

# National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF  
THE FIRST SESSION (2001) OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA  
UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

---

---

2ND SITTING

14:00H

Thursday, 24th May, 2001

---

---

## MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (67)

### *Speaker (1)*

The Hon. Hari N. Ramkarran, S. C., M. P. - *Speaker of the National Assembly*

### Members of the Government - People's Progressive Party/Civic (35)

The Hon. Samuel A. A. Hinds, M.P. - *Prime Minister and Minister of Public Works and Communications*

The Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., J.P., M.P. - *Minister of Parliamentary Affairs*

The Hon. Clement J. Rohee, M.P. - *Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation*

The Hon. Harripersaud Nokta, M.P. - *Minister of Local Government and Regional Development*

The Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P. - *Minister of Culture Youth and Sport*

The Hon. Dr. Henry B. Jeffrey, M.P. - *Minister of Education*

The Hon. Saisnarine Kowlessar, M.P. - *Minister of Finance*

The Hon. Shaik K. Z. Baksh, M.P. - *Minister of Housing and Water*

The Hon. Navindranauth O. Chandarpal, M.P. - *Minister of Agriculture (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)*

The Hon. J. Ronald Gajraj, M.P. - *Minister of Home Affairs (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/ West Demerara)*

The Hon. Rev. Dr. Ramnauth D.A. Bisnauth, M.P. - *Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security*

The Hon. Clinton C. Collymore, M.P. - *Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development*

The Hon. Satyadeow Sawh, M.P. - *Minister of Fisheries, Other Crops and Livestock (Region No. 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)*

*The Hon. S. Rudolph Irsanally, O.R., C.C.H., M.P.	- Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs
The Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.	- Minister of the Public Service
The Hon. C. Anthony Xavier, M.P.	- Minister of Transport and Hydraulics
The Hon. Bibi S. Shadick, M.P.	- Minister in the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)
The Hon. Carolyn Rodrigues, M.P.	- Minister of Amerindian Affairs
The Hon. Dr. Leslie S. Ramsammy, M.P.	- Minister of Health
Mr S. Feroze Mohamed, M.P.	- Chief Whip (Absent)
Mr Cyril C. Belgrave, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.	- (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. Donald R. Ramotar, M.P.	
Mr Husman Alli, M.P.	- (Region No. 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)
Mr. Komal Chand, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.	
Mrs Indranie Chandarpai, M.P.	
Mr Bernard C. DeSantos, S.C., M.P.	- (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)
Mrs Shirley V. Edwards, J.P. M.P.	
Mr Odinga N. Lumumba, M.P.	
Mr Heeralall Mohan, M.P.	- (Region No. 2 - Pomeroon/Supernaam)
Mr Ramesh C. Rajkumar, M.P.	- (Region No. 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)
Mr Kumkaran Ramdas, M.P.	
Mr Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.	- (Region No. 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)
Dr Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.D., M.P.	
Mrs P. Sahoye-Shury, C.C.H., J.P., M.P.	
Mrs Pauline R. Sukhai, M.P.	- (Region No. 1 - Barima/Waini)

**Members of the Opposition (31)**

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

Mr. H. Desmond Hoyte, S.C., M.P.	- Leader of the Opposition
Mr. Robert H. O. Corbin, M.P.	- (Absent)
Mr. Winston S. Murray, C.C.H., M.P.	
Mrs Clarissa S. Riehl, M.P.	- Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly
Mr E. Lance Carberry, M.P.	- Chief Whip
Mr Ivor Allen, M.P.	- (Region No. 2 - Pomeroon/Supernaam)
Mrs. Deborah J. Backer, M.P.	
Mr. Deryck M.A. Bernard, M.P.	
Mr. C. Stanley Ming, M.P.	
Mr. Raphael G. C. Trotman, M.P.	
Mr Vincent L. Alexander, M.P.	- (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

May 24, 2001

Mr. Andy Goveia, M.P.	
Mrs. Volda A. Lawrence, M.P.	
Dr Dagleish Joseph, M.D., M.P.	
Miss Amna Ally, M.P.	- (Region No. 5-Mahaica (Berbice))
Ms Sandra M. Adams, M.P.	- (Region No. 10-Upper Demerara/Berbice)
Mr. Jerome Khan, M.P.	
Dr George A. Norton, M.P.	- (Absent -on Leave)
Ms Myrna E. N. Peterkin, M.P.	- (Region No. 4-Demerara/Mahaica)
Mr. James K. McAllister, M.P.	- (Region No. 3-Essequibo Islands West Demerara)
Miss Lurlene A. Nestor, M.P.	- (Region No. 4-Demerara/ Mahaica)
Mr Abdul Kadir, J.P., M.P.	- (Region No. 10 - Upper Demerara/ Berbice)
Mr Ricky Khan, M.P.	- (Region No. 1 - Barima/Waini)
Mrs. R. Bancroft, M.P.	- (Region No. 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)
Mr Nasir Ally, J.P., M.P.	- (Region No. 6 - East Berbice/ Corentyne)
Miss Judith David, M.P.	- (Region No. 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)
Miss Genevieve Allen, M.P.	- (Region No. 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

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

Mrs Sheila V.A. Holder, M.P.	
Mrs Shirley J. Melville, M.P.	- (Region No. 9 -Upper Takutu/ Upper Essequibo)

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

Mr Ravindra Dev, M.P.

**(iv) The United Force (1)**

Mr Manzoor Nadir, M.P.

**OFFICERS**

Mr Frank A. Narain, C.C.H., Clerk of the National Assembly  
Mr Sherlock E. Isaacs, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

**The Clerk read the Prayer**

### **OATH OF A NEW MEMBER**

**Hon. S. Rudolph Insanally, O.R., C. C. H.**

**The Speaker:** Hon. Members, Mr. Samuel Rudolph Insanally, was appointed Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs with effect from 21st May, 2001. Mr. Insanally is not an elected Member of the National Assembly but by virtue of holding the office of a Minister, he has become a Member of the National Assembly, in accordance with Article 105 of the Constitution. Before Mr. Insanally can take part in the proceedings of the National Assembly, he is required to make and subscribe to the oath of office as required by article 167 of the Constitution Mr. Insanally can now make and subscribe to the oath administered by the Clerk.

[Mr Insanally made and subscribed to the oath which was administered to him by the Clerk.]

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

#### **(i) Congratulations to a New Minister**

**The Speaker:** On behalf of Members of the National Assembly and on my own behalf, I should like to congratulate Mr. Rudolph Insanally on his appointment as Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs. I welcome him as a Member of the National Assembly and extend best wishes to him for a successful term of office.

#### **(ii) Appointment of Whips**

**The Speaker:** I have been informed that the Hon. Members Mr. Feroze Mohamed and Mr. Lance Carberry have been appointed Government



May 24, 2001

and Opposition Whips respectively with effect from 4th May, 2001. My congratulations and those of the Assembly to the two Members.

**(iii) Leave**

**The Speaker:** Leave from the sittings of the National Assembly has been granted to the Hon. Member, Dr. George Norton up to 2nd June, 2001.

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS, ETC.**

The following Papers were laid:

By the Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security:

*(i) Minimum Wages (Employees at Petrol Filling Stations) (Amendment) Order 2000 (No. 34/2000)*

*(ii) Minimum Wages (Watchmen) (Amendment) Order 2000 (No. 35/2000)*

*(iii) Labour (Conditions of Employment of Certain Workers) (Minimum Rate of Wages) (Amendment) Order 2000 (No. 36/2000)*

*(iv) Minimum Wages (Mechanical Transport Employees) (Amendment) Order 2000 (No. 37/2000)*

*(v) Minimum Wages (Employees in Groceries) (Amendment) Order 2000 (No. 38/2000)*

*(vi) Minimum Wages (Cinema Employees) (Amendment) Order 2000 (No. 39/2000)*

*(vii) Minimum Wages (Shirt and Garment Workers) (Amendment) Order 2000 (No. 40/2000)*

*(viii) Minimum Wages (Employees in Hardware Stores)  
(Amendment Order 2000 (No. 41/2000))*

*(ix) Minimum Wages (Employees in Minimum Wages  
(Employees in Drug Stores) (Amendment) Order 2000 (No.  
42/2000)*

*(x) Minimum Wages (Employees in Dry Goods Stores)  
(Amendment) Order 2000 (No. 43 of 2000)*

By the Minister of Health:

*Annual Report of the Ministry of Health for the year 1999.*

## **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**

### **PRESENTATION AND FIRST READING**

By the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs:

**(1) SEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE  
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA (CONSTITUTION AND PRO-  
CEEDINGS) VALIDATION BILL 2001 - BILL NO. 5/  
2001 PUBLISHED 17.5.2001**

**(2) CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT) (NO.3) BILL 2001  
- BILL NO. 6/2001 PUBLISHED 17.5.2001**

May 24, 2001

**PUBLIC BUSINESS**

**MOTION**

**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 Eighth Parliament of Guyana on Friday, 4th May, 2001, and approves of the policy adumbrated therein.*

**The Speaker:** Hon. Members, our first Motion for this Parliament, is to thank the President for the address, which he made to the National Assembly on 4th May, 2001, on the occasion of the Ceremonial Opening of the Eighth Parliament and to approve of the policy adumbrated therein. That Motion is in the name of the Hon. Member, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran. Dr. Ramsaran, you may now move the Motion.

**Dr Bheri Ramsaran:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to endorse the charge given to this House by His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo, on the occasion of the opening of the Eighth Parliament on 4th, May, 2001.

In his charge, the President delivered to us a very extensive analysis of the situation as he saw it. Permeating his Speech was the call for a reaching out, a healing, after having just gone through certain experiences over the few weeks prior to the delivery of that Speech. The Speech was profound and he called upon us to indulge in the process of

*May 24, 2001*

healing, in finding ways and means of reaching out from our various constituencies so as to promote the process of nation building. I, by no means intend to rehash the Speech, but before I seek your indulgence in joining me in endorsing it, I would like to bring a few highlights of that Speech and encourage you to debate those and mull them, and to see with me that the President has given us the direction for the next five years.

As you do know, he would be addressing this body once every five years and having done so, I think we should now look at some of the most salient points in his Address. We are meeting, as was outlined in new circumstances. The National Assembly has undergone certain changes that probably might now be taken for granted, the changes that are born from the recent Constitutional amendments some of which, as were pointed out, are still being undertaken. We are expected now to meet the challenges of the urgent tasks, that confront us while operating in a National Assembly that has a new nature.

As you would recall, and we should reflect on from time to time, the democratic nature of representation has been extended by the mere fact that now there is some direct form of representation by the inclusion of twenty-five Members from the constituencies. This would mean that we are under a more watchful eye. The demands on us would be greater. We need to be innovative, and accountable to the grass-roots who are now more demanding.

Now, interestingly enough, the President did not only recognise that the nature of the National Assembly has changed, but he also did hint that his profound understanding, that to function in those changed conditions, the National Assembly will have to be provided with further resources. And incidentally, this was a reflection of the ongoing entreaties from the parliamentary office, especially from the Clerk of the National Assembly, who had been making representations from time to time.

And I dare say, I should remind you, that these representations have been meeting with positive responses from the PPP/Civic ad-

*May 24, 2001*

ministration since it came to power in 1992 and moreso from 1993 onwards.

I should remind you that the President had pointed out the need for better resource facilities, but while doing so, I must also point out to you that some small steps have already been made in that direction and this reminder is very timely since I notice now that our public gallery is partially filled with some youngsters, to remind them that the Hansard is now easily available, easily and readily provided by the National Assembly to Members. This might be taken easily for granted, the records of the proceedings in this House, but not so long ago that had fallen into disuse. It was not being produced, it was not being distributed.

We should also reflect on the fact that over the past few years, the library in the Public Buildings which is available for use by Members of this House, has been improved with the assistance of international agencies. So friends and colleagues, the President, while touching on the fact that we are operating in a National Assembly of a new nature, more demanding circumstances have promised to lay the foundation to allow us to carry out that charge and to perform in a better fashion. That is one of the things, I think, that as Members of the National Assembly, we should be taking him up strongly on. We should be debating and coming up with ways and means how to make the best of that offer, of that recognition of the Head of State, that the National Assembly will be given further support to carry out its mandate.

As was pointed out in the charge, there are certain challenges that we still face. Among them, and I will not list all, I am certain that other speakers will be able to bring out more salient points. From the charge delivered by the President, is the need for the completion of Constitutional Reform. Here again, like the improvement of the functioning of the National Assembly, Constitutional Reform is not a new issue. If we were to throw our minds back, even in the run up to the 1997 elections, there were strong efforts at achieving constitutional change. The elections overtook those and to the run up to the elections just gone, we have seen the completion of some key aspects of change resulting as I

pointed out in the changed nature of this Assembly.

So, we will have to be facing, in this coming term, while under the watchful eye of a demanding electorate, a more sophisticated electorate, an electorate which is expecting to be participating more and more in the democratic process and which will be expecting more and more from us. We have to be looking at constitutional reform, touching on such aspects as the judiciary. That of course, I think, will promote very heated debate, and I do hope very fruitful debate in this House.

### **State Procurement, The work of the Auditor General**

These are highlights that I picked up out of the charge by the President, which I think, also, are nothing new. The work of the Auditor General's office, we have taken that for granted. We have taken it for granted over the past few years, that yearly this nation should be provided by the presentation here, in this National Assembly with the Auditor General's Report. But I hasten to remind you that only a few years ago, and this is especially for the new Members of the Assembly, the younger members of the media and the public, the National Assembly and, as a matter of fact, the nation was not afforded the benefit of being presented with the Auditor General's Report. In fact, for the previous ten years of the previous regime, or should I say, for the last ten years of the previous regime an Auditor General's Report was not tabled. That is a key tool in good governance.

