's vision.

It is a reality within our grasp as a nation.

What we need is the will to seize it – together!

And that is what I invite every Guyanese, every man, every woman and every child to do.

As the President of Guyana and the Head of Government, my credo and the credo this Government is "Nation Building".

The key word of my Government is "oneness".

The essential character of my Government's vision is "inclusion".

Stop being defined by race.

Stop being defined by politics.

Start being defined by our one nationality, and by our common love for our one country.

Let us lift it up together

And by doing so let us lift-up each other and ourselves.

One people.

One nation.

One destiny.

oooOooo

I propose to give meaning to my call for "One Guyana" by requesting the Leader of Government Business in the National Assembly, Prime Minister, Brigadier, the Honourable Mark Phillips, to introduce, for adoption, an Act of Parliament establishing a "One Guyana Commission" which he will head.

As the great West Indian philosopher, C.L.R. James, puts it: "A nation is built not on abstraction, but on tackling and solving the problems which occupy its people."

The purpose of the Commission would be to try to do just that in relation to the practical steps we can take to cement our one society, encompassing and respecting the diversity from which our "oneness" springs.

The work of the Commission would be countrywide, and it would listen to the free expressions of all voices, concerning ways in which every Guyanese can honour their

ancestral heritage while giving the highest regard to our blended Guyanese civilization.

Among the matters which it would address include education concerning our history; our religions; how we ensure equal opportunities for education, employment and entrepreneurship, and the institutional strengthening of the existing Ethnic Relations Commission to make it more effective.

In all this, we must be guided by the wisdom of Nelson Mandela that:

*“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin,  
or his background,*

*or his religion.*

*People must learn to hate,*

*and if they can learn to hate,*

*they can be taught to love,*

*for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite”.*

We must move nation building from abstraction to action.

And lose, not one more moment in doing it.

Let us stand up for our one nation, our one Guyana.

Let us stand up for what we know in our hearts and in our minds to be right.

Let us stand up for our one identity – the Guyanese identity!

ooOoo

I say a special word about our Amerindian-Guyanese community – the first people of our nation.

They – and their ancestors - have been in Guyana, and of Guyana, longer than any other community in our one society.

Throughout the lands of what is now the Americas - from Canada in the North to Argentina in the South - the indigenous people suffered historic injustices, including colonization by European nations, dispossession of their lands, and prevention from developing in accordance with their particular needs and interests.

In our one Guyana, the Amerindian community occupy a special place as our first people.

This is a circumstance we must never forget and must always honour.

They deserve the respect of all of us for their indigenous knowledge, culture, and traditional practices that contribute to the sustainable development and

informed management of the environment that we all share, and from which we all benefit.

Over the next five years, while my Government is tasked with the responsibility of managing our country's affairs, we are determined to improve the lives of our Amerindian-Guyanese communities, through a range of measures that we will implement.

These include updating the Amerindian Act after consultation with every Amerindian community, as well as improving education, health facilities, housing, and infrastructural development in the areas in which they live.

The culture of the Amerindian Guyanese is a golden thread in the rich tapestry of the common civilization that we have collectively fashioned for almost two centuries.

All of us should be proud of it,  
treasure it,  
and celebrate it.

We must do all in our power to strengthen their status and their contribution, thereby enhancing not only their community but our one nation to which each group is integral and from which no group is divisible.

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Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the National Assembly, we are at an unprecedented time in our nation's history.

We stand together on the cusp of what can be a new economic era of prosperity in which all will share now, and from which future generations will benefit.

But let us not fool ourselves that this new economic era will happen without our collective effort.

That it will happen without our national unity.

That it will happen despite ourselves.

There has never been a greater moment when we, as Guyanese, need to stand as one to secure the benefits of our natural resources and to protect our sovereignty – the right to make decisions in our national interest – and our territorial integrity.

Regarding our territorial integrity, the threat from our neighbour Venezuela has not receded simply because the International Court of Justice (the ICJ) has ruled that it has jurisdiction in the matter and is proceeding to adjudicate the merits of the case before it on the Guyanese Venezuelan contention.

