

National Assembly Debates

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

Part I

2ND SITTING

2.00PM

Monday, 30 October 2006

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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

Members of Government (42)

(i) People's Progressive Party/Civic (41)

(ii) The United Force (1)

The Hon Samuel AA Hinds, MP,

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

The Hon Clement J Rohee, MP.

- Minister of Home Affairs

The Hon Shaik KZ Baksh, MP.

- Minister of Education

The Hon Dr Henry B Jeffrey, MP.

- Minister of Foreign Trade and
International Cooperation

The Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy, MP.

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

The Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett, M.P.,

- (Region No. 9- Upper Takutu/Upper
Essequibo), Minister of Amerindian
Affairs

*The Hon Dr Ashni K Singh, MP.

- Minister of Finance

*The Hon SRudolph Insanally, OR, CCH, MP.

- Minister of Foreign Affairs
(AOL)

The Hon Harry Narine Nawbatt, MP.

- Minister of Housing and Water

The Hon Robert M Persaud, MBA, MP.

- Minister of Agriculture

The Hon Dr Jennifer RA Westford, MP.

- (Region No. 7- Cuyuni-Mazaruni) Minister
of Public Service

The Hon Kellawan Lall, MP.

- Minister of Local Government
and Regional Development

*The Hon Doodnauth Singh, SC, MP.	- <i>Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (AOL)</i>
The Hon Dr Frank CS Anthony, MP.	- <i>Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport</i>
The Hon Brindley HR Benn, MP.	- <i>Minister of Transport and Hydraulics</i>
*The Hon Manzoor Nadir, MP.	- <i>Minister of Labour</i>
The Hon Priya D Manickchand, MP.	- <i>(Region No. 5—Mahaica/Berbice) Minister of Human Services and Social Security</i>
The Hon Dr Desrey Fox, MP	- <i>Minister in the Ministry of Education</i>
The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran, MD, MP	- <i>Minister in the Ministry of Health</i>
The Hon Jennifer I Webster, MP	- <i>Minister in the Ministry of Finance (AOL)</i>
The Hon Manniram Prashad, MP	- <i>Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce</i>
Mr Donald R Ramotar, MP	
Ms Gail Teixeira, MP	
Mr Harripersaud Nokta, MP	
Mrs Indranie Chandarpal, MP	- <i>Chief Whip</i>
Ms Bibi S Shadick, MP	- <i>(Region No. 3—Essequibo Islands, West Demerara)</i>
Mr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, MP	
Mr Albert Atkinson, JP, MP	- <i>(Region No. 8 – Potaro/ Siparuni) (AOL)</i>
Mr Komal Chand, CCH, JP, MP	- <i>(Region No. 3—Essequibo Island, West Demerara)</i>
Mr Bernard C DeSantos, SC, MP	- <i>(Region No. 4—Demerara/Mahaica)</i>
Mrs Shirley V Edwards, JP, MP	- <i>(Region No. 4—Demerara/Mahaica)</i>
Mr Mohamed F Khan, MP	- <i>(Region No. 2—Pomeroon/Supenaam)</i>
Mr Odinga N Lumumba, MP	
Mr Moses V Nagamootoo, MP	
Mr Mohabir A Nandlall, MP	
Mr Neendkumar, MP	
*** Mr Steve P. Ninvalle, M.P.	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary</i>
Mr Parmanand P Persaud, JP, MP	- <i>(Region No. 2—Pomeroon/Supenaam)</i>
Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury, CCH, JP, MP	- <i>Parliamentary Secretary</i>
*** Mrs Pauline R. Sukhai, M.P.	-
Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj, MP	
Mr Norman A Whittaker, MP	- <i>(Region No. 1 – Barima/Waini)</i>

*Non-Elected Minister

***Non Elected Member

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Members of the Opposition (28)

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

Mr Robert Corbin, MP - *Leader of the Opposition*
Mr Winston S Murray, CCH, MP
Mrs Clarissa S Riehl, MP - *Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly*

Mr E Lance Carberry, MP
Mrs Deborah J Backer, MP
Mr Anthony Vieria, MP
Mr Basil Williams, MP
Dr George A Norton, MP
Mrs Volda A Lawrence, MP
Mr Keith Scott, MP
Ms Amna Ally, M.P.
Mr James K McAllister, MP
Mr Dave D Danny, MP - *(Region No. 4 – Demerara/ Mahaica)*

Mr Aubrey C Norton, MP
Mr Ernest B Elliot, MP - *(Region No. 4 – Demerara/ Mahaica)*

Mrs Judith David-Blair, MP - *(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/ Mazaruni) (Absent)*

Mr Mervyn Williams, MP - *(Region No. 3 – Essequibo Island/West Demerara)*

Ms Africo Selman, MP
Dr John Austin, MP - *(Region No. 6 – East Berbice/ Corentyne)*

Ms Jennifer Wade, M. P., - *(Region No. 5 - Mahaica/ Berbice)*

Ms Vanessa Kisson, MP - *(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/ Upper Berbice)*

Mr Desmond Fernandes, MP - *(Region No. 1 – Barima/Waini)*

(ii) Alliance For Change (5)

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

Mr David Patterson, MP

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

Mr Everall N Franklyn, MP

OFFICERS

Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs - *Clerk of the National Assembly*

Mrs Lilawtie Coonjah - *Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly*

PRAYERS

The Clerk reads the Prayer

OATHS

The Speaker: Honourable Members, I have been informed that on 12 October 2006, the President appointed Mrs Pauline R Sukhai and Mr Steve Paul Ninvalle to be Parliamentary Secretaries.

Mrs Sukhai and Mr Ninvalle were appointed non-elected Members of the National Assembly, but by virtue of holding the Office of Parliamentary Secretary, they have become Members of the Assembly in accordance with Article 105 of the Constitution.

Before Mrs Sukhai and Mr Ninvalle could take part in the proceedings of the Assembly, they would have to make and subscribe the oath of office, as required by Article 167 of the Constitution. Also Ms Gail Teixeira who was absent at the First sitting of the Ninth Parliament will subscribe to the oath of office.

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

Ms Gail Teixeira

Mr Steve Ninvalle

Mrs Pauline Sukhai.

The Speaker: Also Honourable Members, before the oath is administered to the Members of the People's National Congress Reform-One Guyana by the Clerk of the National Assembly, he will call the names of Members to take the oath in the order as declared by the Elections Commission of the twenty-two persons, who have become Members of

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the National Assembly following the elections on 28 August 2006.
[Pause]

Mr Murray, is Mr Corbin on his way? Will he be coming today?

Mr Winston S Murray: He should be, Sir.

Declared Elected on 28 October 2006

Mr Winston Shripal Murray

Mrs Clarissa Sabita Riehl

Mr Everet Lancelot Carberry

Mrs Deborah Jan Backer

Mr Basil Williams

Mr George Aubrey Norton

Mrs Volda A Lawrence

Mr Keith Scott

Miss Anna Ally

Mr James Kennedy McAllister

Mr Dave Danny

Mr Aubrey Compton Norton

Mr Ernest Barnabas Elliot

Mrs Judith David-Blair

Mr Mervyn Williams

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Ms Africo Selman

Mr John Austin

Ms Jennifer Wade

Ms Vanessa Kisson

Mr Desmond Fernandes

Mr Robert Herman Orlando Corbin

Mr Anthony Joseph Viera

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

(i) Congratulation and best wishes to Members

The Speaker: Thank you very much Honourable Members. I would like on behalf of us all to congratulate those Members who have taken the oath today, to welcome the three Members of the People's Progressive Party/Civic to the Assembly and extend best wishes to them. I would also like on behalf of all of us to welcome the Members of the People's National Congress Reform-One Guyana to the Assembly and extend best wishes to them.

(ii) Appointment of Parliamentary Secretaries

(a) Honourable Members, I have been informed that the President has appointed on 28 September 2006, Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury as a Parliamentary Secretary to assist the Minister of Housing and Water in the discharge of his functions.

(b) On the 12 October 2006, Mrs Pauline R Sukhai and

Mr Steve Paul Ninvalle as Parliamentary Secretaries to assist the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce and the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport respectively in the discharge of their functions.

(iii) Errors in Bill No. 22/2006

I was informed that Bill No 22/2006 which was circulated to you on 23 October 2006 contained a number of errors. The errors have been corrected in the Gazetted copy of the Bill. The Gazetted copy will therefore be used for consideration by the Assembly.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS:

(1) By the *Minister of Finance:*

(i) (a) Debt Relief Agreement No 1058H under the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Relief Initiative between the Government of Guyana and the OPEC Fund for International Development signed on 2 December 2005 for a total debt relief of approximately US\$ 5,400,000 in end 1998 Present Value (PV) terms.

(b) Enhanced HIPC Debt Initiative Relief Agreement between the Government of Guyana and the OPEC Fund for International Development dated 6 October 2005 for a total debt relief of approximately US\$2,510,000 in end -1998 Present Value (PV) terms.

(ii) Treasury Memorandum Pursuant to Resolution No. 100/2006 dated 16 March 2006 of the National Assembly on the Public Debt of Guyana for 2000/2001.

(2) By the *Minister of Health on behalf of the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs:*

Annual Report of the Supreme Court Registry for the

year 2005.

- (3) By the *Minister of Education*:

Annual Report of the Ministry of Education for the year
2005

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

Annual Report of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional
Development for the year 2005

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Presentation and First Reading

1. **ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP WEST INDIES 2007 BILL
2006 - Bill No. 22/2006**

By the *Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport*

PUBLIC BUSINESS

- (i) **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

MOTIONS

ITEM -1 APPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT'S POLICY IN

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly expresses its sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President Mr Bharrat Jagdeo, for his Address to the National Assembly which was made on the occasion of the Ceremonial Opening of the First Session of the Ninth Parliament of Guyana on Thursday, 28 October 2006 and approves of the policy adumbrated therein.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, the Motion in the name of the Honourable Prime Minister will be moved by the Minister of Home Affairs, resolving that the National Assembly express sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President for his address to the National Assembly and as further set out in the Order Paper.

Before you speak, Honourable Minister, I would just like to make an observation and I must apologise for it in advance. Quite often when Members of one side of the House disturb Members on the other side, I am not alert to it and I do not necessarily hear. Now that we are starting a new Parliament, we have a lot of new Members of Parliament and there is a certain tradition that I would like to remind Members of, and when that tradition is broken by one side, the other side is not bound by it.

The Honourable Minister of Home Affairs

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker, I rose on two occasions. The first was to extend the warmest congratulations to the Honourable Members of the Opposition, People's National Congress Reform-One Guyana, I think they are twenty-two MPs.

I also want to congratulate the new Parliamentary Secretaries and

colleague MP Gail Teixeira.

Now, that the House is fully constituted, I believe that the atmosphere is therefore conducive to healthy debates on the deepening of cordial relations between the Members of this Honourable House. I would not continue much with my congratulatory remarks at this point in time since I understand that there is to be another electoral event in this House during the break and without trying to be too previous, I will await the outcome of those elections knowing that it would be fully democratic unless someone accuses someone of stepping down or stepping up the situation.

Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Honourable Prime Minister, who is now fulfilling the responsibilities of the President, I wish to move the Motion standing in his name, which calls for this House to approve Government's policies as reflected in the Address by His Excellency the President at the opening of the Ninth Parliament.

Mr Speaker, the President in the his Address gave some very broad outlines treating with, for example, the general perspective of the PPP/C Administration, the general orientation of this Administration and the direction which this Administration is taking Guyana.

Mr Speaker, the President in his Address reminded us, as I think we all are aware, that now that we have the elections behind us, it is time we move on with the task of nation building and this requires all and sundry to be part of this exciting task or journey.

The President in his remarks submitted that in his interpretation of the results, the electorate gave a renewed mandate to the Government or the present Government's programmes and policies and in that speech the advances which Guyana has made in the field of education, health, potable water, housing, public infrastructure, agriculture, were all highlighted and we were given a treat as regards the general improvement of our people's standard of living.

As regards the political orientation of the President's Presentation,

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the Honourable House was informed that a fundamental prerequisite in the task of national building is the climate of institutional and political trust. I believe that throughout his Presentation, this question of trust was very prominent.

He made reference to the fight against corruption in order to build this trust, the government's commitment to transparency and accountability at all levels of the administration and he also spoke about the need and the emphasis which the administration will place on a more inclusive policy and securing a more inclusive society providing equal treatment before the law by all agencies whether they are in the public or private sector.

With respect to vision the President alluded to his vision for the next five years and in this respect he made mention of the political, economic and social transformation or the path on which the government is committed in terms of taking the country forward. He placed a lot of emphasis on the government's intention to carry through with constitutional and legislative reforms.

In this regard, the new political framework as laid out in the President's Presentation emphasized four major components. These are:

- (i) Meaningful engagements with all political parties;
- (ii) Reform of the legislative and judicial branches;
- (iii) Continuous engagement of progressive civil society; and
- (iv) Fashioning of an inclusive democracy.

In respect of the economic sphere, the President made reference to the Government's desire to restructure and reorient the economy with a view to achieving greater productive output. In this respect one can identify certain key elements which will stand out in respect of the economic direction of the country. These include:

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- Strengthening of the traditional sectors;
- Supporting new on-going sectors such as the information technology sector
- Developing aquaculture and eco-tourism.

The President also made reference to improving the business environment as well, not to mention the reference that was made to placing emphasis on infrastructural development.

As regards the social sector four areas were identified. These include:

- Expanding access and quality of basic social services
- Uplifting of the physically challenged and socially disadvantaged
- Creating and deepening Unity in Diversity in relation to our culture and
- Developing and creating a renaissance in our educational system.

The President made it very clear, Mr Speaker, that the challenges will be many and the opportunities numerous, but for us to take advantage of the opportunities, and to address these challenges we need to build trust at the political level and create political space for all political contenders.

The point was also made that we need to be compassionate to each other and rise to defend justice on all occasions.

Mr Speaker, mention was also made in the President's Address as regards the major policy thrust of the administration. He said that over the next five years, the administration's policy agenda will be rooted in the primacy of addressing the social and economic needs of our people. On this, the President gave what could be considered as certain basic pillars which will underpin the administration's thrust is moving the country forward.

Reference was made to the whole question of governance which I believe is one of the major pillars on which the administration will develop its policies and programmes and not only develop its policies and programmes, but also ensure that those policies and programmes are characterised by inclusivity as well.

Mr Speaker, in his address, the President made reference to security and crime. I would like at this point to put some emphasis on this question in my opening comments. The President spoke about strengthening of security and public safety and I believe this is a major area of concern for many Guyanese. I would like to emphasize that the high rate of violent crimes can have many adverse repercussions:

- It can have a negative impact on the investment climate; erosion of the development of human Capital as well as social capital.
- It can divert public resources excessively away from productive use.
- It can also have a negative impact on positive developments in the business environment.

One of the points that caught my attention is this section of the President's Presentation was the cost to our economy, that is to say, the cost of security and crime to our economy which he described as tremendous and affecting our country's image abroad.

Mr Speaker, there is no doubt that crime and violence is not a new phenomenon in Guyana or for that matter any other country, but we have to admit that within recent times, we have seen an increase in serious crimes including homicides particularly in Regions 4 and 6. There are many factors that have contributed to these dramatic increases in crime, but I believe that we could, in assessing the reason for this, say that it has been created as a result of a combination of factors such as:

- Political disaffection;

- Persistent poverty;
- Unemployment;
- Emergence of illegal drugs;
- Drug trafficking; and
- The presence of deportees in our country.

But I have to emphasize that in Guyana crime and violence has to be recognised as it is recognised in many other countries as a social and economic issue. If we are to estimate the impact of crime - that is serious crimes - on the economy ... if we take a wide approach to this matter, for example, homicides in Latin America and the Caribbean, then the estimated cost would be just under US\$28 billion per year. The region that is to say Latin America and the Caribbean loses fourteen percent of its GDP to violence and in this respect obviously everyone is affected. That is to say rich and poor and that is why everyone has a role to play in treating this matter. If we are to estimate the cost of the burden of crime and violence, we could probably place this in four categories, that is:

- Direct and indirect cost
- Non-monetary cost
- Economic multiplied effects and
- Social multiplied effects as well.

Mr Speaker, I do not want to burden this House at this point in time with too many statistics and data, but I believe that if we are to make some back-of-the-envelope assessments of the current situation, that is to say the impact of crime and violence on our economy, we would notice for example that for Guyana in 2005, this was about G\$5 billion or 7.7 percent of our GDP. Now clearly a country like ours cannot

afford to have such a burden on our economy and therefore every effort should be made to ensure that such a large chunk of our GDP is reduced significantly and to ensure that the resources which are used in this respect are used in a more productive way.

Mr Speaker, I therefore wish to commend the President's Speech to this House for discussion and I believe that in the course of the debate that we will hear some very interesting presentations from, I think it is four sides of the House, or is it three? Whatever - two sides ... *[Interruption: 'All sides!']* Oh, well without dismembering the configuration and being too precise on that, I would bow to the wisdom and agree that we will therefore look forward to a lively and interesting debate from all sides of the House. Thank you Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member

The Honourable Member Mr Robert Corbin

Mr Robert HO Corbin: Mr Speaker, first of all, allow me to congratulate you on your re-election as Speaker for this Ninth Parliament. I express the hope that you will continue to discharge your duties in accordance with the oath that you have taken.

May I also congratulate all Members elected to this National Assembly and welcome particularly those who are here for the first time?

There are a few missing faces, Mr Speaker, particularly those who have been here for a long time. I note that among them, the President in his Address singled out Mr Reepu Daman Persaud for honourable mention. I too would like to commend him for his years of service to this National Assembly and hope that in his hopefully blissful retirement, he shares his knowledge with those to whom he has passed the baton.

May I also pay tribute to all Members on both sides of this House who were in the Eighth Parliament and are not here today? However, unlike Mr Persaud, I will assure that the absence of some of them from this side of the House is by no means an indication of their retirement from the

political stage, but may best be described as a political sabbatical from this Assembly.

May I also congratulate the re-elected Deputy Speaker, Mrs Ciarissa Riehl and the Chief Whips from both sides of this House Mrs Chandarpal and Mr Carberry?

Mr Speaker, as is customary, at the beginning of every Parliament the Head of State outlines the broad policy guidelines that the Government proposes to pursue. The Address of President Jagdeo to this Parliament on 28 September 2006 was not different. Regrettably, however, the high sounding and well-intentioned-sounding Speech was marred by the controversial legal and constitutional circumstances under which the Parliament met, and clouded by the unimpressive previous performance of the previous administration in the areas highlighted in his Address to this Honourable Assembly. However, I have taken His Excellency at his word on his Address. On Page 27 the first paragraph says:

It is my hope that this Ninth Parliament will be defined and given greater moral democracy by its representative character, your openness and candour, the vigour of your debates, the degree to which you seek common ground and your reception towards divergent opinions.

Well I am not sure they understand fully the reference to moral legitimacy. I do not know if there is indication that there is some concern that subsequent to now that may be the only legitimacy that the Parliament may ultimately be afforded.

The willingness of the President's Administration to accept constructive criticisms will be placed on immediate test. On test too will be the President's other pronouncements. On the said page it says that's his *administration will be receptive towards ideas irrespective from which side of the House they emanate* and I quote again from Page 27, the third paragraph:

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It is not the intention of my Government to retard the deliberative nature of the National Assembly or to dominate the proceedings in this House.

I must say, Mr Speaker, when I heard the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs a few moments ago, I began to take the President very seriously in his unusually mild tone of presentation today.

We believe that there can emerge ideas and suggestions that would further the well being of our people.

In this first debate, speakers from the PNCR-IG's list have agreed to make suggestions. However, time will tell how receptive the administration is to them.

Mr Speaker, before I deal further with the President's Address, it is necessary to place on record the nature of our participation in this House albeit we made our position public in a Press Statement on 28 September 2006 last. For brevity, I would just like to read into the record a brief extract from that statement with your permission, Sir:

The PNCR-IG is shocked though not surprised at the decision of the Court in answer to the questions placed before it with respect to the constitutionality of the Proclamation by the President to summon the Parliament, and the appointment of Ministers by the President prior to the extraction of their names from the PPP/C list of candidates. The effect of this judgement can prove disastrous not only to the functioning of the Ninth Parliament, but also for the future conduct and behaviour of the President and the Executive. It is obvious that this decision has serious implications for the rule of law in Guyana, where the role of the judiciary is expected to be one of arbitor of the law, which regulates among other things the functioning of other agencies of the State and arms of government.

The PNCR-IG has filed its own action challenging the constitutionality of that Proclamation and the appointment of Ministers before the names of persons were extracted. That action is not prejudiced by the decision of the court and the PNCR-IG has instructed its lawyers to pursue action in this matter with vigour and urgency.

We will be eagerly monitoring the behaviour of the court to observe whether the same expedition which attended the hearing of the last action before the 28 September 2006 will be applied to the action that the PNCR-IG has brought before the Court. The PNCR-IG is nevertheless conscious that the effect of the present judgement is to give validity to any act done by the Ninth Parliament unless and until the judgement is struck down by a higher court. In those circumstances, the PNCR-IG has the responsibility to those persons who placed confidence in it at the last elections, to represent them while the Parliament purports to function under the umbrella of the courts imposed legality.

I think the statement speaks for itself, so the record of our participation can be clear.

Mr Speaker, the President's Speech while repetitious on several issues and unclear in some sections, *prima facie*, makes excellent reading and sounds well-intentioned. Indeed the words and phrases in many sections sound appealing both to the ear and the heart. I am not being facetious here. Mr Speaker, some parts sound so good that I can only endorse the sentiments expressed and other sections even sounded as if they were quotations from the PNCR-IG Manifestos both of 2001 and 2006.

Let me give some examples lest Members feel that I am being very facetious here. Page 3, the second paragraph says:

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

Page 4 says:

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

I believe Mr Tony Vieira of Channel 28 must have been smiling when he heard this Speech. [Interruption: 'Who?'] Mr Tony Vieira from Channel 28 must have been smiling when he heard this section of the Speech, because he must have come to the immediate conclusion that his Lottery contract with the Lottery Company would have been returned and restored to his communications network.

I will continue, on Page 4:

THE VISION

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

The core elements of the tasks towards political transformation will include constitutional and legislative reforms.

On page 5:

... The underlying pillars of the new political framework will include meaningful engagement.

... In the economic sphere ... strengthening of the traditional sectors.

... Within the social sector ... expanding access and quality of basic social services ...

On Page 6:

... renaissance in the educational system ...

A lot of people are writing about renaissance these days, Mr Speaker.

