

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SECOND SESSION  
OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA  
2002 – 2004**

**REPORT**

**OF THE**

**SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**THE REVIEW OF PUBLIC HOLIDAYS**

**RESOLUTION NO. 12/2003**

**PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**THURSDAY, 29<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, 2004**

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1.0 **INTRODUCTION:**

1.1 **Establishment And Work Of The Special Select Committee Appointed To Review The Public Holidays Act, Chapter 19:07**

1.1.1 Guyana's Independence Day was being commemorated annually as a public holiday on 26<sup>th</sup> May between 1966 and 1970, when it was taken off the holiday calendar. In 1996, on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence, the Minister charged with responsibility for public holidays declared 26<sup>th</sup> May as a public holiday and has continued to do so to the present.

1.1.2 Guyanese of Indian origin, who form a large portion of the country's population, had for a period of in excess of the past forty years, been calling for 5<sup>th</sup> May to be declared a statutory public holiday, in observance of the arrival of the first batch of Indian indentured labourers who came to the then British Guiana in 1838.

1.1.3 On 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2003 the National Assembly approved the following Resolution (No.12 of 2003):

**RESOLVED,**

That this National Assembly approves of the establishment of a Special Select Committee to review the public holidays appointed by the Public Holidays Act, Chapter 19:07, with a view to including as public holidays, the following days, namely -

*Independence Day, that is to say, the 26<sup>th</sup> May, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day, and*

*Arrival Day, that is to say, the 5<sup>th</sup> May, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day.*

2.0            **BACKGROUND:**

2.1            In March 1967 the Public Holidays Ordinance, Chapter 61, was amended to provide for the following days to be public holidays, namely -

*Every Sunday;*

*The first weekday of January;*

*Good-Friday;*

*Easter Monday;*

*Labour Day, that is to say, the 1<sup>st</sup> May, or if that day is a Sunday, the following day;*

*Independence Day, that is to say, such day in each year as shall by notice published in the Gazette be appointed for the purpose by the Minister for the time being charged with responsibility for public holidays;*

*Commonwealth Day, that is to say the first Monday in August;  
Christmas Day, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day;*

*The 26<sup>th</sup> December, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day, unless Christmas Day falls on a Sunday, and then the Tuesday following Christmas Day;*

*Phagwah Day, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day;*

*Deepavali, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day;*

*Eid-UI-Azha Day, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day;*

*Yaou-mun Nabi Day, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day.*

2.1.1 The amendment provides that the Minister, with responsibility for public holidays, shall cause notices to be published in the Official Gazette of the days constituted public holidays in respect of that year's Phagwah, Deepavali, Eid-UI-Azha and Yaou-mun Nabi so soon as may be reasonably practicable before the dates so notified, respectively.

2.1.2 The rationale for maintaining the level of holidays at twelve was the effect of holidays on production and productivity particularly on a young nation.

2.1.3 A driving force behind the changes made in the holiday structure was the facilitation of people of different persuasions to participate in the rich heritage that the diversity in the Guyanese culture provided. It was accepted then that one of the ways to achieve such participation was to grant religious holidays to Christians, Hindus and Muslims. At the same time this perspective would have enabled the removal of those holidays that had no significance for the Guyanese heritage.

**Further changes:**

2.1.4 There were four (4) significant changes to the list of public holidays since 1967. There was firstly, the addition of *23<sup>rd</sup> February, Republic Day*, which was substituted for *26<sup>th</sup> May, Independence Day* and the inclusion of a new public holiday, *United Nations Day, 24<sup>th</sup> October*. Shortly thereafter, *Caribbean Day*, the first Monday in July in every year was declared a public holiday pursuant to the agreement reached at the inaugural meeting of Heads of Government of the Caribbean held in July 1974.

2.1.5 The final significant change was for a public holiday, in commemoration of the abolition of slavery, to be known as *Emancipation Day, the first day of August in every year, to be substituted for Commonwealth Day*.

2.2 **Constitution of the Special Select Committee:**

2.2.1 The Committee of Selection met on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2003, and nominated nine (9) Members to constitute the Special Select Committee as follows:

**Members from the People's Progressive Party/Civic (5) -**

The Hon. Ronald Gajraj, M.P. - Chairman  
Minister of Home Affairs

The Hon. Dr. Ramnauth Bisnauth, M.P.  
Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security

Mrs. Indranie Chandarpal, M.P.

Mrs. Shirley Edwards, M.P., and

Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.

**Members from the People's National Congress/Reform (3) -**

Mr. Deryck Bernard, M.P.

Ms. Amna Ally, M.P., and

Dr. George Norton, M.P.

**Member from the Rise Organise and Rebuild Party (1) -**

Mr. Ravindra Dev, M.P.