We all know that recently, Guyanese fishermen were arbitrarily arrested and detained by the Venezuelan military while they were operating in waters of Guyana's Exclusive Economic Zone.

This demonstrates that the threat is an ever present danger even as we pursue a path of settlement by peaceful means through international law.

In respect of our sovereignty – that right to make decisions in our national interest – while the prospect for wealth from oil and gas is now real, it could dissipate if we fail to take the necessary steps to ensure that Guyana’s interests and its rightful income are safeguarded.

Our nation is dealing, for the most part, with giant companies in the oil and gas industry.

This is uncharted territory for us, but we will have to map the way that leads to the best circumstances for our country.

For sure, we will need expert advice, based on sound knowledge and robust experience of the industry, including operating agreements, concessions,

laws, and regulations to promote good governance and prudent management of the oil and gas sector, to make sure our people benefit.

But, above all else, we need every Guyanese, united as one, to stand in defence of our rights and entitlements.

Guyana’s sovereignty and territorial integrity must be the Nation’s constant unified watch.

In this patriotic duty, every Guyanese must stand up to be counted.

Every political party, every trade union, every business organisation must stand up and be counted.

This National Assembly must stand up and be counted.

oooOooo

Mr. Speaker

Let me be clear.

My Government wants a co-operative partnership with the companies now licensed to operate in the oil and gas sector of our economy.

Leaving oil and gas in the ground is not an option.

It cannot be an option when their production and sales can transform the economy of Guyana, bringing in considerable revenues that can be utilized to dramatically improve the lives of all our people.

We must also acknowledge that we cannot take advantage of our oil and gas resources without the considerable investment of the companies now operating in the sector.

They are entitled to a fair return on their investment.



Therefore, our relationship should be based on fairness, on equity and on mutual interests.

That is the goal to which the Government will work to ensure future production contracts resound to the significant benefit of Guyanese without seeking to disincentivise foreign investment.

To support Government in managing of the Oil and Gas sector, we will be pursuing various legislative and institutional initiatives; update to the Petroleum Act, building the capacity and the institutional framework for the audit of expenditure and the drafting of new production agreements with international standards under which any new production license will fall.

But even as I look forward to the establishment of the Petroleum Commission, my Government will introduce legislation for consideration by this session of the National Assembly.

One of the pieces of legislation will be to fortify, in law, the Local Content Policy, which is currently undergoing the phase of public consultation.

The aim is not only to align the Policy with international best practices, particularly regarding reporting and transparency, but also to deliver more business and more jobs for our people.

That legislation will be drafted based on the outcome of consultations that I will hold with stakeholders in our society, concerning provisions in the law that would best serve our national interest.

Guyanese must not be second-class citizens in the oil and gas sector in our own country.

They must be its principal beneficiaries, ahead of all and second to none.

Thousands of Guyanese will be trained at every level to create a national corps of managers and technicians to effectively administer the sector.

For the benefit of this generation of Guyanese and those yet unborn, we will establish an arms-length Sovereign Wealth Fund insulated from political interference.

Legislation will be enacted to define how finances will flow from the Fund into the budget, and the purposes for which they will be used.

My Government also intends to account to the nation for every cent earned from the industry and for every cent that is spent.

To accomplish this, legislation will be introduced during this session of the National Assembly, making the Finance Minister and the Finance Secretary responsible for publishing details of all revenue and expenditure in the Official Gazette, allowing the people to track all transactions.

Failure to do so will be punished severely under the law.

The revenues from the sector, like all other sectors, are the peoples' money; they are entitled to know how much money is earned, how much is spent and on what it is spent.

I have also made it clear to my Ministers that transparency and accountability are the fundamental principles by which I expect them and myself to conduct ourselves, and to which I will hold them accountable.

We are the custodians of the people's assets and we will account to them for all that we do.

That is why we will also establish a regulatory framework that is independent of politicians.

And why we will build strong national capability to hold oil companies accountable, and to verify production and other expenditures.

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Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the National Assembly, let me be clear on something else.

My Government does not intend to allow the Oil and Gas sector to encourage what is called "Dutch Disease". Which dominates all other sectors of the economy and diminishes them in value and sustainability.