... fashioning of an inclusive democracy ... where all stakeholder feel involved, valued and respected

... every home has access to potable water, electricity and telephones.

My God, all the residents of Sophia, Sisters, La Grange and on the West Bank of Demerara - Blue Beery Hill, Linden and so on ... Many parts of the country where potable water is like the dream of El Dorado, must have had reason to jump to the roof top after hearing these wonderful pronouncements by His Excellency the President.

On page 7, under *CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES* - It is very nice again, who can disagree.

... We must recapture that spirit of enterprise and innovation

... protection of the environment ... rise to the defence of justice.

Oh my! Oh my! Mr Speaker, again Mr Mark Benschop must have been jumping in his cell and those who have fought for his release while he languished in prison for the last two years must have had renewed hope when they heard this *rising to the defence of justice* ... surely words that one cannot disagree with ... [Interruption: 'He fly up to the roof top. '] It was probably after he read the Speech - *defence of justice* - They were taking good advice from no other than the Head of State.

On Page 9 - *POLICY AGENDA* - This section benefit a little from repetition from the earlier sections on some matters referred to in the vision and so on, but of significance is the goal to promote investor confidence and reduction in inflation.

Page 10 speaks of enhancing the environment in which the private sector operates.

Page 11 is significant. It speaks of the introduction of the Value-Added Tax to spread the revenue base. However, what it does not say is the additional burden which this will place on small wage earners and the rise in the cost of living for the average worker, which will include civil servants, policemen, soldiers, labourers and wage earners in general. This matter will be expanded upon by another speaker from this side of the House a little later in this debate.

However, what I have found interesting is the first paragraph of Page 11. This is what that paragraph says which is immediately after the Value-Added Tax.

... and begin the revision of corporate and personal income taxes over the medium term with a view of making Guyana a more attractive destination for investors.

Well, Mr Mike Correia has already paid the price for taking this undertaking seriously, when he dared to suggest at the opening at GUYEXPO that corporate and personal income tax should be reviewed. Mr Speaker, I shuddered when I heard the President respond on what would otherwise have been an auspicious occasion. The venom in that

response caused me to wonder if it was the same President that addressed this Parliament and uttered these words, which I repeat, *begin the revision of corporate and personal income taxes over the medium term with a view to making Guyana a more attractive destination for investors.*

Mr Speaker, on Page 14, we are told of the National Development Strategy. I do not want to use this opportunity to recap the fate of a motion on that subject in this Parliament, except to say that today we have tabled a similar motion to the one which has lapsed, I believe, with the Eighth Parliament and will see the response to that motion in due course.

Again on Page 14 and I will attract your attention to it, quite frankly I thought that I was reading from the Guyana 21 Plan that was so wrongly condemned in the past. I will read it for your benefit. The section reads:

... our goal of developing an integrated or core infrastructure project that provides a deep port harbour, a possible rail link especially in the mining rich areas of Berbice and Linden, and a highway to Brazil will be advanced in the next five years.

Mr Speaker, I was so pleased for a moment that I began to believe what Page 27 said that no matter from which side of the House suggestions emanate, the Government will be receptive towards them. At last, I thought the President had accepted the validity of the Guyana 21 Plan or at least a part of it. My excitement, however, was short-lived when I read the next sentence of the paragraph which says:

The cost of such a project is prohibitive so careful cost benefit analyses will have to be done.

Well, Mr Speaker, I wonder how this five-year projection will be achieved if we are not yet clear on the cost benefit. Stranger still is the statement which follows:

This project, however, holds bright prospects for transforming Guyana.

On what basis such a statement could have been made if we are still to do the cost benefit analysis? Are we guessing about these projects that we are boldly announcing that we are proceeding with and will be completed in the next five years according to the President?

One is therefore left to wonder about the other serious pronouncements in this Speech. For example Page 18, we will take better care of our elderly. Struggling single mothers will receive some form of support from the State; access to micro credit for income generating.

Page 19 continues in the same vein, Mr Speaker.

We will continue to invest large sums of money in the water sector so as to ensure a safe and adequate delivery of potable water supply to a greater number of our citizenry.

Mr Speaker, it would have helped this National Assembly and it would help us still in this debate if we knew exactly where and when this would take place, because such broad statements of policy without any timeframe are meaningless to provide any real hope for the future and so we look forward to the other presentations to hear about these large sums of money to be invested in the water sector, adequate delivery of potable water supply. Is it that the housing area at Sophia where the children have to use unsanitary water from deep holes in the ground or take a trek from the blocker as they called it, which is their term from the Lamaha Canal? Will it be La Grange where the residents were protesting only a few days ago? How long will they have to depend on the unreliable and inadequate water tanks which they were complaining about? I see Mr Baksh has been relieved of that headache. He is smiling today, because he does not have to answer, but the President and the former Minister could not have been unaware of this serious situation prior to the President's Speech, because I was looking through the Archives of the Stabroek News only last night and I came across a news item of

Sunday, 19 June 2005, and this is what the headline of that newspaper stated:

WATER WOES DOMINATE DURING JAGDEO'S WEST DEMERARA WALK ABOUT - NEW WELL PROMISED - GWI TO LOOK AT SUPPLYING TANKS The story is by George Gomes and it goes on to give a long explanation which I would not bore this House with, explaining all that was promised in West Demerara on Sunday, 19 June 2005. According to George Gomes article, apart from the fact the Regional Administration, the region will be responsible for extending the same road - this is a section of the road [Pause] Jagdeo told residents (and I hear they are speaking about His Excellency, but I am just quoting what the paper said) that over the past three years or so the water company had been trying with remedial works at the well, but a new well will have to be dug - the Bell Vue well services from Sisters to La Grange Villages. Well, the President's words are still hanging out there and I suspect that when they heard his Speech here on 28 September, this woman who said and I quote her, *see wah you can do about the water; one woman sitting on her bridge cried as Jagdeo passed through a street in Sisters Village. One man told Jagdeo that he had dug a hole.* Well, I wonder, Mr Speaker, what were those people thinking when they heard this highflying Speech. No wonder a few days later, we have seen what the residents of La Grange have been thinking, because they figure that somebody else is not carrying out the promises of the President, because after all the President has made serious commitments to this National Assembly.

The question which I am wondering is whether the relevant authorities are also awaiting the cost benefit analysis for these other promises to be materialised too. I can make several examples, but my colleagues will deal more fully with these matters later. My only conclusion is that the President took his own advice on Page 24 when he spoke of buzzwords and thought that if he used some in his Address that those buzzwords will stimulate the whole of Guyana into believing that miracles will happen.

Mr Speaker, had I just awakened from a Rip Van Winkle like

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fourteen years slumber, I would have been suitably impressed and accorded it with the necessary plaudits. Unfortunately, I have been awoken all this time and have been a participant observer of the political developments over this period. I have not been anywhere. Consequently, it would have been necessary for me to state that it would take more than words to impress either me or the People's National Congress Reform - One Guyana at this time. Emotional statements are not enough to cause positive developments to take place in Guyana. It is only the resolute pursuit through concrete actions of principles enunciated that it will be life and meaning given to the spoken word in his Address to His Excellency the President.

There is, however, just one discordant note that I have to comment on in the President's Address. I agree with all of them other than this discordant note. My only worry is when and what time will these commitments be fulfilled, but on the discordant note, I want to say that even in the midst of trying to create this positive mindset for the future, the President had to poise in the atmosphere a little on Pages 2 and 3 and I cannot allow that remark to go unnoticed, where he posited that and I quote here:

Guyana has emerged from a pariah State to one that is firmly on the road to realising its true potential.

Well, Mr Speaker, I took the trouble to check on what that word meant. According to the English Dictionary *pariah* means *social outcast*. Well, I would have been happy for him to amplify that, but I believe that this Honourable House needs to be reminded that it was the People's National Congress in office that introduced and maintained free education from nursery to university. It did not start after 1992 to increase social benefits to the people that introduced the National Insurance Scheme to provide social benefits and guarantee welfare and pension benefits to workers of this country and today it can even be the basis for loans to build the Berbice River Bridge; that pioneered CARIFESTA and incidentally built the lovely site that we are boasting about called GUYEXPO that is now being remodelled and renamed and can be read in all the newspapers

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that GUYEXPO began in 1996. All this re-writing of history, when for twenty-odd years that Sophia Exhibition Site was build and had annual national exhibition and fairs, maybe being called by different names; promoting agriculture, promoting farmers' produce, promoting trade, promoting all kinds of activities and the kinds of activities that we see going on there now. I am not against the Government taking credit to calling it GUYEXPO. I have been there and I walked around on every occasion. I am sorry I could not go to the opening session, I was at a Muslim function, but I went the following night and when something is done properly, I go to see what we are doing to promote the welfare of our producers, our farmers, our entrepreneurs. So nothing is wrong with having a successful Expo, but when you go to the extent of re-writing to call us a pariah State and benefiting so successfully from the beautiful compound build by Dr Ptolemy Alexander Reid, who had the vision to say that we must have a permanent national site where every year Guyanese farmers and entrepreneurs must be able to expand their produce. I commend you for carrying on. I only chide you for changing the name and not acknowledging what went on in the past. So when we speak of pariah State and social outcast, as I said this is the part that was a little discordant. You must remember as well that it was under Mr Hugh Desmond Hoyte and the People's National Congress/Reform then PNC that the Economic Recovery Programme was implemented and despite the stresses and strains of the international environment, we were able to put Guyana on the path to economic development registering in 1992 and average of seven percent growth annually and that continued with the buoyancy which you received in 1992 right on to 1996. If you examine the World Bank Reports they will tell you that. So when you speak of a pariah State - a State that is being an outcast - I think again that we are trying to re-write history and I thought that I should this bit of clarification, because it is absolutely necessary as my colleague reminds me even though I do this rather reluctantly on an otherwise fine and impressive Speech if one was to read the Speech of His Excellency the President. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Your time is up Honourable Member.

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Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: Mr Speaker, I rise to ask that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: You may proceed Honourable Member

Mr Robert HO Corbin: However, that aside I am still inclined to take the President at his word and would like to restrict the remainder of my presentation to the lofty projections commencing from Page 24 under the caption GOVERNANCE. Mr Speaker, I support the President at Page 24, when he states:

My Government will pursue approaches that are predicted on respect for the rule of law, the fair allocation of resources, protection of political, civil and human rights accountability and transparency.

I want to say that I agree fully with this policy statement. My only question which I hope that we will have some answers to during this debate is how this will be translated into real action over the next few months and years. I believe this is what the people of Guyana will like to know for example we must be told during this debate, how soon the President proposes to correct the breach of the Constitution by the unilateral appointment of the Integrity Commission.

When will the constitutional motion that I have filed in this matter be heard in the court? That will give us some substance to believe that these statements bear some relation to reality.

When would the direction of the Auditor General to pay into the Consolidated Fund the money transferred to the Government by the Guyana Lottery Company, but which is now contrary to the laws of Guyana personally disbursed from an account under the control of the Office of the President? When will this happen. This will give meaning to this part of the statement.

We want to hear during this debate when will the constitutional requirements for the appointment of a Chancellor of a Judiciary be made and retreat from machinations to control the judiciary. These things will give meaning to this Speech.

Again, I am looking at an article in the Stabroek News of Tuesday, 14 June 2005. It has a lovely photograph of His Honour the Chancellor. I have printed it from my machine from the internet, but the heading of that article states:

PRESIDENT BHARRAT JAGDEO YESTERDAY SAID THAT ONCE HE HAS BEEN ADVISED ON THE CANDIDATE OR CANDIDATES FOR THE POST OF CHANCELLOR, THE CONSTITUTIONALLY DUE CONSULTATION WILL RESUME WITH THE OPPOSITON LEADER ROBERT CORBIN WITH A VIEW TO MAKING THE APPOINTMENT. Well perhaps since 14 June 2005, the President has not been properly advised as yet, but since I am taking the President at his word in his Address in which he states quite clearly that he will pursue approaches that are predicated on respect for the rule of law, then I expect that within very short period of time these matters will be corrected.

I further look at Monday, 3 January 2005, the same headline in the Stabroek News *FILL TRIBUNAL VACANCY UNION URGES JAGDEO*. What does it say? It starts off that Guyana Public Service Union is again calling on President Bharrat Jagdeo to take the necessary steps to fill the vacancy left on the Public Service Appellate Tribunal when government's nominee George Fung-on demitted office on 17 December 2003. Well I do not know what is the present position, but maybe in this dispensation be clearly advised as to how all these matters will be given meaning in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr Speaker, on the question of protection of Political, Civil Human Rights, accountability and transparency, will be informed in this Honourable Chamber over the next few hours and days when the government's monopoly on State radio will be removed and licences for

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the establishment on private radio stations issued?

Will we be informed when equitable access to the State control media, print and electronic will become a reality? Again, I see another new Honourable Member of this House smiling; he does not have to answer now. He has a much bigger portfolio. Apparently I am told here that he cannot answer for these matters.

When will we be told under this trust for political ... again it sounds nice, let me quote what it says, it is beautifully set here, Mr Speaker.

Approaches that are predicated on the rule of law, the fair allocation of resources, protection of political, civil and human rights.

So again I ask, will we be told of when the persecution of the political prisoner Mark Benschop ends? Has the PPP/C government forgotten its lofty principles adumbrated in 1992, when immediately its ascension to office pardoned several treason convicted and accused persons? Have we forgotten Arnold Rampersaud, Chicken George, Lt Rajkumar and now Senior Superintendent Balram Persaud who was removed from prison and immediately promoted in the Guyana Police Force? These are matters which cry out for the rule of law; political matters which cry out for the rule of law; political matters which will now be addressed and I cannot disagree with the President after, he will have my full support when he takes action in these matters.

Will we be also informed when the Government will take seriously the representation made by the Leader of the Opposition since 2005 on the question of remuneration for the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission? Because since then we have pointed out that if you want to have a robust and vibrant Chairman of the Human Rights Commission in accordance with the Constitution that requires people of a certain calibre, who hold judicial office, you will have to look at the levels of the remuneration if you are serious of preserving human rights in this country. But also unto today, I have heard nothing but I am very hopeful that all

these things will now be addressed on the question of accountability.

Will the Government undertake to pass the Freedom of Information Act before the Republic Celebrations next year? Because I am told that the Republic Celebration - Mashramani - is being launched this week according to the announcement from the Office of Go-Invest - this afternoon at the GUYEXPO. So at the same time, will we be told whether we will have the Freedom of Information Act before the same Republic Celebrations?

Will we be finally be able to have an accurate account for the flood relief operations that we still have not seen and how the money and other resources donated were spent? Or will we be able to have an account of how much state resources were spent on the so-called Cabinet Out-reaches in July of this year, just prior to the last regional and General Elections? This will make transparency a real reality.

How can I disagree with His Excellency the President, when he promises such great transparency? I am eagerly looking forward to know when the Minister of Finance will finally answer my question, which I asked in the Eighth Parliament. Oh! It is a new Minister of Finance, he is gone, I am so sorry. I hope that the new Minister of Finance will not hide under the umbrella that it was not during his era, because the record should be in the Ministry of Finance.

Mr Speaker, many of these matters that I have addressed really do not have to wait on any deliberations in this National Assembly, for their resolutions and implementation of many cases are within the direct responsibility of the executive. We do not have to wait for Parliament to have a demonstration. There is no need for Bills to be passed on some of these matters. Therefore, we would hope to see expeditious action and that there will not be an excuse that we are waiting on some Bill in Parliament to be passed in order to make some of these things a reality.

Mr Speaker, Guyana can therefore have no faith in the grandiose promises in the President's speech unless and until they see evidence of

the seriousness in implementing matters agreed upon several years ago.

Mr Speaker, I have to agree with the President when he states at Page 24:

My Government will pursue Parliamentary and Constitutional Reforms aimed at giving effect at outstanding decisions; ensured that these outstanding reforms are tabled and settled

Having regard to history of these matters, the big question is again when? Will we be told when? Perhaps, Mr Speaker, you have got some pre-knowledge of these matters and you may spare them the trouble of responding and making some announcements at the next sitting.

The Herdmanston Accord was on 17 January 1998; the St Lucia Statement was on 2 July 1998; The Communiqué signed between President Jagdeo and I was on 6 May 2003; and the follow-up agreement was on 18 June 2003. Some matters are of more recent vintage such as the Davies Report and so on. Today is the 30 October 2006; perhaps it is indeed possible for the preverbal leopard to change its spots I recalled hearing from Mr Lance Carberry a story from the great Chinese Leader Chuin Li when presented at a conference that there was certain people in the world who could walk through fire without being touched. The learned Chinese Leader said, we Chinese believe in many things, but we prefer to wait and see. I adopt the words of Chuin Li this afternoon. I will wait and see when all of these grandiose... noting well that today is 30 October and while I am on it, let me say that I also await to see on the Parliamentary Agenda since all these reforms are going to be implemented that we move towards ensuring the autonomy of any entities such as the Office of the Auditor General and the National Assembly in consonant with the constitutional provisions. In this regard the Financial Management and Accountability Act of 2003, which declared the Parliament Office, the Office of the Auditor General, and the Guyana Elections Commission as Budget Agencies answerable to the Office of the President, must be amended.

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Will we be told when this amendment to the Financial Management and Accountability Act will come to the Parliament? Will someone in responding provide us with that answer? Expediting the appointment of the Rights Commission in accordance with Resolution 17 passed since 8 May 2003. These Commissions include the Human Rights Commission and so forth - the Rights of the Child Commission. These are matters that we are willing to work with and to ensure that they are settled and we are willing to cooperate.

Resolution 18 passed on 15 May 2003, sets out the consensual mechanism to be used by entities nominating Members for the Rights Commission. I am afraid that this particular section has been deliberately breached, but in keeping with the new Commitment, we will look to see what will be done to correct these slight flaws that have occurred in the past. I look expectantly to hear of reports of matters moving in this direction.

The early appointment of the Public Procurement Commission, thus removing the political interference and discriminatory practice that still prevails in the award of contracts. I am told that there are certain moves in this direction which give hope, but of course, Mr Speaker, hope lies in the bosom of fools. We have to see the reality before we believe that these things will become a reality.

The implication of recommendations of the Special Select Committee unanimously approved by this National Assembly which examined the Report of Sir Michael Davies and Bradford Associates for the strengthening of the oversight functions of this National Assembly. Ensuring proper professional research and documentation is provided to Parliamentarians particularly for the work of Sectoral Committees.

The speedy implementation of the Broadcast Legislation to facilitate the appointment of a Broadcasting Authority and to regulate the issue of licences to television and radio stations.

All of these matters we look forward to welcoming in this Parliament on

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the shortest possible time.

Legislation to provide remuneration for the members of the Regional Democratic Council to discharge their legal obligations in accordance with the mandate given by the electorate at the elections.

We look forward to the appointment of Local Government reform being made a reality and we can have these Local Government Councillors being empowered to be able to perform their duties that they have been elected to perform

Mr Speaker, unless we see this kind of action, I would be reminded of some words and verses that I love to read from the Holy Bible at first Corinthians verse 30. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not charity, I have become like a sounding brass and tinkling symbols [*Interruption: 'What page is that?'*] First Corinthians' - you can go and read it. That is how the President's lofty presentation will sound, like tinkling symbols if we do not see the action coming after this presentation in the House and I hope the Honourable Members in this House would not let the President down. So Mr Rhee, Dr Jeffrey, Dr Ramsamy and all the Ministers who charged with this portfolio. The President has given his instructions. I would expect to see how soon these instructions will be carried out.

Finally, I have to agree with the President - when he states at page 3 of his Address:

Continuing to move the nation forward, will require more than a set of sound and well-intentioned policies.

How true!

In fact, it will require a climate of institutional and political trust.

I think Mr Rhee did allude to this particular section. I could not agree with the President more; continuing to move this nation forward will require

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more than a set of sound and well intentional policies. So all these policies we have here, how well astounding they are, are not enough unless ... [Interruption]

The Speaker: Your time is up Honourable Member

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl: Mr Speaker, may I ask that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation?

Question put and agreed to

The Speaker You may proceed Honourable Member.

Mr Robert HO Corbin: The President spoke at length about trust, because I think he himself recognised in his presentation that you can have the greatest of policies, but if you do not have the correct political climate and atmosphere that the policies alone will not be enough

I am assured at Page 14, which states again and I shall be reminding the Honourable members on the other side of this House throughout the period that I am here about these various quotations from the President's Speech...[Interruption: *How long that would be? I am hearing sounds.*] ... as long as the people want me to be here. I quote,:

We will take all necessary measures...

Not sound!

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

I would like therefore, to take seriously the President's request for advice and say to him and the PPP/C Administration that if they are really serious, there is much to be done in this regard.

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Mr Speaker, I want to recommend again with no fictitiousness, the good reading of the 2006 Manifesto of the PNCR-1G to my friends on the other side of the House. At least they will appreciate and understand the thinking of the People's National Congress Reform - One Guyana on these issues to which the President has alluded and on which time would not permit me in this brief debate to elaborate to any great degree.

I want the PPP/C to also note that the issues of discrimination and marginalisation are not buzzwords, but real issues which if not addressed will undermine any objective on the line in the President's speech. I want to seriously say to my friends (I am glad Mr Ramotar is writing, I know he is speaking later) so that he will tell me that he agrees that these matters will be taken seriously and terms like *alienation* and *marginalisation* must be examined seriously within the context of the Guyana's situation and from the point of view of the perception of people who live in various communities and cannot be dismissed at the whims and fancies of political propaganda.

I want to assure the Honourable Members of this House that I am not making any threats, because in the context in which the President puts it, he suggests that when one speaks of these matters, one is making political threats. But I am not doing so at all, I am just pointing out a fact of life. Also that part of the law has caused an effect and we do not need any clairvoyance skills to understand this principle as the history of civilisation has taught us much. We therefore need Mr Ramotar, to apply these lessons of history. I am told that you are one of the forward thinking Members in the political row, so I hope that you will so guide your colleagues in the interpretation, the reality of the objective conditions which exist in the society.

The fact is that there is a perception real or imagine that discrimination in all forms continues in Guyana to generate social friction and personal bitterness in our society. We can argue whether it is real or imagine, but I do not think that one can deny that that perception exist. We must address them frontally. Why should some areas of this country

benefit from huge State resources to provide infrastructure in Housing development when not a single house has been built and there are other housing areas like Sophia, Canesville and others where people have been living for years and do not see any significant attempt to improve their welfare until the gong of elections is being rung. Well hopefully there will be serious efforts to remove those perceptions. I was in Sophia just two Sundays ago and I am sorry that - I will make the tape available to Members of the Government if they wish to hear what the citizens think. [*Interruption: 'Is Vieira set you up?'*] No, this is the PNCR-1G media Department. We should play it on Vieira; I think I will ask him. I will do that so that you will see it there. The point is if you understand the perceptions of people in this country, I think, you will understand that what is necessary is not just political propaganda, because that cannot remove those perceptions. What is necessary is concrete action at the level of the communities all over this country. If you go to Essequibo, you will find the same thing where people feel that they have been discriminated or left back, they are considered secondary in any developmental programme.