As you would recall, President Bharrat Jagdeo, on 4th May, right within these walls, indicated that the changed National Assembly will have to help this administration with good governance. So that, again, is on the table. How will we go about improving the work of the Auditor General? As I indicated that you will only get continuation of the process already started under the PPP/Civic government. I do hope that you will endorse the sentiments in the Speech by the President that we need to look at this further, and not only to use the publication of this document as a means of attacking the government. Of course, that might be done but I would like to remind you that this tool is intended, for the

*May 24, 2001*

purpose of bringing out flaws in any system and giving us the strength or the mechanisms to deal with those weaknesses, all in the name, of course, of good governance, and good governance now is becoming a cliché. Everybody speaks about good governance but the PPP/Civic has been laying the foundations. I do hope that you can build on that especially as far as the Auditor General's Office is concerned.

I do note that another key aspect of our social life as it reflects on possible legislations was touched upon by the President and I refer to the need for us to look at broadcast legislation. As you would recall, Colleagues, over the past few weeks, civil society, religious organisations and the general public have been very much disgusted by the misuse of freedom of speech - so-called freedom of speech. As a matter of fact, as I flick through my files, I came across calls by several responsible organisations, for example, religious groups, for example, the Muslim group, C.I.O.G., which prompted one daily newspaper to say, shut down TV stations that spread malicious rumors. Mr. Speaker, I can very well have added not only malicious rumors, but hate-speech and activities aimed at promoting ethnic problems. So here again, before this House, over the next term, Mr. Speaker, we have in the charge given by the President, a call to look at broadcasting legislation. From our constituencies, I cannot tell you how strongly or more strongly, that this will definitely need to be addressed.

In other parts of the world, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind you, it was the media, and more specifically the electronic media, and I am speaking more particularly about a certain part of Africa, where the electronic media and certain miscreants within that media laid the foundation for mayhem in that part of the world.

And now, if we were to check the comments of the international observers, noting the goings-on in that part of the world, it is easily said, it is easily understood, that some of those observers had predicted that if something was not done about the misuse of the media in that part of the world, that further problems would have developed. We have seen the results of those warnings from the international diplomats who were ob-

*May 24, 2001*

servicing the evolution of that situation in places like Rwanda as it relates to broadcasting. We saw the results of their predictions being disregarded. So, I do think that having observed, what has been going on especially in the post elections period over the electronic media, and to a lesser extent in some sections of the printed media, we definitely need to take seriously the call by the President and to look seriously at broadcast legislation. I hasten to add that there is right now, functioning a Joint Committee which will be looking into these aspects of things. Of course, the Joint Committee I refer to, is one of the six such joint committees which were agreed upon when the President and Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte met in the post elections period. The findings of that Joint Subcommittee will be made public at the right time but I can assure you that that Committee is working.

The efforts and contributions of Members of this Assembly towards the work of that Committee will be very welcomed and will indicate a broader participation in the need to address this aspect of our national life.

Similarly, uncompleted aspects of Constitutional reform still trouble us, some seemingly simple, sometimes. The need to update our laws and to keep up with developments to make them deterrent to miscreants and to persons otherwise thinking they can get away with a small or light penalty. Those are things that are still on the table before us.

While endorsing the charge by the President, I wish to note that not only did the President highlight the need for continuing, ongoing constitutional reform, but he also touched on the socioeconomic sphere. He pointed out that because of the analysis he was proffering, we needed to bond together and to unite to face certain challenges. I am referring to his analysis which says that although globalisation and trade liberalisation have their benefits for mono-cultural economies like ours, small states like ours, and I am saying "ours" here in the plural because I must remind you that present at that time were representatives of two neighbouring states of the Caribbean, that is, the Prime Minister of Barbados and the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, so the Presi-



May 24, 2007

dent pointed out that if we are to swim and not sink, we must address seriously the implications for our small nations not singularly but collectively, and this of course is a continuation of all the traditions which started sometime back not only by the PPP/Civic but even by other regional administrations towards unity and integration.

As was pointed out, if we were to try to stand individually, we will be doomed to marginalisation as a nation and as a region. So it is before us in the coming weeks/months to fashion innovative ways whereby we can promote unity on a regional basis. When I was listening to this charge, this Speech by the President, I looked around the House and reflected that there were many young lawyers, and not so young sometimes, many of whom were trained in Caribbean institutions and I do know, and met some overseas also, other lawyers who would have been trained at Hugh Wooding Law School and who would have rubbed shoulders with our lawmakers here. While listening to that aspect of the President's Speech, I reflected that how good it would be if these comrades-in-arms, these persons who would have shared the same school ties, would very well have come forward and having similar legal training and regional interests, could have formed innovative ways of helping their governments to promote regional integration. While living up to the charge given by the President that we should confront the demon of narco-trafficking that is taking over our small nations and that we cannot fight single-handedly but against which we must unite.

So, I reflected that the President called for and indicated that there were already embryonic forms of diplomatic initiatives on a regional basis emphasizing that CARICOM has been labouring to establish a single market and a single economy. Of course there will be need for the necessary diplomatic input and this caused me to reflect and that is why I spoke about the lawyers being good ambassadors for Guyana that we can probably work out ways and means of pooling the diplomatic resources of tiny states and instead of having representation as single entities or as micro entities, our efforts can be pooled for the better good. In other words, as the President puts it, to increase our bargaining power.

May 24, 2001

Those are some of the highlights, Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to this House and I would like to point out that throughout the Speech, President Bharrat Jagdeo, pointed out that these efforts are changed, these efforts that are bringing about improvements by the work of the National Assembly cannot be undertaken alone, that no single party is capable, or no single entity in this country is capable of achieving our goals. That it would require, not sporadic meetings of the National Assembly but more regular parliamentary sittings. I fully endorse that. I am certain that other speakers will and I am certain that we will be able together to work out ways and means of making the parliamentary sittings more productive.

Mr. Speaker, with those opening remarks, I would like again to endorse the charge given by President Bharrat Jagdeo and commend it to my Colleagues, fellow Members of the National Assembly for similar endorsement. *[Applause]*

**Mr Cyril C. Belgrave:** I rise to second the Motion. I reserve the right to speak.

**The Speaker:** The motion is proposed. The Hon. Member, Mr Winston Murray.

**Mr Winston S. Murray:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I extend sincere congratulations to His Excellency the President of our Republic on the Address he delivered to this National Assembly, on the occasion of our First Session of the Eighth Parliament held on May 4, 2001.

I readily acknowledge, Sir, the wide ranging nature of that Address. It touched on a number of crucial issues, the proper resolution of which, can only have a fundamentally positive impact on the future course and fate of our beloved country. But beyond the touching on crucial issues, Sir, or the mentioning of them, I had looked forward to a five-year vision in the President's Address indicating where it was that he proposed his government would take Guyana and, broadly, Sir, how

May 24, 2001

that government was going to get us there.

In essence, Sir, I look forward to proposals to resolve those crucial issues, so that the necessary positive impact could be realised. I am sure, no one here would disagree that transparency and accountability are indispensable cornerstones of a true democracy and the foundations for them should have been strengthened in our respectful view by a Presidential Address at the first Sitting of a new Parliament. This, as said by my Hon. friend Mr. Ramsaran, is the one and only time in the normal life of this Parliament, when we, the Members of the National Assembly have an assured opportunity to hear our President, the President of our Republic outlying the government's programme.

The people of Guyana, Sir, and their elected representatives should have had, as clear a picture as possible of the goals and targets and the main instruments of policy for achieving them. Many promises would have been made on the campaign trail and on such an auspicious occasion as the opening of our Eighth Parliament, the populace and their elected representatives had a right, Sir, I suggest, to have expected the President to convert those promises into clearly defined goals and targets by which performance could be measured over the life of the Parliament. [*Applause*] Such Presidential imprimatur would have given a sense of commitment at the highest level of government to the broad outline of policies and targets for a five-year term of office. A further, and not insignificant benefit of such an approach would be to set a publicly declared and committed context for the assessment of efficiency of the many, yes, many, Ministers of the Government.

With such a framework clearly set and defined, Sir, the annual budgets of the various agencies and of the government as a whole would have been an opportunity to check on annual performance and proposals for consistency with the goals and targets set by the President. Serious questions could then be asked and explanations demanded by the people's representatives in the National Assembly for any deviations or perceived variations from those stated objectives. For all of us, who declared a commitment to transparency and accountability, I suggest that

such an approach should be most welcomed.

I would like, Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence to demonstrate what I mean by referring to a few statements made about the economy in His Excellency's Address. I have chosen this particular area simply because it is the one in which I hold a watching brief for the People's National Congress/Reform.

On page 2 of his Address, His Excellency said, the Guyana for which he dedicated his energies was one of accelerated economic progress. On page 5, he said :

*to increase the demand for labour fast economic growth is required*

So, what can the nation expect of its representatives in the National Assembly? What can they hold the government to as its target for economic growth over the life of the Parliament? What should we understand to be fast economic growth or accelerated economic progress? How will we measure these things? The fact of the matter, Sir, is that there are many sources from which information is available. For example, IMF documentation on Guyana, IBRD information and HIPC documentation. They all projected, Sir, an average growth rate over the five-year period of the life of this Parliament of between four and four and a half per cent. The People's National Congress/Reform believes that this Parliament ought to know whether the government, at the level of our President is prepared to commit itself to an average rate of growth of between four and four and a half per cent over the expected five-year period of this Parliament. The problem the President may have had, Sir, is labelling such growth rate as either accelerated or fast, against a backdrop of an average rate of growth of over seven per cent for the five-year period between 1992 and 1996 propelled in large measure by the impetus of a PNC economic policies inherited by the PPP/C's government when it assumed office in 1992. *[Applause]*

Apart, Sir, from noting that the President said, that to increase the demand for labour, fast economic growth is required. I look assiduously and scrupulously for the target of the government for job creation over the five-year period. The strongest statement I could find on jobs was on page 4, where His Excellency said this:

*Worthwhile jobs are the basis for sustaining a dignified life and a healthy family environment, and viewed from a national standpoint, employment growth is the most effective way to reduce poverty.*

Then we are told, that greater levels of investment and production need to be encouraged since they are the engines of employment creation. Intensified efforts are required to upgrade the labour force. We have to look outward since export growth is essential for employment creation. These are fine words, Mr. Speaker, with which no one can disagree but surely, the Guyanese people ought to have been told that the end result of such encouragement of investment, intensification of reduction of poverty, an outward looking towards export promotion was to create five thousand, ten thousand or whatever number of jobs over the five-year period.

We could then examine annual budget performances and proposals against this given overall target of our objective. I was, Mr. Speaker, particularly disappointed at the almost cursory reference to CARICOM in Guyana's present economic circumstances. We were fortunate to have had in our midst, the present Chairman of the movement, Prime Minister Owen Arthur from Barbados, and the successor Chairman from July 1, 2001, Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

We, of the People's National Congress/Reform believe that the occasion was opportune to observe that Guyana had a proud record of observing both the letter and spirit of CARICOM in almost all spheres of the Community's activities. In this, of course, the government must get its due credit. But our President should have made it known that all Guyana is concerned about the unfair impediments to some of our ex-

May 24, 2001

ports in particular at this time when one of our very, very major exports, and that is rice, to particular CARICOM importing countries, at the time when our producers and exporters have invested millions of U.S. dollars in the construction of facilities to produce the type and quality of product that CARICOM requires.

I wish to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that if such a statement was made by our President, the People's National Congress/Reform would have led the applause in this Assembly to convey the message to our distinguished visitors that in matters of defending vital national interests, in this instance vis-a-vis CARICOM, we broke no division in our midst. *[Applause]* Our rice producers and exporters would have drawn strength for the battles still to be fought. *[Interruption:... 'Ignorance has its place, please behave'] [Applause] [Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker, I agree with the President's expression that CARICOM is labouring to establish a single market and economy with the emphasis on labouring. There is a real risk, may I add, that this labour may lead to a still-birth. The essence of a single market and economy is the free movement of the factors of production specifically labour and capital but we have only to look at the treatment meted out to our nationals at the ports of entry of some CARICOM states to realise that free movement of labour will not be at hand anytime soon. And when the forces of the Free Trade of the Americas are unleashed, the attendant dismantling of the Common External Tariffs for our Free Trade of the Americas' partners, the one instrument giving real meaning, if not life itself, to CARICOM, namely the Common External Tariff, will be removed and CARICOM's very survival, I make bold to say, could be threatened certainly as a cohesive economic entity. And these are matters which, by properly using the presence of our distinguished guests, we could have brought to the attention of our peoples.

Mr. Speaker, His Excellency spoke fittingly about the need to encourage greater levels of investment and production and about shifting the economy towards those products and sectors that have the brightest prospects. No one can disagree with these sentiments, but I believe the

*May 24, 2001*

Guyanese people ought to have been given at least a glimpse of some of the mechanisms and policies which the government expects over the life of the Parliament to investigate and probably adopt in order to realise the required levels of investment and production.

Clearly, there are some measures, by their very nature which may be left for reflection in the annual budgets of the government, but I would argue that there are some policies so fundamentally important that it would have been almost an imperative for the President to have sent clear signals in relation to them.

For example, while there may be many incentives on paper, it is no secret that it is the most frustrating exercise to know where to go to get things effectively done especially since where you are supposed to go, nothing gets done.

Will the government, therefore, for example, commit itself to remove the discretionary nature of incentives which introduces a high degree of uncertainty as to who is truly eligible for the grant of incentives?

Will the government simply lay down clear ground rules criteria and let those who satisfied them qualify automatically?

Will the government grant the necessary autonomy to GO-INVEST to be a true one-stop investment agency?

The discretionary grant of incentives is particularly obvious, Mr. Speaker, in the tourism sector which quite honestly probably needs the most liberal regime of incentives. In this regard, it would have been more than useful for Guyanese and potential investors to know whether, for example, an autonomous national tourism board will be established to research and develop tourism products as well as to regulate the sector.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, whatever improvements we hope will materialise in our economic well-being as a country and individually, will depend to a great degree on the motivation of the workforce



May 24, 2001

in order that each person's contribution can be maximised.