2.3 **Commencement of Committee's work:**

2.3.1 The Special Select Committee on the Review of Public Holidays held its first meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2003 and met on 14 occasions during the months January, 2004 to April, 2004 as follows:

Meetings	Date
2 <sup>nd</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup> January, 2004
3 <sup>rd</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup> January, 2004
4 <sup>th</sup>	21 <sup>st</sup> January, 2004
5 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup> February, 2004
6 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup> February, 2004
7 <sup>th</sup>	18 <sup>th</sup> February, 2004
8 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> March, 2004
9 <sup>th</sup>	17 <sup>th</sup> March, 2004
10 <sup>th</sup>	31 <sup>st</sup> March, 2004
11 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup> April, 2004
12 <sup>th</sup>	13 <sup>th</sup> April, 2004
13 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup> April, 2004
14 <sup>th</sup>	15 <sup>th</sup> April, 2004

**2.4 Mandate/Work Programme:**

2.4.1 The Committee's mandate was guided by the parameters of Resolution 12, that is to say:-

to review the public holidays appointed by the Public Holidays Act, Chapter 19:07, with a view to including as public holiday the following days, namely -

- (i) Independence Day, that is to say, the 26<sup>th</sup> May, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day, and
- (ii) Arrival Day, that is to say, the 5<sup>th</sup> May, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day.

2.4.2 At its first meeting, the Committee discussed the *modus operandi* for achieving its mandate. Discussions led to the formulation of a Work Programme with a projected time frame of 29<sup>th</sup> February, 2004 for its completion and 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2004 as the deadline for submitting a report to the National Assembly. However, on account of unforeseen contingencies these dates were reviewed and adjusted to 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2004.



### 3.0 APPROACH/STRATEGY:

3.1 The Committee agreed on the widest possible contributions from the public at large to facilitate the process. In this regard, members of the public were invited through public notices in the press dated *17<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> December, 2003 (Appendix I)* to submit written submissions to the Committee not later than 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2004.

3.1.1 The *15<sup>th</sup> January, 2004* was originally agreed on as the final date for the receipt of submissions. However, the Committee later decided that any submission received after that date would also be accepted.

3.1.2 A decision was also taken to invite those who had made written submissions to appear before the Committee (if they so desired) and make oral presentations to amplify and/or clarify any issue arising out of their written submissions. Final oral presentations were made on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2004.

### 3.2 **Response to Public Notice**

3.2.1 The Committee received a total of fifteen (15) written submissions from nine organisations and six private individuals as follows:

<b>Organizations</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Private individuals</b>	<b>Region</b>
Guyana Indian Heritage Association (GIHA)	4	Ms. June Mendes	4
Indian Arrival Committee (IAC)	4	Ms Eileen Cox	4
African Cultural and Development Association (ACDA).	4	Mr. Phillip Prashad	4
Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha	4	Mr. Gordon Bristol	6
Guyanese Indian Foundation Trust (GIFT)	4	Mr. Takur Persaud	7
Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT)	4	Mr. Clarence Ellis	USA
Guyana Organisation of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP)	4		
National Front Alliance (NFA)	4		
National Amerindian Environment Education Development Foundation (NADF)	4		

The organisations which responded were Georgetown based.

4.0 **SUMMARY OF SUBMISSIONS:**

4.1 **Ms. June Mendes**

Negative on 5<sup>th</sup> May

Negative on 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.1.1 Additional holidays would affect the economy. An Indian Arrival Day would be a stimulant for other groups, including Amerindians, to demand holidays and why not in particular have a holiday for Amerindians the only indigenous people.

4.1.2 There were many positive ways in celebrating the arrival of Indians, which could educate the people and develop a better understanding and appreciation of their individual background.

4.1.3 Republic Day was sufficient as a public holiday to celebrate the nation's independence status. Holidays in May could adversely affect the educational process particularly with respect to external examinations.

4.2 **Mr. Gordon Bristol**

Negative on 5<sup>th</sup> May

Supported 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.2.1 Mr. Bristol did not agree that the 5<sup>th</sup> May, the first day Indian indentured labourers arrived in Guyana, should be declared a public holiday to celebrate "Arrival Day", but 23<sup>rd</sup> February should be declared "Arrival Day".

4.2.2 He has asked that 26<sup>th</sup> May, Independence Day, be declared an additional public holiday.

4.3 **Ms. Eileen Cox**

Negative on 5<sup>th</sup> May

Negative on 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.3.1 Ms. Cox claimed that there were already too many holidays in Guyana and it would be disastrous to add another. Granting a holiday to any ethnic group would encourage others to seek the same privilege, which could defeat the concept of the national motto.

4.4 **Mr. Takur Persaud**

Negative on 5<sup>th</sup> May

Supported 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.4.1 Mr Takur Persaud wished -

- (i) There should be a public holiday designated "Guyanese Day";
- (ii) Abolition of Easter Monday and Boxing Day from the calendar of holidays as they bore no significance to the Guyanese society;
- (iii) Any holiday falling on a Sunday should not be carried forward to the following Monday;
- (iv) 5<sup>th</sup> May, Indian Arrival Day, should not be declared a public holiday; and
- (v) The clock should be adjusted during the year according to sunrise and sunset.

**4.5 Mr. Phillip Prashad**

Supported 5<sup>th</sup> May

Supported 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.5.1 Mr. Prashad supported 26<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday because of its significance, the date Guyanese were given the chance to chart their own destiny. He also supported 5<sup>th</sup> May, the arrival day of East Indians in Guyana to be declared a holiday.

4.5.2 According to him, together with the Africans the Indians developed Guyana and as the Africans have Freedom Day, 1<sup>st</sup> August, there was no harm in the Indians being granted 5<sup>th</sup> May, as a National Holiday to keep them focused on their heritage and to remind them of their origin and where they were.