If we are interested in building trust, building inclusivity and good then those perceptions will have to be removed by real actions. I want to say that political trust cannot be purchased at the shop of political chicanery, it rests on performance. Much will have to be done in this regard and I strongly recommend the views of the PNCR-1G on how President Jagdeo and the PPP/C administration can foster inclusive and good governance. I refer to Pages 6 and 7 of our Manifesto where speak of shared governance or a governance of national unity as being essential to removing some of the problems which exist in the country. The laws of the land must be upheld making Parliament meaningful, making government accountable and making government transparent. We can shun on the idea of shared governance and say that someone is trying to get into government through the backdoor. We can find all kinds of political excuses, but to the extent that we are serious about really grappling with the issues of development in this country; to that extent I want to recommend that we seriously read the views of the PNCR-1G

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on this matter, not only what is stated here, but what was stated years ago, since 2004 in our website, on our original paper on shared governance. These statements were made not today for this debate, but since 2004.

Mr Speaker, I conclude by stating that the PNCR-1G stand ready and committed to a platform of shared governance and inclusivity. We have made it clear that we are willing to share executive authority and explore and negotiate imaginative forms of governance and reform of our national, regional and local governments to ensure that the goal of full inclusivity is realised. We do not force this on any administration. This was our commitment which we made and the people of Guyana placed unanimous trust in the People's National Congress Reform - One Guyana, but whatever may be our views on the outcome of the national, regional and general elections, I repeat the words of the President that policy statements and policy programmes cannot bring about development unless we deal with the political imperatives first.

Mr Speaker, I therefore wish that over the next five years in the Parliament, with the lofty Speech by His Excellency the President, we will see full meaning given to it in the many that I outlined before this National Assembly of the Ninth Parliament today. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, I think this is a good time to take the suspension, but before doing so, can I ask Members of the Opposition to remain in your seats as there is an election to be conducted immediately. I will return immediately after, so do not move. *[Applause]*

15:53 H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

16:40 H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Speaker: To all Government Members of the National Assembly, I would like to report that during the suspension, at a meeting with the non-governmental members, the Honourable Member Mr Robert Corbin has been elected unanimously as the Leader of Opposition. *[Applause]*

Congratulations to the Leader of the Opposition

Honourable Member, Mr Ramotar.

Mr Donald R Ramotar: Mr Speaker ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Yes, one minute, Honourable Member.

Hon Clement J Rohee: You look down so often in your book, Mr Speaker that you do not see when I rise to ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Not deliberately.

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker, it has become so often that I rise mainly to congratulate the Honourable Member on being re-elected as the Leader of the Opposition and I know that we can look forward to interesting contributions from him in the debates and to wish him well in his renewed mandate. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mr Donald Ramotar.

Mr Donald R Ramotar: Mr Speaker, I would also like to join my colleague in congratulating Mr Corbin on being re-elected as the leader of the Opposition. I would also like to echo his own sentiments about many of the colleagues from both sides of the House who are no longer with us for one reason or the other. I wish also to assure him that those from our side, who are not here, have not also retired.

Mr Speaker, the Address by His Excellency the President to the National Assembly, was giving in broad framework, the direction that the PPP/C Government will be heading for in these five years ahead of

us. Of course he covered several themes in his Speech. He spoke about economic and social development in the international relations, all in very broad strokes. Today, I want to concentrate on one of the central *is underpinned by democratic principles and ethos.*

He later went on to Pages 4 and 5 to also emphasize, when you are speaking about the vision that he has for development, he said:

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

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

These points that he made, even coming to the end of his Speech, on Page 27, he once again touched on the importance of democracy in the development of our society. Mr Speaker, he was speaking directly to us as Members of this National Assembly and said:

You have an important role to play in ensuring scrutiny of my Government. I see such a role as integral to promoting a vibrant democracy and to ensuring transparency and accountability. I expect the opposition in particular to be robust in offering constructive criticisms and alternatives to our legislative and policy agenda.

I have no doubt that they will be robust, but like the Chinese proverb, I am waiting to see how constructive they will be. *[Laughter]*

Mr Speaker, it was only natural that the President would have emphasized these point. This is so, because it is at the very heart of the PPP/C's views of constructing a free and prosperous nation. We are strongly

convinced that it is not possible to have sustained socio economic development without strong political democracy. Indeed, Sir, this was at the very foundation and the very beginning of our own party and the modern political movement of our day. In fact, it is a happy coincidence that this year on 6 November, we will be marking the 60th anniversary of the formation of the Political Affairs Committee, which was the forerunner of the People's Progressive Party. The first bulletin of that organisation was published on 6 November 1946 and that date is being recognised as the date of the founding of the PAC.

Mr Speaker, as I said from the very beginning, three years later that body transformed itself into the People's Progressive Party and wrote on its banners from the very inception, *the fight for democracy to end colonialism* and to build a society where there is social equality in every aspect of life. It was from this body that the first struggles, the first voices were raised for one of the most fundamental aspects of political democracy, and that was for universal adult suffrage - One Person, One Vote. It is therefore clear that democracy is rooted in our party and at all times, we try to ensure that the will of the people of our country is respected and their trust not betrayed. That is why, at the very first congress of the People's Progressive Party in 1951, the issue was raised about the right to recall members who were elected to Parliament on a party's ticket and who crossed the floor or who wants to sit as an independent member. *[Interruption: 'Who is Nadir?']* Nadir did not cross the floor. *[Interruption: 'He was pulled across.']* That is a betrayal of the people who elected such members - a betrayal to the very essence of democracy.

Indeed, in 1953 the party tried to implement that position and it was no less a person than the late Mr Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, who piloted the motion for a recall in this National Assembly, in which they had a First Reading but the suspension of the Constitution made that Bill lapsed. It went through its First Reading. I hope that this Ninth Parliament would find the courage to pass this most important piece of legislation that would strengthen democracy in our country.

Mr Speaker, we on this side of the House, firmly believe that there is a direct link, a dialectical link between political democracy and socio economic progress. There was a period of time in this Parliament when the Hansard was not produced, but I recall several times sitting in the visitors' gallery and listening to some of the debates that took place at that point in time. I have heard from all the PPP Members in Parliament at that time that was one of the themes that ran through their presentations, that there must be political democracy if we are going to experience any kind of development in our society. I remember when those members of the PPP were on the other side of the House, they were pointing out ... and I think Mr Corbin was one time the Minister of Agriculture, to him that rice does not grow in the Chronicle, it grows in the field and therefore, you had to have political democracy which is directly linked to production in our society.

Dr Jagan in particular was very strong on these positions and that is why I say it is a pity that Hansards were not produced in those times and I hope that there will be some type of project to once more go through the notes of that missing period - that gap - so that not only us in the National Assembly, but the nation can benefit from the richness of the debate in those periods of time. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: There is such a project, Honourable Member.

Mr Donald R Ramotar: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

The Speaker: We will be having the CD with those Hansards in due course.

Mr Donald R Ramotar: I want to congratulate you for your administration for that and to promise the full support of this side of the House.

Mr Speaker, even shortly after Dr Jagan became President that theme ran through all of his speeches and all his deliberations during the short period when he was the President of this country. In his first address to the National Assembly, after he became President on 17 December 1992, unfortunately too, it was his last address to this National Assembly, he

went over and over that theme. He quoted from Page 4 of the PPP's Manifesto of 1992:

I want to put on record two relevant sections of the PPP/C's Manifesto, which will guide my administration. The new State will be a republic founded on universally acclaimed principles of freedom, equality and solidarity, where the only paramount institution will be Parliament guided by the new constitutions fashioned by the Guyanese people.

He did not see the end of that, but we worked together in reforming our Constitution and giving this Parliament some dignity that it was robbed of at some period of time. He went on to say,

The PPP/C government will recognise the existence of multi-party system and ensure that the laws directly or indirectly related to political activities are observed and enforced. Opposition parties will not be treated with the arrogant disdain of the past. There will be no harassment of political parties in the search for political support.

[Interruption: 'What?'] I do not know if you were not around when people were getting their head burst ... ask Clement.

The attainment of political power by democratic means will be recognised as a legitimate objective, which is the right of every political party and not the preserve of the ruling party.

Mr Speaker, I want to say that from the very beginning - from 1992 to now - the People's Progressive Party/Civic has remained loyal to this position that Dr Jagan made here in December 1992. [Applause]

Another relevant part that I want to bring to the attention of Members ... [Interruption: 'Which President's Speech are you talking about?'] It is a continuation, my friend. It is true that a fundamental characteristic

of democracy is that the will of the majority prevails over that of the minority, but the minority must be able to rest assured that decisions have been taken only after opposing views have been expressed. That alone must be cause for comfort and that alone must assure electorate that Parliamentary democracy is being practiced for the collective good of our Nation.

Mr Speaker, I make these points to show that the President's Speech was a continuation of what the PPP/C believed in from the very beginning. It was also a reflection of what also is inside the PPP/C's Manifesto, which incidentally came out well before the PNC's Manifesto. Mr Speaker, just to say that democracy in itself, as I firmly believe, raises the quality of life within every society. One man once said that there is nothing greater than freedom and that inspired generations of people to rise and struggle for their rights in many parts of the world. It is also true that even sometimes when the economic situation is not functioning, political democracy adds to the quality of life that people enjoy in any part of the world. I am happy, although sometimes distressed when I looked at some television stations, yes, distressed, sometimes at the abuse of some of the freedoms that exists in this society. I am distressed sometimes of what is put forward, sometimes, some of the misrepresentations of truth that are there but at the same time, Sir, I feel proud that the PPP/C government has given people the right to express their views. *[Applause]* There was a time in this country when people often looked over their shoulders before they expressed a particular point of view. No longer do we have these things happening. There was a period in our history, and I am not saying this to attack anyone, but I am just reminding of a reality that was there. There was a time when trade unions could not have elected their leaders ... *[Interruption: 'You're talking about Harrylall?']* ... No, I am not talking about Harrylall, I am talking about other things that you know about; you are around long enough to know about a lot of things. There was a time also, when even Amerindian Captains elections were rigged in our society. I am saying that people are now able to express their views generally in order to express themselves fully. So in my view and even by itself,

the quality of life. If you read many of the Human Development Reports of the United Nations, you will see that that body is not now only measuring development on the basis of GDP and per capita income, but they also measure it on the availability of the services to the people. They also measure it on the freedom that exists within the various societies and they measure these things in this way at this point in time.

I must also say that economic policies, programmes and outputs do not have an effect on democracy. Indeed, this is an old debate; this was a debate that went on in the British Parliament in 1832, when it gave universal adult suffrage; whether universal adult suffrage or expanding democracy would affect economic growth. This was an argument that again was raised again in 1867 in the same Parliament of expanding democracy and while they had given that right to their own people, they did not give the right to the colonies, because they felt that it would have had an effect on production and productivity. Even though that is a long time ago, unfortunately, some of those arguments remained with us today. As late as the spring of 1993 in Vienna, when there was the debate on strengthening people's rights, there were several countries, unfortunately many of them Third World countries were arguing that economic progress was even more important than political democracy. They were arguing then that it sometimes retards democracy and people were more interested in what is in their pockets than the political freedom.

My own view is that they were posing those questions wrongly. As I said, they were posing the issues from a wrong point of view. As we mentioned, what is important, and I firmly believe that this argument is still in the air and has not been totally settled. There is a theory that is called the Lee Theory, after Lee Quan Yu, who is also arguing that democracy is not so important as economic development. I believe that is putting the question wrongly. It is not asking the proper question, because what in my mind has been proven historically, that while there can probably be an economic spurt under dictatorship as we saw happened in Chile, I am of the profound view that that is not sustainable. That sustainable social and economic development is only possible when there

is political democracy at the heart of your policies and this government has been working with the limited resources at its disposal to provide these possibilities for people everywhere. I am not saying these things because I want to antagonise anyone, but if you again look at what our production figures were in 1990, you would see that they had reached rock bottom. Let me tell you, in 1990 we produced 90,000 tonnes of rice; you imported *Bhusi* from Italy. So, I am convinced that this was because of the lack of democracy in our society.

The Honourable Member Mr Corbin just now made the point and hitting his chest loudly and said, they brought the ERP and 7.2 percent growth in the economy in 1992, but the question to ask is, who made it necessary for us to have an ERP? Why was it necessary? *[Interruption: 'Why was it necessary to have the IMF?']* That is a different question; we are going to debate it at another time. We are talking about the President's Speech now. So the point is why was it necessary for us to have an ERP in the first instance? *[Interruption: 'You used to burn sugar.']* Are you teaching at the university? That is why I spoke about the rice figures, nobody burnt rice. Rice is not burnt to be reaped.

Mr Speaker, as I said, we have delivered, not only in the area of production but in the area of social services. Of course The Honourable Member Mr Corbin has made the point that under the PNC there was education and that was good. No doubt they had some good intentions. I do not think the PNC did that from bad intentions, but the reality was that the quality of our education crashed.

Mr Speaker, in 1964 when the PPP left government, we were passing at the highest level, we were topping the Caribbean in GCE passes at examination. By 1992, even with Barney was teaching culture, teaching people to play steel band; even then in 1992 we were at the bottom of the ladder as far as education passes were concerned. More than that, today, the highest enrolment at the University of Guyana at any period of time is in this 2006. *[Applause]* You implied in your speech that because there is not totally free education that there are going to be less people getting education. That was implicit in your statement and that is

totally wrong.

Mr Speaker, in every other area, in health services we are moving from just primary care, where rats were eating children's hands at the Georgetown Public Hospital, to having now a cardiac ward, to having now a cancer treatment ward and other things. I believe very firmly that is because of our democratic performance that we are bringing these things to our people's attention. More than that more books, there is a flowering of culture being written at this point in time because in my view, it is largely of the democratic opening that now exists in our society.

Mr Speaker, allow me very quickly to respond to some of the points that the Honourable Member Mr Corbin made. For instance, he mentioned that VAT will be carrying up the cost of living for people and making all sorts of statements. What he should tell this House, if he is convinced that that is so, why is it that is in the PNC/R's 2001 Manifesto – the implementation of VAT? If he strongly believes that that is true, why is it that the PNC/R supported the VAT legislation in this National Assembly? So again, as I said, we have to look for the constructive criticisms that we were expecting to see from the PNC/R. Because it is for no use you come now and criticize VAT and try to ride on the tide, when at the same time, the PNC/R supported VAT, raised it earlier and had it in their Manifesto of 2001.

Mr Speaker, when the President mentioned about a pariah State, he was not saying from the point of view that nothing was done under the PNC's regime. Nobody was saying that. I stood in this Parliament on several occasions and I did not say that, but it is also a factor. All that we were talking about was the lack of political democracy that existed at that time. No one can doubt too, that at that point in time, elections in this country were massively rigged. In fact, one Member in this National Assembly said that calling the 1973 elections was giving it a name. *[Interruption: 'Who said that, you']* Cheekes said that. Another one said that down the corridors of time, this day will be remembered with shame and that is what the President was mentioning when he spoke about the question of a pariah State.

Mr Speaker, most of what the Honourable Member Mr Corbin said, you can go into any democratic society and make several of the same points that he made, because societies will always have problems and will always have difficulties that have to be resolved. I am sure when we win the elections again in 2011, that the Honourable Member Mr Corbin would probably come here and say the same thing once again - that is if Basil does not knock him out, I hear Basil is working hard on a thing. *[Laughter]*

Mr Speaker, on the question of discrimination and marginalization, I am glad that the Honourable Member Mr Corbin said in his presentation that it must be perception. This is the first time I heard him saying that it might be perception, which is a big step forward, because at all times, he stood in this Parliament and said that is totally and absolutely ... he spoke in these terms, but today he said that it might be perception and even if it is perception, we have to deal with the issues.

Mr Speaker, but from the very beginning of the PPP/C government in office, we have worked hard; we have worked tirelessly to fight against discrimination of any kind. We are totally opposed and have always been, it goes against the grain of the philosophy of our party. That is why our votes went up in Linden. *[Interruption: 'It did not go up.']* It went up from four percent in 1992 to twenty-three percent today and that is why it has gone up in every single area. In Region 1, we won sixty-four percent of the votes and we won in every single district in Region 1. Clearly, Sir, we can go village by village to show that we increased our support in every area. Clearly, if the PPP/C government was the one carrying out any kind ... *[Interruption: 'You were sharing out money.']* That is not true; we do not have money. We are not like you. Stanley Ming paid out so much money for you. I do not know what has happened to it - Century 21. If the PPP/C government was practicing any form of discrimination, we would not have had the results at the elections that we have had over this period of time.

Of course I can speak on many other things. While I speak about the importance of democracy, I do not want to belittle the importance of

economics on democracy itself, because even as late as 2004 ... [*Interruption*]

The Speaker: Before you go on to 2004, you need an extension of time.

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, I rise to ask that the Honourable Member be given fifteen minutes to conclude his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr Donald R Ramotar: Mr Speaker, I just want to point out to you that I think, I am not trying to belittle the importance of economic development and the impact it has on democracy. I believe that they impact against each other, because even as late as 2004, there was an article from Reuters published in the Stabroek News on 11 August and that was one of the points it had. The headline was WHAT HAS DEMOCRACY DONE FOR ME, Latin Americans asked. There they raised the point that people in some countries in Latin America ... this was said by one gentleman that people are ready to sacrifice democratic institutions to give powers to leaders who offer solutions. This was said by Ricardo Israel, a political scientist who heads Chile's International Centre for Quality of Democracy. So the point I am making is that there is a link and there is interaction with economics and democracy and while the government will work tirelessly to ensure that that democratic framework exists. I think that there is a responsibility of all of us from both sides of the House to work together to ensure that our economy grows stronger, so that we can consolidate the democracy that we work for. I thank you for your attention. [*Applause*]

The Speaker: Honourable Member, Mrs Backer.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Mr Speaker, first of all, I would also like to join with the previous speakers I would like to congratulate the Honourable Member Mr Corbin on his re-election to Leader of the Opposition.

I would also like to congratulate all MPs who have been extracted - extracting is usually a painful thing - but I think that some of them came here without pain and I particularly would like to congratulate the female MPs and I say without fear of contradiction that we have in our hands the opportunity to lift this Parliament. If we were to leave it to the men, Sir, it may not get where we want it to go and I say this hoping that there would not be no retribution from this side of the House. *[Laughter]*

Mr Speaker, taking the lead from my very dear friend, the Honourable Member Mr Ramotar and seeing he took the liberty of quoting so extensively from the late Dr Cheddi Jagan, I have sent for the last speech from Mr Hoyte, so that I can refer to extensively. While I await that speech, Sir, could I stick to my remit and speak about the Address that is before us today. I cannot leave my dear friend, Mr Ramotar, without expressing my delight at his mixed metaphor, *flowering of culture being written*. He spoke about that, Sir, I do not know if it is a mixed metaphor or a mixed up metaphor or just as Mr Carberry has said a confused set of words.

Mr Speaker, my remit is primarily on security and crime and I have noted with some pleasure, my learned friend Mr Rohee's very sedate presentation and while I am not of the age as yet, where I would be sedate, I would at least try to be conciliatory. *[Laughter]* Sir, reading from the second sentence of on Page 22 of His Excellency, President Jagdeo's Address, one gets the impression and I read:

We have secured a significant sum of money to support Police reform and the reform of the judiciary. We have also secured commitments from a number of bilateral donors ...

And then in Paragraph 2 and here is the actual lift off because the President started,

We have secured a significant sum of money to support police reform and the reform of the judiciary. We have also secured commitments from a number of bilateral donors

...

And then in Paragraph 2, here is the actual lift off, because the President stated:

We have secured a significant sum...

And then he goes on to say:..

... work has started, we have a clear idea what changes are needed. We now have to urgently move forward ...

And he goes on. Sir, the PNCR-1G finds it quite alarming that after so many reports and so many studies, recommendations made over the years on the reform of our Police Force, including but not limited to the 2000 Simmonds Report, the 2004 Report of the Disciplined Forces Commission, the establishment of countless committees and task forces that His Excellency, President Jagdeo can say with some comfort on 28 September of this year, *we now have to urgently move forward, we now have a clear idea what changes are needed.*

Sir, is it possible that after hundreds of murders, thousands of traumatised victims that the People's Progressive Party/Civic has now woken up to the reality that our security and crime, is at crisis stage? We accept without reservation that we need external help if we are to do all the reforms that are needed for our security forces. We have said that, however, what this government has failed and in my respectful submission, failed miserably to do is to implement the many recommendations which have emanated from reports, committees, political parties and civil society, which recommendations do not need massive foreign aid. These recommendations include and are not limited to amending necessary legislation; recently the issues of causing deaths and the carnage on our roads have been very topical. We can also improve police community relationships, this is critical. We do not have to wait on massive foreign aid to do that. We have to improve the behavioural pattern of police; we have to employ civilians to do non-core police work, freeing up our police to do police work. We have to find a way to increase

salaries, donors will not do that and we have to do it, so we have to be innovative and find ways to do that. Sir, we have to also raise the minimum education requirements for entry into the force.

Mr Ramotar spoke glibly about the improved education in this country. Sir, the hard and harsh facts are between 2004 and 2006, Guyana recorded passes in Mathematics of 25 to 27 percent, a core subject, English was marginally better for this same period of 2004 to 2006 at 33 to 37 percent. Is this what Mr Ramotar wants us to applaud, Sir?

We also have to implement in the Police Force proper succession policy. We have seen recently many of the top tiers of the police going off on retirement, one after the other and a gaping hole is being left at the top of such a critical organisation.

Sir, Guyanese want to see change and they want to see it now. They want to see change in our Police Force and they want it now. We and primarily the government have a responsibility to do that and we are saying that they continue to fail in their performance of things that do not need external help.

Sir, if I can turn briefly to the impact of narco trafficking. That phenomenon of narco trafficking is still with us. There are some who feel that departure from Guyana of a particular person signalled the end of narco trafficking and its negative impacts on Guyana. We know differently. Narco-trafficking and its many bedfellows are still very much with us. they include violent crimes and gang warfare.

Gun running - Acting Commissioner Green recently informed Guyanese that the incidence of gun crimes continue to rise.