It was heartening, I admit, to hear His Excellency recognise so movingly:

*We believe that creating remunerative employment is a sacred objective of the undertaking of national economic development. Worthwhile jobs are the basis for sustaining a dignified life and a healthy family environment.*

It was disappointing, however, that the President could give no clue whatever in his Presidential Address as to the wages and incomes' policies his government will pursue over the next five years for those who are, in particular direct employment of the state to ensure that those workers could sustain what the President refers to as a dignified life and a healthy family environment. The very, very minimum assurance, Mr. Speaker, he should have found the energy and courage if that is what it took to give it, is that over the period, the government would ensure that the increases in salaries of public sector workers will never ever be less than the rate of inflation but even that the President could not find it fit to say.

It is the considered view, Sir, of the People's National Congress/Reform that a primary aim of a Presidential Address at the opening of a Parliament should be to inspire the general citizenry to the conviction that over the next five years things will generally improve and that their individual lives will be better. Such inspiration can be a great motivation to harder work and to the achievement of greater heights.

At this particular juncture, Sir, it was almost imperative, he should have sought to define a framework with clearly identifiable targets which the government under his stewardship was committed to achieving.

In 1992, when the PPP/Civic took office, it would have been understandable then that the late President Jagan may not have been as forthcoming as I suggest President Jagdeo should have been, for the government had just then acceded to office after a prolonged period in



May 24, 2001

the wilderness. Sir, but after being in office for eight consecutive years the government must be able to quantify targeted objectives and identify important mechanisms and instruments for achieving them. And there is probably a more important reason why this should have been done. There are many persons across the political divide who are prepared to give President Jagdeo an opportunity to prove that he could make a positive difference to their lives and to the future of Guyana. They were led to believe that if the President was elected to office, he would very early in his term, assert his authority in government. Let's be frank here, the perception is that this has just not happened.

I make bold to say, Mr. Speaker, that in the nature of the presentation His Excellency made, he would not have dispelled the doubts which persist about the degree of his charge over affairs. It is of course possible that individual Ministers may, during this debate, give fulsome indications of targets over the five-year period for their specific agencies. While this would be most welcomed, I respectfully submit that crucial elements of such targets, qualitatively, would have better come through His Excellency the President's Address.

I must tell you, Sir, and this august National Assembly that it was like music to our ears to hear our President say and I quote from page 3:

*My Government was elected to represent the interests of all Guyanese and I will not shirk this responsibility.*

[Applause]

And from page 2:

*Ours must be a future that affords all our people the right and opportunity to earn a decent livelihood.*

We, of the People's National Congress/Reform, view these statements as unequivocal commitments. We deem them as applicable to every tier of government and across our entire land. All I would say, is that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. We will observe with

critical eyes but with open minds whether the government as a whole will live these commitments to their fullest. And I assure this National Assembly that I will never be shy to give credit to the government if it delivers on these fundamental commitments. Equally I must fore-warn that the People's National Congress/Reform will never be silent in the face of breaches in these commitments. *[Applause]*

And, Mr. Speaker, before I take my seat, let me say this for the records, beyond what we say here or do or think as a party, as a National Assembly or as the government or as the opposition, it is in the final analysis, the people themselves who will pass judgment on whether these commitments are lived up to.

We know, that there are some within the government who believe that this is simply an unsettled period in our history and let us through hard-sell and soft-talk and effective public relations get over this period into calmer times and then return the things of yore. But I tell you, believe me when I say, the people out there are more aware than all of us combined in this National Assembly and believe me, Sir, when I end by saying, that the challenge is ours and the people await to pass their judgment. Thank you Mr, Speaker. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Mr. Murray.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Clement Rohee, Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation

**Hon. Clement J. Rohee:** Mr. Speaker, the last time I read a speech in this National Assembly, I was told by some of the Members who happened to survive the last elections, and are now sitting in this Honourable House that it is not proper to read a speech in this Honourable House and in fact the Opposition Leader drew it to the attention of the then Speaker. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that this tradition or this practice which seemed to be emerging as a tradition in this House will, on the PNC/R side, cease under your distinguished Speakership. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I thought I should make that remark in terms of my opening statement because what is happening in this country, it seems to be what

is good for some is not good for others and what is good for others is not good for some.

Mr. Speaker, what the Hon. Member, Mr. Murray did was to selectively choose certain excerpts from the President's Speech to make statements, which in his view did not concur with the views of his party. So what you had in his presentation was a very selective manner in terms of approaching the President's Speech.

In other words, what he sought to do, was to pick and choose elements of the Speech. On the one hand to attack and on the other hand to appear as though he was congratulating the government but, Mr Speaker, we can see through that very easily, we can see through that tactic very easily. It is an old parliamentary style of out-doing things. Mr Speaker, what the Hon. Member wanted is that he wanted the President to deliver a Winston Murray speech, but what the President did was to deliver a vintage Bharrat Jagdeo Speech which was welcomed by the overwhelming majority of people in this country.

Apparently the Hon. Member didn't read the entire Speech because if one is to read the Speech in its entirety, one would see the logic, the flow, the vision and one would see the direction but he obviously did not see that.

Mr. Speaker, there is one particular section of this Speech that attracted my attention and let me quote that for you:

*— for us to build a nation secured in its borders and content with itself, we must join hands and work together as one people.*

And this is what he goes on to say, listen carefully:

*The creation of a new society must begin in our minds, the preoccupation must cease to be about preventing, restricting, depriving and become more about liberating and expanding jobs, social opportunities and resources.*

This is a very important aspect of the President's Speech and the Hon. Member Mr. Murray failed to overlook or did not overlook [Laughter]. Overlooked, sorry, or failed to take into consideration.

Mr. Speaker, the President went on to say:

*Nation building demands involvement of all of us. Let us not refrain or delay from embarking upon this task so that future generations will have kind words to say about us.*

Mr. Speaker, I thought I should mention those two paragraphs in the President's Speech because in debating the Speech that was delivered. It is important for us to touch upon those parts which deal with overcoming the present problems in our country in a macro way while at the same time dealing with the social and economic problems at the micro level.

Mr. Speaker, reference was made in the President's Speech to the fact that what is required, is accelerated economic progress, expanded opportunities and rapid social development. He went on to speak about the problems, the challenges which developing countries such as Guyana will face with globalisation, trade liberalisation and also about the opportunities that exist within that context.

The presentation, Mr. Speaker, I would say, drew very intense attention to the fact that if we do not put our house in order, while the world is moving at a very rapid pace, we in Guyana, are likely to end up marginalised as many developing countries might very well be in the whole process of globalisation and trade liberalisation. But I do not want, Mr. Speaker, to use these words, globalisation and marginalisation, as clichés which are being banded around now in a very popular manner and do not mean much to people.

The United Nations Human Development Report showed that over the past three decades only fifteen countries enjoyed what is described as high levels of growth -fifteen countries of all the countries in the world - and eighty-nine countries were worst off economically than they were

May 24, 2001

ten years ago. So obviously what we are seeing there is the gap between a small but very rich group of countries becoming richer and richer and a large group of countries becoming poorer and poorer, as marginalisation and trade liberalisation begins to take grip of the world process.

Mr. Speaker, another interesting fact that we should know, if we are to place this whole process in proper perspective, is that there are eleven countries in the world out of those fifteen who are benefitting more than the great majority, the overwhelming majority of countries, from the process of globalisation. In fact they account for sixty-six per cent of the trade that takes place between the developing countries and themselves. In other words the trade flows between the eleven countries of the world and sixty-six countries are so uneven, not to mention the unevenness of prices of the commodities, that it is almost well nigh impossible for that gap to be narrowed.

Mr. Speaker, this also applies to the whole question of not only foreign direct investments but also the question of financial flows and all the trends show that this is likely to continue as we go on further into this new century unless certain steps are taken by the developing countries to put an end to this process.

Mr. Speaker, the President said in his Speech that we have to display the political will to adjust. What do we mean by displaying the political will to adjust? Displaying the political will to adjust does not mean shouting on the streets everyday "more fire" because that is not going to take this country anywhere.

Mr. Speaker, while we, on the one hand seek to understand what is meant by the saying *displaying political will to adjust*, another section of the society continues to display total disregard for the exigencies of developing countries and the pressing challenges that confront them in this globalised world. Unless that section of the population is of the view and is convinced that irrespective of the shouts and the clamours and the belching of the "more fire" Guyana will move forward, and, unless they feel that by bringing the country down that we will make progress. This

02/25

*May 24, 2001*

is totally a contradiction. It can't happen! It can't happen!

What is amazing with this process, Mr. Speaker, is even in the smallest developing country - the least developed countries (LDC's) for example, in Africa (Mr. Powell is now in Mali) is seeking to come to grips with under-development. Others are seeking by virtue of the political division within their jurisdictions not to allow development to take place. Who is benefitting from this?

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Mr. Murray, said that the President did not refer to the question of what we are doing on the regional front and that he should have utilised the presence of the Hon. Prime Ministers of Barbados and of the Bahamas to extol the virtues of the single market and economy and so forth. That is my interpretation, I am subject to correction. You know, once we go into selective reading, I am not saying that people should not be selective in their readings these days because there are so much information around, unless you are very selective in your reading, you will spend your life reading and don't understand what you are reading. I know that there are some over there who are probably victims of that situation. I don't think the Hon. Member Winston Murray is a victim of that.

But the point I want to make, Mr. Speaker is this, Guyana is now engaged in important negotiations for the creation of a free trade area of the Americas, which should become a reality by the year 2005. In addition to that, we are committed to the creation of a CARICOM single market and economy which should become a reality at least two years before - at least two years before - and on top of that as though it was not enough, we are committed to negotiating with the European Union new trading arrangements to replace the current ones.

Now, you tell me, Mr. Speaker, in the presence of this Honourable House, how is Guyana going to accomplish these objectives if the country is not united, and if the country does not put its house in order so as to ensure that we have national consensus on some of these issues, so that when we go out there to negotiate we are speaking with one voice, not only as a community within CARICOM but as a developing country

May 24, 2001

in the ranks of the developing world.

Mr. Speaker, the challenges are enormous. In fact, in my view, they are mind boggling and we need to have the best resources that are available and at our disposal in the country, in the region and in the wider region to be able to negotiate on our behalf.

We have issues that are confronting us now which never confronted us before - electronic commerce, intellectual property rights -all that we have to negotiate among thirty-four nations, and I believe, Mr. Speaker, that unless we take this matter seriously and stop bandying around platitudes and regurgitating old facts, pontificating, Guyana is not going to get very far. The country is not going to get very far and if Guyana doesn't get very far, it means that Guyanese as a whole, not a section, not the PPP/Civic government or the PPP/Civic supporters, everyone will fall behind and we will have no one to blame but ourselves if that happens.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Guyana as a single entity is already on the periphery. We talk about marginalisation as a single entity, as a country. We are in a sense on the margins of all these exciting and challenging developments that are taking place, but together working within the Caribbean Community, working within the Association of Caribbean States and the African Caribbean and Pacific Group, we constitute an important force to change, what the President said is the process towards marginalisation of developing countries in the context of globalisation.

We have established, Mr. Speaker, the regional negotiating machinery. The Hon. Member Mr. Murray did not refer to that, he overlooked that. That is an important development in the entire process and therefore if Guyana is to, indeed, make a worthy contribution, if we are to be part of the process to not only attract investments, to not only attract enterprise development, not only from the Caribbean but also from the wider Caribbean, we have to be part of this global process.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Hon. Member was seeking, with all due



May 24, 2001

respect to score some cheap political points when he threw in the question of rice and barriers to trade that are being raised in some CARICOM countries, with respect to some of the commodities that we export from Guyana. Of course anybody is free to do so inside this Honourable House or outside, but they must know the facts.

Mr. Speaker, only yesterday, at the Foreign Trade Ministers Meeting that was held in Georgetown [*Uproar*] [*Interruption ... Murry vs Rohee* 'How would I know?' "You have to follow the papers, you have to read". 'The papers don't have that' "You have to read".]

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Murray was a former Minister of Trade in the PNC government for a number of years and now he says, he is keeping a watching brief on these matters. But what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that only yesterday, at this meeting, I raised the question and I told all those who were present that Guyana is not going to stand by any longer and allow non-tariff barriers and barriers that are mounted to keep our products out from those countries. We are going to go on an aggressive campaign to ensure that those barriers are removed because they contradict the letter and the spirit of the Treaty of Chaguaramus and even the new protocols which have just been signed to establish the Single Market and Economy.

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member also raised the question of treatment of our nationals within the Caribbean Community. Now, we are dealing with the question of free movement of skills which is an integral part of the Single Market and Economy. Now, Mr. Murray is saying that we should have taken the opportunity in the presence of Prime Minister Owen Arthur and the Bahamas to raise these matters. I am not so sure whether this would be the appropriate forum to do that, I am not so sure, Mr. Speaker, whether the President should have used the opening of Parliament to launch a broad side against his colleagues on a matter like that. That is what was implied. The point is this, it is not that Guyana is not doing anything to overcome and to treat this problem. We have been carrying out a very aggressive engagement with those countries and they know who they are, I don't have to name them, we know who



they are and we know where the benches are located at the airports. We have been actively engaged with those countries, with those governments, to tell them that this type of treatment to Guyanese must stop. We never raised any question about taking retaliatory action. Some people say we must do that but I would not want to go down that road. I would not want to suggest that we go down that road.