**4.6 Mr. Clarence Ellis**

Negative on 5<sup>th</sup> May

Negative on 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.6.1 The thrust of Mr. Ellis' submission was that the African and Indian populations stood divided and an Indian Arrival Day as a public holiday would be seen as a triumphalist holiday, which would perpetuate the existing differences. After enquiring whether celebrating Indian Arrival Day, as a public holiday would not be indulging in a shallow racial acclamation, he posited that the country, after forty years of independence, should have developed the maturity to identify a holiday, which was ennobling.

4.6.2 The strategies adopted by the planters with the immigrant labourers at their disposal, defeated the Africans' aspirations, and to suggest that this was an experience worthy of celebration, was insensitive and ignored the pain and disappointment that immigration occasioned among African Guyanese.

4.7 **Guyana Indian Heritage Association (GIHA)**

Supported 5<sup>th</sup> May

Negative on 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.7.1 The call for 5<sup>th</sup> May, Indian Arrival Day, as a public holiday reached as far back as forty-five years ago. Such a holiday would provide the opportunity to honour the contributions of the majority Indian population to Guyana's development. It would make the Indian community feel proud and dignified, and respected as an important people of Guyana.

4.7.2 The organization did not support 26<sup>th</sup> May as a holiday as that date marked the anniversary of the brutal Wismar massacre. Republic Day was sufficient a day for the celebration of national pride and dignity.

4.8 **Indian Arrival Committee (IAC)**

Supported 5<sup>th</sup> May

Supported 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.8.1 The Indian Arrival Committee (IAC) had been calling for 5<sup>th</sup> May, Indian Arrival Day, to be declared a public holiday because of the significance of that date for the Indo-Guyanese.

4.8.2 Indians had brought about enduring economic, demographic and cultural changes in Guyana. In the pluralistic society of Guyana there was need for each group to learn about, and understand the contribution of, others in the quest for national unity.

**4.9 African Cultural and Development Association (ACDA)**

Negative on 5<sup>th</sup> May

Did not comment on 26<sup>th</sup> May

Proposed 12<sup>th</sup> October as a public holiday

4.9.1 This Association has claimed that it had submitted in the past, several letters to the Chairman of the National Holiday Committee, to which there had been no response, calling for 12<sup>th</sup> October, Holocaust Day be declared a public holiday, but saw it as discriminatory for the call for a holiday - Indian Arrival Day - to be treated with such alacrity.

4.9.2 It accepted the call for an Indian Arrival Day with mixed feelings as the Europeans used that source of cheap labour to wreck the village economy of the freed slaves resulting in their restoration to their previous servitude.

4.9.3 On the other hand the Indian immigrants suffered humiliations that embittered race relations that prevailed to this day.

4.9.4 Unlike Holocaust Day where a crime was to be assuaged, Indian Arrival Day would be a triumph over circumstances, a part of which was over Africans. ACDA would participate in the celebration of an Indian holiday but not in an event that was used by the planters to starve the efforts at "self-determination".

4.10 **National Amerindian Environmental Educational Development Foundation (NADE)**

Negative on 5<sup>th</sup> May

Supported 26<sup>th</sup> May

Proposed 10<sup>th</sup> September as a public holiday

4.10.1 NADF advocated that 26<sup>th</sup> May must remain and be classified a National Holiday instead of a public holiday as “National” transcends “Public”.

4.10.2 The NADF did not propose 5<sup>th</sup> May being declared a national or public holiday in recognition of the East Indians arrival here. Regardless of their numerical strength, each group has contributed to the development of Guyana.

4.10.3 It proposed that 10<sup>th</sup> September be recognized as a public holiday in recognition of the Indigenous Peoples and their contribution towards the development and preservation of Guyana. This proposal was being justified on the grounds that -

- (a) Indians as a whole already have four holidays;
- (b) Amerindians as a group did not have any identifiable holiday;
- (c) Amerindians had occupied Guyana from time immemorial.

4.11 **Guyanese Indian Foundation Trust (GIFT)**

Supported 5<sup>th</sup> May

Supported 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.11.1 In advocating 5<sup>th</sup> May to be declared a public holiday in commemoration of Indian arrival in Guyana, GIFT saw the day as one of the most significant moments in the history of Guyana.



4.11.2 The arrival of Indians irrevocably altered the landscape - both human and physical. Providing the day as a holiday together with the month of May as Indian Heritage Month would be an opportunity for the Guyanese Indian community to reflect on its history and to continue unabashedly and unapologetically to stake its claim for equality and respect in the national life, and for all Guyanese to recognise the centrality of their presence in the Guyanese reality.

**4.12 Guyanese Organisation of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP)**

Negative on 5<sup>th</sup> May

Negative on 26<sup>th</sup> May

Proposed 10<sup>th</sup> September to be a public holiday

4.12.1 Guyanese Organisation of Indigenous Peoples requested that 10<sup>th</sup> September be declared a public holiday which it had been advocating for over a decade. It was not in favour of 5<sup>th</sup> May, Indian Arrival Day, as a holiday. It further suggested that to overcome Guyana having too many holidays, 26<sup>th</sup> May, which it saw as a holiday, be deleted from the calendar of holidays.