Money laundering - Some economists and accountants put as high as 40 to 60 percent of the former economies. Our new Minister of Finance will most probably tell us about that when he speaks.

Corruption of state officials and law enforcement officers and the criminalization and corruption of our young people are more and more

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drawn into being active participants in narco trafficking. These above bedfellows act as a strong disincentive to foreign investors and the foreign investors turn away from such increase in security that goes with narco trafficking, corruption and illiteracy, so we may want to be glib about it. I think that it was Minister Rohee who said that a lot of these things are interwoven and if we do not get that right and reduce crime, people would not come to spend and invest and poverty will persist. That cycle that we all want to get rid of will persist.

Former Minister Texeira whom I shared a very cordial relationship with, said more or less towards the end of her tenure that she knew who the drug lords were, because she advised us that there are certain places where we should not shop and should not patronize. Well, Sir, she is no longer Minister of Home Affairs, so I do not know if that is what was done about her statement, but as far as I know, apart from that move, nothing else has happened.

We have the National Drug Strategy Master Plan Page (i),

In fact, it is now recognised that possibly the greatest threat posed to democracy in the English speaking Caribbean

...

Mr Ramotar, listen carefully.

... is the narco trade and its complimentary activities, such as illicit trafficking in arms, prostitution, heightened criminal activities and violence.

That is your largest threat, not the PNC/R as you would have some people believe and it goes on to say on Page (iii):

Therefore, new approaches and continued programmes must be implemented and strengthened.

In this Report, it is acknowledged that the first Drug Strategy Plan from 1997 to 2000 never worked and this second one seems to be

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going the same way, because although it was introduced with some fanfare at Le Meridian in June of last year, since then we have not heard of it. I do not know if it is dead or if it is comatose but it is not in good health and perhaps Dr Ramsammy can look at that. I will ask Mr Sharma to ask him to do so. *[Laughter]* We would want very seriously to call on this government to stop giving lip service for the fight against the narco trade in Guyana and start doing something.

White collared crimes - I think because they are not as sensational as violent crime, they have a way of being brushed under the proverbial carpet. The PNC/R feels very strongly about these types of crimes, because they have a very debilitating effect on our economy and this negative effect results in the government being unable to increase wages and also results in insufficient monies going into the crucial social sector areas, the health sector areas and the education sector, to name a few. Sir, these crimes are well known to us and indeed, many do not even see them as crimes, they include tax evasion in all its varied forms, bribery and grafts, which often results in the most competent people not getting contracts and in the long term, indeed in the medium term, it results in buildings having to be built and rebuilt, roads having to be built, rebuilt and rebuilt. If they were done properly in the first place, then there was no need to rebuild them. *[Interruption: 'Like Globe Trust']* I am going to sell you some shares after this meeting. Sorry, Sir, I just lost my trend for a short while there.

I must touch on the *prisons* quite briefly. Mr Rohee said and I agree with him that many factors go into making criminals and many factors go into what results in crime, but we have to look at the other end. We have to accept and recognize that all the prisoners, save of course, perhaps some like Mr Benschop and others will one day come out of prison and we have to aggressively spend money to rehabilitate those prisoners. If not, when they come out, they will fall back into their same trends and I suspect that if any proper research is done, you will see that there are two-time offenders, three-time offenders and four-time offenders, because 60 percent of them go in there as hardened criminals and 80 percent come out as hardened criminals. We have to

focus on reorienting our prison population, so when they come out, they could make a meaningful contribution, because they are going to come out and we cannot wish them away forever. So that end of the crime scale, we must not continue to neglect them.

In fact, the Disciplined Forces Commission made several recommendations along that line. I think seventy-one recommendations were on the Guyana Police Force ... no that was prison ... under prison, they made many recommendations along that line. Rehabilitation and reorientation of prisoners and the PNC/R feels very strongly that one has to look at them.

Sir, I turn briefly to the *rule of law and executive lawlessness* and before I go any further, I would want to say that I agree entirely with the Honourable Member Mr Corbin, where he said that in principle, the President's Speech seems like a good document - a good Speech. On the face of it, it seemed like a good speech and in fact, if it had had a table at the back telling us when these things would be implemented, I suspect no one from this side of the House would have spoken. If after these 28 pages - this last page - would have had a chart, in 2006 A, B and C will be done, in 2007 ... we may not have spoken, but as the Honourable Member Mr Corbin said, past experience suggested to us that this may be mere, as you would appreciate, when I use the term *sales puff* on the part of His Excellency President Jagdeo.

On page 7 of the National Development Strategy and I am turning now to the rule of law and executive lawlessness, it says in Chapter 3.1.1,

Good governance is characterised by participation, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, equity and strict adherence to the rule of law.

And at 3.1.7 on the same page it says:

The basic features of the rule of law are:

- (i) the law must prevail over all persons and all institutions,

including even the government;

- (ii) citizens must be shielded from arbitrary and unlawful acts by other persons and by the State; and
- (iii) *all citizens should be given equal treatment before the law and should be subject to the law.*

Sir, when we look at those three features of the rule of law, we would submit most respectfully that we still have quite a way to go before we can stand on the rooftop and say that the rule of law prevails in Guyana.

The government of the day has on several occasions shown that it considers itself above the law or at best considers that it has a duty to occupy the court's time in litigations that any progressive government would seek to avoid. They wait and they allow these things to happen and people have to go to court, whereas these things could be settled and I speak here and I am threading very delicately. The recent litigation over Articles 61 and 69 could have been settled without going to court, but the arrogance of the government and the feeling that they are above the law led to that.

Then there are ongoing saga with government for some reason being usually reluctant to abide by contracts made between themselves and citizens or between public institutions that they have control of and citizens. Many of these things have to go to court, whereas a proper government bound by the concept of the rule of law would seek to go out of their way to settle these things before they get to court.

Sir, it also speaks about citizens being shielded from arbitrary and unlawful acts by other persons and by the State. We have almost daily examples about people still talking about police brutality and about being locked up unnecessarily. Those things detract from the adherence to the rule of law and in the People's National Congress Reform-One Guyana's opinion, as a country we still have a long way to go before we can say the rule of law is being adhered to.

We have the old case of the Marshals and I do not mean to go into that. That is just yet another example of the government feeling that they are above the law and a classic case of executive lawlessness. At various parts in his Address, His Excellency the President touched up on the reform of the judiciary. An independent, efficient and effective magistracy and judiciary are also prerequisites of the rule of law. On the question of independence, acting judges and this also includes the Chancellor must not act for years. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Corbin touched on the position with the Chancellor. If I am not mistaken there are three judges acting in the High Court. I understand from Mrs Riehl that one is to get an Oscar. Sir, that judge has been acting for so long. When a judge is acting, it interferes with his independence. Sir, you would know more than I do. The Constitution does not protect acting judges. So that must stop. A judge or judges cannot act for four, five or six years before they are appointed. At the end of a year or at the end of six months, you must know whether that judge is competent or not because then you will have the whole issue of reasonable expectation. I cannot act for five years and then you are going to say that I am not fit. It will open you up to more criticisms. Judges must not have to negotiate with the President, whoever he or she may be for salary increases and other benefits, that demeans the office, it brings it down, to go cap in hand to the President and say, *Ow, give us a raise, nah, help me nah*. Judges must not have to do that.

In terms of interference, judges need to appreciate and not only must they be impartial and here I am criticising the judges now. They must not only be impartial, but they must also appear to be impartial. Independence is one thing, but what citizens are just as concerned about is the efficient and effectiveness of the judiciary and the magistracy.

Mr Speaker, lack of speedy trials remains a major humbug, how can we speak about a proper judiciary when the Chief Magistrate's matter is pending after two years and I speak now about Magistrate Juliet Holder Allen. Some people cannot even remember that she is the substantive Chief Magistrate. The Honourable Member Mr Corbin mentioned Mr Benschop, the lone person in prison charged with treason

can we speak about a proper judiciary when the Chief Magistrate's matter is pending after two years and I speak now about Magistrate Juliet Holder Allen. Some people cannot even remember that she is the substantive Chief Magistrate. The Honourable Member Mr Corbin mentioned Mr Benschop, the lone person in prison charged with treason

I have here, the lone person rotting in prison. Then there are scores of prisoners who are awaiting trials for the capital offence of murder. Today when I came here I saw the Annual Report for the year 2005 of the Supreme Court Registry and as you read it you realise how serious the backlog is in the High Court and also in the Magistrate's Court. But what amused me, Sir, is page 6 and I know that there are many of my learned colleagues here, some more learned than others, Mr Bernard De Santos, Senior Counsel and I would invite them to look at Page 6, at the beginning of the second paragraph. I am now reading from the Annual Report of the Supreme Court Registry for the year 2005.

However, efforts are being made by the judiciary to reduce this backlog, through a special exercise working between the hours of 16:00h and 18:00h each day ...

Sir, they are talking about Guyana, do you know of any judge who works between 16:00h and 18:00h every day in Guyana? I challenge any lawyer to say yes and they will be considered as perseverers of untruths with greatest of respect. It goes on about the entire backlog and these things. So we cannot speak about an effective judiciary, we cannot speak about wanting judicial reform. These things do not need to wait on monies from the World Bank and from the IMF. Judges have to work if they are to be paid then there must be systems in place.

What about the long delay in decisions? When you get them to do trials, you have to wait for two or three years. Lawyers have a problem. Sometimes when a notice comes to you saying you are to appear in the matter of Rohee versus Texieira, you cannot even remember when you appeared for Rohee or Teixeira, because the matter was ventilated so long ago. This is true. The other day Mr Nandalall, did not know who he was appearing for in a matter. *[Laughter]* Of course that could be because he has so many cases.

The Speaker: Well, I was just going to say that, Honourable Member.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Yes, Sir. But very seriously, we cannot have

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these very long delays on one hand and on the other hand, speak about the independence of the judiciary and a proper functioning judiciary - justice delayed is justice denied.

Sir, there are certain things that we can do immediately. We can make mediation mandatory in certain cases. We can increase the number of magistrates, so that more courts can sit simultaneously and this is where the Honourable Member Mr Rohee's new initiative, his *coup de grace* can come in, the initiative of a traffic court. The only problem with that initiative is that it is twenty-five years old, but nothing is wrong with that. I should remind Mr Rohee very gently that the month is coming to an end; he has promised us that within a month, a new court - a traffic court. The clock is ticking, dear Clement.

Sir, we have to update and make our laws more relevant. For example, the Narcotics, Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act and the Domestic Violence Act, we have to keep those Acts under review and update them. We also have to enforce sections of laws that we have that are not enforced for example what about the rehabilitation part of the Drug Act? We have never set up rehabilitation centres, so we have some good legislation on hand, but we are not doing anything about them and then we have old archaic legislation and we are keeping them on the Statute books. For example, the one on divorce, people would be appalled to know that presently there are only three grounds that you can get a divorce. Of course that would not include you or me (Donald, I am not speaking to you) - cruelty, adultery and malicious desertion. Sir, in this 21st Century, what about irreconcilable differences? We have to make our legislation breathe, they have to be living, they have to be relevant for the society that we are at any given time.

Sir, I would want to recommend that what we need in Guyana is a permanent law reform commission, whose task is to keep under constant review, all of our legislation and to make timely recommendations to this House or to the government as to what needs to be changed, why it needs to be changed and when it should be changed. We will not be the first in the Caribbean; other Caribbean territories already have per-

manent law reform commissions.

There are many things that we can do together as a people, without having to wait on donor funding. It is unacceptable in the 21st Century for the government to want to fold its hands and use as an excuse whenever necessary; we do not have money; we have wait on the donor community. We must be innovative; we are leaders, not followers. I suggest and I submit that if all of us put our heads and work together, many things that may seem impossible, if either side is to take it on, it would be possible, if we work together.

In conclusion, I want to say that much work and much reform needs to be done in the areas of security and crime and in the area of the rule of law and the judiciary. Sir, the People's National Congress Reform-One Guyana stands ready, willing and able to play our part as together we strive to improve this country which we all hold dear to our heart. I thank you, Sir. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Minister of Health

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, like my colleagues before me on both sides of the House, I would also like to extend my congratulations to all of the Members who are returning from the Eighth Parliament to this Ninth Parliament and also to all the new Members. I would also like to add my congratulations to the Leader of the Opposition and to you, Mr Speaker and the Mde Deputy Speaker for your reappointments.

As we look around, we all notice that a few people that we had become so used to in this House and I too would like to make special mention of the fact that we do miss Mr Reepu Daman Persaud, who served for more than four decades in this House.

Mr Speaker, I too would like to express my gratitude to His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo for his excellent Presentation outlining

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his vision for the next five years and we all have been able to read his Speech.

I want to say to the Honourable Member Mrs Deborah Backer that this is not *sales flap* [*Interruption: 'Sales puff!'*] and to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition that it is indeed a well intentioned Address and as what we outlined throughout this debate, the Presentation by His Excellency was of a programme that is realistic and one that we have evidence that this government has been implementing and we will see many evidences of that in the next few days.

Mr Speaker, the President has outlined his and his government's vision for Guyana and it is a vision that was contained in the PPP/C's Manifesto of the 2006 Election - *A Brighter Future for All Guyanese*. I too commend this document to our colleagues on the other side. If they have not read it as yet, they should read it, because this is our contract with the people of Guyana.

Mr Speaker, as we deliberate over His Excellency's charge, we do so fully expecting that His Excellency will be gracing the Ninth Parliament with his presence more often in the next five years, more often than any President has visited prior to the Ninth Parliament.

continued in pt.II

National Assembly Debates

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

Part II

2ND SITTING

2.00PM

Monday, 30 October 2006

continued from pt.I

we have questioned each other's commitment to this model of participatory democracy. I am hoping that we could learn how to effectively utilize the opportunities possible, even now to make this participatory approach which states for all stakeholders, one that truly contributes to building an effective democracy, which as the President said on Page 3,

... a climate of institutional and political trust ...

We can stand here today in Guyana and point fingers and accuse each other of not being committed to this idea. The Honourable Member Mr Corbin in a very nice way sought to do that. Mr Speaker, God knows that we have done much of this in the recent past and in the distant past but today as we begin serious work in the Ninth Parliament, I hope that we can take the words of His Excellency and reaffirm our contract with the people to work harmoniously. Even when we disagree for the common goal of achieving a better Guyana for all and a brighter future for all, this is the only way that we can create as the President said on Page 4,

*... a society where there are opportunities for all to build
a more inclusive society in which there is equal treatment
before the law ...*

And by all we can see, it is whether public or private.

Mr Speaker, His Excellency attempted to provide us with a vision for Guyana that we can only endorse and I am happy to see that the Honourable Members Mr Corbin and Mrs Deborah Backer agreed that it is a document that we must endorse. The vision of the PPP/C government for this period of our development focuses on:

- achieving quality and good life for all;
- assuring a brighter future for all;
- inspiring a unity among our people and achieving our motto of One People, One Nation and One Destiny;
- consolidating and expanding good governance and the rule of law;
- building a just society;

People have been secure and human rights honoured,

- building a strong, resilient and competitive economy that can function in a global environment; and
- providing opportunities for entrepreneurship and opportunities for good paying jobs.

On Page 5, of His Excellency's Presentation, he outlined the PPP/C government's commitment to the development of the social sector and committed to continue our efforts to as he said on Pages 5 and 6:

... expand access and quality of basic social services to all Guyanese and work towards the upliftment of the physically challenged and socially disadvantaged.

In this regard, Mr Speaker, His Excellency committed his government to increase resource allocation for social sector development over the next five years.

As Minister of Health, I am convinced that one way to ensure that such a bright future can be attained is to have better health for all. The PPP/C government believes that health is a fundamental and social right and a priority pillar on which to build national development.

We believe that the society thrives because all people regardless of age or race or where they lived, enjoy healthy, fulfilling lives at home, in schools, at work and in their communities. In working for a brighter future for all, the PPP/C wants to ensure that every Guyanese has access to quality healthcare. Over the next five years, our programme is designed to increase life expectancy for both men and women and empower people to be independently active for longer. Our plans include:

- to achieve the Millennium Development Goals for health;
- to ensure greater equity by improving access to health services, especially by the poor and people in rural communities;
- to guarantee adequate amounts of drugs and medical supplies and an efficient supply chain management system;
- to achieve and maintain 100 percent immunization coverage with existing vaccines and to introduce new vaccines, such as vaccines for rotavirus, which contributes to significant diarrhoea among children to vaccines against the Human Papilloma Virus, HPV, which is now unequivocally shown to be linked to the development of cervical cancer. Indeed the world now has an opportunity to eliminate cervical cancer with that vaccine;
- to introduce a pneumococcal vaccine and indeed we have already purchased pneumococcal vaccine for introduction in 2007;
- to reduce communicable diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and STIs, TB, malaria, dengue and acute respiratory infections and eliminate Hansen's disease, leprosy and lymphatic filariasis.

The Ministry of Health under the PPP/C government has prepared detailed plans for the reduction of HIV/AIDS, STIs, TB and malaria. Guyana must achieve universal access to HIV, STI, TB and malaria services.

Mr Speaker, in the last Parliament we had a motion that was on the Order Paper for the support of the Members of Parliament for HIV/AIDS Programme and that lapsed and I hope in this new Parliament that that motion will come forward early.

Our programme is designed to contain chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, heart diseases and cancer to manage through community based mental health programmes and mental disorders such as depression and substance abuse.

We must tackle the issue of alcohol and tobacco abuse.

We must decrease motor vehicular accidents and also industrial and home accidents and I commend the Honourable Member Mrs Deborah Backer, not only today, but in previous presentations on making some very sound suggestions on how to decrease motor vehicular accidents.

We must enhance rehabilitation services, such as the physiotherapy, speech therapy and occupational health therapy programmes and have special programmes to assist the disabled. There is need to reduce disability caused by preventable factors, such as, vision and hearing losses.

We must improve dental and oral health by providing more trained staff in all ten regions and by making available ART nationally. The new programme to train dentists at the University of Guyana must be expanded to ensure that every community is served by a dentist.

We must ensure rapid response in the case of disasters and improve and enhance collaboration with other programmes to improve our environment, education, housing, security, water, sanitation, transport

and food safety because all of this contributes to better health.

We must continue our aggressive health reform programmes, improving governance oversight and the legal framework of the centre. Indeed, we have already drafted a new Health Promotion and Protection Bill that will replace the old Public Health Ordinance.

We have already prepared a new Health Facilities Licensing Bill, which the Attorney General's Office has indicated to me will be returned to the Ministry of Health tomorrow.

We must have an Allied Health Professional Bill which has already been drafted and which is undergoing scrutiny at the Cabinet Sub-Committee, legislation to regulate healthcare professionals and alternative medicine practitioners are necessary if we are going to have good quality service in our country. HIV legislation has been prepared and will be introduced in the new Parliament soon.

Mr Speaker, I should highlight some of the things that are happening now and in the near future.

Our vision is that the Georgetown Public Hospital must be transformed in order to match other hospitals in the Caribbean. We will continue to strengthen the Georgetown Public Hospital, all the old buildings, especially the in-patient buildings which are to be demolished and be replaced by a modern new building. The design for this building has been completed and a new construction will begin early in 2007 at the cost of \$1.6 billion. New services such as hip replacement and joint replacement services, heart surgery, cancer radiation treatment, glaucoma surgery, vitria retino surgery are all surgeries that are at some advanced stages of preparation at the GPHC. The entire hospital operations are being computerised, a new modernised IT library is to be established - a virtual library has already been established.

Training programmes have been enhanced; we have already started a post graduate surgical programme with five young doctors; a new post graduate programme for obstetrics and gynaecology is in its advanced

stages of preparation and similar programmes in other areas are in various planning stages.

The Georgetown Public Hospital Health Education Department is being established. An active research programme has already emerged, more specialists have been hired and we want to make the Georgetown Public Hospital, equal to and competitive with any hospital in Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica. Guyanese would not need to travel to any Caribbean country for healthcare, since the Georgetown Public Hospital would be able to do anything hospitals in the Caribbean can do.

Mr Speaker, as we speak, the Port Mourant Hospital is being transformed to become Guyana's first ever eye care specialist hospital, at the cost of \$140 million dollars. In collaboration with the Cuban Government, the Port Mourant Hospital Ophthalmology Centre would be able to provide state-of-the-art care not available presently in Guyana. People from all across Guyana, from the Caribbean and Suriname would benefit from this service. We have been enhancing the service at Georgetown Public Hospital, itself. We have seen the success of the Poly Clinic at Enmore and in the coming term we will extend the Poly Clinic concept to other areas in the country, South Georgetown and the Linden Highway and in Mabura Hills and Paramakatoi, among other places.

The whole infrastructure is being reconstructed. The East Bank of Demerara will for the first time ever, have its own hospital at Diamond and this will be completed before the end of 2006. *[Applause]* New hospitals are presently being constructed at Mahaicony, Leonora, Suddie, Lethem, Mabaruma and Linden and most of these will be completed early in the new year. In the case of Linden, early in 2008, replacing all the old structures and providing state-of-the-art physical infrastructure for modern healthcare service.

The Skeldon and West Demerara hospitals will also be reconstructed in this term and the government is already mobilising resources to undertake these two projects. Major rehabilitation will occur at Charity,

Bartica, Fort Wellington, Leguan, Wakenaam, Mibicuri and at Mahdia. We will continue to improve the physical infrastructure at all our hospitals and health centres and build new ones to improve access to healthcare. As we speak right now, the Oncology Centre at the Georgetown Public Hospital is being established. New diagnostic programmes for cancer, will include routine mammography, pap smear, PSA testing, HPV testing and other DNA based testing for breast cancer and other forms of cancer. Many of these things are already available. We have already expanded our capacity for pap smear and we have introduced our plaintive interventions, such as, VIA and VIT for cervical cancer. We are in the process of acquiring technology for Human Papaloma Virus testing and as we speak a new mammography equipment has arrived in the country.

The list of cancer drugs for chemotherapy is being further expanded and radiotherapy is now for the first time in Guyana available at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. More than 100 Guyanese have so far benefited from high quality radiotherapy treatment, right here in Guyana and with technology that is not available anywhere else in the Caribbean.

Heart surgery is now about to appear in Guyana, diagnostic services for heart diseases and heart surgeries, including valve replacement and bypass surgeries are now services available in Guyana, at the Georgetown Public Hospital, for the first time ever. Several Guyanese have benefited from state-of-the-art stress test capacity at the Georgetown Public Hospital. Seven Guyanese who would have had to endure huge expenses and travel abroad to obtain angiography services have benefited from this programme already. In a matter of weeks we will be performing Guyana's first ever open-heart surgery at the Georgetown Public Hospital. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity and cancer, often referred to as lifestyle diseases will be aggressively fought against in order to reduce mortality and morbidity. Aggressive health promotion programmes are targeting these diseases. Community health facilitators are being trained and will work in every community to

bring public awareness and to enable people to monitor at home their blood pressure, sugar level and their weight. The national council for the promotion of healthy lifestyles will promote good nutrition and physical exercise, reduction of tobacco use and alcohol and substance abuse.