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member said that the President did not have clearly defined targets and goals in his Speech. *[Interruption... Murray vs Rohee 'In the areas of the economy'. "Mr. Speaker, by the beginning of next week, I will put a copy of the Interim Poverty Strategy Paper along with a copy of the National Development Strategy in a nice briefcase and send it as a gift to my good friend, the Hon. Winston Murray." "I want you to know that I have those documents." "...because in these documents, particularly this document, all those questions which you are asking, are answered". 'No, they are not answered.' "All those questions are answered in these documents. You want to talk about poverty alleviation, employment generation ... they are all answered in there, what is vision of the government. So we cannot look at the Speech in isolation from the overall policies of the government which exists in the Interim Poverty Strategy Paper and the National Development Strategy. [Applause] They have to be placed in a context and as you said, you have the documents and I appeal to you again, don't just collect documents but read the documents". [Laughter]]*

Mr. Speaker, I have listened very carefully to the Hon. Member because I have respect for Winston - I have respect for the Hon. Member - and his debates are indeed of a quality nature, one has to admit that. But let me say this, the Hon. Member kept stressing over and over again about setting targets, goals, planning, everything must be set in matrices clearly defined and so forth. Apparently, the Hon. Member forgets that he is living in a market driven economy. He is talking as if he is living in a socialist economy where you have state planning institutions that plan every unit of production right down from beginning to end. We are not living in a socialist society, we are living in a market-driven

economy, where demand and production are driven by supply and demand.

The question of jobs is also driven by the extent to which you can have investments in the country both of a domestic nature and an external nature. The State is no longer the major employer of people in Guyana. So they keep accusing us of living in the past, but these people themselves are living in the past - they are living in the past because these targets, goals and objectives which the Hon. Member is asking us to set in clearly defined stratifications and so on come from a thinking that used to occur in the past in our society, a past that we wish had never existed in Guyana and also that will probably never again exist anywhere in the world in the not too distant future because we are driven by market economics. So no one can guarantee that we will have a thousand jobs, it all depends on the extent to which you co-operate. It depends on the extent, Mr. Speaker, on which the PNC/Reform co-operates with the government, gives us the support to ensure that the economy develops and that we get the requisite investments which will then generate the type of employment that you are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude by saying that the Speech by the President, is one that points the way forward and one which we should read over and over again because it sets out certain broad conceptual guidelines and thrust. We don't expect to find the great details in here. Next month we will hear a budget speech, I think, and then when you hear the budget speech, you will hear some of the things that the Hon. Member was asking for. So, Mr. Speaker, let us not be too anticipatory in what we want to see and hear from 'the highest excellence of government and the state' but let us take the speech for what it's worth, work with it and ensure that Guyana moves forward as a united and prosperous nation. Thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** The Hon. Member Mr. Alexander.

**Mr Vincent L. Alexander:** Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, may I first of all take the opportunity to thank the people of Guyana, who through

*May 24, 2001*

my party, has made it possible for me to serve in this National Assembly, and serve I will.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the President on his Speech because, Mr. Speaker, the Speech of the President was relatively in-offensive. One could see clearly that the President avoided the normal innuendoes from that side of the House, innuendoes of twenty-eight years of this and twenty-eight years of that and so he should be congratulated for that.

But more than that, I would wish that those in his party who have seen it fit to thrust him into the position of President of the country, but not into the position of President or leader of the party to which he belongs, would walk in his footsteps during the course of this Eighth Parliament, take a page out of that book that he has presented to us and desist from the innuendoes which I noticed started to creep in when the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramsaran, rather than talking about twenty-eight years talked about ten. Mr. Ramsaran would benefit from taking a page out of his Leader, sorry, the President... Well, you are so accustomed to your Leader being your Presidential Candidate that I have to get accustomed to this anomaly on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, having noted the new element, which is more or less the form and not the substance of the President's Presentation, I must hasten to say, and if I were to give a description of his presentation, I would say it was one of platitudes. I am advised that those platitudes have their origin in the National Development Strategy, so on that score, the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee might be right, for a change, since he himself also referred to that Strategy.

But, Mr. Speaker, the state of our country requires more than platitudes and in that regard, my colleague, the Hon. Member, Mr Winston Murray, identified that the President did not deal with the concrete issues that one would have expected a President to deal with, given that he only has one opportunity in five years to address this august body. But the fact that the Speech is one of platitudes seemed to be reflective of the state of things on the other side of the House and on the state of

things in government.

Mr. Speaker, if we reflect over the last nine years, you would see that over the last three to four years, this country has experienced negative growth in most instances and negligible growth in one instance and so these platitudes are reflective of this dormancy, this lack of movement, absence of foresight which is required to take this country forward. It is against that background, Mr. Speaker, I beg the observation that the President in his Speech made absolutely no mention of local government in a world where local government is becoming more and more important from two perspectives, from the perspective of governance which has been mouthed about in this House even today, and from the perspective of development which is also being talked about.

Local government, Mr. Speaker, is at the centre of governance, it is at the centre of development, even in a market driven economy, because I dare say, Mr. Speaker, that even in a market driven economy, that very often the resource approach development which is associated with the market driven economy is supplemented by the local approach to development. And so we see, a vacuum in terms of an understanding of what is required if we are to take this country forward.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, very little reference has been made to Constitutional Reform - two or three broad statements. In fact it may be argued, that it is unfortunate that on the occasion of the opening of the Eighth Parliament that the President had to refer to Constitutional Reform in the manner in which he did. We should recall, Mr. Speaker, that most, if not all, of the amendments were in drafted form prior to the end of the time of the last Parliament and they were not brought to this Parliament for reasons still unknown. We now have the unfortunate situation, where on one hand, the President in conjunction with the Leader of the Opposition, has to charge this Parliament to ensure that those amendments are brought within a month. And on the other hand, the President himself, comes to this Parliament to reinforce that charge by pointing to the fact that this Parliament should complete that process and they gave us a deadline. That deadline is fast approaching and all that we have

May 24, 2001

before us is the tabling of a small part of the amendments here today. Mr. Speaker, I urge this House and Members of the other side in particular, if they want to stand here and to enunciate on the worth of the President's Presentation in this Parliament, to this House, then they must demonstrate that in the manner of which they approach these amendments with the urgency required. And so it is not the speeches which will matter, it is the action, it is the manifest commitment which will matter.

Mr. Speaker, I have referred to the fact that the President's Speech has a number of platitudes. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to refer to some of those platitudes and from a standpoint of contributing to the betterment of this country, seek to transform those platitudes into concrete ideas that we could all work on. But before I do that, I want to refer to one of the platitudes found on page 1 which reads as follows:

They have given us the mandate to govern in their interest, and the charge to engage our collective wisdom for their good and for the advancement of our country.

I refer to this platitude, Mr. Speaker, because I get the impression that there are many persons out there, and I dare say some in here, who do not understand the role of the National Assembly, who do not see the role of the National Assembly as a body responsible for legislation as well as for policy formulation. And further they do not realise that the present engagement between the Leader of the Opposition and the President reflects the failure of this House, to properly deal with issues of national interests, both from a legislative perspective and from a perspective of policy formulation. It is not failure that will let us down that road and so for all of those out there who seemed to suggest that someone is trying to occupy the space of the executive, let it be known that if the executive has recognised the role of the Parliament and allows the Parliament to do its work, then there would have been no need for these committees to be operative at an extra parliamentary level. *[Applause]* And so Mr. Speaker, the challenge is ours, to ensure that this Parliament

May 24, 2001

recaptures that term which belongs to it, but not only recaptures, but makes positive use of that term to ensure that the affairs of this country are conducted as they should be from the chambers of this August House.

Now, to the rest of the platitudes, the President in his presentation said:

*They are observing us and will respect to us, if courageously we place the national good above partisan interest.*

Mr. Speaker, the issue here is placing the national good above partisan interest. The challenge before this House is to do exactly that and many of the provisions which are still to be brought before this House for amending the Constitution seek to do exactly that, to ensure that the framework in which we will operate will put the national good above partisan interest. And so, Mr. Speaker, I look forward not only to the passing of those provisions into Constitution amendments, I look forward to the speedy implementation of those provisions. Because even in the case where provisions have been passed into amendments of the Constitution, implementation has lagged far behind.

An example of that, would be the question of land allocation and land distribution. If one goes back to the report of the Select Committee of Constitutional Reform, the content of that report, one would have observed that that report made a specific recommendation and I dare say, the report and its recommendations were adopted by this House, that the government should bring to this House a paper on the criteria for land distribution. And not only should they bring a paper on the criteria for land distribution, but that should be followed by the establishment of a Monitoring Committee, to ensure that land distributed is in keeping with those criteria. That was included in the Select Committee's Report. Nothing has happened to date. It has reached to the point, where the President and the Leader of the Opposition have had to entrust that responsibility now to a Special Committee, hence my earlier contention; and if the House does not do its work then other groups will have to do the work of the House and then the un-informed will go about saying that the opposition is trying to usurp the functions of the government.

May 24, 2001

*[Interruption: 'You have missed the vessel.' "Mr. Speaker, the only vessel I might have missed, is the vessel of the rapid land distribution which has taken place during the period which I am speaking about. I missed that vessel, I am aware of it" ].*

The next platitude I would like to refer to is as follows:

*Mr. Speaker, this Eighth Parliament of the Republic is new both in time and quality. It comes after the deliberate decision to reform our Constitution and consolidate our democratic institutions and practices. In this regard I say to this House, that any consolidation of our democratic institutions and practices will have to include a significant reform of our local government system.*

It is in that regard, I found it strange that the President did not see it fit to make any reference whatsoever to our local government system and I wonder whether in his mind, because an Hon. Member said earlier that these things begin in your mind but I now wonder whether in his mind he had local government because I rather suspect that it is the things of the mind which are reduced to presentations that are made to this House, and the extent to which that was not reduced to a presentation here, suggests that it might not be one of the things of his mind. Here again, time ... time will tell but may I hasten to say that time is not on our side.

The President also said in his presentation that we give expression to the meaning of representative democracy by the Constitutional amendment, which today brings twenty-five members elected directly by constituencies to the National Assembly. I want to make the point that this provision is ephemeral and the House needs to make note of that fact. For those who may not know or for those who may not care to know, when this matter was discussed - the matter of electoral reform - it was a conscious decision that we could not go the full distance in terms of electoral reform under the time frame within which we are operating and that the system which we put in place is an indication of the direction in which we want to go, but let's not at all suggest that we have arrived



May 24, 2001

where we want to arrive. And so, I want to caution that not because we have arrived at this point does it mean that the journey is completed, the journey is far from completed and I hope that the President knows that the journey is far from completed. Because if he is at the helm and is responsible for taking us where want to go, then he should know to which port he is taking the ship and it is certainly not the port that he is referring to in his Speech, this is just a port along the way.

Mr. Speaker, he went on to say:

*Additionally, our Parliament is poised to participate in greater measures in the governance of our country.*

And in that regard I would like to say two things:

Firstly, I would like to say, when we talk about the governance of our country, we must talk about that governance in the context of democratic state, and if we are talking about that governance in that context, we cannot restrict our understanding of democracy to representation and representation alone. Representation as we see here today is merely an element of a democratic system. We still have to do lots of work to ensure that other elements, elements of responsibility and the element responsiveness are in fact embraced as essential elements of the system. We have to ensure in the context of responsibility, that the people of this country have some degree of certainty about what to expect of the administration, hence the reference made earlier to procedures and not discretionary powers, those procedures that can assure citizens of how their rights can be realised. And no one person must feel that because one is elected (or if elected) one can do what one feels, because one is elected. A democracy requires responsible behavior. It requires that the citizens can look forward to certain services knowing which rules and regulations apply to them in that regard and not to discretionary powers which allow for arbitrary decisions and possible discrimination and victimisation in the dispensation of the services of the state. And so I hope that the Members of this House, particularly those on the other side understand that they still have some distance to travel in terms of their embracing the much touted concept of democracy, because it is



your party member and more importantly, the President, who in his Speech said, (I think he is referring to the population):

*They expect, at the end of the process, many of the ills that beset and retard us will be removed.*

Now that is a platitude. The Lord knows what it means, but I am trying to give some meaning to it so that this House, in its work during the course of the Eighth Parliament could deal concretely with issues of governance and with issues of delivery of services, does not have a kind of arbitrariness which makes the Minister feel that she can get to a citizen \$10,000, a citizen in dire straits after the wanton killing of her mother and the Minister reaches out to give \$10,000 and makes it a big news item - big news item --- [Interruption: 'Shame! Shame! Shame!' " -- - when hundreds of thousands of dollars are being doled out to other persons at the said Ministry quietly without any announcement, doled out every day, every day! Ask Chandarpal ---" 'Lie! Lie! Lie!' "— she produced it! Doled out every day sums of money in excess of \$10,000 for matters of lesser significance than \$10,000!]

Mr. Speaker, we don't want to find a thousand guns at this time, we want to find the one who killed Donna McKinnon, - just one! [Applause]

Mr. Speaker, may I emphasize what the President said? The President said that:

*nation building demands the involvement of all.*

The challenge before this House is to ensure that indeed we have the involvement of all, but to have the involvement of all requires that we have a local government system which will ensure that there is broad-based representation at the local level and that everything is not honked by Ministries in terms of local affairs.

And in closing, Mr. Speaker, the President also said:

May 24, 2001

*... good governance flows from demystifying bureaucracy.*

I close in saying that good governance also flows from decentralisation because in decentralisation, one makes it possible for government to be closer to people. It allows for governance with transparency at a wider level and it also provides the basis for the local approach to development and in that regard provide an opportunity for us collectively to take this country forward. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Thank you Mr. Alexander. Hon. Members, I think this is a good time to take the suspension.