Our country must not suffer the fate of other nations that came to depend on oil and gas so substantially that they faced ruin when the sector floundered, contracted, or diminished.

Revenues from oil and gas resources must be used to strengthen the agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and services sectors to make them globally competitive so that Guyana can be a resilient nation, now and in the future.

oooOooo

And that brings me Mr. Speaker, to the Manifesto which my party presented to our nation at the March 2<sup>nd</sup> general and regional elections.

Our Manifesto is a statement of my Government's ambition for our country.

It is an ambition we shall aim to fulfil.

Like all ambitions we shall have to mould it to life's changeable realities – to the realities of Guyana as impacted by the world of which we are part.

It is the path we shall follow in fulfilment of our dream for Guyana.

There will be times when we pause to check our bearings;

times when our bearings call for variable tracks.

But our goals will be constant and our promises secure.

We shall do so over the life of the Government.

Fulfilment cannot be instant in all matters; some will be delayed by circumstance.

But you will have no cause to doubt our resolve to keep our promises.

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Mr. Speaker, without going into detail of every pledge in our Manifesto, which remains publicly available on the Internet, my Government will strive to honour in our period in office, every aspect, every promise, every commitment. Let me mention here a few that must command immediate attention.

We stated quite clearly that our objective is to create 50,000 jobs.

That goal which, once, seemed distant and impossible, is now within our nation's reach, made possible by the transformative agenda of Government that would see the expansion of construction, investment in mega-scale infrastructure, reduced cost of energy leading to industrialisation and upscale agro-processing and manufacturing, environmental services, engineering services and the spin-off of major private sector investments in new hotels and shore base facilities.

The area of logistics and energy security would also see massive investment and opportunities. These, supported by the revitalisation of our agriculture sector, support to mining and expansion in quarrying will pave the way for job creation.

Even with inadequate shipping facilities, we already supply fish, vegetables, and fruit to regional markets, and even further afield to our diaspora communities in the US, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

An example of the market opportunities available to increased agricultural and fisheries production is that last year, the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) imported more than US\$5 billion worth of food.

There is every reason why our farmers, including our rice farmers, should seek a significant share of that market.

Therefore, my Government will give every assistance to farmers by improving drainage and irrigation, by incentivising young people to pursue farming as profitable careers, providing concessions for large-scale farming, remove VAT on machinery, equipment, fertiliser and pesticides and providing grants and a support system for small farmers.

We intend to do the same for fisheries, manufacturing and forestry by providing incentives, concessions and support.

We want our farmers, fisherfolk, miners and livestock growers to think globally as they develop and increase their production and the marketing of their products.

My Government is committed to providing the infrastructural framework in which these enterprises can develop and expand, improving directly the lives of all who invest their efforts in them, and benefiting our country as a whole indirectly by increasing its wealth and the welfare of our people.

oooOooo

Mr. Speaker, I say a special word about sugar.

Sugar is more to us, as a people, than a mere agricultural crop.

In a real sense, it represents our beginnings as a Guyanese nation.

Yes, our ancestors were brought from different lands to the place of our first people – Amerindian Guyanese – but sugar was the start of the fashioning of our identity as Guyanese, and our struggle as one people to end colonialism and exploitation and take control of our destiny.

Dr. Cheddi Jagan, once observed that both Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese “watered the sugar cane fields with their blood”.

We should all ponder that thought.

Those sugar cane fields, in which our ancestors toiled and in which their blood was shed, represent the shared exploitation of our people.

Well, the blood, sweat and tears of our people should never again water fields for any exploiter.

In the words of the Jamaican-American Poet, Claude McKay:

*“If we must die, let it not be like hogs  
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,  
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,  
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.  
If we must die, O let us nobly die,  
So that our precious blood may not be shed  
In vain”.*

All of this is why, we Guyanese must resolve to nurture and care for what we have built together, and never allow the circumstances to arise where we dilute our “oneness” or weaken our one Guyana.

Sugar symbolises all that.

But, even more, sugar still has every possibility of continuing to provide jobs, revenues and modern skills to our people, while providing them with dignity.