Guyana presently sends many clinical tests abroad to be done, capacity is being built for many more tests to be done locally. A state-of-the-art public health laboratory is being established at the cost of US\$2.5 million and be equal to a better than any public health lab in CARICOM.

Improved laboratory services are already available and we will enhance these at the Georgetown Public Hospital and all hospitals. Mr Speaker, indeed a guaranteed package of laboratory services is being introduced in our public health system. X-ray services will be improved throughout the sector and every hospital will be equipped with x-ray services, a mammography, CT MRI services, will be introduced in the public sector during this term.

The PPP/C government will reconstruct the National Psychiatric Hospital in Canje in order to provide more humane services for those persons who need long term mental health care. We will introduce a community mental health plan that will enable families to provide greater support to family members stricken by mental health. The psychiatric in-patient facility at the GPHC will be moved into more spacious and comfortable settings.

Mr Speaker, the PPP/C government has already begun to develop a modern international standard storage facility with refrigerated capacity and computerised inventory system. The new 2007-2008 Essential Drug List is to be published in the next two weeks and it is intended to be reviewed every two years. It will include drugs for cancer, HIV, glaucoma and other diseases. The publication of the Essential Medical Supply List will be done for the first time and indeed the new Essential Drug List for 2008, is now being called the public sector national formula, since it has gone far beyond the WHO's recommended list of essential drugs.

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We will strengthen the Food and Drug Analyst Department;

We will introduce a new unique identifying system for patients;

We will establish the ambulance services;

We will expand our training programmes and indeed in the next five years, we intend to have more than 1000 doctors trained, 50 dentists, 200 medexes, 50 dentexes, 250 community health workers, 1200 nurses, 200 midwives, 30 anaesthetic nurses, 100 multi purpose technicians, 50 rehabilitations professionals and more than 25 optometrists.

In addition, Mr Speaker,

We will expand postgraduate studies for doctors in surgery, medicine, infectious diseases, ophthalmology and gynaecology and for nurses in anaesthesiology, mental health and aneuro sciences.

We will work with the University of Guyana to improve training programmes for pharmacists, for medical technologists and radiographers.

We will introduce new categories of health workers, such as operational room technicians and community health facilitators.

We will continue strengthening of the public/private partnership that has led to the introduction of radiation therapy, dialysis and cardio-vascular intervention.

We will reduce waiting time for surgery and introduce a first class surveillance system.

We will introduce a computerised health information system which is already in place and we have already introduced limited teleconference facility in the health sector.

Mr Speaker, my colleagues on the other side said very clearly that had the President's Speech include a matrix and timetable, they would not even speak, now they cannot even listen to the PPP/Cs programme,

shame on you, colleagues! Mr Speaker ... *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Honourable Member, your time is up.

Hon Sheik KZ Baksh: Mr Speaker, I ask that the Honourable Minister be given fifteen minutes to continue his presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

The Speaker: Go ahead, Honourable Member.

Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy: Mr Speaker, this is our vision for Guyana. These are the programmes to make better health in Guyana available, to make a better life for Guyanese, a brighter future for Guyanese. For sure, Mr Speaker, what we present is not a panacea miracle plan that will happen tomorrow morning when we get up. As the Honourable Member said, it will take hard work. There is hard work ahead and the challenges are great. The present financing arrangements for the health sector, as the Minister of Finance will tell you, will not guarantee this ambitious programme.

We have outlined a programme that no country can sustain through its public sector financing; it is indeed an ambitious programme. The government has committed to free health for a guarantee package of services. The question is how we will permit those who cannot afford those services, outside the guaranteed package, services such as dialysis, open-heart surgery and radiation therapy? The government has committed that no one will be deprived of these services. Now the challenge is to determine how every Guyanese will have access to these services. We will need to think this through and we will ask everyone for their support as we try to ensure that every Guyanese, regardless of their status in life can afford to access these services.

Mr Speaker, before I end I must also say that protecting the environment must be a priority in our development plans for Guyana. We have a relatively good history in terms of our environmental responsibility, but as we pursue sustainable development, even greater atten-

tion must be paid to the environment. Environmental sustainability is not an option to pursue; it is an imperative that must be given the same overall priority as economic growth, the pursuit of justice and the pursuit of adequate social services. In this respect, Guyana must play its role nationally and internationally. We recognise and accept the occurrence of global warming.

Today, a new study was released by the British government, which demonstrates the perils of doing nothing about global warming and climate change. Guyana is already a victim of global warming trends and changes in climate. I congratulate the British government for the forward and progressive position it has taken on this issue. I would like to urge other developed countries' governments to follow the lead of the British government. I believe that Guyana could continue to play and should continue to play a vital role in promoting sustainable development of the global environment. I believe that Guyana could find rich opportunities to also develop industry through the carbon credit opportunities that have already begun to evolve as a result of global recognition of preserving our global carbon assets, but government have already moved in this direction. I urge all my colleagues in this House for us to take up the challenge issued by His Excellency to build together a better Guyana and to assure a brighter future for all.

I believe that a progressive consensus for a common Guyanese vision for economic growth, for social justice and environmental sustainability, a new human global order, as Cheddi Jagan puts it and how to get there is possible. This is our country; working together we can make Guyana a better country. Working boldly together, we can demonstrate that our El Dorado is not stuff of myth, but a real place. What steers us ahead is a milestone of opportunity around our necks. History sometimes tells terrible, shameful stories and sometimes it tells beautiful, proud stories. When the history of our generation is written, when the history of the Ninth Parliament is written, let it be one that tells beautiful stories - stories that we are proud of. This afternoon, I will not try to emulate my colleague, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition in quoting from the Bible, but maybe I can quote from Robert Kennedy,

not from James Kennedy McAllister, but from Robert Kennedy who states that -

Let no one be discouraged by the belief that there is nothing one man or one woman can do, against the enormous array of the world's ills, against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence. Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events and in the total of those acts will be written the history of this generation. It is from this number nonetheless, diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an idea or acts to improve the luck of other or strikes out against injustice, he sends a tiny ripple of hope and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls.

Mr Speaker, this evening and on Thursday, when we complete the discussion on the President's vision and charge for the next five years, there are many things we must commit to. This afternoon as I stand here and I am tempted to respond to my colleagues the Leader of the Opposition and Mrs Deborah Backer for some of their misrepresentations, but I thought this afternoon I will deal with our programme in the next five years. A brighter future is possible in our country, a better future for all Guyanese, colleagues, is possible if we work together and I hope that in the next five years we can work together to keep our contract with the Guyanese people and that is to serve them well and create our own El Dorado - our Guyana El Dorado. Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member

The Honourable Member Mr Trotman.

Mr Raphel GC Trotman: Mr Speaker, I rally for the first time on behalf of the Alliance For Change to offer my contribution to the Motion

which is before the House this evening.

Mr Speaker, this Motion has asked us to express our thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President and the Alliance For Change has no hesitation in doing so from the outset.

As we gather here this evening, we see many new faces; some who have been here before and I will refrain from saying old faces. Mr Speaker, I wish to congratulate firstly, yourself on being re-elected. I have always held you in high esteem and will continue to do so. We may differ from time to time, but I intend over the years ahead to challenge you on some of your previous rulings. Hopefully there will be the evolution of the jurisprudence so to speak of this House.

I wish to congratulate other members, who have returned to Parliament - the Ninth Parliament and to say congratulations to those, particularly those who have come here for the first time. Some of them are my fraternal and professional colleagues and I single out the Honourable Minister of Finance, who is a dear friend of mine; my sister, now the Minister of Social Services; Mr Nandalall, with whom I clash pretty often in court and some of my colleagues who are besides and immediately before me.

Mr Speaker we have had an afternoon of strong and robust debate and I myself had started to wonder that we are seeing an extended campaign and the precursor to the budget debates which are to come in January. Many have referred to manifestos and indeed as has already been pointed out, much of what is written and contained in the President's Presentation can be found either in some part or wholly in the manifestos of others and lest we believe that the AFC cannot and will not number among the strong. We too have our manifesto, which we wish to commend to members of the House - the action plan of the Alliance For Change.

Mr Speaker, quite frankly, I consider it to be a paradox that we are debating a Motion on a policy which is based on promises. We in law would refer to this as an offer to treat. We have simply before us well

written words, which were eloquently delivered, but which really say that we are to believe all that is written and stated here will be accomplished.

As I listen to my colleague, the Minister of Health a few moments ago, I wonder whether we are living in two different countries, because what he described to be the state of health in Guyana is perhaps a state only available to a mere fraction of the people of Guyana. Those who are fortunate to travel abroad know of a different healthcare and I will join with him in saying that hopefully in the not too distant future all Guyanese, including prominent Guyanese, who sit in this House, will not have to travel to the United States for surgery and operations.

Mr Speaker, if there is one sub-theme which runs through the President's Address; it is one of *working together*. However, some aspects of this Speech do give rise to some concerns and I will quote from them.

The first, as it appears to me is on Page 3, the second line from the top, which starts with the sentence -

The society is now free and open and underpinned by democratic principles and ethos.

Mr Speaker, I will stop there, because again I wonder whether we live in two different countries, like that great novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. Mr Speaker, if perhaps the author of this document, the person without being facetious, who delivered this Speech had said that a portion of our society is all free and open and a portion of those who live under that society experience good democratic principles and ethos I will agree with him. But Mr Speaker, if it is one thing that the 2006 campaign afforded me and I know other colleagues in the AFC, was the ability to see first hand both the pain and the suffering as well as the accomplishments of Guyanese. Again I dare say that over 80 percent of the people of Guyana do not enjoy this free and open society which is being boasted of here.

Mr Speaker, I have to wonder whether as we hear about potable water supply, housing, education and public infrastructure. *[Interruption: How much did it cost you?]* I will let you know in the corridors when we discuss it later. As one reads about these things, one wonders about:

- those who continue to suffer and reference has already been made to prisoners such as Mark Benschop and others who took to the roofs;
- those who are without healthcare;

I see the Minister has disappeared.

- those who die without being able to receive care;
- those who go to school - children - and I have heard of a case only last week Friday, of a child who goes to school with water and a slice of bread and a little margarine on it, that is all that the parents can afford.

Those things continue not to be the rare case, but in many cases the average as it obtains in many communities in this country.

Mr Speaker, moving on, I would like to turn to Page 4 of the President's Address, the first Paragraph in which he says:

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

Again Mr Speaker, we wonder whether in a year's time these words in this document will be nothing more than a tissue of promises or it will be something that we can wave proudly and say we have achieved or are well on our way to achieving them. A person once remarked to me that persons who celebrate their marriages by having grand receptions, ought to save their money and wait for the first five years to see whether

they will survive. We believe that like a marriage, this Speech is based on promises and if one were to look at past performance, one is not likely to put much hope in the fulfilment of these promises. However, we accept that the President's words are his. In listening to him, he appeared and sounded sincere and we are prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt, but we put it on notice that come the presentation of the budget, brother Ashni Kumar Singh, whenever he presents that budget in January, we expect that the first blocks will be placed for the building of the foundation which is set out here. Perhaps after one year, and hopefully we can convince the President to return, not just at the beginning of the Parliament, but on a yearly basis. We can challenge him on what he has achieved or not achieved. Therefore, I do not intend to spend much time on this Speech, but prefer to wait on the first budget presentation and the first year of this Government's administration to pass, before I make any definitive statement. As I said, we have in law twenty-eight pages of promises, which read very well, which sound sincere, which we are prepared to hold the government to. As we have said before, many of the things which are set out here do not require legislation such as:

- the grant of radio licenses;
- appointments to boards and commissions;
- the establishment of the Human Rights Commissions;
- the establishment of the Procurement Commission; and
- a host of other measures and things that have been approved since 2001.

If we are truly committed to being able to build a better, just and more equitable society, we will display our good faith by doing so immediately.

Mr Speaker, I close by referring to statements made again by His Excellency on Page 25, the second Paragraph, when he said:

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In addition, I have already signaled my intention to join forces with the political opposition and find innovative ways to work together to solve our problems. This will be pursued within an enhanced framework for political co-operation, encompassing the principles of increased meaningful contacts, the identification and implementation of an agreed agenda of national issues and greater scope for the participation of civil society in the decision making process.

Mr Speaker, what do these words really mean? We had a golden opportunity after the elections to start on the right foot. In the end we had to approach the courts of Guyana to seek determination of some issues which we in law, would have considered to be trite. Unfortunately, we did not start off on a good foot, but that in itself does not mean that we cannot repeat our steps and make them good. Therefore, I wish to say that the Alliance For Change cannot in all good conscience approve what is asked of us in this Motion. And that is to approve the policy adumbrated it within this paper. We can express our appreciation, yes, to the President, congratulate him, yes, but we cannot approve, because the record of the PPP/C Government does not say so.

If I am to say, notwithstanding the fact that there are new faces and hopefully these new faces will bring something new. We cannot approve this paper until we have put them to the test.

I wish to end there and to say to my loyal colleague on the other side, Mr Ramotar, that his boast earlier, of winning seats in all ten regions will soon be proven wrong, when the AFC reclaims its Region 10 seat.

I forget to mention in excess of my congratulations, congratulations to the new leader of the opposition Mr Robert Corbin. Thank you. Good evening.

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member Ms Teixeira

Ms Gail Teixeira: Mr Speaker, I have listened with interest to the different speeches, but I think sometimes we have to look at the whole emergence of democracy in our society, as a process in which in fact what we are experiencing in Guyana is something that many other countries are also going through, including much more advanced democracies than ourselves. So I think that in fairness, when we listen and we discuss the President's Speech, it is not promises as my honourable colleague across the other side refers to it. It is a policy direction. It is saying what the vision is for the future. Where the government of the day wants to go, where it intends to go and it is correct to disclose, and disclosure one must do to be able to let the populace know and obviously we will be judged on that. There is no doubt and there is not fear of that. But this is a policy direction in which we are saying over the next five years the areas we are going to work on as the Government in relation to the delivery of services, to working with others to improve and create a new political culture. A political culture cannot just be created by the Government in power. It has to be created by willing partners in the society, the opposition parties, civil societies, NGOs, the media and so forth. It is not something that one can just wave a magic wand and I think we do ourselves a disservice if one believes that the state is there standing with a magic wand to make things happen. In fact, we are always caught between the two things; when the Government genuinely goes forward and makes decisions, we are accused of not consulting, and when you do consult and it takes too long, and you do not come to an agreement, then you are not acting.

I think when we look at the ending of the Seventh Parliament, with the Constitution amendments that were made in preparation for 2001 and we look at the Eighth Parliament and what we achieved over five years, I think all of us in this House should feel proud of the part that the Guyanese Parliament played and that it took some very, very imaginative and progressive positions. In fact, the Guyanese Parliament is one of the most progressive parliaments in this hemisphere. Whether we like to say it or not, check your records in terms of the status of Commonwealth countries and look at the agreements that were made in terms of the Commonwealth principles of the accountability and relationship be-

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tween the three branches of government, and the decisions that were made by the Heads of Government in 2003 in Harare. So the fact is as one of the countries, we have been complying; we are in a process of moving towards that. Coming out of a whole period - whether the opposition likes it or not - it is a historical fact that we were not in a democratic country. Therefore what is now going on is a whole process. No one sat in 1992 and said, okay democracy existed now. We have always talked about the restoration of democracy, the institutionalization of democracy and the consolidation of democracy. The process is not over as yet. Let me look at the Commonwealth document that came out by the Hon Tony Valarie, who is the leader of the Government in the House of Commons in Ottawa, talking in 2005, about the debate that is now going on by Canadian Parliamentarians, minority and majority, of what is the dialogue and discourse that needs to go on between the engagement with the civil society and MPs' role. In contrast to the US senators and congressmen, who are subjected to lobbyists who have a tremendous amount of money and who can vote according to whatever they want. Whereas the Canadian Parliament, more like ours, is based on a party system and party discipline. So let us start off from a promise that the Seventh and Eighth Parliaments, when the history of the Parliament is written will probably be seen, other than the period which brought in independence, as some of the most radical changes in terms of Parliamentary reform. Certainly that process is not over. We have leftovers from the last Parliament, which the President in his Speech refers to. He talks about the incomplete work that we still have to resuscitate and make sure it comes back on the agenda. Local Government Reform and the Human Rights Commission and I have heard some of the speakers before refer to the Human Rights Commission. For those who are new in this Parliament and I hope my colleague the Honourable Member Mr Trotman as he said, did not want to call some of us old, but I am not a new face as some of you will know, but for the new members of the House on both sides, we had the radical thing that was do - the Sectoral Committees - where for the first time, not only was the Government's public accounts going to the Public Accounts Committee, but that Ministries and Ministers could be brought to the Sectoral Committee on Eco-

conomic Services, Social Services, Foreign Relations ... and I am forgetting one of them... Natural Resources. My friend, my good sparring partner Mr McAllister, headed one of those and so did other members of the House, my good friend who has returned Mrs Volda Lawrence, also headed one of those committees. In many countries in the Caribbean these Sectoral Committees do not exist in Parliament. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: In no country in the Caribbean

Ms Gail Teixeira: Thank you Mr Speaker, I wanted to say that, but was afraid to be found wrong. Only in Australia in 1980 was this introduced and Australia is considered so much more advanced in Parliamentary democracy than we are. In fact only in the Public Accounts Committee is the tradition in Parliament that the opposition chairs. But we have gone further in our Parliamentary reform. Now we have a committee, because I was going through the National Development Strategy that has put out a civil society document, which I heard one of the media experts on the television many times referred to. The civil document was out forward by luminaries, whom I have great respect for, Mr Kenneth King and so on, who was also a member of this House on the side of the PNC and who has also worked with the Government, because he is an expert in so many areas. So when you look at some of the issues that were raised in the National Development Strategy, it talks in 2000 about the whole issue of the appointment of the Judicial Service Commission, the Public Service Commission, the Police Service Commission; which at that time it was the President's prerogative to do. We have changed all of that. There is the Appointment Committee, which is made up of Government and Opposition. In fact right now, the President only has one person to name on the Judicial Service Commission. In fact the writers of the Constitution forgot to give him the right to name anybody on the Police Service Commission and in the Public Service Commission he has one name.

Let us go to the Human Rights Commission that everyone has been talking about, because that is an outstanding issue in this Parliament's

agenda - the Ninth Parliament. And I hope ... [*Interruption: 'Who are you fighting with?'*] It is just a style Deborah. We have this style; we just cannot it; we always fight; it is the way we talk. [*Interruption: 'What about the Human Rights Commission?'*] I am coming to that. When my friend who just heckled me ... where we dealt with the Women and Gender Equity Commission and my other friend at the back Mrs Holder, when we came to this laudable body and presented our proposal to this Parliament for the names of the women and men who would be members of one of the Human Rights Commissions - Women and Gender Equity Commission - my dear opposition members voted against them. So we could not get the two-thirds majority that the Constitution required to set up the Women and Gender Equity Commission. So when we come here, we are starting over again, so I sincerely hope that the very laudable words on this side about what we did not do with the Human Rights Commission will now be matched by a serious effort to be able to come back to this House and bring the Women Commission, the Children Commission and the Indigenous Peoples Commission. Because we who sat here since 2003 and trying to get unanimity, feel a lot of very important work went on in that Committee. So the issue is the process, because we can say we want Human Rights Commission, we must have them. But if we are not able in this House to find a way - whether it is horse trading, compromise, negotiations, whatever it is, to reach agreements, then the issue of Human Rights Commission, so critical to our Parliamentary reform, and for inclusion and representation of people who feel they may not have the right to represent themselves. We would be found failing not the Government - all of us in this House. So the issue of democracy is not them and we, it is an issue of us. *We* are the harbingers and the champions of democracy. *We* meaning this collective here, who are elected by the people of this country. We are all elected by the people.

Let us go to the Disciplined Forces Commission, because that was referred to in one of the speeches. The Disciplined Forces Commission's Report was sent to a Special Select Committee by this goodly House, 164 recommendations in the period of time, we finished doing 71 of the recommendations which had to do with the Police and we

were supposed to come with an interim report here of where that Committee had gone. Unfortunately, time caught up with us and the draft report had not reached conclusion with members of the Committee. So do not let us bring politics, because you can go back to the Committee's records and those minutes are the proof, not Gail Teixeira. By the way of the recommendations, not all were supported by the Committee. In fact, the Committee unanimously rejected some of those proposals and also questioned some of them. So the issue of the parliamentary agenda, we have some excellent framework within which to work. In other words, we cannot complain - Government and Opposition - that we have not based on all sorts of issues, come to a point where we have a framework of Parliament in which there is now a Constitutional Reform Committee, there is a Standing Committee to deal with all of these Commissions. In fact the President's role has been eroded in terms of these constitutional bodies. We have to complete the work of the establishment of the Procurement Commission, but certainly if we go about it where there are no negotiations and which neither side allows each other negotiating room, then we will continue to be in this situation. So these are issues we have to go back to. They are not over and I do not feel bad about the fact that we did not complete everything. We all want to finish what we started, but at the same time, what was hanging over our heads all the time were elections, the preparations for elections, the campaign and everything else, the risk and threats of danger, violence, crime and so on. We have crossed that hurdle. We, as a people have crossed it in a matured way. We were successful as a people in having peaceful elections. So I believe that Guyana is at a higher stage of maturity than we were five years ago. And so we are going to be able ... I have great confidence that we can reach these issues and discuss them, agree to disagree, because we cannot always reach unanimity. My colleague across the floor, Mr Trotman spoke about not having to agree, he is sorry that it had to go to court on matters of trite issues. Parliament's role is not to interpret the Constitution and interpret laws. That is the role of the court. Therefore, on the issue of an election petition, people have a right to go before the court. A right that in earlier periods in 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985, when there were elections petitions that never saw the

light of day. So let us get some perspective on what we are talking about.