### **Suspension of Assembly at 15: 57H**

### **Resumption of Assembly at 16:30H**

**The Speaker:** The Hon. Minister of Health, Dr Leslie Ramsammy.

**Hon. Dr Leslie S. Ramsammy:** Mr Speaker, I stand in support of the Motion by the Hon. Member Dr Bheri Ramsaran. We, in this House, endorsed the policies that were outlined in the Presentation by the President. If you would permit me, Mr Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity of congratulating first, the Hon. Member, Mr Vincent Alexander, on making his maiden presentation in this House. I would also like to take the opportunity since it is my first time speaking in this session to congratulate the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker and all the new Members of the House and to take the opportunity of congratulating the Hon. Member, Dr Rudy Insanally, on his appointment as the new Minister of Foreign Affairs. *[Applause]*

The President's Presentation asked for all of us to join hands and take our country forward. In fact I would like to quote from page 4 some of the things that the President said:

*... we must join hands and work together as one people.*

May 24, 2001

*The creation of a new society must begin in our minds. The preoccupation must cease to be about preventing, restricting and depriving and become about liberating and expanding jobs, social opportunities, resources.*

The President continued:

*Mr Speaker, my Party sought and has been granted the mandate to pursue this journey and to lead this process. This is a great honour as it is a profound responsibility. It is, however, a journey that none, in spite of capabilities and experiences must, or dare undertake alone. Nation building demands the involvement of all of us. Let us not refrain or delay from embarking upon this task so that future generations will have kind words to say about us.*

And in that note, Mr Speaker, I would like to congratulate and thank both the President and the Leader of the Opposition for getting together to give Guyana and our people a chance to move forward.  
[Applause]

We have a country, Mr Speaker. At this time all good intentions and our efforts are mired in poverty but we are rich in resources. Yes, we have made, over the last decade, significant advances and have reduced poverty but we still have a long way to go. Guyana has no chance to escape the strangle-hold of poverty unless we work together, unless all of us understand that our actions and our words must promote unity. In so doing we all must stand resolute in our position and reject violence, reject hate-speeches and reject all those things that destroy our people.

The Hon. Member Mr Belgrave had this to say in trying to get someone to refer to one paragraph of this Speech and so I would try to refer to that now and I hope that I would bring some measure of

gratitude to Mr Belgrave. This is the paragraph where the President talked about rejecting the hate-mongers and he said:

*It is now time for us to allow the structures and institutions we have established to function for the good of our people. We must utilise the institutions established for the resolution of differences rather than descend to risky and destructive means. As a people our lives are interwoven to the extent that violation of any kind does harm to all. We are all demeaned in our own land when any of us is targeted because of our ethnicity.*

And so, Mr Speaker, I am asking my colleagues in this House, for us to join together because when our people, in the weeks following the elections, were being beaten simply because of their ethnicity or the political party they support, when buses are stopped and people dragged out and beaten, when we throw channa bombs in buses and burn our people, when we go to the hospitals and we see these people laying there, let's all join our voices, let's all join our hands and say, 'No more! Stop the nonsense and stop it now!'

In this, Mr Speaker, we follow and we join hands and walk with our President. I am glad that the Hon. Member Mr Vincent Alexander asked us on this side of the House to walk with the President. I want to assure the Hon. Member and assure all the people of this country that we on this side of the House walk with our President hand-in-hand. We give our President all of our support and we will be there at every second of the day and every corner of this land to give him support as he takes this land forward. I ask you on the other side of the House, let's walk with our President because he is the President of this country and he is the President of all of our people.

The President of our country, said in this House, in his Speech, that we need to build our health sector, to improve our health sector. Mr Speaker, we have to develop a strong responsive, effective and equitable health sector. It is an imperative that we cannot ignore or not pay

attention to.

It must be an important task of our Poverty Reduction Strategy and that is exactly what we intend to do. We have to improve our hospital infrastructure, its technological capacity, its human resource. We have to improve not only our procurement but we have to improve our efficiency in the sector, our immunisation has grown and is already ninety per cent - in excess of ninety per cent - but we have to cover every child, every citizen that is eligible for immunisation. We have to address the problems of our disabled people and improve our rehabilitation programme.

Mr Speaker, the number-one cause or the most important cause for mortality and morbidity in our young people today is accidental causes, behavioural causes. It has been a major public health problem - accidents on our roads and in our work places, mental health, child ... Mr Speaker, the Hon. Member, Mr Alexander, knows the facts. The Hon. Member knows very well that this issue was addressed in the Constitutional Reform. The Hon. Member was an important member of the team that was working on Constitutional Reform, and he himself ... In terms of local Government the Hon. Member knows that this is a very important component of this reform and he knows the reasons why it did not come to this House toward the end of the Seventh Parliament. The Hon. Member Mr Alexander also said that the Committees that are now in place because of the dialogue should have never come about because the Parliament would have completed its work by responsible people in the sub-committees, and others in the participatory growth of our democracy. This must always be important and it must always involve more than the Parliament of this country --- it must not be our total burden - it must not be the total burden of this House, but it must be at all levels, and I say the people of this country are a useful addition in taking this country forward. I congratulate those who are now participating in those Committees. *[Applause]*

I want to reiterate that while Parliament is important and a major part of our democracy, it cannot be the exclusive purview of the partici-

May 24, 2001

patory democracy that we strive for and that is the objective of us on this side of the House. I know other speakers will make reference to other areas but I just want to end on this note. There was a paper that was supposed to be prepared on land distribution, it is part of the Constitutional Reform and the work of the Oversight Committee addressed and the Hon. Member knows very well that we, in the Oversight Committee had said that it was not something for us to prepare within that but we should leave the provision for that to happen and that is also the consequence of the process proceeding now. I hope that we get to it early, it is important but we must understand that these incremental approaches depend on all of us working hard together for the future of our country, for our nation.

So with those words, Mr Speaker, I end by saying to all of us -all of our people - we have a country we can build, so that in reality, it becomes a great country. Let's work together, with our hands and one voice, for all of our people. Thank you very, very, much. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** The Hon. Member, Mrs Shirley Melville

**Mrs Shirley Melville:** Mr Speaker, fellow Members of the National Assembly, I would like to commend the Speech of our President and to bring out some issues that are very important to us, the people from the Hinterland.

Regional representation has been achieved, as such we look forward to greater participation being introduced from the bottom up and not the top down. Unless you have been there or lived the life only then could proper decisions be made that affect our people's lives at the grass-roots level.

Mr Speaker, we definitely need development to move forward with a greater input from the people. The larger percentage of poverty is in the hinterland which happens to be the richest part of our country. As such we need to take our people into consideration when we speak about rapid social development. Our people need rapid social develop-

May 24, 2001

ment and we have a lot of patching up to do. We cannot address poverty in a rushed manner, we need to take our time, we need to have more participation from the grass-roots level up. Without strong roots nothing could survive at the top.

The vision among our people in the hinterland is not a problem. The vision we have, the peace we have, therefore we have a very strong base on which to build. We do welcome the health centres and schools that are being built within our region, but we need to have them staffed properly. Therefore there is definitely a need for more human resource strength. Mr Speaker, with the combined efforts of us all here and some of the very best brains in our country, we feel that we could move forward into taking up our responsibility and the reason for which we are here, not only to be rubber-stamps but also to have the job done. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** The Hon. Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs, Mr Rudolph Insanally

**Hon. S. Rudolph Insanally:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members, although I am ill prepared to intervene in the debate at this time, I would not fail to seize the opportunity which this debate presents.

First, to acknowledge with appreciation and thanks, the warm welcome which you, Mr. Speaker, and Members on both sides of the House, have been kind enough to extend to me, on the assumption of my seat in this Honourable Chamber.

And second, to say a few words, on the vision and strategy which were expounded by His Excellency the President, at the opening of the Eighth Parliament on May 4, 2001, to guide the future conduct of our nation's foreign policy.

It will not surprise you, I think, to find that my few remarks will be based on the foreign affairs, and particularly on my own experience and on my recent Chairmanship of the CONFOR meeting here in Georgetown.

My preliminary observation, on the text of the President's message is that his assessment on the current international environment within which small states such as Guyana must now contend is shared virtually by all Members of the International Community. The twin processes of globalisation and trade liberalisation, which now drive global, political, economic and social relations among states, have the potential not only for accelerating development but also unfortunately for the marginalisation of those, particularly the small and disadvantaged who are ill-equipped to compete in this new playing field.

In the face of this danger, small states like ours are challenged to take stock of their situation and to devise a strategy and a policy for survival. We can be pleased to note that the Caribbean Community, to which His Excellency averts in his statement and of which Guyana is an active member, has now been fully sensitised to the need to rethink and retool both our domestic and foreign policies in order to address the new circumstances in which we find our selves. At a landmark meeting held in 1999, in St. Kitts and Nevis, a decision was taken to attempt to formulate a new vision and strategy to inform the direction of the Community's foreign policies. Following upon this initiative, the recently concluded Georgetown Meeting gave thought to the principles and purposes which should underpin the exercise as well as to devise a programme of action which would safeguard and promote our common interests and to help counter the negative effects of globalisation's impact on small economies. It is, therefore, in Guyana's interest, I believe, to recognise this growing interdependence among states and the countries of the Caribbean and Latin America, I should add, to pursue, to the full, our developmental objectives.

Mr Speaker, Hon. Members, there is obviously much more than can be said in terms of our economic and social objectives but, given the constraints of time and my fear of taxing your patience, I will content myself with these general observations in order to be able to say a few words on some political and security concerns which continue to engage the attention of the region and Guyana in particular. As indicated by His Excellency the President, in his statement to this body earlier this month,



*May 24, 2001*

“globalised and restricted movement of capital is not the only threat to our sovereignty”. So too, are the plague of drug-trafficking, HIV/AIDS, environmental dangers and, in our case especially, our border controversies with neighbours to our east and west. In order to resolve the latter, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will do its utmost to create an environment in which all concerned may be able to engage in a constructive dialogue in order, hopefully, to reach a peaceful settlement of all outstanding differences. In this regard, the proposed establishment by this Parliament of the Committee for National Defence and Borders assumes critical importance. The multipartisan nature of such a Committee will not only, as His Excellency the President said, bring to bear our best expertise on the issues, but also, equally important, forge a unity of purpose that is critical.

I therefore pledged to do my utmost to co-operate with the entire membership to translate this idea into reality. At the same time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will work closely with other relevant Ministries and Agencies to protect our national patrimony from encroachment. In these endeavours, we have been heartened by the unfailing support which CARICOM Countries continue to give to Guyana and Belize in the preservation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity. On this last occasion, they went further to note the importance of maritime boundary delimitation issue in the Eastern Caribbean relating to Venezuela and their great concern with the situation. There is thus a growing spirit of solidarity within CARICOM on these crucial matters.

Mr Speaker, I do apologise and I mean finally, since as a newcomer to this House, I should not exceed my welcome, I would wish to underscore an invitation which I made in my opening remarks at the COFCOR Meeting, viz., that the full-time business of managing our foreign affairs - even or rather, especially in small states - requires the involvement of all in our civil society, including of course our Parliament which is their public advocate. I therefore consider and I believe, we will all feel that the Encounter with Civil Society, which is being planned by CARICOM for engaging in a serious dialogue with all actors on the regional stage very shortly with a view to harmonising our agendas for

May 24, 2001

the common good will be most welcomed.

In all of this, Mr. Speaker and to conclude, this Parliament can serve as an important interlocutor between policy makers and the public whose interests you are mandated to safeguard and on whose behalf that you must act. In this context, it may be interesting to note that the Fourth Meeting of COFCOR considered the role which the recently created Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians (ACCP) which last met in Belize, November 2000, can play in helping the region to advance. At that meeting, a number of important resolutions on the region's foreign policy were taken. Unfortunately, however, support for the body is apparently less than expected perhaps because of the perception that it has no decision-making authority.

But I do believe that we can encourage this since even in the multi-lateral framework of the United Nations in almost every conceivable process that is now taking place, whether it can be the financing for development, conflict resolution, whatever the area, there is always a parallel process to allow the voice of the people to be heard and in many cases, the little progress that we have seen is a result of that. The progress that we have seen largely on the question of debt and the question of the environment and even in the area of nuclear disarmament.

So, Mr Speaker, Hon. Members, with these observations, which were inspired by my cursory reading of the President's Statement, I would like to give Members of the House the assurance that as a new boy, I would strive assiduously to work in this Chamber as appropriately with you and to seek your guidance in the continuous shaping of our country's foreign policy. I thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** The Hon. Member, Mrs Volda Lawrence.

**Mrs Volda A. Lawrence:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to add to the debate on the floor. It is true as the President has said,

*Our society faces many challenges and the legislative agenda that comes before this National Assembly will have*

May 24, 2001

*to take these into account.*

and

*the cornerstones of a successful economic strategy are good governance ...*

which leads me to wonder what indicators we must use when we are thinking of good governance. For me, at least, and I dare say for the party which I represent, *good governance* comes about when the government in question has gained the confidence of an extremely large number of the Guyanese population.

And how exactly do we know when a government has gained the confidence of a large amount of its citizens? Is fifty-three per cent a figure large enough?

For me, *good governance* means incorporating in the government's policies the cries and progressive well-being of the population into considerations of policy, which brings me to the question of Guyanese youths.

I have searched in vain through the Address of His Excellency, President Jagdeo for concrete indicators of what he intends to do for these persons. In case the President has forgotten, let me take this opportunity to remind him that the Guyanese population as I speak, is skewed in their favour. In other words, we are dealing here with large numbers of youths - teenagers and young adults - of all races. Are we to satisfy ourselves with the exportation to other countries of these resources - more valuable than gold - human resources? What are the plans for them? After all, as the President has said:

*Nation building demands the involvement of all of us.*

The President also spoke about *demystifying bureaucracy*. I myself am mystified about what he means. I would like to know if demystifying bureaucracy entails making available more funds channeled into the economic well-being of our youths.

*May 24, 2001*

Surely, there are ways by which monies can be made available for programmes and activities, aimed at the improvement and development of our young adults. I am quite serious about this. I am not aware that there is in existence any concerted means being undertaken by the government to raise the economic and social welfare of our young adults. Are we to wait until their mothers die to offer them \$10,000?