In resuscitating the Industry, I have already directed a detailed revitalisation plan of every estate, whilst we are examining possible private investment to support the diversification, expansion and modernisation of the industry, leading to its sustainability and economic viability.

oooOooo

Mr. Speaker, every Guyanese aspires to a better quality of life.

Each of us wants a home, reliable electricity, water when we turn on the taps, education for our children, health facilities, and a job that will allow us to pay for those things.

That is why job creation is at the top of my Government's priorities.

But, we recognise that while we create the conditions for more jobs and better incomes, there are immediate steps that must be taken to improve living conditions for all.

That is why, we have removed VAT on electricity, water, medicines, and certain food items.

That is also why we will upgrade health facilities across the country, including expansion of diagnostic services such as CT Scans, ultrasound, and echocardiogram, at key regional hospitals as well as improve ambulance services.

We will also focus major investments to address issues of mental health, reproductive health and invest in a state-of-the-art maternity and children's hospital.

We will also create the enabling environment to drive private investments in healthcare, thus making Guyana a regional and international hub for health services.

We will also ensure that there is adequate supply of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies with a focus on timely procurement, proper storage and reliable delivery to hospitals and health centres.

Very aware that our medical practitioners – doctors and nurses are in the front line of maintaining the health of our people, particularly now– we intend to improve conditions of service and remuneration for health care workers generally.

And, let me take this opportunity at this Parliament – the highest decision-making body of our nation – to express, publicly, our deepest appreciation and gratitude to the medical personnel who have risked their own health to help our nation in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic.

Even as I note that the battle is far from over, and more will be expected of them, I thank them most sincerely on behalf of a grateful nation, and I call on all here gathered to applaud their effort with respect.

As a nation, we will not be judged only by the way we treat human beings, but we must also pay particular attention to the environment, our natural heritage and the way we treat animals.

My Government will support initiatives and invest in programmes that addresses all these issues, sometimes referred to as 'soft issues' but which importantly adds to the story of who we are as Guyanese.

oooOooo

Mr. Speaker, Guyana is blessed with an abundance of natural resources that provides opportunities for every Guyanese.

Few other countries in the world can boast of being home to gold, diamonds, bauxite, sugar, rice, cattle and other livestock, forestry, oil and gas, abundant agricultural lands, fresh water and tourism.

There is no reason for our country to be poor, or for our people to want.

We, together, have to take hold of these natural resources that have been gifted to us and turn them into national treasure.

My Government intends to lay down the infrastructure that will result in the full utilization of all these resources.

Mr Speaker, I do not wish to pre-empt the Budget that will be presented to the National Assembly in a few hours.

Our development plan will be set out in granular detail in the budget.

However, I give this honourable House and the Guyanese public insights into elements of our development plan, including some of what we are doing, and why we are doing them.

We plan to expand our road system across the country, including community roads and hinterland roads.

We will also build a bypass road with connections to Mocha, Eccles and the Demerara Harbour Bridge.

We will initiate work on several transformative infrastructural projects, that will take years to complete, but we will start them.

They will include:

- A deep water harbour at the Berbice estuary
- Support to shore- base facilities
- Support to private investment that will see new branded hotels
- Support to agriculture that will see mega investments in large scale agriculture
- Opening up of new lands through the construction of farm to market access roads
- Commencement of the Linden to Lethem road
- Four Lane highway from Georgetown to Timehri
- Commencement of the Parika to Goshen Road Link to Bartica
- Upgrade and development of new all-terrain road links from Timehri to Bartica
- Upgrade of regional airports
- Building of new ferries

- The construction of a four-lane link between Mandela and Diamond with interconnection to the existing highway to reduce travel time
- Completion of the new Demerara River Bridge
- The construction of a new superhighway from Schoonard to Parika

We are working with our neighbour Suriname to establish a Corentyne River Bridge which would have great benefits for the Private Sector in enlarging markets, expanding the scale of business and increasing employment.

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Mr. Speaker, we are very conscious of the rich but fragile environment with which we have been endowed by nature.

As promised in our Manifesto, the government will reinstitute an expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). The strategy as it is now will be broadened to include wider environmental services, water resources management, climate resilience, biodiversity, renewable energy, and the marine economy.