The President's Speech makes about twenty-one references to issues that relates to governance. One of the issues - again I go back to the NDS - because I believe that the amount of work that went in and obviously, ironically, if anyone of you get a chance to go back and read it, you will see that a number of the areas that were proposed in 2000, out of the 79 recommendations that were made by the NDS to do with Governance alone that in fact about 60 have been approved, and are in progress or are being put in train. So there are 12 outstanding issues from the NDS on governance alone in relation to controversial issues that none of us may agree with or that there are ways in which we have to think out and find our own answers. So when we look at Guyana's track record, we talk about poverty, but whether we accept, whether we like it or not, the fact that the studies on poverty were done in Guyana, leading up to 1992, seventy percent of the people of this country lived below the poverty line. In fact seventy-five percent, all women who were pregnant suffered from anaemia and were giving birth to low-birth babies and there was a high infant mortality rate.

I think, the last study was done on the poverty level in 2004 - and this is not Guyana's studies, these were done with international criteria and methodology - showed that those living below the poverty line have reduced to below thirty-five percent. No one is denying that there is poverty in Guyana, but certainly the aim of all of us is to be able to try to reduce it and to work towards reducing it. So when we look at the issues before us in terms of one of the biggest hurdles, what we will have to cross as a people is in terms of what kind of political culture we want to develop. What kinds of arrangements in terms of governance and opposition that can work towards the development of our country. What kind of engagements are we going to have in terms of participation and decision making of people? That is Government's relationship with civil society, Parliament and its legislators - all of us - with civil society. Because obviously there is a big debate going on among the Commonwealth Parliamentarians as to whether MPs are only sponges that react to pressures from the electorates or do they in fact, as elected members

also make judgment on what issues to take to forward. Those are moral, ethical and political issues that are going to continue to challenge Parliaments around the world in terms of what is the role of the State, what is the role of the Parliament. One of the challenge which we will have to face and which is referred to in the document in a variety of ways has to do with the three branches of government – Parliament, the executive and the judiciary.

What is the relationship among them? In what way can we in Guyana with our own idiosyncrasies, with our own special history, geography, culture, ethnicity, laws and everything, be able to mould that into what is a model for Guyanese democracy? Certainly the President's Paper sets a trend, and I hope that all of us - not as the Honourable Member across the other side, Mr Trotman, said that we will wait and see, because if we wait and see then we are talking about no movement; we are standing still. Our country and our people do not deserve that. We were elected, not to stand still and wait, and therefore it is an issue of what is the engagement that needs to take place in terms of this whole concept of developing an enhanced framework for political cooperation. What does that mean to the opposition parties? What does it mean to the ruling party? How can we design something that would be workable and would be able to energize our people rather than polarize our people to a point where we will have an increase in production, we would be able to have greater growth and economic activity, because it is clear in all the readings and writings that democracy and development are like husband and wife - if you do not have democracy you cannot have development. If you want development, you have to have democracy. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: On that domestic note, Honourable Member, I do not know if this is an appropriate time for us to take the suspension. It is now seven o'clock. Honourable Members the new Standing Orders provide the suspension should last for one hour. However, having regard to the number of speakers remaining, I wonder if you would permit us to take the suspension for half an hour and then resume at 7:30 p.m. *[Pause]* Silence, I gather as consent. Thank you very much.

19:00 H - SUSPENSION OF SITTING

19:40H - RESUMPTION OF SITTING

The Honourable Member Ms Teixeira

Ms Gail Teixeira: As I was saying when we look at the President's Speech, he is really referring to the direction of the Government and the direction in terms of building our country and developing it and moving forward. So, we as a country have been held by:

the Millennium Development Goals, which we have agreed to

the Poverty Reduction Strategy; and

the National Development Strategy.

There are many other countries and moreover as we are an emerging democracy, we face many challenges. I have spoken about the progressive nature of our Parliament and yet there is a number of the outstanding issues that we have to look at in relation to the last Parliament. I believe amazing strides were made with the amendments to the Standing Orders and in relation to the agreements that were reached. I think there were 79, in relation to the Bradford and the Davies Reports that were presented in this House.

There is a constitutional reform pertaining to the local government reform and I know that the President has indicated outside of this forum his intention to reconvene the multiparty task force on local government so that we can get moving forward and conclude what are probably the two stumbling blocks in relation to laying the foundation for local government elections.

We should also be proud as a Parliament of issues such as the

Amerindian Act which was passed here, whether one totally agreed with it or whether one had differences with it, in that the consultation process that took over two years and travelled throughout this country, just like the Constitution reform process that took place in 1996 period and then again in the pre-2001 period.. These were actually landmarked in the Parliamentary and legislative reforms probably than any other country in the CARICOM or Latin America. So while we want to play politics and to 'dis' as the young people say, what was stated in the President's Speech, at the same time we sow an injustice to ourselves by denying our own history and what has in fact taken place in these halls.

The fact that civil society's engagement and one in which the private sector ... these are all areas we have to work on. ... but we must also be proud of the number and plethora of community development groups, whether they are working in cleaning up areas or volunteers, community policing groups, women's groups, youth groups and church groups, the numbers that exist in our country now, have never existed in this enormity and certainly they pose challenges to try to find unanimity of common grounds for action.

I think when we look at the President's Speech, we need to also note that the President has secured funding form the IDB, on massive investment in terms of the Public sector modernization management project, the fiscal financial management project, the citizens security project and the justice project, all relating to what is rule of law with the judiciary and the police as well as what are issues relating to effectiveness of the public sector and the proper financial management of the public sector. These value approximately over US\$60 million for the next forty-five years. Yet, I do agree with what the Honourable Member Mrs Deborah Backer who said that there are simple things that can be done that may not cost money. But we do have challenges in making quantum leaps, probably 30 to 40 years at one time, what other countries have probably taken 100 years to do. So when we look at the whole emergence of what is probably the biggest issues this Parliament would address are issues of institutionalizing and consolidating democracy is that we would have to confront the fact that sometimes we have to agree to

disagree. We have to live with compromises and we have to move forward rather than getting stuck on a situation where an example is the local government reforms and the broadcast legislation, whereas it was not one way or the other and I know - I was part of those debates on those issues there were many dialogues with former members of this House who are not here unfortunately, in terms in the areas of broadcast legislation we had come to an agreement on. So when we look at the progress that has been made, we also have to recognize that we have many challenges to face. One member of the house raised the issue of migration and people leaving to go North. I just thought I would throw in for the purposes of this debate that the University of West Indies studies and CARICOM studies on education have shown that UWI, uses approximately 58% of its graduates annually to other countries, meaning mainly the North and Europe. So we are not the only one. In fact the migration problems for third world and developing countries are a major factor and a burden and a hurdle on how we can move forward. So Mr Speaker, I would like to call on my fellow MPs - in fact we are in a period of history making and the President's speech point in the direction to challenges and to find innovative ways in which we can move this country forward. Because when we work together in a more unified way, not necessarily all agreeing with one another, the country is energized, and instead of bad talking our country outside to the foreign investors are afraid to come here, we should be working in unity to attract investors and to help the business sector to work better. So these are all the issues of the regulations that the Government will be addressing to try to facilitate private investment, both local and foreign, as well as ensuring there is accountability and transparency.

So I look forward to the next five years and to also ask Members of Parliament that if we are to get the benefit, the richness of debate in this house, that we also work towards finding areas of consensus, and also learning sometimes where we have to agree to disagree, but in which policies and decisions are able to move forward rather than be stymied or held for ransom, and therefore cannot move forward. My particular appeal is in relation to the Human Rights Commission, that those will be able to move rapidly forward in relation to them. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member Volda Lawrence

Mrs Volda A Lawrence: Thank you Mr Speaker. I am happy to be in this House once again. More so, I am happy not only for myself, but that I have the opportunity to represent those persons whose voice would not be heard otherwise. So I rise to speak not on my own behalf, but on behalf of all those thousands of destitute and needy persons, the elderly, the single mothers and fathers, the street children and the working poor, in fact all those who eek out an existence on the edge of society.

Mr Speaker, for too long those whom I have just mentioned have been clamoring for our support and consideration, but for the most part they have been overlooked, almost forgotten, drifting into our thoughts and out again without any fundamental steps being taken to address and improve their situation.

Mr Speaker, the President over the past decade has intimated time and time again that the Government is committed to improving our standard of living, particularly of those who fall below the poverty line. In fact in his Address to the opening of this Ninth Parliament, he has once again reiterated his Government's commitment to strengthening the economy to ensure higher standards of living for the people of Guyana.

But again Mr Speaker, I must inform this Honourable House that while the utterances of the President might have generated interest and hope for some, yet the realization of such utterances have so far failed to become a reality. For, it is his misguided government's policies, which have slowed down the flows of investment and the levels of growth which are so sorely needed. Consequently the Government must be seen as being certainly at least partly responsible for the social ills in our society. More and more those persons of whom I speak, are sinking further into apathy, receiving little or no tangible help from the Government. Guyanese and more so low income earners, and the poor have lost all confidence

in the Government's plans, and see migration as the solution to fulfill their dreams. That is of living a life where basic necessities from day to day are ensured. Mr Speaker, allow me to elaborate on some of the Government's plans for addressing the conditions of the poor and needy over the past decade.

The Government has promised and has never fulfilled its pledge to utilize the policies and programmes outlined in the National Development Strategy, which when implemented would have paved the way for improving at all levels, macro, economic, social sectors, productive sectors as well as infrastructure. Moreso, the livelihood of all Guyanese, especially the poor, since it states that --

The social sector will include forward looking policies for poverty alleviation, health, education, the environment, the role of women in development, the role of indigenous people, housing, urban development and the strengthening of regional and local government.

Mr Speaker, the President cannot pretend that the massive social problems which we have are new, since they all developed under the watch of the PPP/C. They must accept the blame for the social dislocation, the street people, the homeless, the street children and the working poor. After all fourteen years is a long time, and it is the policies of this Government and the must accept responsibility for the many social ills in our society. The President should know that the people of Guyana are no longer fooled by speeches; only tangible actions will demonstrate his commitment to real democracy. The World Bank and IMF on the 27 October 2006, in its joint Staff Advisory Note in the Stabroek Newspaper said in Paragraph 7:

Guyana needs to boldly address some of the fundamentally structural weaknesses. Namely, poor investment climate, weak governance, infrastructure bottlenecks persistent security concerns and political tensions.

Mr Speaker, these very issues raised are consistent with those highlighted in the National Development Strategy papers as issues which the Government and Guyana have to deal with. Are we dealing with these issues? The Poverty Reduction Strategy paper was also drafted in 2000/2001 in an attempt to address the special needs of the poor in our society. To date, the 27 October 2006 issue of the Stabroek News features the review of the World Bank and IMF, in which they stated that the PRSP Programme is being done at a slow pace and that critical issues need to be urgently addressed further.

According to the IMF during consultation process for preparation for the 2005 APR, a number of participants voiced concern on the short falls in attaining the goals of the PRSP in governance and transparency, crime and security, and access to and improvement of basic services. Also a number of the participants stressed the absence of a well functioning PRS monitoring and evaluation system.

The IMF Report Mr Speaker, showed that the Government has to display more commitment to the realization of these programmes. This is not a time for mere rhetoric, but sound, firm action directed at addressing those weaknesses outlined in the report. It is only in this way. Positive actions, not mere words that the plight of the poor and needy can be addressed. On Page 18 the President said:

I am pained at times at the stories of indifference meted out to the poor and needy in our society. I am disturbed by the knowledge that some of our citizens still sleep on our streets. I am troubled by neglect of the elderly, many of whom are forced to spend their golden years without adequate love and support.

One must ask the question, does this happen by chance? Is this an admission of failure? Is this abdication of responsibility for effective governance? Or are these mere words? Mr Speaker, the late President Mr Hugh Desmond Hoyte, before his death, in this very House spoke pas-

sionately about street families in our society. He also asked this same President to provide assistance for the clearing of the backlands in Buxton in order for those poor families and the young people of the village to obtain a living off the land once more. Can these utterances be a valid reason to celebrate or only to divert attention from the major and pressing problems which face our society today, such as the poverty stricken village of Buxton, and others? The lack of programmes for our school drop-outs, the numerous deaths of our young mothers in child birth, the lack of proper provision to provide our elderly, who are plagued with inadequate housing, health, transportation, waiver of water rates, high electricity charges and a decent pension. What about the reform of the National Insurance Scheme? Persons having worked and paid their dues are dying and not receiving their pensions. Can you ever come around to accepting that the inability to deal with the scourge of poverty is an expression of enlightened leadership, or a caring Government? The time for talk is over. For too long the Government has been slow and adequate in its responses to the problems of youth skills deficit, and the issue of teenage and adult functional literacy. Thus, the level of employability has been very inadequate for dealing with the issues. There has not been a truly coordinated policy, which takes into account the related sectors, health education et cetera to tackle our social problems.

Mr Speaker, I now that we in this Honourable House will once again of the large sums of money spent on education and perhaps that may be true. But the question is, are we educating our youths for the 21st century?

In 2004 through 2006, as was mentioned by the Honourable Ms Backer, it is noted that only 25 percent to 30 percent children passed in Mathematics, while thirty percent to thirty-seven passed English. Perhaps the Honourable Member Mr Ramotar can tell us about the SSEE results for 2006, where in Georgetown, only 7 out of 30 plus schools, had positive growth. This is Georgetown and the results in the region are more alarming. Where then Mr Ramotar is the improved education? Today marks the ninth week for the new school term and the IRI Mathematics, a part of the BEAMS project, is not yet implemented. Both

children and teachers need tools to carry out their tasks, like any other tradesman would. And certainly 10 textbooks cannot suffice for 100 children, nor can exercise books be given to the children one term per school year. The teachers in the Kurukubari Village spoke of the lack of basic teaching materials, and schools throughout the country lack laboratory and physical education equipment – important elements for the education of Guyana's children.

Mr Speaker, the President spoke of the need to increase functional literacy. How could you increase functional literacy when there is no adequate staff, when our schools are overcrowded, and our teachers continue to migrate? Is it not time we reconsider the retiring age of our teachers? Surely it is time that the Government admits that education is on the decline. That this important sector of our economy has failed to uplift the standard of education even though this sector has been in receipt of considerable financing from the IDB and UNICEF. There is too much talk, let us call a spade, a spade. Let us educate our children. Let us as leaders seek to change the culture in our schools, to rebuild the prestige for teachers, to truly improve teachers' remuneration and to provide adequate tools. Let us carefully plan, let us organize; implement and most of all supervise the way in which we educate our children.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Minister Ramsammy, spoke of all the lofty plans for the health sector, but forgot to tell this Honourable House that the pharmacy at the Georgetown Hospital, lack adequate supply of eye drops, especially since he spoke of the state-of-art ophthalmic centre. The Minister also forgot to tell this House about the deliberate act to have names of nurses on the list of graduands, at the recent graduation, when those nurses' test papers have not even been marked as yet. But take note Members that this list of graduands was printed in the National Newspaper or did the Minister mention of the students enrolled in the rural midwifery programme at Linden. Whereby they are forced to occupy the Amerindian Hostel, because of the deplorable conditions at the place where they were placed by the Ministry of Health. As I speak, these students are considering returning to their villages.

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Mr Speaker, I would like to turn our attention to the second paragraph on Page 27 of the President's address which reads:

You have an important role to play in ensuring scrutiny of my Government. I see such a role as integral to promoting a vibrant democracy and to ensuring transparency and accountability. I expect the opposition in particular to be robust in offering constructive criticism and alternatives to legislative and policy agenda

Let me take this opportunity to once again remind this Honourable House of the many alternatives, which not only I, but my colleagues have brought to this house in previous sittings. I have advanced in this Honourable House recommendations for the aging pensioners and I have said that a UNFPA Survey conducted since 1990, showed that like other countries around the world, countries in the Caribbean, we are undergoing changes in our age structure, and are observing an increase in the number of old age persons. Since then there have been several reports by various organizations: PAHO, WHO, the UN and CARICOM to name a few. And that the tie has come for us to examine and make fundamental plans for our age.

Mr Speaker, in so doing I submit that we need to review those laws and regulatory framework governing the administration of pensions and that we need to enhance the capability, viability and integrity of the National Commission for the elderly. To develop a National Policy for the elderly and to utilize to the maximum, through implementation the recommendation outlined in the Citizens Policy Development Committee Report submitted since 1998, to look into the provision of housing, subsidizing of utility and medical bills and to structure regular monitoring and evaluation of the management of the homes for the elderly in order to ensure that appropriate standards are maintained with discipline to care for the elderly. Most important, to introduce a senior adolescent partnership programme to equip young people with skills and discipline to care for the elderly. And also submit to this House some youth and adolescent models of which the President spoke of on Page 19. That we should establish a

programme for employment preparation which will seek to correct the deficiency, illiteracy and numeracy using computer technology, and provide skills for those who have left secondary schools and are unable to find employment.

To reintroduce National Service, which will expose young people to our environment, skill training and expose them to the required discipline.

To introduce a programme which will recognize the difficulty young women face in accessing opportunities for support, counseling and development, skills development, training and child care skills, free vocational training and reproduction programmes.

I also said that be it public assistance, old age pension, food, school uniform vouchers, spectacle or medical assistance, it must be based on a commitment to restructure the Public Assistance Programme, while attempting to bring those persons to a level of self-sufficiency, by providing the basic needs which will allow them to acquire the necessary tools for self development, as well as attaching a developmental programme through which resources are given, or referrals made to institutions for participation in activities or micro-entrepreneurial opportunities. I even submitted on empowerment initiatives and grant programmes with emphasis on women, where we should seek to address positively and in a tangible way these issues, by supporting, training in the niche industry of specialized handicraft, which will target single heads of households, by establishing programme centres in the various neighbourhoods, which will serve as a business incubator and by providing support in the research of markets, and establish community education and support programmes which will focus on community awareness, geriatric, child care and skills training.

All these alternatives were put forward by the People's National Congress/Reform, in this Honourable House. Were they given any consideration? Certainly not!

Mr Speaker, I am sure that these suggestions, though not exhausted, we speak to the President's utterances of working together to solve our problem.

In concluding, it is my firm hope that when alternatives and constructive criticisms are put forward by the opposition that these will not be thrown aside and that the Government - in fact the President as Head of the Government would lead by example and adhere to his word on Page 27 of his Address which emphasizes the entertaining of such alternatives for the development of the livelihood of destitute and needy persons, the elderly, the single mothers and fathers, the street children, the working poor and progress of the Guyanese people. The time has come when our people want to hear ideas that can actually become reality. Let us give it to them. Let us give them reality. Let us give them substance. Thank you Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member

The Honourable Minister of Agriculture

Hon Robert M Persaud: Mr Speaker. I rise in support of the Motion, for the approval of Government's policies, as was adumbrated in the President's Speech to the National Assembly on 28 September.

First of all, Mr Speaker, I want to join in congratulating all those who are now serving, yourself included, in this august Assembly. Also, I want to make a special appeal to those of us, young Members of Parliament, I think it gives us an opportunity to do or to take up the President's call, of fashioning a new political culture in our country. But sadly, after listening to the Honourable Member, I thought I was an election campaign. I thought I heard all of it, some of it fabricated, some of it misrepresented from the reality from the Honourable Member. I think, the Honourable Member Mr Trotman made the point too that it seems as if we were still in an election mode.

Mr Speaker, before I address some matters or elaborate on some policy directives, as outlined by the President in his Speech to the Na-

tional Assembly, I think it would be remiss of me, if I do not set the record straight on a couple of issues. I am quite sure subsequent speakers on this side, will definitely cover areas that I have not. The Honourable Member seeks to create the impression that there has been a neglect of our elderly, or those we consider the less fortunate in our society. I invite her and I think, the Honourable Minister of Human Services and Social Security should probably extend an invitation to her and to brief her fully on what is taking place and certainly, what are some of the plans in this area.

- She would probably be told of the increased pension that moved from \$400 to \$3,500. Last year alone there was a seventy-five increase;
- She would probably be told, about the Drop-in Centre, which was created;
- She would probably be told also, about the \$1.5 billion allocated for difficult circumstances;
- She would also be told of the waivering of the water bills for pensioners or the elderly;
- She would also be told of the night shelter which was established; and
- a range of other initiatives, which were introduced by this Administration, because of the care and consideration for the Less Fortunate and certainly for the elderly.

The Honourable Member also seeks to portray that our education system has not advanced or made any strides and I am quite sure that the Honourable Minister would be willing to edify and to keep her abreast of what is taking place in our country so she does not drown in her Party's propaganda.

- She would probably be told that in 1992, we had just

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about 13,000 students who wrote CXC. Today we have in excess of 18,000 and if she looks at the regional statistics in terms of passes, Guyana is within the real range or within the range of what obtains in other CARICOM territories. She will see that our passes have been increasing as the years go by.

- She would also recognize that in 1992, there were only about thirty-five percent of trained teachers. Today that is close to sixty percent.
- Further, she would also be told that the allocation in terms of the education sector is now close to fifteen percent of total budget in the range of \$20 billion when it was just about \$1 billion when we came into office.

I can go on and on, and on but I am quite sure that the Honourable Minister would be willing to touch on those.

I also invite her to look at some of the plans that we have and some of the work we are doing in the area of dealing with the less fortunate in our society. For instance,

Very soon a *Special Assistance Single Parent* plan will be created. She will also look at *better care* for the homeless and elderly. There are some specific programmes in terms of dealing with that.

In terms of our young people,

we have already commenced the implementation of a \$1.5 billion programme to train our out-of-school youths, targeting 25,000 over a five-year period.

We are also looking at programmes in terms of sponsoring better lifestyles among our young people.

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In sports, we will also be creating three multi-purpose centers, across our country. A Sport Development Fund of over \$100 million per annum will be established.

Mr Speaker, having been briefed and having been taken on a tour of some of these facilities that the Honourable Member, in her next intervention in this House will probably want to recant or even apologize or even admit that she was overwhelmed by the propaganda of her party.

There is another point that she made in terms of the foreign direct investments - for the last ten years of her party's administration, 1982-1992, we have it as US \$2.6 million per annum. The last ten years of the PPP/C, saw the annual rate being in the range of US \$76 Million US per annum.

She spoke about poverty the Ramprakash Study, commissioned by the World Bank found poverty in the range of eighty percent 1991. Today it is below thirty-five percent.

There are many other statistics which she has misrepresented over that period.

Mr Speaker, the President on Page 25 in his Speech, made the following statements:

I have already signaled my intention to join forces with the Political Opposition and find innovative ways to work together to solve our problems.

He has also called for:

The identification and implementation of an agreed agenda of national issues and greater scope for the participation of civil society in the decision making process.

I was happy to hear, when the Honourable Leader of the Opposition and other Members referred to that. So there are some commonalities

with the President's vision and I think this serves as a point or an indication for us to rally round the things that we see as good for our country, good for all our people and certainly the broad statements as outlined in the President's Speech will serve as the framework for us to work together as we seek to move this country forward and certainly to ensure that our people have a better standard of living.