4.12.2 No further additions of holidays must be made once the decision on those of 10<sup>th</sup> September and 5<sup>th</sup> May was made.

**4.13 National Front Alliance (NFA)**

Negative on 5<sup>th</sup> May

Did not comment on 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.13.1 The National Front Alliance saw the declaration of 5<sup>th</sup> May, as a public holiday would obscure the reality of the coercion, duplicity, brutality and dehumanisation of the human cargo, practiced in the process of introducing Indian indentureship in Guyana.

4.13.2 Any attempt to accord recognition to the various race groups based on their assumed relative contributions to development or decline of the country was a subjective exercise and one which could exacerbate tensions in the society.

4.13.3 The NFA believed that the priority task of the Committee should be to enunciate clear and rational criteria for the institution of National Holidays and to apply those criteria in the evaluation of future claims or requests and in the review of current 'so-called' National Holidays.

#### **4.14 Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT)**

Supported 5<sup>th</sup> May

Supported 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.14.1 The Guyana Islamic Trust advocated that the two statutory Muslim holidays be Eid-UL-Azha (already a public holiday) and Eid-ul-Fitr, which was an equally important occasion, being the culmination and crowning moment that marked the end of the Islamic holy month of fasting. The GIT suggested that Eid-ul-Fitr be substituted for Yaou-mun Nabi as a statutory holiday.

4.14.2 GIT admitted the difficulty involved in ascertaining the date of Eid-ul-Fitr, but felt that with scientific calculation of the estimation of the sighting of the moon it would be possible to be at least 90% accurate in determining the date of Eid-ul-Fitr at the beginning of the year or even before.

4.15 **Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha (GHDS)**

Supported 5<sup>th</sup> May

Did not comment on 26<sup>th</sup> May

4.15.1 The Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha asserted that the arrival in Guyana on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1838 of the first Indians was an event of utmost significance in the ultimate evolution of the nation notwithstanding the circumstances of their arrival. Therefore, 5<sup>th</sup> May must be sanctified as a National Holiday.

5.0 **HIGHLIGHTS OF ORAL PRESENTATION:**

5.1 The Committee found these presentations to be useful in that, they allowed for a better perspective and understanding of each organisation's proposal that was not brought out in the written submission. The following were the more compelling views expressed –

5.2 **National Amerindian Environmental Education Development Foundation (NADF)**

5.2.1 The representatives of the National Amerindian Environmental Education Development Foundation in their opening remarks stated that “When the NADF made the proposal to the Holiday Review Committee, it did all in its power to make contact with all the Amerindian organisations in the country, because the NADF, although it is operating under that name, the document entails the representative organisations and those people that we work with. Amerindians are Amerindians whether they belong to TAAMOG or the Guyana Organisation of Indigenous Peoples or the Amerindian Peoples Association regardless of political parties or whatever. Amerindians are Amerindians and this document covers all the Amerindians in this country.”

5.2.2 The representatives referred to the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society, Articles 11 and 26 regarding the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to the development process that undertook to continue to protect their historical rights and respect the cultures and way of life of these peoples. The representative opined that the Charter paved the way for the recognition of Amerindians in the Commonwealth, and in Guyana since there was a Constitutional Commission – it can pave the way for Guyana to be the first country in CARICOM to have a holiday for Amerindians.

5.2.3 When questioned about the significance of 10<sup>th</sup> September, the representatives responded, "that September 10<sup>th</sup> was when Mr. Stephen Campbell, an Amerindian, first entered Parliament as a Legislator in 1957."

5.2.4 The representatives entreated the Committee to look closely at the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society and consider Articles 11 and 26.

5.2.5 In response to an observation that there was already a month that had been identified as **Amerindian Heritage Month**, the representatives observed that there was no law which gave Amerindians, a month to celebrate and reflect. They stated that the Amerindians were never torn away from their lands against their will and brought here nor did they come here on agreements to stay and a certain time to leave. They were here. They did not need a month to reflect.

5.2.6 The representatives referred to the four holidays that already existed which are considered Indian holidays.

5.2.7 Members of the Committee clarified the statement by pointing out that in the case of Islam there were people of different ethnicities that were members of the Muslim community.

5.2.8 The point was made that only Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago designated holiday to East Indians since those were the only countries with a sizeable amount of East Indians.

5.2.9 The issues that have emerged are:

- (a) **The representatives who are claiming to speak on behalf of all Amerindians are of the view that they do not need a month to reflect since they were always here;**
- (b) **They would like to have 10<sup>th</sup> September be a public holiday.**

**NADF advocated that 26<sup>th</sup> May must remain and be classified a National Holiday instead of a public holiday as "National" transcends "Public".**

**NADF is not in favour of 5<sup>th</sup> May being declared a National or Public Holiday.**

**The positions of the NADF as stated in (a) and (b) are clearly not within our mandate, however, considering the reasons and rationale for 10<sup>th</sup> September the Committee may wish to include this as a proposal for the National Assembly to consider.**

### **5.3 African Cultural And Development Association (ACDA)**

5.3.1 This Association claimed that it had submitted in the past, several letters to the Chairman of the National Holiday Committee calling for 12<sup>th</sup> October, Holocaust Day, be declared a public holiday.