The youth initiative must not be political. The effort is being spoilt by the blatant politisation and by the fact that it is being administrated from above. This is not a handout. Governments help youths by simply helping them to help themselves, by providing the framework and then letting the youths get on with the task.

Mr. Speaker, this group is also plagued by three important issues, those of unemployment, poverty and HIV/AIDS epidemic. These issues affect the lives of our youths, who are the present and the future human resources of this country.

Mr. Speaker, unemployment leads to poverty and the tendency to be involved in improper social conduct, thus the high increase of HIV/AIDS victims. May I say also that no amount of HIV/AIDS education and sensitisation programmes can remove the social ills which bring about AIDS. Unless unemployment and poverty are addressed, Mr. Speaker, HIV/AIDS will become a burden we may not be able to carry.

I refer just now to the population being skewed in favour of youths. May I seize this opportunity to remind

His Excellency that women make up fifty-one per cent of the population. I would also remind His Excellency that even though there are female Ministers of the Government, a female Chancellor of the Judiciary - my heartiest congratulations - the status of women in general in Guyana, has shown no reasonable improvement over the last nine years. Women are still the underpaid workers, the only slightly appreciated workers in our offices and when we look for any sizeable amount of female decision makers, we seem to look in vein. My question is, what will the government do about these persons about whom there is no

May 24, 2001

mention in His Excellency's Address?

Finally, what are the plans in train for the Family and Juvenile Court? A court which will quickly look after the rights of families and children - including women, of course, without being held up in long delays.

His Excellency does well to speak as he recently has about judges freeing political activists. Would he not wish women who are experiencing legal difficulties to have quick resolutions to these problems.

To close, I repeat my call for concrete measures to be taken concerning the welfare of young people, for women in Guyana, to be given the status they deserve by means of a strengthening of the judicial system and by the coming into existence of a Family and Juvenile Court. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** The Hon. Member, Mrs Indranie Chandarpal.

**Mrs Indranie Chandarpal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand in support of the Motion moved by the Hon. Member Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, of the Government's policy in the President's Address to the National Assembly.

But before going into that, Mr. Speaker, I, first of all, would like to congratulate all the new Members of the National Assembly and also the new Ministers of the PPP/Civic Government.

The Address by His Excellency the President on the occasion of the opening of the Eighth Parliament, in a very profound manner reiterated the critical issues which have engaged our attention as a nation. We have a unique opportunity as elected representatives of our people to make this Assembly a truly deliberative one by the level of debate we engage in, where we become less acrimonious and with possibilities of reaching consensus.

His Excellency, in his Presentation stated on page 2:

May 24, 2001

*Ours must be a future that affords all our people the right and opportunity to earn a decent livelihood. It must, like a swelling tide, lift those who are in the grasp of poverty and in the dungeons of deprivation and despair and transport them to the shore of safety and security. It must be a place of caring for all, where the poor, the weak, and the aged are not trampled upon by the rich and powerful; where capital and labour form partnerships to create wealth; and where there is no eruption of enmity.*

The Speech of His Excellency emphasized the need for our people to work for a secured future. Central to that objective is the need to realistically assess the ways in which our people have historically worked for the common good but in short spaces of time could be pushed toward the path of self destruction.

Guyana has achieved great progress in the last eight years. This is reflected in the strides we made, not only in the improvement of the economy and in the rebuilding of our infrastructure, but also in the care shown and betterment achieved for our women, children, elderly and the destitute. Not only, Mr. Speaker, did we create policies but we created the mechanisms and the institutions, and the National Commissions on the Rights of the Child, for women, for the family and the elderly. These Commissions were tasked with numerous responsibilities to give effect to our vision in these areas. The issues of gender equity and the advancement of women were given high priority on the government's agenda. Agenda main-streaming document was adopted in the major sectors of development, a strategy on women and gender and development formed parts of a chapter of the National Development Strategy.

Mr. Speaker, the government embarked on conscious awareness programmes in all the ten Regions of our country where all the practical and strategic needs of women were incorporated into the five-year action plan for women. The establishment of the Women's Leadership Institute, was the first of its kind in this hemisphere. The National Resource and Documentation Centre provided a catalyst for the advance-

May 24, 2007

ment of women.

Legislation such as the Domestic Violence Act, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, the Prevention of Discrimination Act and the signing of the Bellingdow Pada Convention on the eradication of violence against women reaffirmed the government's firm commitment to CEDAW and to gender empowerment.

Support services which had never existed before became a reality, shelters for women, for children and the destitute were all established. We brought eight records where women shattered the glass ceiling for the very first time in Guyana and I am amazed that my Sister and fellow Parliamentarian, can say that nothing has been achieved.

The promise of our late President, Dr Cheddi Jagan, in his inaugural address on the National Commission on Women became a reality through the Constitutional Reform process with one-third women representation. I wish to once again congratulate all the female Members of Parliament who are now in the corridors of power and whose very presence will provide a new dimension to the political spectrum.

I also wish to inform the Assembly that on March 7, of this year, the first meeting was held towards the formation of the Association of Women Parliamentarians. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Hon. Members from all the sides of the House will work together in making this proposal a reality. The important issue to be underscored is that these strides could well have been substantially greater in an environment of unity and stability.

As a nation, we have to rebuff the hate-mongers whose intention is to create disunity. We must replace that with respect for each ethnic group. We are a poor people, Mr. Speaker, living in a rich country because our natural resources are yet to be exploited and we owe it to our people to make their lives complete. We recognise our people are living in various degrees of poverty. This is pervasive, an unacceptable phenomenon - it is an unacceptable phenomenon.



May 24, 2001

The Hon. Member Mrs Melville, in her presentation referred to poverty and the need for participation. I agree that this is the way we have to go. We have to get people involved in the process and at the same time I wish to remind her about the engagement of all those who are involved in the PRSP in which there is going to be a lot of dialogue with the civil society.

We may want to engage in polemics, Mr. Speaker, how poor is poor but the bottom line is, our people deserve a better life. We have a nation to build, not to destroy. Everywhere Guyanese of all walks of life are making demands, they want everything, but how can we provide them with what they are asking for if we cannot create it? Who is going to spend their money in a climate of political tension, Mr Speaker? Who will want to invest when they can become targets based on how others perceive them?

Mr. Speaker, we either work together and build a nation or we will all perish together. We can be rich or we can be poor depending on the path we choose. If we work together, we will be a great nation and if we divide, we will remain poor and this is the choice that we have to make. There are many social problems in our society and though many positive improvements were made in every sector, we still have a very long way to go. We have to ensure that investment in the sectors are translated into more benefits for the citizens and we know, Mr. Speaker, of thousands of cases where changes were made and the people's attitudes have remained the same.

The challenges are great and the problems are numerous. Violence in all its forms, continues to be a major problem. Whether it is family violence or political violence, all should condemn such actions. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I wish to clarify a point that was raised by the Hon. Vincent Alexander, when he referred to the \$10,000.

The Hon. Minister was informed that one of the daughters of the late Donna McKinnon, went to the Ministry and requested assistance to the tune of \$5,000. She was given \$10,000 by the Minister. [Interruption ... 'Lie! Lie! lie!' "That is your problem if you think it's a lie. Mr



Speaker, I am reporting what was told to me"].

Also, Mr Speaker, I wish to refer to the point by Hon. Mr. Alexander, when he stated that the Ministry was giving out hundreds of dollars and I want to tell him "yes, we have been giving out hundreds of dollars through the Poverty Alleviation Programme for people who are in need of a leg, for people who are too poor to bury their dead, for women who have small children and who do not have anyone to help them."

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member Mr Carberry reiterated that point and I used the occasion to provide a list to him and I am sure, if his colleagues are interested in seeing who received what, they can, please, ask him.

Mr. Speaker, family cohesion and the growth and the development of stable family life form another challenge for us as a nation. The family is a unit which underpins the society and when this institution is in crisis, society is adversely affected.

The Hon. Member Mrs Lawrence referred to family and the laws and I wish to inform her that representation was made and as a matter of fact, the Attorney General's Chambers was given in the last Assembly or the last Parliament proposals with regard to the Family Court.

The problems of our children, Mr Speaker, the women and young people are addressed in various ways. Much improvement has been made and many new initiatives and programmes are in the pipe line. These must be accelerated and efforts must be made to continuously expand them. Mr Speaker, it is only through building on our achievements, limited as they may appear to be, and whatever, taking advantage of the heightened awareness generated year by year that sustained progress can be made.

Together we must move forward and it is only through unity, Mr Speaker, that we can bring about change in the status of our people. Let us move towards deriving maximum benefits for the full involvement and

May 24, 2001

contribution of all our people in all spheres of national development. This to my mind, Mr. Speaker, must be the challenge for all of us at this juncture of our common history.

I commend the Address by His Excellency the President to this National Assembly. Thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Thank you. The Hon. Member, Mr Manzoor Nadir.

**Mr Manzoor Nadir:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Mr. Speaker, during this second session, I note Members have set a very short standard for speaking and I don't want to deviate from that new norm. *[Interruption: ... 'He has nothing to say']*

Mr Speaker, I want to tell the Hon. Member who said, "I have nothing to say", I have lots to say but I have been editing it.

Mr. Speaker, I first would like to congratulate the President and to thank him for his Presentation to the National Assembly, and to recognise that in his Speech, we have seen a certain level of maturity over the past eighteen months that His Excellency has been serving as Head of Guyana.

Mr Speaker, his Speech has been commended by at least two Members of the Opposition so far. One Member recognising the wide ranging issues that are covered in the Speech and the other Member recognising his President's statesmanship in devoiding his Speech of any innuendoes and admonishing Members of the PPP/C to follow that statesman-like lead of His Excellency the President.

Mr. Speaker, but when you look at the Speech in its entirety, you can put it into a few categories. The President is reaching out to enhance and build this fledgling democracy.

Secondly, he is issuing a call for shared-responsibility and third, he stresses the emphasis on getting our economy going to deliver a better lifestyle for all Guyanese.

May 24, 2001

Mr. Speaker, no one can dissociate themselves from these three admirable qualities that resonate from the Speech of His Excellency the President. The President recognises that today all of us are here as a result of democratic elections. Those who have been elected in the National Assembly, in the Regional Democratic Council, we have our genesis in free and fair elections held not so long ago.

Mr. Speaker, the President in his message to us, signalled the strengthening of these democratic institutions. He pointed us to the many Commissions that we are going to be establishing as part of our Constitution and he asked of us to build on these institutions. We have, as I said, the Commission to strengthen fundamental rights, that will strengthen our democracy, the importance of the judiciary and the important developments in terms of the Constitution delinking the judiciary's financial support direct from the Minister of Finance and putting it in the hands of the National Assembly. These are going to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and also strengthen our democracy.

The expanded role of elected officials is one of the other issues which have been alluded to in the President's Speech and perhaps more important, Mr. Speaker, is at this issue of dialogue and I will come to that a bit later.

Mr. Speaker, as I said one of the other aspects of the President's Speech is at this issue of shared-responsibility. You know, many people today, are talking about power sharing but we get from the President in his Speech that he is saying let us join together in this journey, that we all have a responsibility to those who elected us to deliver a better lifestyle to all Guyanese, and this is the shared-responsibility. Those who will speak of power sharing got it wrong, those would be the selfish ones. This is not power to share among a few but this is a responsibility to develop Guyana for all Guyanese. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker, I detect this strong personal will by the President to work with diverse and different interests to develop Guyana by creating space and opportunity for all. Mr. Speaker, he sees himself and his party not as winning power but being selected to lead in this quest to

develop our country. Mr. Speaker, why good can come from this young leader is because clearly, he does not want history to speak badly of him. In at least two places in his Speech he mentioned that let history speak well of us and as I was reading the Speech, it reminded me of the words of Mark Anthony in Julius Caesar, when he said, "the evil that men do live after them and a good is often endowed in their bones." Mr. Speaker, we get this, as I said, resonating from the words of the President.

Some have said that he has provided weak leadership and what he is saying in his Speech, 'beating and robbing of innocent people is not legitimate protest.' I want to associate with him and all those of us who want to build this democracy and want to associate with the responsibility that we have been given by those who elected us. We need to come out and condemn those who want to destabilise this democracy. [*Applause*] This is not about destabilising a government, this is about destabilising a democracy and clearly there are a few persons out there who would love to rule over ruins - they would love to rule over ruins - so we must all come out and condemn arson, murder, TV hate-mongering. Mr. Speaker, I see a few persons on a dragged-out mission of continuing in this way, and I want to associate with the President when he condemns those who are involved. [*Interruption ... 'You want the Home Affairs Minister'. 'The Hon. Member, Mrs. Deborah Backer, is assigning Ministries now'.*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to the issue of dialogue and we have to commend the dialogue that has started between His Excellency the President and the Leader of the Opposition. Many persons have said that this is a sign of weakness, this is a sign of generosity, this is a sign of recognising that we are in the boat together. This is a sign of recognising that it is better to sit at the table and discuss our problems and try to come up with civilised solutions to them, rather than resorting to destruction and terror.

Mr. Speaker, we have, as I said, to commend the dialogue process and wish it well. I have no problem them to exclude the certain persons,

May 24, 2001

but we have an opportunity, those who are elected even by the smallest of margins to speak. We have earned that right from the people, and the PPP/C and the PNC/R, we recognise are supported by more than ninety per cent of the population so that they have a greater responsibility to lead the process of building this democracy, promoting dialogue and of leading Guyana down a path of economic prosperity based on an environment of stability, peace and civility.

Mr. Speaker, the President in his wide ranging Speech focused more than sixty per cent of his Speech on these two issues:

First, *the issue of working together*, and second, *the issue of the economy*.