Mr Speaker, the President's vision in this speech seeks to strengthen the traditional sector and to support new and growing sectors. As the Minister of Agriculture, I wish to amplify on a few areas that will give life to the President's statement. Talk was made or it was suggested by the Honourable Member Mr Trotman that these were just promises but these are not promises. *[Interruption: 'He promised Gomatie.']* *[Laughter]* They are not promises, these are clear. *[Laughter]*

Mr Raphael GC Trotman: May I, on a point of order? Could I break the honoured tradition of no heckling please? I ask permission to break the tradition of no heckling, because it is not being observed on the other side. Thank you, very much. *[Laughter]*

The Speaker: You can go ahead, you know.

Hon Robert M Persaud: Thank you very much Mr Speaker. I do not mind the heckling. I want to speak of some of the policies and programmes within the President's statement that the Ministry of Agriculture intends to pursue. The goal is to transform this sector and address the constraints and threats that they face. Why is it that I am putting a lot of emphasis on Agriculture? Members of this august Assembly would know that Agriculture contributes about thirty-two percent of GDP. It is very, very critical for the sustainability and certainly stability to our social and economic conditions.

The focus of the next five years would be on the transformation, as I said, of the sector and development and the diversification of the various Sub-Sectors, complimented by supportive relative links such as:

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- Appropriate research;
- Extension Services;
- Technical Training;
- Improved Production and Post-Harvesting Technologies;
- Marketing; and certainly,
- Private Sector Investments, which we want to promote.

I want to look at the strengthening of the traditional sectors as referred to by the President. Let us talk a little about *Sugar*. In response to the EU price cuts, we are currently implementing a number of measures to modernize and make more competitive our sugar industry. Emphasis is being placed on:

- Increased production;
- Manufacture of high standards and quality products;
- Manufacture of value-added products;

Some of the proposed activities as part of this plan includes:

- Brand and product development;
- Improved field mechanism;
- Up-grade factory to improve competitiveness;
- Installation of a packaging plant at Enmore;
- Construction of a new state-of-the-art sugar factory at Skeldon with refinery and cogeneration plants;
- Construction of a cogeneration plant at Albion;

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- Construction of a cogeneration Plant at Enmore and Blairmont expansions;
- Support for private cane farmers;
- Rehabilitation of the West Demerara drainage system;
- Construction of a deep-water berth;
- Ethanol production from cane;
- Better storage, shipping and logistics; and certainly
- Seeking additional support from West Indies sugar cane breeding station.

Through the establishment of these and other initiatives, we expect that by 2015 sugar production will be in excess of 475,000 tonnes. The Industry's strategic development plan and efforts also have great emphasis on the production of value-added branded products. I must say, certainly boast a bit and all of us should be proud that Guyana's Sugar Action Plan, submitted to the EU has been deemed the best by the European Union and certainly this will see us receiving considerable support, to mitigate the socio economic impact as a result of that development, that is the price cuts and other challenges facing Sugar.

Let us talk a little about *Rice*. The focus of the Rice Sector has been to:

- Increase competitiveness. We have already commenced the implementation of €11.10 million rice competitive programme. What are the broad elements of this programme? They are to:
 - Provide technical assistance across the industry;
 - Have expertise and training of Rice Industry Operators;
 - Rice Policy Advice;

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- Enhance extension and research services;
- Diversification;
- Stakeholder's training
- Farmers and Millers Organizations - strengthening these Organizations.
- Improvement of water management through repairs and rehabilitations of related structures;
- The establishment, very importantly of a credit facility for farmers;
- To undertake and manage the changing dimensions on some of the developments within the rice sector;
- The restructuring of the Guyana Rice Development Board to meet the challenges of an evolving and certainly, a competitive Rice Industry.

I wish to touch on the President's statement for support for New and Growing Sectors with a bias on Agriculture. Our five-year development plan recognizes the promotion plan of non-traditional commodities, recognizing or knowing fully well, as was shown here and elsewhere that it will increase rural income, create employment and more foreign exchange for our economy.

Let us talk about the Non-traditional Sectors. More than ninety percent of Guyana's exports are made up of deplete resources, forest products and food items.

Within the sector, agriculture is recognized as being business oriented and certainly, market driven exports of non-traditional sector as produce, those exports have been increasing annually.

Our focus over the next five-years to give more life, content and reality

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to these broad objectives would be the implementation of US \$14.1 million Agriculture Diversification Programme, which we are currently negotiating. This programme will adopt a system or chained-approach to export development and contribute to conducive business and investment atmosphere.

Selected non-traditional crops and livestock activities have been identified and will drive this programme.

We see this also as contributing to the overall growth of our economy and certainly employment for many of our people. The plan will also result in sustainable increase of non-traditional agricultural exports, vegetables, fruits and the meat sub-sectors.

Also, we will intensify the monitoring of marketing opportunities, promoting of Guyana's fresh and processed agricultural produce and certainly, provide various support to our exporters, farmers, agro-processes and all those who are involved in the chain.

The President also has identified as an emerging sector, aquaculture, but aquaculture has to be seen within the context of our plan for the fisheries sub-sector. As we know, over time the fisheries sub-sector has played or made a significant contribution to our economic development. We intend to drive the aquaculture initiative forward. We also have to put in place the necessary institutional support and we will soon be implementing, the Fisheries Management Plan. In another week's time, we will be conducting the final consultation of this Management Plan. We hope, to convert or to create the Fisheries Department into a semi-autonomous agency to provide the necessary support of growth, in this area.

We will also establish the Fisheries' Advisory Committee. We will continue to do assessment on shrimp and fish species. We will continue to increase our vessel monitoring system to be managed by the Maritime Administration. Also significant will be the development of Coastal polygic species and certainly put in place new legislation required, in terms of us

tapping into the polygic resources.

Specifically on aquaculture, this will be given high priority as a new area, in terms of addressing food security needs, not only in Guyana, but in the Region also and providing opportunities for diversified cropping systems and improving productivity and income for our farmers and entrepreneurs.

Some of the specific areas or initiatives that we have are:

- Expansion of the Mon Repos Fresh Water Station;
- Sustained research of polyculture fresh water training and activities;
- Expansion of the aquaculture staff complement within the Ministry;
- Expansion of the fish-culture.

We have done some successful experiments through the help of FAO and we intend to expand that more widely;

- To continue collaboration with the newly formed National Aquaculture Association of Guyana;

We will be bringing to this House the aquaculture legislation which is so necessary. We hope that this will come early next year as part of our Ministry's Parliamentary Agenda. We have planned:

- We have planned the development of brackish aquaculture;
- The expansion of agriculture in the interior locations;
- The construction of brackish water research;
- A demonstration station on the Corentyne Coast; and

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- Continue to provide training for workers and entrepreneurs in the area of aquaculture.

Mr Speaker, this Sector as we have seen in Jamaica, in Belize and in the Bahamas, and if we go further afield in Israel, it can become a very leading, very significant foreign exchange earner and job creation activity for our economy.

I wish to touch a little on *Forestry* - The Forestry Sub-Sector has been one of the major agricultural industry with area for growth, which is consistent with the President's Policy of supporting, in terms of growing or an emerging sector. Over the next five years, we want to focus on:

- Attracting new investments for logging, timber processing and joint ventures;
- The proportion of additional value-added and downstream industries.
- The creation of forest sector incentive.
- Increase exports and processed forest produce.
- Technological improvements and a number of training activities.
- Pilot plantation incentive focusing on forest landscape, plant restoration and plantation forestry.

As I said earlier,

- Value-Added will be promoted to include furniture, kiln-dried lumber, veneer and dimension lumber.

Certainly, we are doing this with the objective of:

- Paid reduction in export of logs.

Mr Speaker, Marketing is very important. In 2005 the Government established the Forest Product Marketing Council. This body has been working to secure market and has been able to do so with a high degree of success. We have also established joint venture. Just recently one of the Companies now which has a joint venture scheme with a logging company in Berbice, also wants to expand its presence to do much more processing, in terms of forestry products and certainly has an interest in agro-processing.

But for all of this to happen, we need the necessary infrastructure, because agriculture depends on a lot on a certain infrastructure. One of which we have been looking at and working on for some time ... my predecessors and certainly those Members who have been in this House, in the Eighth and certainly, the Seventh Parliament ... would have addressed the issue of the intermediate savannahs, which we considered as the second frontier here for major agricultural development after the Coastal areas. This offers our farmers an ideal land area for large scale agriculture and certainly for agro-processing.

Already we have seen another area that we want to put emphasis on too and that is Region 9 in terms of its potential for the cattle industry and even small ruminants. We think that with improved infrastructure and linkages that there is great potential.

Drainage and Irrigation which is the backbone or essential prerequisite for the success of agriculture. In view of this importance, Members who were here, in the eighth Parliament would recall that the National Drainage and Irrigation Bill was passed, which converted the National Drainage and Irrigation Board into the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority from 1 January 2006. This is very important, in terms of the management of our Irrigation System and in another week's time, we will be launching the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority Board.

In addition, we have various projects within the Ministry, which are responsible for the various aspects of Drainage and Irrigation, this includes:

- The Rice Competitive Programme which I referred to, which has a focus on components in terms of water management for the rice industry.
- The Agriculture Support Services Programme. This too has a strong emphasis on D&I and especially, of the development of Water User Association.
- Under implementation of the Poor Rural Community Support Services Projects and also at the NDIA centrally, we are expending billions of dollars to upgrade, manage and certainly to have our Drainage and Irrigation Systems at an optimal level.

Over the next five years, we will continue to focus on:

- The ongoing maintenance of the East Demerara Water Conservancy and other Conservancies;
- The rehabilitation of drains and channels, embankments and revetments;
- The construction and rehabilitation of sluices, culverts and other structures;
- The purchase of new pumps, dredges, pontoons and other related equipment.

IT related services are important in terms of giving life to what the President spoke about in his Speech, in terms of giving support to new and emerging sectors. We see reliable *IT* services will impact on the efficiency of agriculture related systems, especially regarding extension services. We also want to use *IT* as the means, in terms of connecting our farmers to the market. Also to help our farmers and to help the entire sector, to be much more businesslike and much more market oriented in our agricultural activities.

Hydroelectric Power also is a means of cheap source of electricity; it has the key in terms of unleashing our Agro-processing potentials. The Electric Power supply in Guyana costs an average of US 25cents per unit, while our competitors have their power charge at about US 10cents, because of hydro power and many of them are producers of fossil fuel.

Fair and efficient allocation of land is another area in terms of the context of providing the necessary infrastructure. The semi-autonomous nature of Land and Surveys Commission allows for this to take place.

We have also seen benefits, with particular reference to fifty-year leases given out to farmers, to have an impact in terms of greater investments in agricultural activities.

The MMA-ADA, a semi-autonomous agency, is also responsible for agricultural land lines within the borders of Region 9. That too has been making progress in ensuring fair and efficient allocation.

Mr Speaker, the challenges facing the agricultural sector especially when we talked about the removal of preferential access and also, the competition created in the context of a free market and globalized economic framework, have lead to the creation of new opportunities for selective and sustainable diversification activities and certainly increase competitiveness in the sector.

As I said, the Government has commenced several programmes. We are pursuing new initiatives within the context of the President's commitments in terms of giving support for new and emerging sectors.

Some of the programmes that we intend to benefit from and to serve as a catalyst to these plans are:

- The Regional Transformation Programme;
 - The Commodities Competitive Studies which was done;
- and

- The implementation of the Historic National Competitiveness Strategy.

Mr Speaker, I just thought of outlining just a few of the broad initiatives and programmes within the Agricultural Sector which will give life, substance and reality to the President's declarations on 28 September in this regard.

We see that with the further rapid implementation of these programmes and certainly, with the intensification of work and the Jagdeo's Initiative as adopted by CARICOM Heads which identifies, key constraints facing agriculture, we see agriculture being transformed, not only in the Region, but being transformed in Guyana and certainly will lead to sustainable economic framework.

Mr Speaker, there is one sector which the President highlighted and which given in another light, I served as the Coordinator for the drafting of the National Coded Strategy, which touched a bit on ITC. The President in his Speech, made it clear that -

The Government will liberalize, the Telecommunication Sector to ensure a more reliable and Competitive Service, which is required for the development of the IT related Service Industry and certainly, employing thousands more of our young people.

He also committed that - *it is his Government's intention, that eighty percent of household be connected to the Internet, and every Guyanese be made Computer literate.*

The President also committed in his Speech that - *the Government will support New and Growing Sectors, that are related to IT.*

We see this, as leading to the generation of more wealth, higher standard of living for our people and ensuring that all of our people benefit from all the facilities that IT has. This is not *pie-in-the-sky* that the President has been talking about. Today worldwide is experiencing what might be described as the establishment of a new or a Global Order and one

that witnesses a transformation that commenced about two decades ago with the creation of a Global Information and Knowledge Society through the introduction of competition of the traditional monopoly telecom market fostering the use of and application of ICT.

Even the World Bank 2006 Report on Global Trends and Policies on Information and Communication for Development states that at the global level, ICT has the potential for reducing poverty and fostering growth in developing countries is ever increasing. Mobile phones provide market links for entrepreneurs and farmers. The Internet delivers vital information to schools, workers and private sector and increase productivity and participation.

The World Bank observed that by connecting people and places, ICT plays a vital role in National, Regional and Global Development.

The Report also point out that ICT is crucial to sustainable poverty reduction, because it makes the country's economy more efficient and globally competitive; improve health and education services and creates new sources of income and employment.

Mr Speaker, we have commenced much work in this area. Where are we in this regard? We have just developed a National ICT Strategy. One that is tied to our country's overall development goals and is intended to promote and coordinate ICT Investments and extend the benefits to the entire population. Our strategy aims:

- To extend ICT use in government and schools;
 - To liberalize and expand communication infrastructure;
- and
- To provide an appropriate legal and regulatory framework for the development of ICT information skills and certainly E-business growth.

Our strategy was born out of the Government's recognition of the sig-

nificance of ICT and its tremendous potential in accelerating social and economic advancement and achieving the goals of our National Development Strategy, Poverty Reduction Strategy, as well as the Millennium Development Goals.

Our Strategy was developed through a national process in a highly inclusive and transparent manner involving active participation of hundreds of persons from the Public and Private Sectors and Civil Society. It is designed to better ensure that it is practical and feasible and it best assures Guyana's economic and social advancement through the deployment of ICT.

We will, I seek and I am quite sure that all Members of this House will support the implementation of this strategy. One critical and first step will be the introduction of market reforms in the Telecommunication Sector for which I am quite sure we will enjoy the support of all Members of the National Assembly in the interest of developing our ICT Sector.

Mr Speaker, our country as the President outlined has a very exciting future. The vision that he has outlined, I think it is a vision that caters and represents the interest of all our people. I seek and I urge Members of the National Assembly, Members of the Opposition to work together, work with the Government as we seek to fulfill this vision of creating a harmonious, a united society in which there are opportunities for all our people. I thank you Mr Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honourable Member Ms Africo Selman.

Ms Africo Selman: Mr Speaker, Madame Deputy Speaker, Clerk of the National Assembly, Leader of the Opposition, Fellow Members of Parliament, it is an honour and privilege to have been selected to serve at the nation's highest, deliberative and decision making forum. I recognize that side by side with immense prestige that being a Member of Parliament bestows the Office also devolves on us tremendous responsibili-

ties. With this in view, I rise to examine the notion of economic development of the Government, which the President alluded to in his presentation at the opening of the Ninth Parliament recently.

Mr Speaker, the President presented his case as if it were a panacea for all ills, but we all know that Guyana is experiencing a depression, the characteristics of which are seen in the responses of the people, widely publicized in our media on a daily basis.

The optimism that Mr Jagdeo thinks is occurring in Guyana is virtually non-existent. It is irresponsible and naive for a Government to imagine that all is well; when daily we see just the opposite.

Mr Speaker, everyone knows that economic development is the development of the economic wealth of a country for the well-being of its people. Economic development creates a sustainable increase in living standards that result in increased per capita income, better education, health and environmental protection. It is the development of these basic ingredients that will reduce poverty that Mr Jagdeo spoke about in his Presentation.

The United Nations organization of which Guyana is a Member has developed a widely-accepted set of indices to measure development against a nexus of composite indicators.

The United Nations Human Development Index measures a country's average development in three basic dimensions of human development. These are:

- Life expectancy;
- Educational attainment; and
- Adjusted Real Income.

Also this same United Nations Organization has a Human Poverty Index which measures deprivation using:

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- The percent of people expected to die before age forty;
- The percent of literate adults;
- The percent of people without access to health services and safe water; and
- The percent of underweight children under five.

These are the yardsticks or indicators of development. The Policies that the Government needs to implement should first and foremost seek to alleviate poverty.

Many of the people who are dying daily in our country with unfulfilled dreams and aspirations are extremely poor and hopeless. Many do not have the basic accessibility to healthcare or to education.

The people in Caneville, a community not so far away from the capital city, do not have safe water to sustain their daily lives and not only safe water, but all the other basic necessities to sustain the economic development of the community. Caneville is an example of one of several communities throughout the length and breadth of Guyana that cannot be economically empowered, because the Government sees it fit not to care about their existence. Yet this Government boasts of macro economic stability.

Mr Speaker, the Members of Parliament of the People's National Congress Reform - One Guyana and I know that this development must start in the community with establishment of social amenities like:

- The provision of safe water;
- The development of accessible health facilities;
- Improvement of education; and
- The provision of electricity.

There is need to treat all Guyanese as one regardless of life expectancy of the citizenry. At present, under this administration our life expectancy rate has declined to an all-time low of 64 compared to 74 in neighbouring Brazil and higher 70 in other sister Caribbean.

Mr Speaker, just a few years ago Guyana's life expectancy rate was in the high 70s, but the fact that it is declining and is further likely to decline is due to the government's poor record of development.

The Guyanese people are stressed more than ever to deal with additional complexities of life made extremely difficult under the present regime. What the common people earn is insufficient for their survival. People just cannot live on their wages and salaries except for few who enjoy special contracts in the Public Service.

The cost of living is high and will continue to be made higher with the introduction of new taxes. People are finding it harder to save' to purchase the essential things that will sustain longer and healthier lives. Under this Government's watch hospital bills and other related health support amenities have escalated beyond unprecedented proportions. What the Government needs to do is to create wealth in the land and so ease the struggle and the hardships that our people face daily. I believe that a concerted effort should be made to make health-related issues and instruments more accessible so that the quality of life of the people could be enhanced.

Our solution to this problem includes investigation of the nutritional status of children and adults to identify nutritional deficiencies and implement appropriate remedies. The formulation and implementation of economic policies are crucial to the survival and development of a country's economy. Sad, but very true, the absence of any foreign trade policy in the Address of His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo to the Ninth Parliament of Guyana is an indication that the Government lacks policies that are necessary for the stimulation of production, the concomitant of which is as if the government does not accept the initiatives and proposals that the People's National Congress Reform-One Guy-

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ana proposes, Guyana will remain in the doldrums for the next five years. Guyana will continue to be regarded as a heavily indebted poor country, whose existence is determined by the fancies of the donor agencies, which inevitably leads to the infiltration and the manipulation of Guyana's territorial integrity and political sovereignty.

Guyana wants to be independent of heavy debts. Guyana begs to be able to fully utilize its human and physical resources to generate economic wealth. One very serious problem to be addressed is the debt burden and despite obtaining so much debt relief and debt write-offs, we still remain a heavy indebted country through the mismanagement and misappropriation by personnel employed on behalf of the present regime.

Mr Speaker, the key to this problem that will continue to grow if the Government does not change its policy of mismanagement and encouragement of corruption is to ensure that the money freed as a result of the debt write-off be used for sustainable development so that Guyana frees itself from unmanageable debt and our people, who do not know how this debt is incurred can be freed from the perennial poverty that has now become the legacy of Guyana.

Mr Speaker, it is imperative that our Government remembers that the Government is the repository of trust of the citizens. In the realm of collective decision and consequently the Government has a responsibility and obligation to return trust to the beautiful people of Guyana in the form of wise decisions and policies, which contribute immensely to improve the living standards of all.

Mr Speaker, with the overall development of Guyana in mind, the PNCR-G strongly suggests that the key to rapid economic growth is large scale and continuous investments from the foreign and local investors. For example, Omai Gold Mines Ltd. was brought in economy and employed 1,000 Guyanese. Guyana needs a multitude of such investments in all sectors of the economy.

I sincerely hope that the Government will rise to the challenge and incorporate and implement sound policies that will facilitate economic growth through the maximum utilization of its resources. Guyana's resources are tired of being not fully utilized. The resources of this land, begs to be utilized.

Mr Speaker, the PNCR-IG recognizes that a prerequisite to economic viability of Guyana is the establishment of export promotion zones, which will grant concessions to investors who are specifically interested in using Guyana, as a place from which to export their Goods and Services, and free trade zones, which are utilized as facilities for traffic of Commodities have proven themselves in several countries around the globe as kick-starts to development.

We firmly believe that Guyana is uniquely placed to serve as a bulk-transshipment point among the northern Brazilian States, the Caribbean, North America and the rest of the World.

Mr Speaker, one of the first priorities of the Government should be the assembling of suitable investors and reaching agreements with the related governments so that identification of locations for the export promotion zones and related port facility can begin. This will provide employment in the construction and related industries will be lent to the upgrading of the Guyana-Brazil road to an international highway and will stimulate the growth of related warehousing, processing, manufacturing and service.

Mr Speaker, the Government should more vigorously pursue international trade especially in improving the quality of our exports by making them more market competitive and attractive to buyers. This can be achieved by:

- (i) Educating our exporters about the importance of product quality, and also
- (ii) Setting up strict guidelines which these exporters should follow.

Thus, if the Government is really serious about the Economic Development of all Guyanese *per se*, it will not work on programmes in isolation, but sensitize the local personnel involved so that they will be able to effectively and efficiently compete with the myriad competitors of the global village. Hence, what is strongly recommended is quality consciousness to coin a phrase.

Mr Speaker, the President claims:

A visit to Guyexpo will demonstrate that we are producers of high quality Value-Added Products that will compete well in regional and international markets.

Mr Speaker, we are all cognizant that exhibits that we see at Guyexpo and other trade fairs within the country do not always have the same quality when purchased by the consumer. In short, the Government successfully promotes activities of show, but the reality is that the consumer is continuously being short-changed.