5.3.2 He said that no response was received and he saw it discriminatory for the call for a holiday for an Indian Arrival Day to be treated with such alacrity. The Chairman indicated that he was unaware of such letters and requested a copy.

5.3.3 The representative reported that Holocaust Day was already being observed at a ceremony held annually at the sea wall. He pointed out that they were in the process of erecting a monument to the African Holocaust and that that day should be on the calendar of events.

5.3.4 A check of the CARICOM member states revealed that no other states observed 12<sup>th</sup> October as a national or public holiday.

5.3.5 The representatives proposed that 12<sup>th</sup> October be considered as a National Holiday; Guyana will be the first country to have done this in the CARICOM states.

5.3.6 With respect to 5<sup>th</sup> May the representatives were of the view that while they welcome a holiday in recognition of Indians who came to Guyana, they felt that Arrival Day was not a day they would support, since the coming of the Indians to work in the plantations was to the detriment of the efforts of the freed slaves.

5.3.7 The representative stated " I would like to make one thing very clear and, that is ACDA and my own self do not say or believe that the coming of Indians to Guyana was in any way a conscious movement on the part of Indian people to destabilise anything which the Africans were doing. We feel that all peoples, the African and the Indians, were manipulated by the white plantation owners, one against the other for the benefit of the plantation owners. We do not say that the Indians had come and were doing something to undermine these efforts at establishing villages, provisions for farming *et cetera*. We are sticking to our point that the act of indentureship and the use of Indian people went against the efforts of the Africans in those early days and therefore we do not see the event as something we want to celebrate as a holiday. We know perhaps that Indians would want to do that, but we do not feel that the event is what we would like to celebrate as a holiday, maybe another day for some other reason, but not Arrival Day."

5.3.8 **Issues for consideration:**

- **The introduction of another proposal relating to 12<sup>th</sup> October as Holocaust Day;**
- **Preferred another day in recognition of Indians arrival rather than 5<sup>th</sup> May;**
- **Did not comment on 26<sup>th</sup> May.**

## 5.4 Guyana Indian Heritage Association (GIHA)

5.4.1 The representatives informed the Committee that Gandhi Youth Organization made a submission in 1960 when the PPP was in office. Jaguar Committee, GIFT, ROAR and GIHA made calls when the PPP came into office in 1992. They pointed out the following: -

- Amerindians were given September as Heritage Month to celebrate their culture and their heritage.
- Africans were given August as their Heritage Month to celebrate their culture and heritage as well as a National Holiday - Emancipation Day on which they celebrate their freedom from slavery.
- GIHA was asking for the same national recognition for Indians so that they too could celebrate their culture and heritage.
- 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1838 was the day Indians arrived in Guyana - it is more than just arrival in Guyana - it was the arrival of Indians into the New World. It was the first footfall of Indians into the Western Hemisphere.
- Trinidad and Tobago already enjoyed Indian Arrival Day as a holiday.

5.4.2 The representatives affirmed that they welcomed the idea of a Heritage Month in May.

5.4.3 However, the representatives stated that they were totally opposed to 26<sup>th</sup> May being declared a National Holiday, since it coincided with the period when atrocities were committed against Indians in Wismar, when more than 3000 persons had to leave their homes and take up residence elsewhere.



5.4.4 The Committee reminded the representatives that although it was cognisant of the atrocities that were committed, the fact was that 26<sup>th</sup> May was the day that the Union Jack was lowered and the Golden Arrowhead was hoisted.

5.4.5 The representatives proposed the removal of Boxing Day as a holiday, since it was a hangover from colonial times when the slaves were given a holiday after Christmas by their masters.

5.4.6 The representatives indicated that they did not wish to give consideration to the designation of 5<sup>th</sup> May as "Arrival/Indentureship Day" since this would show contempt for Indians in Guyana, in light of the contributions that Indians had made towards the development of Guyana. The representatives quoted this excerpt from the Pillai Tivari Report (1923): "It is admitted on all hands that but for them - the East Indians - the sugar industry of the colony would have collapsed years ago and that they have saved the colony from utter ruin and bankruptcy".

5.4.7 **Issues for consideration:**

- **5<sup>th</sup> May to be declared a National Holiday, that is, Indian Arrival Day;**
- **May month to be designated Indian Heritage Month;**
- **Removal of Boxing Day since it had no relevance today;**
- **Opposed to 26<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday.**

5.5 **Guyanese Organisation of Indigenous People (GOIP)**

5.5.1 The representatives made the following observations:-

- GOIP started lobbying for Indigenous Heritage Day since its formation in 1990.

- A letter was written to the President in February 2002.
- Lobbying for Indian Arrival Day began recently.
- The organisation would consider a holiday for new arrivals for all people who arrived in Guyana voluntarily or otherwise over the past 500 years.
- They were in favour of the month of May being designated Indian Arrival Month.
- They supported the removal of Boxing Day and Independence Day.
- The representatives were of the view that there should be an indefinite ban on the addition of any new holiday to the calendar and wanted present deliberation with regard to indigenous heritage and new arrivals ended.

5.5.2 Committee Members in their observations asked about the significance of 10<sup>th</sup> September. The representative's response was that 10<sup>th</sup> September was when Mr. Stephen Campbell, an Amerindian, first entered Parliament as a Legislator in 1957.