We believe that this strategy will allow Guyana to earn substantial revenue that can be utilized to diversify the economy and create employment opportunities for our people as we did previously under the Norway Agreement. In this agreement, we can earn hundreds of millions of USD as we have established in our earlier arrangement with the Norwegians. From this agreement we seek to ensure the creation of new clean jobs. We also intend for the benefits from the Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) to flow to all Guyanese, especially our indigenous communities, where First Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) principles and the Opt-In Mechanism shall be strictly observed. The expanded LCDS will also include the establishment of an International Centre of Excellence for Biological Diversity with objective of promoting cutting edge research and developing and exporting educational services.

The national strategy will also seek to strengthen the institutional mandate of the Environmental Protection Agency by providing an empowering regulatory framework to guide economic growth initiatives. This also means that the National System of Protected Areas will also be strengthened and expanded in accordance with international standards of environmental integrity.

Finally, the expanded LCDS will provide opportunities to our people by creating avenues that will provide grants for start-up businesses of a renewable energy nature.

Beyond the management of our natural resources, the expanded LCDS will also ensure the issue of land management and access to land is also addressed. This will be done by the establishment of a formal inter-agency mechanism with the intention to coordinate among key sectors to address various land use conflicts in Guyana via the implementation of the Land Use Policy.

The implementation of this policy is also expected to be implemented with a regional dimension that would ensure to incorporate the interests of both residential and commercial users.

The expanded LCDS will guide our developmental trajectory along an inclusive, low carbon, sustainable, clean, resilient path with increased economic opportunities and investments linked to greater social and infrastructural development for the benefit of all.

**ooooOooo**

Mr. Speaker,

Beyond the richness of our natural resources, Guyana has no greater wealth than its people.

We recognize that human capital development is crucial for inclusive economic growth and transformation and it is the responsibility of government to ensure that its people are prepared for this change. Therefore, my government will ensure that ALL Guyanese are equipped for transformation in the economy by identifying employment intensive sectors and ensuring that our people are trained to enable them to meet the demand in these sectors.

Investing in Guyanese is not only good for our economy but has broader equity and welfare implications. With rapid change in technology, we recognise that investing in our people is pivotal. Our move towards knowledge-intensive industries will also enable greater participation from female Guyanese and help to reduce the gender gap in our society.

These fields are expected to see higher future demand as our economy continues along its diversification path and will be supported by the 20,000 scholarship programmes, expansion and improvement in educational facilities, expansion and use of ICT in education, enhancement of opportunities in Technical Vocational Education, curricula reform, establishment of an online university to promote e-learning, and provision of textbooks to our school children among other things.

The drive towards diversification and sustainable employment requires a vibrant private sector to absorb labour and labour market that allows flexibility, skill building and reasonable compensation. My government will continue to work with the private sector, recognizing that they are the backbone of any economy.

Our local companies must be given a level platform to compete; training and capacity building initiatives along with the transfer of skills and technology are important to this process.

We are cognizant that there are impediments to businesses providing goods and services to the oil and gas sector, especially in the area of finance and cost optimization. My government will ensure that our regulatory frameworks are conducive for local companies that work in this sector so that they can garner the necessary resources needed to take advantage of these new opportunities. Our economy is changing, and we have to ensure that our policies are flexible and fit for purpose. These incentives will ensure that our Guyanese people continue to prosper and truly benefit from the oil and gas sector.

It is our firm belief that the Guyanese people are the greatest asset that this nation possesses.



In supporting the new economy, my Government understands the necessity of developing skills in emerging areas such as Oil and Gas, Agro-processing, Industrialisation, Manufacturing, Climate Services, Environmental Services, Bio Diversity , Sustainable Tourism Management and Aquaculture while at the same time strengthening our capacity in the traditional sectors with the aim of making them more productive and competitive.

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Mr Speaker,

Our potential to become a major player in the energy market is not only limited to our borders, but we have already commenced discussions with our neighbours, Brazil and Suriname, in the establishment of an Energy Corridor.

Guyana's Energy Security will be driven by an energy mix that will see solar, wind, hydro, natural gas all being key components in making us the energy capital of the region.