We have to get the economy right. After one generation of enjoying our independence, have we delivered to our people that better quality of life that they all yearn for and depart these shores for? I do not think so. And so we have to associate with the President, when he speaks of rapid economic development. *Rapid Economic Development* has to be what it says, rapid economic development. This country can only survive as a nation if we have rapid economic development. We understand some of the problems, ten thousands of our young people come on the streets every year looking for jobs and so the economy will have to find 10,000 x US \$20,000 of investment annually and in order to do that, you have to vigourously seek out this investment and so the President spent almost thirty per cent of his Speech talking about rapid economic development.

The President's thoughts on employment creation as a means of reducing poverty is the only way to go. You cannot donate and get a person out of poverty. We can only alleviate the poverty situation by creating employment and I think he mentioned that employment which will redound to the benefit of your pocket significantly. Our people can no longer, Sir, wait for El Dorado. El Dorado is an unfulfilled dream and we have to move fast as the President said, to fulfill these dreams.

Mr. Speaker, in his statement the President implied more attention

being focused on tourism, manufacturing, toward export accredited production and toward employment in information technology areas.

The President also implied, and I think I quoted correctly when I said, "rapid growth requires greater competition in international markets", and what he is signaling there is exactly what we have to do with sugar, rice, bauxite and even our forestry products. We have to become competitive on the international market, we cannot hide behind barriers and protection by LOME but we have to have a competitive environment in Guyana that is efficiently going to produce goods, that can compete on the international market and this is another aspect of the rapid economic growth that we need to pursue. I hear the President as he is saying, we must modernise, we must modernise significantly rice, sugar, bauxite not only to say the jobs in those industries but also to create new jobs.

Someone mentioned that the President lacked defining what may happen over the next four years, but the Throne Speech in the old Parliament when the Queen came, outlined the general thrust of the government over the next five years. She outlined the strategy. So I said, let me look and see if in the President's Speech, he has outlined a strategy. I said, let me look and see, like the Westminster tradition that we have if the President has outlined a strategy and there is a strategy and a strategy I want to associate with.

It would be dishonest, Mr Speaker, it would be difficult to disagree with His Excellency's strategy and what that strategy entails? He says we must have a more favourable business environment, I don't know who is going to disagree with that - "more favourable business environment". We must have "adequate infrastructure development." He says, and this is directly from his Speech, "the strategy must be in the context of good governance" and he will undertake appropriate economic policies in all domains. What is happening here is, he is outlining the broad strategies and inviting us to participate with him and I think over the past two months we have heard the several invitations emanating from the Presidential Secretariat for those who have the brilliant ideas and plans

*May 24, 2001*

to put them on the table and then let us work them through for the benefit of all.

### **A More Favourable Business Environment**

His Excellency the President is recognising that more could be done to strengthen the business climate and all of us who have been in this Parliament for a longer period, every budget, we have been criticising the government for lack of a policy paper on investment but we have seen some changes. We have heard the announcement of a new investment agency now headed by a former Minister of Trade Tourism and Industry. He is saying that this industry will become more effective, it will cut red tape and it would be vibrant on the side of business.

We look forward to reforming the tax system which the President has signalled. The President has said that you can look forward to liberal incentives to the business community. This is all part of the strategy.

Mr. Speaker, we look forward to the work of the Special Select Committee that will deal with the economy, that is now going to be part of this National Assembly, part of the Sectoral Committees, that will be able to work along with the government in a non-partisan way in order to woo the investment dollar be it local or foreign.

Mr. Speaker, as part of that strategy to develop business, the President recognises the need for appropriate infrastructure development. We today, saw the problems that can happen with unreliable lights, water, telecommunications, drainage and irrigation, air transport, sea transport, all part of the appropriate infrastructure development that is needed for investment to take hold in Guyana. They provide the fertile soil for investment.

The other issue, Sir, is the issue of good governance. Mr. Speaker, good governance will be attained not only by transparent policies of the party in government but also by the checks and balances created by institutions and by the vigilance of the Opposition and the media.



May 24, 2001

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's Office is being strengthened in the Constitution - is being strengthened by legislative reforms - The Public Accounts Committee has completed its work, up-to-date, Procurement Commission is being introduced and we have the pledge of a more vibrant Parliament. All these will add to the issue of good governance, the framework within which the investment dollar will come to Guyana.

Mr Speaker, the President finally said ...*[Interruption ... 'Manzoor finally says' "The President finally said, not Manzoor finally says,"]*  
*[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker, the President finally said that implementing appropriate economic policies in all domains is going to be a priority of his government to attract investment. Land for business, freehold title to land, long-term leases and easier access to state lands are on the drawing board. Our exporters are calling on the government for more support on all fronts and perhaps, Mr. Speaker, that is why today we have a Minister appointed for international trade to help those who have to deal with the export oriented development that has led to the development especially of the Asian Tigers. The President now sees the private sector as a partner and he signals help on the diplomatic front as I have said.

The President said adequate infrastructure development and transport are also important. Mr. Speaker, he promised reform of the financial sector and I want to hear him relaxing the draconian measures imposed by the FIA, because today, from what is happening in Guyana over the past five years, and the US we need to stand by those people who want to invest here and the current measures within the FIA need to be relaxed at this particular time. It is a time of crisis and those who have a few dollars left to invest in Guyana need some space to do so.

Mr Speaker, finally I reiterate that the President has set two important frameworks within which this country has to develop. He is saying it must be shared-responsibility in a democracy and that we all must work together to get this economy moving to deliver El Dorado to our people. Mr. Speaker, as I sat during the break, I was given a programme for the Flag Raising Ceremony tomorrow evening. *[Interrup-*



May 24, 2001

tion: ... 'How he get that? We aint get that.' "Maybe only Ministers get it." [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote the last two verses of *Guyana The Free* that I just read during the Break. It says:

*No rich El Dorado has ever been found  
Though many have ended their lives on this ground  
Our labour in factory and office and field  
Will give us the wealth and the fall harvest yield*

*With purpose and vigour we will create our own fate  
Unmoved by distraction prejudice and hate  
Together we will strive for our new nation's goal  
Inspired by goodwill and kinship of soul.*

Thank you. [Applause]

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Mr Nadir.

The Hon. Member, Mr Jerome Khan.

**Mr Jerome Khan:** Mr. Speaker, the Motion before the House as tabled by the Hon. Dr. Bheri Ramsaran is to express sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency the President, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, for his Address to the National Assembly and I wish to join my colleagues in extending congratulations to His Excellency the President for his Speech to this House. But like some of my colleagues before me, I wish to say that I am truly disappointed with the vague, nebulous and sketchy nature of the presentation.

The Address, Mr. Speaker, can best be described as a glossy overview of the National Development Strategy. In fact, it would appear that the President's Speech was lifted from the National Development Strategy. I refer specifically, Mr. Speaker, to the section —  
[Interruption: ... 'I realise, Sir, that that gentleman understands the

May 24, 2001

*canine culture and the language of the canine culture he is very familiar with. If you look, the halls of the British residence are still resonating with the words of the canine culture, only he and I know what that means'].*

I refer specifically, Mr Speaker, to the section on investment in the National Development Strategy, in which his government proposed and presented ... [Pause]

Among the few things he said were:

1. They would be creating a more favourable environment
2. Developing adequate infrastructure
3. Good Governance
4. Implementing appropriate economic policies in all domains, and
5. Setting about new, bold approaches to the access to land

Mr. Speaker, all of the above are enunciated in section 4 (xi), (xii) of the National Development Strategy under the caption "Policies for Promoting Investment." It would appear that the President has adopted the National Development Strategy as his holy book. I really do not have any problems with that, save and except to say that any such reliance must be holistic in nature and not piecemeal.

I wish to also urge that the National Development Strategy by itself is not enough and other investment proposals presented by the Members from this side of the House should be reviewed. In the current spirit of collaboration, I believe tremendous benefit can come to our nation if we open our minds and our hearts to work together. This we must do for Guyana. While there is no magic wand to wave to bring investments to Guyana, it is imperative that a government must behave as though it is serious about attracting investment.

Investors look for basic elements such as an investment code. We

02/62

May 24, 2001

are still waiting, Mr. Speaker, with abated breadth for the long overdue investment code. Promises were made more than two years ago, that gestation period has been very very long. Mr. Speaker, why? What is so technical, scientific or difficult in preparing this much-needed document which will establish a way of doing business with Guyana? This is a shame, Mr. Speaker, indeed a shame — *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Hon. Members, I do not recall the Hon. Member Mr Jerome Khan interrupting anyone when they were speaking. I ask you to extend the usual courtesies granted to a new Member making his maiden speech and allow Mr. Khan to continue and conclude uninterruptedly. Thank you.

**Mr Jerome Khan:** Thank you for your protection Mr. Speaker, I know it is a question of breeding. But it is very symptomatic of this administration caught between two worlds, still being left-wing Communist and wanting to be Capitalist. The government is not sure what to do, that is why they cannot produce an investment code, since abundant evidence is available about this philosophical conflict as the President is on record and so was my colleague the Hon. Indra Chandarpal for chiding people wanting to become rich.

Financial success is something that Members of that side of the House must understand comes with a lot of pain and not through government. The President chided our farmers, Mr. Speaker, who built big houses as that colleague over there was saying. I am not a farmer but envy is part of his training. What kind of message is this sending to people and investors and people who want to invest in Guyana when all you hear is comments coming from the President about their homes and the new cars that they are buying.

But over and above the rhetoric is the action and attitude of the government and the commissars of the state who are hired to promote investment in this country. This is a serious business and I must make reference to that Institution called GO-INVEST. This agency was established to be a one-stop shop for fast tracking investment. It has so far been a one-stop shop to send investors away from Guyana.

May 24, 2001

The public dispute between the late Minister Michael Shree Chan and Ms Sandra Baptiste is much publicised. She was hired, fired, re-hired and then redeployed somewhere and the most recent head of GO-INVEST has been a dismal failure, a fiasco. He is no longer there, I understand and it is very unfortunate that my former university colleague, Mr Geof DaSilva has now had to be relegated to that position. I am sure, he is a victim not of down-sizing as the Cabinet has increased but he is a function of the failure of GO-INVEST.

We have information, Mr. Speaker, and some has been publicly ventilated that business plans and proposals mysteriously disappeared from GO-INVEST only to appear later as a project by someone close or some allied to the government. That's a shame. *[Interruption: ... 'Shame! Shame! Shame!']*

This kind of conduct sends the wrong signals to any would-be investor.

It was disclosed many times in the press. Please read the newspapers. I have noticed from the Hansard reports which I have, I take pains and time to come and get copies and to read them because I want to know what transpires in this august body here, in this House. What I have noticed is that my university colleague, the Hon. Geof DaSilva as he was then, went at great lengths to express the glory of GO-INVEST, but what has GO-INVEST brought to Guyana, nothing. It has brought nothing other than ridicule to this country. It was not a one-stop agency for investment, it became a one-stop shop preventing investment from coming into this country. Shame, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker, I do not share the pessimism of the President in his Address to this House, the pessimism, Mr. Speaker, I repeat, neither do I share his reading or understanding of our domestic and regional markets, a population of Guyana of the size of 750,000 may not be a great number, but it is of sufficient sizeable density to encourage local industry particularly local agricultural production and diversification to meet local market needs.

02/64

May 24, 2001

Our importation of food items, soft drinks, clothing, footwear, furniture, alcoholic beverages among other things speaks volumes, the fact that we rely so heavily on importation is because we have not help to nurture the development of a vibrant manufacturing sector. We have failed to help our farmers particularly those involved in the cultivation of crops other than rice and sugar. This administration cut off the very life-line which helped those farmers in the farming community when it closed GAIBANK. We shut off completely any development capital. This is probably the worst decision that was made by those over there who are entrusted with managing the economic affairs of Guyana. Farmers, manufacturers, among others, were forced to borrow from commercial banks at punishingly high interest rates. The spate of bankruptcies and business failures can be linked to the stringent requirements of the Financial Institutions Act also mentioned by the Hon. Member, Mr Manzoor Nadir, which restricts commercial banks in their way of doing business. The philosophy and management of a development bank are different, risk taking is different, risk assessment is different.

The National Development Strategy to which I made reference earlier and which I posit is the basis of the President's Address, recognises as well the deficiency in the system. I wish to make reference to section 11 (xv) which deals with agriculture, permit me, Mr. Speaker, to quote from this section. Section 11 (xv) states the following:

*The penetration of rural areas by commercial banks is low, leading to inadequate savings, credit mobilisation and delivery. In addition this unsatisfactory interface and contact between the banks and the agricultural producers coupled with the preference of commercial banks for asset based as opposed to cash flow lending results in inflexible lending policy towards the sector. Importantly as a consequent only a small percentage of the banks' funds are lent for development purposes, while an extremely high percentage rate is invested in special discount for treas-*

May 24, 2001

*ury bills and therefore are not available to productive lending to the economy.*

Indeed current lending rules and practices effectively exclude from access to institutional commercial credit more than eighty per cent of Guyana's farm households.

That is significant. It is with interest that in today's Stabroek News we read that rice magnate, Beni Sankar, is making an appeal for the establishment of a development bank and I quote from the Stabroek News, that the government, he says, should inject some financing in the industry by setting up an agency like the former GAIBANK created under the PNC, where low cost financing would be accessed from overseas and lent at low interest rate.

GAIBANK was closed not because of economic reasons, Mr. Speaker, but because of vindictiveness and spitefulness and that should not be forgotten. *[Applause]*

In the just concluded meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED), the focus was on agriculture. Agriculture dominated COTED talks. The outgoing Chairman of COTED, Mr Osborne Riviere, noted that no one can deny the importance of agriculture to the economy of several Member States of CARICOM, and that there is a need for improving the international competitiveness of the agricultural sector.