5.5.3 **Issues for consideration:**

- **Supported the removal of Boxing Day and Independence Day;**
- **Did not support 5<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday but favoured the month of May being designated Indian Arrival Month;**
- **Called for 10<sup>th</sup> September to be a National Holiday.**

5.6 **National Front Alliance (NFA)**

5.6.1 National Front Alliance was the only political party that appeared before the Committee.

- The representatives hoped that the Committee would craft and develop a new criteria for the creation of national days or National Holidays.

- They were opposed to the Indian Arrival Day since according to the representatives it was a shameful and disgraceful episode in the history of immigration. The representatives referred to the Parliamentary Papers, which outlined the Indian arrival and the deplorable conditions under which the Hill Coolies were brought.
- The representatives stated that they were against anything that promoted one ethnic group above another or seemed to promote the ascendancy of one ethnic group above another one.
- The proposal to glorify the presence of Indians in Guyana through the celebration of an Arrival Day obscured the reality of the coercion, duplicity, brutality and dehumanisation of the human cargo.

5.6.2 Members of the Committee observed that there could be unity in diversity and the exercise of the Select Committee was all about finding ways of accommodating one aspect of that diversity into the unity called the Guyanese mosaic.

5.6.3 It was further observed that the purpose of Indian Arrival Day was to commemorate rather than to celebrate.

5.6.4 The NFA commented on 26<sup>th</sup> May only as a point of reference but did not offer a definite yes or no in relation thereto.

5.6.5 **Issues for consideration:**

- **The rejection of 5<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday;**
- **Oppose the idea of any holiday that sought to celebrate the arrival of Indians;**
- **Was of the view that the occasion provides for the establishment of criteria for national days or National Holidays;**
- **Did not take a position on whether 26<sup>th</sup> May should or should not be a National Holiday.**

## 5.7 Guyana Indian Foundation Trust (GIFT)

- The representatives indicated their support to the idea of 5<sup>th</sup> May being declared as a National Holiday and also declared as "Indian Arrival Day".
- They further stated that the holiday should not be seen as a holiday for Indians but rather the holiday should be seen as a national one to commemorate a watershed moment in the history of Guyana.
- The Indian Arrival Day according to the representatives was probably one of the most significant in the foundation and creation of this country called Guyana. Indians were more than 50% of the population and had brought two major religions and several languages to Guyana.
- On whether 26<sup>th</sup> May should be a National Holiday, the representatives believed that this should be so, since for the same reasons as was pointed out before: the country moved from one form of government and governance - from a colony to an independent country.

5.7.1 Asked whether they also supported the idea of Indian Heritage Month, the representatives responded that already there were events that were taking place that did not necessarily have to become a statutory event defined by Government. However support of the Government would be welcomed.

5.7.2 The representatives stated that National Holidays did not have to be actions of celebrations; they could be days for reflection.

5.7.3 In responding to a question whether there were not too many Indian holidays, the representatives said "that the fact that the East Indians might constitute the majority in Hinduism and in Islam should not blur the distinction to suggest that there are four holidays for Indians."

5.7.4

**Issues for consideration:**

- **The Members of GIFT were in support of 5<sup>th</sup> May as Indian Arrival Day as a National Holiday;**
- **They were in support of 26<sup>th</sup> May being a National Holiday;**
- **National Holidays did not have to be celebrative but could be used for reflection;**
- **They supported the idea of May to be considered Indian Heritage Month.**

5.8

**Guyana Islamic Trust (GIT)**

- Preferred to substitute Eid-ul-Fitr for Yaou-mun Nabi.
- They proposed Eid-UL-Azha and Eid-ul-Fitr should be the designated statutory Muslims' holidays.
- The representatives explained the difficulties Muslims faced in the celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr when it fell on a working day.
- They also supported 5<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday since it was associated with Indian ancestors coming to Guyana.
- The representatives supported 26<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday since it was associated with Guyana's independence.

5.8.1

Members of the Committee suggested that there should be wider consultations among the Muslim community with respect to the assigned days for the two significant Muslim holidays.

5.8.2

**Issues for consideration:**

- **Eid-ul-Fitr should be substituted for Yaou-mun Nabi;**
- **The two National Holidays for Muslims to be Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-UL-Azha;**

- **The representatives supported 5<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday in recognition of Indian Arrival to this country;**
- **They also supported 26<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday.**

5.9

**Indian Arrival Committee (IAC)**

- Made submission a year ago calling for 5<sup>th</sup> May to be declared a public holiday as was done in Trinidad and Tobago.
- Guyana is a pluralistic society, and thus, the need exist constantly for members of each group to learn about and understand one another, and in doing so, not diminish the contributions of others in the quest for national unity.
- They were aware that all other Indian organisations were supportive of 5<sup>th</sup> May being declared a National Holiday. A common appeal from the various Indo-Guyanese organisations was that they would like Indian Arrival Day to be a statutory holiday in recognition of Guyana's Indian community and for its vital role in the country's development.
- Already moving towards ameliorating some of the divisions that exist, IAC represented not only Indo-Guyanese but also some Mixed Guyanese as well as people who might no longer be looking like Indo-Guyanese but who had Indian ancestry.
- IAC supported Independence Day, and African Holocaust Day as National Holidays.