This of course will see tremendous investment in manufacturing and industrial development that will be supported by the gas to shore project, the natural gas plant and the establishment of the Wales Development Authority.

We have already received numerous proposals from major manufacturers looking at Guyana as their next investment destination.

To support the growing demand and potential for commodity trading, Government will be establishing Free Zones to facilitate trade and open up new opportunities.

These investments will also see the expansion of the hinterland electrification programme, and the development of micro grids for large hinterland villages for off grid areas.

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Mr. Speaker

No country or society can progress without the safety and security of its people.

We have committed to the reform of the security sector, the update of laws, strengthening of capacity and building institutions that will support our plans and programmes for safer communities and country.

We have already commenced tackling crime with the involvement of people. To this end we are strengthening community policing, intelligence services and widening focus on making existing institutions stronger.

We are investing in new and appropriate technologies, providing tools and equipment to allow for better response to crime and more proactive policing, whilst at the same time, we are working on the improvement of welfare and conditions of service for our men and women in uniform.

Critical to the strategic approach to crime fighting is the strengthening of the regionalised structure of the Guyana Police Force.

Greater integration with interest groups and stakeholders at the regional level will be facilitated to improve accountability and transparency in crime fighting.

We will also be strengthening our ability to secure our borders with the establishment of a Border Patrol Unit. Special Legislation is being drafted to give effect to this.

oooOooo

Mr. Speaker, when my Government's Budget 2021 is presented to the National Assembly and when my Ministers contribute to the debate, greater details will be provided on the implementation of our Manifesto pledges, covering more aspects than I have mentioned in this address.

However, I want to speak myself on the matter of partnerships between Government and representative bodies in the governance of our One Guyana.

The watchword for the governance of our country must be "partnership".

I propose to have regular high-level consultations with the representatives of the private sector, the trade unions, religious bodies and other civil society groups to address key issues that confront our nation.

I intend also to directly engage communities and community leaders across every village in building trust and deepening relationships to the benefit of the people of those communities and I intend to do this personally, leading this personally; in every village, every community we will build trust, we will win hearts and we will develop in the interest of all of the people of this country.

With these representatives, it is my desire that consensus will be found on how to tackle these issues effectively.

I have encouraged my Ministers to establish similar consultative machinery so that, in making decisions, government can be advised by the best brains and talent in every area of our national endeavour.

And the hand of partnership will also be extended to the Guyanese diaspora.

It is my intention to enhance the oversight of 'diaspora' affairs so that we can maintain meaningful links to the diaspora and for convening meetings with their organisations.

In this connection, we are in the process of establishing a Diaspora Council to engage the government in a structured and regular manner.

Our diaspora is a source of investment, of talent and of knowledge – all of which can benefit our nation.

They can also be an important influential body in the countries where they have made their second homes, for promoting the interests of Guyana.

All must be involved,

All must be consumed.

oooOooo

Mr. Speaker,

My Government understands the importance of youths in the development of the country. It is for this reason I have established the soon to be operationalised – Youth Advisory Council which will be at the heartbeat of policy making.

Our support for young people will go beyond education, health and sports. We will be establishing a special development, innovation and research fund to stimulate new business ideas and to create a space for youth participation in the new economy.

Young people can expect investments in every region that will give access to state of the art sporting facilities, and importantly, incentivising participation in the creative industry.

Our support to cultural development and the creative industry will be critically linked to our tourism and hospitality sector.

Home ownership for young people with support from the banking sector is also a top priority for my Government.

Mr. Speaker,

All of which I spoke is dependent on the institutions, systems and various arms of Government understanding their distinct role in the common future of our country.

Whilst the arms of Government are separate, they must all assess the direction of the country and build the relevant institutional capacity to meet the demands of the future.

This of course requires training, retraining, retooling and expansion of the existing framework in which they operate.

To support this, my Government will unfold a legislative agenda that will create the statutory and legal foundation on which a new and modern Guyana will rest.

This will require the modernisation of archaic laws and the introduction of a new set of laws to reflect the changing nature of our new economy.

However, the legislative agenda must be people focused, making it easier and less costly to do business, whilst at the same time creating a more efficient and affordable system to give justice to the ordinary man.