It is important that the Government sees it fit to demonstrate transparency and honesty in its entire doings, so that these attributes can become part and parcel of our Guyanese well-being. It should be noted that there is more talk than action by this Administration. In short, fourteen of hullabaloo and nothing tangible to show, since their primary interest is their public relations gimmick and while they do this the Guyanese people feel the squeeze and experience the hardship and the Administration remains unaccountable. This should not be allowed anymore as we demand greater responsibility and accountability as well as carefully coordinated strategy implementation of policies and programmes to get Guyanese out of... [Pause]

Mr Speaker, the President in his Speech said:

In order to promote the rich cultural diversity of our country, my Government will create a national endowment for the arts; provide opportunities for our writers, musi-

cians, artists, dancers and others in order to promote their talents.

Mr Speaker, these are lofty ideals which we in the PNCR-IG can have no significant disagreement with. We, however, hope that the President could have been more specific. In this regard, the People's National Congress Reform-One Guyana wishes to call on the Government to enact copyright legislation since this will go a far way in protecting the work of writers, musicians and artists, et cetera and they will be able to benefit from their creations. I sincerely hope that the Government will incorporate and implement sound economic policies that will facilitate economic growth through the maximum utilization of Guyana's physical and human resources. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member, for that spirited opening presentation.

The Honourable Member Mr Odinga Lumumba

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Mr Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate you on being Speaker once again. I also want to congratulate the Opposition Leader, Mr Robert Corbin, Members of the AFC, and all the New Members of the PNC, in particular Mr Norton, welcome back, it has been a long time. I know you had to come back. I also would like to congratulate all the New Members of Parliament, the Parliamentary Secretaries

I think the presentation of Ms Selman was very spirited and I would like to blame the Honourable Opposition for doing such an early damage to Mr Selman's daughter by allowing her to proceed and comment on issues which are obviously incorrect and I would like to respond to some of these things.

The first one which I think was really out of sync with reality was the fact that she was so critical of our local products and manufacturers.

The other thing too, I thought that in this Session of Parliament, I

had hoped and looked forward to us having a very pleasant atmosphere, one of which is common respect, so that we can listen to each other. You noticed I was very quiet in my moments.

I think it is very unfortunate that she would have been so harsh on our local manufacturers. It is quite possible that some of the products may not be up to standard, but we must guide them instead of openly criticizing them. Then those who are around us in particular the foreigners who were in Guyana might think that the products at the exhibition centre were not worthy for exportation. *[Interruption: 'You are lucky that she did not speak about dolphins.']* Well, that is fine. We can talk about all the things that you have been accused of in the past. So do not let us go down that road, you know that I can continue the process. Let us do not go down that road. We can talk about different things, because I am opened to talk. I can talk whole night.

Mr Speaker, I also think in her presentation the young Parliamentarian used some scientific words to talk about the size of people's bodies and the impact food; there is not enough food. That bothers me, because for the thirty years that the PNC had been in power and with all those short-comings in terms of inadequate food, Guyanese would have disappeared by now. We all would have been about two inches in size and weighed about two pounds if I should follow her theory and her scientific explanations.

In addition, she spoke a lot about schools and education. I think it is important that we note, even though one may want to be critical one must clearly state that hundreds and I do not want to feel like I am campaigning. Elections are over, you have lost, but you want to campaign again.

We have evidence of hundreds of schools that we have built and repaired. We do not need to go down that road. It is quite possible and I would not disagree that we might need more schools and we must work together to ensure that more schools, so the criticism should be that there might be a need for more schools in the different communities.

One cannot stand in this Honourable House and say, we do not have schools, we do not have enough schools, we do not have schools and the education policy is not geared towards schools. Those are not good statements and they are incorrect statements. I think some of those things should be withdrawn.

She spoke about water, and again, the Member of Parliament obviously does not to have enough information. She had never been able to go to Region 5, Region 6 and witness the thousands of citizens, who on a daily basis, before the PPP/C came to Power, had to draw water in pans and bowls, basins, buckets on their heads and in many cases some of the people had to use water from the canals and boil it before they drink it. *[Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Let us have some order please, Honourable Members.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: The Honourable Member of Parliament also spoke about lack of Electricity. Obviously, again she has been misinformed, because she should have known that there are dozens and dozens of communities that did not have electricity when the PPP/C came into power. These are the facts. She also should know that there are dozens of communities that have been given electricity for the first time under the PPP/C government.

She spoke about health. Again this is ridiculous. The Member of Parliament cannot even criticize the issue of Health. There are active health centers in almost every community in this country. There were communities in Amerindian areas that never had health facilities. There are nine or ten modern hospitals that have been built. Under the PNC the Public Hospital had no medicine and doctors.

The Comrade spoke about misappropriation of funds, et cetera. She might be correct, but we cannot tell, because for over eleven or twelve years, we did not know what was spent, because the Auditor General's Report never got any information from the People's National Congress Government.

Mr Speaker, the Honourable Member Mrs Lawrence spoke at length about a World Bank Report, but she failed to point out to this Honourable House, that the same Report said the following,

- (i) There have been improvements in human development indicators and progress with reforms;
- (ii) Guyana continues to make progress in laying the foundation for poverty reduction;
- (iii) The prudent fiscal policies and private/Public Sector Investment Programme should continue to be perused;
- (iv) Guyana was able to maintain macro economic stability, in the context of modern growth.
- (v) The 2004 fiscal overturn was considerably stronger than was anticipated under the fund programme. Public Sector deficit declined by some 2.4 percent during the period.
- (vi) Notwithstanding the progress made the staff noticed significant delay, which was due to capacity constraints, political instability and an outbreak of crime.

I think my emphasis tonight really is to talk about democracy. I believe that everyone and all political organizations have contributed to democracy and to the progress and to the way we are and I think everyone should be given some credit. Of course, I believe that the PPP/C has played the most fundamental role in this process. We can debate it, we can discuss it, but like I said earlier, I think everyone played a part.

I want to start with the 6 September 2006 Press Release by the OAS and I will be very brief:

The Organization of American States election monitors have reaffirmed their assessment that Guyana's 28 August General and Regional Elections were conducted in a manner that does credit to all concerned.

The Preliminary Report by the OAS Observation Mission, which Assistant Secretary General Albert Ramdin addressed to the Permanent Counsel today stressed that the current post-election momentum provides an opportunity for Guyana and all Political Parties to work across Party and Ethnic lines, to address Economic and Social challenges of the 21st Century.

I think, my friends on the other side that is what is fundamental. What is fundamental is where we are today. It is important that on this course on democracy that we understand where we came from, because if we do not understand where we came from, we might slide back into the original position which is not a good position.

I want to also briefly outline and speak for a few minutes about what we have accomplished here as Parliamentarians.

Last year through Bradford's and Michael Davies' Reports, we were able to work together as a group on both sides. We were able to put aside party preferences or party positions and come up with something fundamental that I believe this country will look forward to. I will just list a few of the items.

- The issues of response of Ministers to questions within a specific time period, which is twenty-one days, is on the table and was agreed to;
- We have provided more time for scrutiny of Bills;
- Annual State-of-the-Nation Speech to Parliament;
- Policy Statement by Ministers;
- Provisions for sending Bills to Sector Committees or Special Select Committees before they are considered by the National Assembly;
- Establishment of a Salutory Instrument Committee;

- Oral questions without Notice.

These recommendations could not have been accommodated in the Standing Orders had they not been referred to the Speaker and Clerk of the National Assembly or the Parliamentary Management Committee for administrative reasons.

The Parliamentary Management Committee is an innovation to note. This is the Committee established to facilitate the smooth functioning of the National Assembly. Again, that is important and that is what the Guyanese Public expects from us. Honourable Members, I was looking at doing some research. The reason why I wanted to do that was because if I am to speak on democracy, I need a base from which to start. I am not trying to attack anybody in this discourse. I think it was interesting that I want to start from where we came and where we are. I found a document that listed the sixty-one dictators. I went through this thing and I found:

- Kim Il Sung, who was forty-six years as a dictator.
- Castro was forty-four. I mean. I love Castro.

By the way, I did not come up with this information. I am just reading this document here, Honourable Opposition Leader. When I reached No. 29, I saw:

- Forbes Burnham, Guyana, twenty-one years as a dictator

That is true. Listen, there are some dictators who have done good things, I am not saying everything a dictator does is bad. They do good things and bad things. So, understand that. So, I am not saying it is a good yardstick to start.

We started with Guyana at one time was under a dictatorship. Today, it is clear that we are under a democratic process and a democratic government. The question is, how did we get here?

Now, I saw another document and this one is a lovely and interesting document. I will give the Leader of the Opposition a copy. It says:

In the twenty-two years since independence, massive systematic electoral fraud has denied the Guyanese people their right to freely elect their government; to unable to express themselves politically in free and fair elections.

Interesting then it skips and says:

Today, Guyana stands at human rights crossroads. National Elections, the first in five years, must be held by March 1991. If that election is free and fair, Guyana could return and regain the road to political freedom and the restoration of national confidence. But a free and fair election cannot be held without fundamental changes in the deeply flawed Guyanese electoral process.

Now, we have to move pass that. Now that we have pronounced on the problem, how did we move from that problem to where we are today? One of the most interesting things I found and Mr Speaker, you know that my research is very good. I saw a document that dealt with National Security Act. This document is very important in relation to moving us towards a democratic process. This document was implemented 1 January 1, 1967... Robert you know fully about this document; because you used it well. It says:

- (a) Subject to Section 6, the Minister may, if satisfied with respect to any person that have used to prevent this Act in any manner prejudicial to Public Safety or Public Order or Defence in Guyana, it is necessary to provide preventative detention, make an Order directing that he be detained.
- (b) *Stating concise on the grounds for such detention, so however, that no defect of any kind with such statement shall invalid the Order.*

This process of Democracy, will give everybody what they deserve. Thanks to President Hoyte, he made changes. In 1991, Mr Hoyte said that this thing cannot work, but Mr Hoyte made that change kicking and screaming by the PPP/C. He did not make this change just because he woke up one morning and decided that he needed to change it. International pressure, the Opposition, and Mr Carter forced him to make those changes, but he made these changes. Now that was an important change.

I think the next most important change in this process ... and young people must know what this change is - the status of the Elections Commission

Under Mr Burnham, the PPP had one appointee, the PNC had one appointee and the President appointed the chairman after consultation with the Opposition. But in those days, consultation was, Cheddi, I got a man. [*Hang up*] That was consultation in those days. [*Laughter*] As a matter of fact that issue was dealt with. I remember when Honourable Minister Jeffery, then was Minister of Health, had an issue with the Medical Council and the Honourable Justice Bernard ruled that *Consultation must be a process that includes discussion and debate*. Consultation cannot be, Cheddi, this is the Chairman [*Hang up*]. So that process has changed. [*Interruption: 'How could you call him Cheddi?'*] I am not calling him *Cheddi*. That is what Burnham called him. Burnham said, Cheddi. [*Noisy Interruption*]

The Speaker: Honourable Members, please allow Mr Lumumba to proceed with his presentation undisturbed. I believe you are being unfair to him.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: That is okay. I understand the PNCR-1G. They just cannot help it. Allow them to do that, Sir. That is their normal behaviour.

We are moving through the process of democracy here.

The next step is, Mr Carter came here. Mr Carter, the American and the Europeans insisted that there needed to be further amendments to

the Act, so that the Election's Commission could be independent.

We are able now to have an Elections Commission that has three Opposition members, three Government members and a Chairman, who is proposed by the Opposition. So what we see today is democracy that has travelled like a train from one stop to another stop. That is what you have seen today. Democracy cannot be implemented. *[Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Mr Murray.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: No, leave Mr Murray. It is okay.

The Speaker: Mr Murray, stop getting agitated, be patient.

Mr Odinga N Lumumba: Mr Speaker, Mr Murray is my dear friend. Mr Murray is given permission to behave this way. It is okay. Mr Murray understands the lack of Democracy in the PNC, because if the PNC was democratic Mr Murray would have been the Leader of the PNC and he knows that. *[Applause]* I still respect Mr Murray and his credentials are there, his history is there, but yet he is not the leader. So we would not get into that. So he is a victim

Mr Speaker, what I said to you earlier and what I am saying to the Honourable Members is that this process of democracy has been a process that went through different stages. It moved from Burnham; it moved to some liberalization by Mr Hoyte; it moved to a full implementation of total freedom under the PPP/C. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, democracy does not end because you have won an election; that is part of democracy. Mr Speaker, it is the consultation process that has been fulfilled by the PPP/C, that is part of this process of democracy. It is the ability of the PPP/C to meet all groups; it is ability of the President of Guyana to meet the Opposition Leader and to have sensible discussions on all issues. That is part of the process of democracy. It is our ability to meet the Private Sector; our ability to meet Trade Unions; our ability to meet with all organizations in all com-

munities, which is part of democracy that we are fulfilling today.

Mr Speaker, as I stand here today, I am trying to be nice to everybody and in particular to be respectful to the Leader of the Opposition, because if he crosses the line, I am going to cross the line. If I cross the line his head will hurt from now until year 2096. Let us do not cross the line. Mr Speaker, I have never disrespected you in Parliament. I have never disrespected any Member of the Opposition in Parliament. I come and I speak on an issue. *[Interruption: 'You were disrespectful to Mr Hoyte.']* I have disrespected Mr Hoyte. You are disrespectful to this Parliament and this nation as the Leader of the Opposition. I have never said that before, but I am saying it.

However, it is your democratic right to say whatever you want to say on the other side. I have made my point. I am saying that there is a process. It started with a dictator. We have made changes, we have made amendments; we have gotten constitutional Bills; we have reduced the powers of the President. Today all Guyanese for the first time have been able to participate in elections, free and fair, without intimidation. The OAS and the world all over have said that this has been the freest and the best elections in the history of this country. I thank you. *[Applause] [Noisy Interruption]*

The Speaker: Mrs Backer. This is the National Assembly.

Mrs Deborah J Backer: Sorry.

The Speaker: Mr Lumumba, please stop shouting across the hall, gentlemen.

Honourable Member Mr Everall Franklin

Mr Everall Franklin: Mr Speaker, please allow me to first of all congratulate the Speaker of the House on his re-appointment, the Leader of the Opposition on his re-election and of course that of the Deputy Speaker.

I must let you know that since I have no one else next to me to give an extra fifteen minutes I will be within the time allotted. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: I will hold you to that.

Mr Everall Franklin: So you can hold me to that. I will start by a quote:

They are observing us and will respect us, if courageously we place national good above partisan interest and country above self. Let history speak well of us.

That is His Excellency's address to the Eighth Parliament, 2001. So, has he since spoken? Reflecting once again on the President's Address to the Eighth Parliament, he said:

Dwelling within safe borders, living in peace and harmony, will allow our people to unleash their creative energies and to utilize new and changing technologies to accelerate the creation of wealth and improve their welfare.

Has this been achieved? Mr Speaker, after studying His Excellency's Address to this Ninth Parliament, it is to note that the vision outlined is commendable. The working towards a situation, where all of our people have equal access to resources and actually benefit from economic development and any improvement in social conditions. This would seem to be the reason why any Government should exist. The core element of the tasks at hand as outlined by His Excellency would see constitutional and legislative reforms, involving all political parties represented in this House along with progressive Civil Society. But who defines *progressive* when it comes to *civil society*? I think there needs to be a little clarification as far as that is concerned.

This Government has once again, an opportunity to work with all Guyanese to unleash that creativity required for rapid development. It was heartening to hear His Excellency speak about building trust and creating space for all at the political level. This finally may be recognition

of the fact that we all have to be involved or we all will be consumed.

Under *Sustaining the Environment for Economic Growth* His Excellency outlined his Government's policies of maintaining macro economic stability.

Disappointment was, however, experienced after no mention was made of an exit strategy from the IMF. Since we can all agree that true freedom to pursue a Guyanese agenda will be hampered by the economic albatross, which we have securely fastened around the necks of our citizens, in spite of debt relief, which often benefits the lender, since it frees up and allows the borrower to once again borrow from the same people, who gave debt relief and gave life to their economies.

Mr Speaker, the President recognizes that Guyana has been and still is a primary commodity exporter. The proposal to reverse this trend is noteworthy. The Guyanese people will be looking forward to concrete steps, which encourage investments in small and medium sized enterprises, which have proven to create most employment and wealth in developing and developed countries. These countries, however, have invested heavily in education to prepare its people for the task required to support emerging sectors of as stated by the President agro-processing, eco tourism, information technology and aquaculture. Therefore development cannot be taken in a haphazard manner, all sectors have to be on board working towards a national plan subscribed too and supported by most. We can ask ourselves a question, are we adequately prepared?

Indeed, the answer should guide us, to examine our state of readiness and to deal honestly with the work ahead of us. It would also encourage us to make use of the best brains in and out of Guyana to accomplish the stated aims regardless of political labels. Therefore investment in our human resources especially in the education sector should be of utmost importance. We, I say *we*, must find a way, to stem the tide of our migrating teachers by addressing aggressively their salaries and conditions, if we are to achieve even part of the vision provided by the

President. Forty percent of untrained teachers in our school system ought to have set off alarm bells all over this land. A way must be found to do what is necessary for our sustained development despite IMF and its conditions, which sometimes make it impossible in a country such as ours to progress if we doggedly follow their programmes.

On Infrastructural Development, under this heading the President echoed the sentiments of all political parties in and out of this House. Therefore, the task at hand is to turn these plans into reality. Deep water harbour, rails, road links from Brazil to mining areas of Regions 10 and 6 are doable projects, without burdening this State's coffers. Innovative ways to finance these projects without affecting obligations to International Financial Institutions must be explored without fail.

In this regard, GAP-ROAR will avail itself to assist in the furthering of these plans in a very direct manner if called upon to do so.

Investment in Physical Infrastructure is of national Importance. This Government prides itself in being able to launch many projects within short periods, especially around national elections.

However, much more emphasis must and have to be place on the quality of work supplied, value for money spent, waste and slipshod work must be relentless tackled and reduced.

The PPC- *Public Procurement Commission* - must be established as soon as possible.

On *Social Conditions*, His Excellency outlined his plans for investment in health and education which on paper cannot be faulted. However, the resource personnel in both areas are leaving this country in large numbers. Since the greatest resource that a country possess is its human resource, it was our expectation that some thought would have been given to address the plight of the workers in these two important sectors. I think all plans have to be centered on people, who will have to execute, the teachers, nurses, health professional, social workers and the recipients who have to benefit from these plans.

Of note, was an open admission by the President of our elderly, the destitute and single mothers who in need of help.

The President mentioned some steps to be taken to correct some of these ills in our Society. Missing from His Excellency's Address was the expressed need for drug rehabilitation centers for many of the destitute citizens who are caught in crime, abuse and poverty. To my mind, this will reduce significantly those inhabiting store fronts and markets in our cities and more recently in our villages.

His Excellency, when dealing with *Youth, Sport and Culture*, stated that the government will spend over the next five years, more than G\$1.5 billion to train over 5,000 young persons in various skills with a view to rebuilding the entrepreneur class. Interesting it would be, to find out how this figure was arrived at.

Recreational Facilities for our young people is of utmost importance. Therefore I submit that no new schools should be built without consideration for recreational facilities at those schools.

With respect to *Promotion of Cultural Diversity* the establishment of a National Endowment for Arts is indeed welcomed. However, as another speaker stated, the issues of copyright and the protection of intellectual property must also be seriously addressed if writers, musician, artists and dancers, as stated by the President, are to develop their skills and benefit from such an initiative.

The *Environment* Mr Speaker, the President dealt with the enhancement of the Community, the lack of pride by citizens in their surroundings and allowing their neighborhood to be littered without any regard for propriety. This is the case of many areas in this country. In this respect, the government offices and agencies should take the initiative and would do well to clean up their compounds and facilities freeing them of the bush, old furniture and discarded equipment.

Not so long ago, the Ministry of Health, on Hadfield Street, the back

entrance was filled with rubbish and was not in keeping with Ministry of Health's environmental standard. That situation has improved significantly.

Security and Crime

On this most important issue we seem to be saying all the correct things, doing the appropriate studies, securing finance, but achieving very little. One of the single most disturbing things that our people are confronted with is their personal security.

Security issues are no longer someone else's problem concentrated in a specific location and affecting only one segment of the population. They are our problems. However, it is the responsibility of the government to offer strong leadership in this area, acknowledging that all have to actively be involved in finding solutions and working together to achieve success.

Mr Speaker, His Excellency spoke about increased international cooperation and improvement of our image abroad. In this regard, it is our belief, that Cooperation which would benefit this country has to be based on natural respect. Very often, the image that we, as a nation project is one of disunity and mistrust of one another here at home. We have to address this if we are to be viewed as worthy partners, in the international community. We have to begin to solve some of our problems here at home with our own resources.

With respect to Economic Diplomacy, being part of the Foreign Policy Agendas the work of our Embassies and Missions must be focused on bringing Investments home and success of these offices must be measured, by the quality of such Investments coming to this country.

It must be safe to say that the entire House would support the Government when our sovereignty and borders come under threat. However, His Excellency Government must be clear, when dealing with neighbours that claim even a blade of grass of this Country.

Therefore it is strange, that we have engaged one such country expert to review and find remedies for our conservancy. A most important aspect of our lives is being handled by a potentially hostile country. Recent defence has underlined the state of that relationship.

I suggest we await the outcome of the UN good Offices before we proceed along those lines.

On *Governance*, heartening, Mr Speaker, was the President's pledge to give effect to decisions on Parliamentary and Constitutional Reforms. This would be of great significance, if we are to progress as a Nation and fulfill the dreams and aspiration of a proud people. Yes, Mr Speaker, the people of this Country deserve at least that but also much more. Therefore, our role in this House must be to ensure that after each discussion, debate or even quarrel, our Citizens must benefit from outcomes that have their interest, well-being and programmes at heart.

Mr Speaker, His Excellency can rest assured, that this Member without doubt can offer constructive criticism whenever necessary to the Government's legislative and policy agenda.

The hope is, as stated in His Excellency's Address that -

The Government is receptive, not as a courtesy to the Opposition, but with the understanding that no one in this good House, has a monopoly of great or even good ideas. And our destiny is directly proportionate to the seriousness with which we handle the Affairs of the State and each other.

I thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you very much Honourable Member.

Honourable Members, I think we have exhausted our list of speakers for today. I understand this is to be continued on Thursday.

NOMINATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SELECT COMMITTEES

There is one other item on the Agenda - Nomination of members of the Select Committees. I understand that there is a request, that this be deferred until we meet on the 2 November, 2006

[Deferred]

Thank you very much Honourable Members.

Honourable Minister of Home Affairs

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker, I wish to move that the House be adjourned, until 2 November 2006 at 14:00h.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, the House is so adjourned, until 2 November.

Adjourned accordingly at 21:48h