5.9.1

**Issues for Consideration:**

- **IAC supported 5<sup>th</sup> May as being designated Indian Arrival Day and as a National Holiday;**
- **Supported 26<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday;**
- **Supported 12<sup>th</sup> October as African Holocaust Day;**
- **Proposed May as a month dedicated to Indian Heritage.**

5.10

**Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha (GHDS)**

- The representatives expressed their support for 5<sup>th</sup> May to be declared a National Holiday.
- They argued that indentureship was an integral, inseparable part of the history of Guyana. History was always commemorated and celebrated but history did provide an opportunity for reflection, contemplation and possibly for resolution.
- The representatives referred to Trinidad and Tobago where the Prime Minister was one of the persons who spoke supporting the motion that was introduced by a Member of Parliament, Mr. Trevor Sudama, on Indian Arrival.
- The representatives also supported Independence Day, 26<sup>th</sup> May, to be a National Holiday.

**5.10.1 Committee Members asked the opinions of the representatives on the following issues:**

- Whether they agreed with the idea of not supporting 26<sup>th</sup> May in view of the atrocities that were committed at Wismar against Indians.
- Whether celebrating 5<sup>th</sup> May as Indian Arrival Day would not defeat the objective of the national motto "One People, One Nation, One Destiny".
- Whether it would not be seen as divisive to single out a special ethnic group for special recognition.
- Whether consideration should not be given to 5<sup>th</sup> May as "Arrival Day" rather than "Indian Arrival Day".
- Whether they would consider the proposal that was put by a Member of the Committee to consider 5<sup>th</sup> May as a "Day of Indentured Peoples".

5.10.2 The representatives pointed out the following: -

- 26<sup>th</sup> May was the outcome of years of struggle for independence, which eventually became the day when Guyana won its first major constitutional victory, which gave Guyanese their sovereignty.
- 5<sup>th</sup> May should not be seen as celebration of Indians alone, but it should be a day of celebration for every Guyanese. All sections of the community ought to celebrate all the commemorative occasions that had historical significance. "Unity in Diversity" was a well defined concept/slogan which had to be promoted.
- The representatives were of the view that they came with a mandate for 5<sup>th</sup> May to be "Indian Arrival Day". They were not inclined to consider the idea of an "Indentured Day".

5.10.3 On the question of "celebration" versus "observation" the Committee posited the notion that it was the emancipation of slaves that occasioned indentureship because that same emancipation, which was being celebrated, occasioned indentureship which was intended to provide the plantocracy with a large and manipulated labour force.

5.10.4 The representative, in responding to a question posed by the Committee, argued that they were commemorating history as against celebrating a day that was demeaning. The representative went on to say that what could be truly argued and said was notwithstanding the demeaning features the *Indentured labourers faced, they battled with it and worked to change it and now formed part of a nation with different people, from different backgrounds who were committed to pursuing a path of unity in diversity to build a land and nation, to construct and craft a people where development and welfare could be catered for all.*



6.0 ANALYSIS, OBSERVATIONS/PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 **Analysis**

5th May

6.1.1 Nine organisations presented written submissions and made oral presentations. Of these, 5 agreed to 5<sup>th</sup> May being declared Indian Arrival Day and a National Holiday.

6.1.2 Four were against 5<sup>th</sup> May being declared a National Holiday. Four organisations supported 26<sup>th</sup> May being declared a National Holiday. Of the six individuals, one supported 5<sup>th</sup> May being declared a National Holiday.

6.1.3 On examining the submissions and presentations, the Committee noted that of the total responses, only six were specific to its mandate. Three individuals and one organisation proposed new holidays, while five organisations submitted proposals, which fell outside of the mandate.

6.1.4 The Committee after due consideration, agreed that those proposals, which did not fall within its mandate, would nonetheless be considered in its deliberations and be included in its report to the National Assembly.

6.1.5 It was also recognised by the Committee that a great percentage (80%) of the submissions had originated from Region No. 4, with one each from Regions No. 6 and No. 7. The other was e-mailed from the USA.

6.1.6 **What is significant is that the majority of the organisations supporting 5<sup>th</sup> May and 26<sup>th</sup> May are all Indo-Guyanese.**

## 6.2 Observations

6.2.1 Some of the proposals which came from the respondents fell outside of the mandate. The Committee, nonetheless, believes that they are important for the healing and unification of all our peoples. It is important that we demonstrate that equity is seen to be dispensed equally within the principle of unity in diversity.

6.2.2 The Committee noted the zero sum premise of many of the presentations that evince a belief that the acknowledgement of the claims of one group would somehow take away from the claims of other groups. The Committee is of the view that this ought not to be so.

## 6.3 Proposals

6.3.1 It became evident to the Committee that, after several submissions and presentations, there was some confusion in the citizenry's mind as to the usage of the word "public" versus "national" in reference to our official holidays.

6.3.2 The Committee is requesting Parliament to give consideration to the renaming of the Public Holidays Act as the National Holidays Act.