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Mr. Speaker,

In closing, I wish to share just a few targets my Government will pursue over the next five years in key areas.

We believe that that we must be held accountable and in holding us accountable, you must know where your country is going. You must know the target. Therefore, I wish to state just a few of these targets.

## **ENERGY**

- The development of a world class energy mix
- Installation of 400 mega watts of new installed capacity inclusive of hydro power, solar, wind and natural gas.
- Reduction of electricity cost for households and businesses
- Making Guyana's energy cost globally competitive
- Working with Brazil and Suriname to create a new energy corridor
- Outlining a clear path to becoming a net energy exporter.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

- Adopting an expanded LCDS as our national development framework to create opportunities to tap into and earn hundreds of millions of US dollars through the sale of environmental services. The Vice President will lead these efforts. We have already started and we are confident about the returns that will come to Guyana. We did it before and we will do it again.
- Establishing a world class biodiversity centre
- Pursuing opportunities for payment of eco system services
- Incentivise good environmental performance in the Private Sector. The Private Sector also has a role to play and we are going to support them in that role.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE TRANSFORMATION**

- Opening up of hundreds of thousands of acres of agriculture lands through the investment in farm to market roads and drainage and irrigation systems
- New super-highways on West Demerara, East Coast and East Bank corridors
- New Demerara River Bridge crossing
- Support private investment in new hotels adding at least 2000 more rooms to our stock
- Creating an environment to make Guyana a major logistics hub
- New shore base and harbour facilities supported by Government policies and planning
- Investment in new ferries and capital drainage equipment to improve efficiency of our ports. You know, one of the major difficulties of our ports is the dredging of the Demerara River, and it has caused our ports to become very inefficient. We are going to invest in the Capital equipment to resolve

this issue and make our ports viable, sustainable and operate at an optimal manner.

- Create an enabling environment that would see investments leading to a new deep-water harbour connecting to regional and international markets
- Commencement of the Linden to Lethem Road Highway
- Creating the infrastructure that will see more investment in agro- processing and manufacturing supported by a ballooning of engineering services
- Creation of new road networks in the hinterland and riverine communities
- A new road and river link between Timehri and Bartica
- Commencement of works on the Parika – Goshen Road
- Investment in key transformative infrastructure in the hinterland, Region 10, Region 2 and Region 6
- Modernisation of our community roads across all regions and investment in hinterland and regional airstrips to boost our tourism product.

Already on the bright side, we were able to in just six months bring forward the approval of the new four-lane road from Ogle to Eccles, funded by the Indian Government, by almost a year.

Today we received the news that all of the approval has been given in India. We are moving to the procurement stage. This is a project that was delayed for almost seven years.

Today we are on the journey of achieving this and bringing relief to the people of Guyana.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

- Building a world class and highly skilled, and literate population
- Investing in technical and vocational education leading to international certification
- Creating opportunities for training, retraining, and retooling of our human resources to meet the future demands of the economy
- Conducting a market driven analysis as the basis on which our education system will be geared to ensure that there is a right match between educational output and economic input. On the positive side we are in an advanced state of discussion to have our own institute of oil and gas here in Guyana,

## **TECHNOLOGY**

- Creation of a masterplan for ICT development in Guyana
- Investment in technology to improve our competitiveness, efficiency, transparency and reliability
- Moving Government services towards a paperless environment
- Ensuring every child leaves school computer literate
- Investing in a patient care management system that would see every Guyanese connected through one card
- Expanding access to internet services across all communities

- Reduction in the cost of data to individuals and households
- Increasing the number of persons using the internet from 36% by 100 by the end of our five years
- Increasing the number of households having access to a computer from 31% by 100% in five years
- Investment in technology that will increase competitiveness in doing business and breaking down barriers
- Investing in software development that will reduce time in processing construction permit, getting electricity and water connection by 50 % .

Important to all of this, we must have world class social services.