6.3.3 The Committee further requests Parliament to consider:

- the removal of Boxing Day as a National Holiday;
- the inclusion of 12<sup>th</sup> October as a National Holiday designated "African Holocaust Day";
- 10<sup>th</sup> September as a National Holiday for Amerindians;
- after consultation with the Muslim community whether to replace Yaou-mun Nabi with Eid-ul-Fitr as a National Holiday;

- the principle that whenever a holiday falls on a Sunday it should be observed or celebrated on that day, with the exception of Easter Monday, and not on the following day.

6.4

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### (i) Re: 26<sup>th</sup> May

#### Rationale

- All countries of CARICOM observe their Independence Day.
- Independence was not handed on a platter it was fought for by the people of Guyana.
- Apart from political, economic and other considerations 26<sup>th</sup> May signifies the day when the Union Jack was replaced by the Golden Arrowhead, and "British Guiana" became "Guyana" thereby signifying the attainment of sovereignty by the Guyanese nation.

#### Recommendation

The Committee, therefore, recommends that: -

- *Independence Day, that is to say, the 26<sup>th</sup> May, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day, be included in the Public Holidays Act, Chapter 19:07 as a public holiday.*

#### Caveat

- The Committee is cognisant of the fact that the recommendation, herein made in accordance with our mandate, appears to run counter to its proposal with respect to holidays falling on Sundays.

(ii) Re: 5<sup>th</sup> May

Rationale

The proposals and counter proposals supporting 5<sup>th</sup> May must be seen in the context of Guyana's realities. Having regards, therefore, that:-

- **the call to designate 5<sup>th</sup> May as a National Holiday was made over 40 years ago with increased support over time;**
- **Indians constitute the majority of the population of Guyana;**
- **they have made significant contribution towards the development of Guyana;**
- **while there were different assessments as to the nature of or meaning of Indian Arrival all respondents accepted its landmark status as a seminal event that had permanent consequences for all Guyana.**

Recommendation

The Committee, therefore, recommends that: -

- *Arrival Day, that is to say, the 5<sup>th</sup> May, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day, be included in the Public Holidays Act, Chapter 19:07 as a public holiday.*

Caveat

While the aforesaid recommendation is in keeping with our mandate the Committee wishes to note that all the submissions favouring 5<sup>th</sup> May as a Public Holiday recommended that it be designated "Indian Arrival Day" as is the case in Trinidad and Tobago.

7.0            CONCLUSION

7.1            The Committee is of the view that the recommended changes will not necessarily increase the number of holidays being celebrated annually in Guyana.

7.2            There is a distinct possibility that the number of working days being celebrated as National Holidays may very well be reduced.

7.3            The feeling of Members is that they have been honoured by the opportunity to serve on this Committee.

7.4            The Committee's work could not have been effectively and efficiently concluded without the participation of the public - both organizations and individuals - by way of written submissions and oral presentations. The Committee wishes to express thanks to them.

7.5            The staff of Parliament Office contributed immeasurably to the work of the Committee. The Committee would like to thank them too.

7.6            It is hoped that the recommendations of the Committee find favour with Members of the National Assembly.



# **PARLIAMENT OFFICE**

## **Review of Public Holidays**

### **Invitation to the Public for Written Submission**

A Special Select Committee has been established by the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana to review the public holidays appointed by the Public Holidays Act, Chapter 19:07, with a view to including as public holidays, the following days, namely:

- Independence Day, that is to say, the 26<sup>th</sup> May, or, if that day is a Sunday, the following day, and
- Arrival Day, that is to say, the 5<sup>th</sup> May, or if that day is a Sunday, the following day.

The Committee has begun its work but wishes to receive from members of the public their views on the review of the public holidays to include those mentioned above.

The Committee is, therefore, extending an invitation to members of the public to forward written submissions on this review not later than 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2004.

All submissions must be addressed to:

**The Clerk**  
**Special Select Committee on Review of Public Holidays**  
**Committees Division**  
**Parliament Office**  
**Public Buildings**  
**Georgetown**

S. E. Isaacs  
Clerk of the National Assembly  
December 17, 2003

Summary of Submissions – Oral and Written - Appendix

Organization	Individuals	May 5	May 26	Other Holiday	Deletion of Holiday	Remarks
National Amerindian Environmental Dev. Foundation				September 10		
	Ms. June Mendes	No	No	No		Too many holidays.
National Front Alliance		No	No	No		Seeking the establishment of clear and rational criteria for national holidays.
	Mr. Clarence Ellis	No	No	No		
Guyana Islamic Trust		Yes	Yes	*Eid-al-Fitr		*In substitution for Youman Nabi.
	Mr. Gordon Bristol	No	Yes	No		
A.C.D.A		No	No	Holocaust Day October 12		
	Ms. Eileen Cox	No	No	-----		Do not need holidays that would defeat objective of national motto.
G.I.H.A		*Yes	No	No	December 26	*Must be designated "Indian Arrival Day".
G.O.I.P		No	No	-----	May 26/Dec. 26	Considers a "New Arrival Day".
G.I.F.T		Yes	Yes	-----		
I.A.C		Yes	No	*Holocaust Day October 12		*Supports October 12
Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha		*Yes	Yes	No		*Must be designated "Indian Arrival Day".
	Mr. Takur Persaud	No	Yes	Guyanese Day	Easter Monday, December 26.	
	Mr. Phillip Prashad	Yes	Yes	-----		