### **WORLD CLASS SOCIAL SERVICES**

- Public and Private investment that will see world class health care system acting as a net foreign currency earner for our country. Already we have tremendous interest in this area and I am delighted that many Guyanese are coming together in pursuing this interest also.
- Specialised healthcare for maternity and children services
- Comprehensive and reliable access to primary health care across every region
- World class educational facilities as incentivising private investment
- Building of sustainable communities in achieving the 50,000 houseslots
- Commencement of a new, modern, sustainable secondary city
- In addition to the provision of free university education during this term and the granting of 20,000 scholarships, you will also see the establishment of an internationally accredited Oil and Gas Institute
- Investments will be made in training and increasing the quantity of educators whilst modernising the curriculum, expanding the use of technology and improving educational facilities
- The mix of new communities and infrastructure links will be geared towards reduction in traffic congestion, improvement in road safety, the physical security of our people, expansion of affordable homes and a quantum leap in the eradication of squatting.
- Investment in water resources to ensure 100% access by every community and expanding treated water coverage to at least 70% of the population.
- Direct investment and allocation will be placed in the National Budget to support persons with disabilities.
- Direct investment and allocations will be made to support Associations and Organisations in our efforts to prevent cruelty against animals.
- Specific provisions will be made to support mental health and reproductive health.

Important to the achievement of all of these targets is a sound, stable and viable macro-economic framework.

### **MACRO ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK**

- The aim is to create an environment that would ensure our competitiveness, diversify the economy, support sound monetary and fiscal policies whilst enhancing transparency in a pro- poor approach to growth and development
- Whilst we are targeting high economic growth rate this acceleration must, and I emphasise, must be managed to minimise the risk of overheating
- Our focus will be on maintaining exchange rate stability and managing inflation in lower single digits
- Rebuilding our depleted foreign reserves
- Diversification of new industries for large scale plantation type agriculture including aquaculture, among other things.

I am pleased to say that we have already managed to bring out livestock producers together and with the enthusiasm of private and public investment, we anticipate that all of the protein needs in the production of feed will be produced locally; all the corn , all the soya bean.

We will support businesses, we will support the private sector, we will support workers. Let me be clear, every single worker, public sector worker; whether you are nurses, doctors, members of the judiciary, I assure you by the end of our fifth year , not only will you be better off from a salary perspective but the benefits, the society in which you live and the services that will be delivered to you, would enable you to live a good life, a great life in Guyana.

No more must the dream be to exit the shores. There is a bright future ahead. Let us embrace it. Let us support it. Dream big, your Government will support those dreams.

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Mr. Speaker, there is no end to the Manifesto tasks that lie ahead, for there is no end to the efforts we must make for the homeland. We all want Guyana to be for each of us and all of us – and for the generations that will follow.

To build that home, it would not be right for us to forget or neglect our obligations beyond our shores – in the Caribbean Community, in the Americas, in the world of small states and in global affairs.

For we are not an island unto ourselves.

We owe a special debt to CARICOM for helping to ensure that we could sit in this democratically elected Parliament today.

It is one we shall never forget, as we work to build a Caribbean Community worthy of the highest ideals of regional integration.

Nor will we be neglectful of members of the international community who kept vigil with us; Canada, the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom among others.

We will honour their vigilance for us, by joining them in pursuing the values of equality, of peace and of the rule of law, world-wide.

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Mr. Speaker,

For too long, our country has been held ransom to the ambitions of partisan politics and the narrowness of partisan ambition.

It is time to set those two impostors aside and to embrace in their place the virtuous cause of patriotic duty. A commitment my Government has made already.

Guyana and the Guyanese people deserve no less; they have endured enough.

We are at a decisive moment in our history with a greater opportunity than previous Parliaments to make our country a better place than it has ever been.

This is the honour and the challenge that time, and events have laid at our door.

We must – each of us – live up to it.

The people of Guyana expect us to not spend our time squabbling and bickering;

they want us to find common ground on which we can build a nation in which they are safe and their children's future is secure.

I pledge myself to that task.

And I urge every representative in the National Assembly to join me in striving for its fulfilment.

There can be no task more fulfilling;

no task more honourable;

no task more noble!

Let us, together, run with endurance the race God has set before us.

God bless you.

God bless our beloved Guyana.

And may God bless our joint endeavours.

Thank you.