For us to benefit from the over US \$2 billion Food Market in the Caribbean, we must encourage investment in agriculture, we must continue to invest in the development of our backlands so that our small farmers can again cultivate. We must create homesteads in our intermediate savannahs and make land acquisition easier.

Indeed it is reassuring to see that His Excellency the President has stated:

*A bold, new programme of access to land will be imple-*

*mented.*

He also stated that priority will be given to market access to land through freehold and long-term leases and that access to government-held land will be simplified and made more transparent. We are going to hold these statements by the President and we are going to hold the President to his word. Let me put on notice, Mr. Speaker, that we need the settlement of the Rose Atlantic Co-op Society land conflict. This is a burning issue and that this must be settled soon because people in that area are held back from developing those lands.

My focus so far has been on agriculture, Mr. Speaker, because we found and mentally believe, on this side of the House that agriculture is the bedrock of rural development and our rural communities can be empowered to liberate themselves economically if we give meaning to the lofty ideals contained in the Address of His Excellency the President, Bharrat Jagdeo.

Mr. Speaker, the clarion call is to exploit the true potential of our agricultural sector. We must not ignore, and while that is so, we must not ignore the other sectors of the economy. The forestry and forest producing sector must not be ignored. We must never repeat or have a repetition of the chaos UNAMCO fiasco that faced this nation. The signal sent to international investors interested in this area was very very poor, very bad indeed, it was indeed a shame.

Like my esteemed colleague the Hon. Mr Winston Murray, I wish to go on record and say that if this government performs well, I will say so and I will commend it. But I will also be vigilant as a Member of this August body, in representing my party, the People's National Congress/Reform and representing the people of this country and the interest of all Guyanese.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, let me make comment on a few things that were presented today in this Assembly.

The Hon. Dr. Bheri Ramsaran in trying to get it right, spoke of

good governance. Investment will not come if corruption is not gotten rid off. Corruption is endemic in government ... *[Applause]* - in the government circles - and those who want to deny it, will be putting their heads like the famous ostrich in the sand. Investors will not want to invest their money and subject themselves to the rapaciousness of any administration as currently exists.

I am sorry, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs is not here - Foreign Trade, sorry, my apologies - the Hon. Mr Clement Rohee. He was giving us a lesson in market economics. I know the gentleman is confused most of the time and I hope he was not confused this time around, because there is a fundamental difference in market oriented approach to development and state controlled systems. I know he was nurtured in GIMPEX and the university of Freedom House. Perhaps he wants to borrow a few books on Western economics. I will be more than happy to lend him.

Finally, my colleague the Hon. Mr Manzoor Nadir said that we should condemn violence. I support the Hon. Member in condemning violence of any kind. I, however, hope that he is equally vocal in condemning violence against the state. Violence against the state in the form of corruption, the stone scam, contract awarding, violation of tender board procedures, influence peddling and executive lawlessness. I will also join him when he echoes those words in this House.

Mr. Speaker, this has been my maiden speech in this House and I know that it has already caused some stir on the side of government but I can assure you, my language is the language that will represent the interest of this House and not of a canine culture. Thank you. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Mr Khan. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Mr Navin Chandarpal.

**Hon. Navindranauth O. Chandarpal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. His Excellency President Bharrat Jagdeo, in his Address before us had this to say:



May 24, 2001

*Mr. Speaker, whatever stirred us to stand for election, must have included the conviction that we possess the commitment and purpose to devise ways to improve the well-being of our people. To infuse hope, and ensure that their lives are better at the completion of our terms than when we commenced: I believe that there can be no higher purpose, no greater call, and certainly, no worthier occupation than service to our nation. I believe it was for this single purpose we are elected and for this reason we are here.*

Mr Speaker, those words from His Excellency the President, should be a continuous reminder, to those of us who have been elected by the people of our country to sit in this National Assembly, because we are living in times that require that kind of service: We are living in conditions where we have a responsibility to this nation, to put it on a track which should reflect the needs of the beginning of a new century and a new millennium.

I have heard, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member Mr. Winston Murray, pointing to the fact that the presentation of His Excellency did not reflect on certain key points of what would be expected to be priorities in this period. But I think we need to take into account, the fact that His Excellency took an approach in his presentation to deal with what he considered to be the necessity of ensuring, that whatever the details of our plans are, that the right atmosphere is created so that we can have all of those implemented.

We must note that his presentation was made at the time when our country was at the brink, when because of certain activities, we were faced with a situation that all our plans, all our good intentions could be made into nothing if tensions had escalated any further. Therefore the focus of His Excellency's Presentation was let us put our nation above everything else, let us recognise that if we want to move this country forward we have a responsibility to our people, to carry out activities and to act in such a way that the good of our country would come first.

I think, he was combining, he was attempting without saying so, to combine what the two major political parties said to the electorate before the elections, "put Guyana first and let progress continue". [Applause]

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we need to recognise that the presentation by His Excellency, must be seen as supplemental to other positions that have been expressed especially during the course of the electoral campaign. And I want to make this point about the strength all our manifestos. The People's Progressive Party and the PPP/Civic place special attention to what it reflects in its manifesto.

We would recall from our history that in the golden days of the Cheddi Jagan/Forbes Burnham People's Progressive Party that our Constitution was suspended in 1953 because the PPP dared to fulfill what it had promised in its elections manifesto. This is a serious commitment that the PPP has made and which the PPP/Civic has continued to make, that our manifesto stands out as a guiding document which places on record our priorities for the purpose of the construction of our country.

However, Mr. Speaker, the PPP/Civic also recognises that the process of development as we are all saying cannot be limited to the thoughts and ideas of a single party because we have won the elections. In our consideration of being inclusive, we have recognised the need to work in ways where we put forward our ideas and there are committees and bodies which will help to give them further consideration and that we can involve in getting the thoughts and ideas of the best people in our land.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, we have to see the direction being set, as being linked also to a number of important policy documents. Reference has already been made to the documents related to our strategies for Poverty Alleviation, and more importantly the National Development Strategy. We need to recognise there also that that strategy is still in the making. It has changed in its approach where from initially an intention of the government, it was taken on as a document being created by civil society in which every chapter was the result of the work of several experts putting their efforts together. And this process, Mr. Speaker, is still in train. I would hope that now that elections are behind

May 24, 2007

us that we will be able to give the due attention to that process because you would recall just before the end of our last Parliament, that the National Development Strategy was laid before this House.

We therefore have in the process of the many tasks that lie before us, to work out ways in which we can give further thought to that document so that we can guide the various aspects of our development to improve the lives of our people. But, Mr. Speaker, if we reflect on what His Excellency has asked us to give attention to, we need to do a bit of thinking about the circumstances in which we are.

The Hon. Member Mr. Murray said that the President was different from what other Members seemed to be doing in talking of periods before, but we have seen attempts, Mr. Speaker, to go back into history and while it was not my intention originally, I must for just a short while do that because there were attempts here to distort the realities of history.

We have seen attempts, Mr Speaker, to describe the current conditions of people in our country in different parts as though they were of recent origin. If we are honest to ourselves, we would realise that there were serious structural problems that overtook our economy and our society in general during many years under the last regime. And because they were deep-seated, these could not have been remedied in the short period that we have had of the PPP/Civic Administration and we need to recognise strengths.

When we speak about employment opportunities, when we talk about creating jobs for our school children when they leave school, we have to recognise where things were, when mention is made about agriculture, what do you remember about where agriculture was at the beginning of the 1990s, when it was in total shambles and disarray and it took sterling efforts by the PPP/Civic administration to put agriculture back on tract so that today we can continue to survive because of what agriculture is producing for us. *[Applause]* Mr. Speaker, again attempts are being made to cover some of the defects of the previous administration.

Reference was made to GAIBANK. The PPP/Civic had no choice about GAIBANK because under the PNC administration, loans under GAIBANK were misdirected and there was a high backlog, there were many ... *[Interruption]*

GNCB, the Agri bank and those others, Mr Speaker, you will remember where those loans were directed and how many people closely linked to the leadership of the past administration were the recipients of loans for which there were neither collateral nor proper repayment arrangements. That, Mr. Speaker, was the reason why those steps had to be taken. *[Applause]* Mr. Speaker, the effort to distort history also lead ... *[Interruption]*

**The Speaker:** Hon. Members, I wonder if you can allow the Hon. Member, Mr Navin Chandarpal, to speak without interruption. The hour is getting late. Thank you.

**Hon. Navindranauth O. Chandarpal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and one other attempt, as we can see, to give a wrong impression of what we have around us is the phobia, it is the repeat of what has been a constant attempt by certain Members of the Opposition to bring in red herrings. Where in today's context is the issue of Communism? I think, Mr. Speaker, that the Hon. Member, a Minister responsible for live-stock would be happy to note that foot and mouth disease is not confined to cows when some people want to bring such ideas into consideration. *[Applause]* *[Interruption ...: 'Four runs, that's a bad one']*

Mr. Speaker, I think we need during the course of discussions on the way forward when we go into more detailed debates, we need to really come to grips with the causes of under development in our country and why we are where we are.

Those who speak about corruption, I would like to ask them to read the McIntyre Report, read it and understand what it said about the PNC regime and corruption. *[Applause]* Mr. Speaker, we have been trying to lay the base through a recovery of our economies and we have done considerably well but unfortunately there are some who apparently

cannot sit idly and allow progress to continue. That is why we have had disturbances and disruptions of our peace associated with electoral process in 1997 and in 2001.

Mr Speaker, we can dwell on what took place, but some Members have alluded to this and I would like to go on.

I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that His Excellency the President has set out a framework in which we need to proceed. Our manifesto gives more depths to what we intend to do and as I said, our National Development Strategy is there to be built on. If we had listened carefully, Mr. Speaker, to the presentation by the Hon. Member Mrs Melville, she made a very important point. She said, we are thankful for the health centres, we now wish to have them filled with people who can carry on what needs to be done there. This is what our country is faced with.

Mr Speaker, as we cover one task, as we deal with one need, there are many others because we are a far way from where we need to be. When we were told of the effects of globalisation, free trade, we saw that we are clearly facing many serious challenges. We cannot therefore go forward to confront the difficulties posed by a global economy that is not friendly to us, if we are not friendly towards ourselves.

Therefore at this time, Mr Speaker, I think that it is important that our messages to our people be clear. I would like to ask that the Honourable Members of the Opposition make it very clear that they are committed to this process of rebuilding our country, of healing the wounds in our nation and not leave ideas loose that give mixed signals to those who support those ideas.

Mr Speaker, I think that we have very serious tensions still remaining in our country. Hopefully the talks and the processes that have resulted from those talks will lead us into situations that can bring better conditions for us to work on and walk with, but we have to recognise, Mr Speaker, and I would like to ask that those who have had the habit of promoting "slow fire and more fire" to remember that fire is a good

servant but is a bad master and as we have seen, when a leading member of the PNC can be attacked on the outskirts of the headquarters and inside, that fire, out of control can back fire. [Applause]

Mr Speaker, we want a real victory for our people, those who are representing a sizable section of our population, I would ask them to join us, so that a victory for our people must not be a fake victory, it must be a victory in which we will have our resources in tact so that we can move on.

Mr Speaker, I think large sections of our population admire two heroes of our last century. Two great men who stood up for the rights of people, but their activities were described as civil actions because they were civil. I would like to quote from Martin Luther King (Jnr) and to remind us that he said, he advised us that violence leaves the oppressor to act on his own barbarity and, Mr Speaker, Mahatma Gandhi taught us that if we all seek to have an eye for an eye, we will have a nation of blind people.

Mr Speaker, I feel that we are at a time when we need to heed such advice, when we should ensure that whatever have been our difficulties, if we are to make a new beginning, if we will take seriously the challenge that at this stage of world development, we want to move forward, then let us be committed to the process we have put in place.

Mr Speaker, His Excellency also told us that he is:

*heartened by the maturity of our people, that they have rebuffed hate-mongers and those who would ferment strife in our society, they have rejected attempts to divide our people along ethnic lines. Let us show, that as leaders in this country, as those who have been elected to move this nation forward, that we share those concerns and that without reservation, we are prepared to take these same positions as our people have shown in the face of severe provocations.*

May 24, 2007

Mr Speaker, in supporting the Motion, that we express our appreciation to His Excellency the President, I would like to quote from another great President of our country, Dr Cheddi Jagan, the father of our nation - I might have quoted this before - but in closing, Mr Speaker, let me say as Dr Jagan asked us:

*... now is the time when we must give a little more for our freedom, we must care a little more for our people, we must sacrifice a little more for the greater good of our nation and for our future.*

Mr Speaker, with those words, I would ask, let us proceed to help to fulfil the charge that His Excellency President Jagdeo has given to us and to our nation. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**The Speaker:** The Hon. Member, Dr Bheri Ramsaran

**Dr Bheri S. Ramsaran:** Mr Speaker, indeed, this afternoon's proceedings have demonstrated that the charge delivered to this House by His Excellency the President has proved to be really good food for thought and this is interesting to note when we reflect on the fact that, for example, Mr Murray attempted to characterise it as being empty of proposals and Mr Alexander attempted to outline it as being a speech of platitudes.

Mr Speaker, if this was the case, indeed the ensuing discussions have put that to rest, have put the lie to that.

The charge given to us, as I said, has indeed proven good food for thought, a chart for the next five years. My colleagues on this side, several of them, have effectively rebutted those misconceptions about the alleged omissions that the President committed. Of course, I would like you to see this as a broad tapestry against which the embroidery will come later, probably sometime later this month or some weeks from now, when other documents, for example, in the form of the National Budget would be presented for debate here.



So, I would like to paraphrase Mr Rohee's statement when he said that this is a broad conceptual outline. Our colleagues over there have failed to recognise that. They try to deal on the omissions but they signally were silent, ominously and definitely silent on some of the things that the President did pronounce on and it would be remiss of me, Mr Speaker, if before I move for the formal endorsement of this Motion I did not dwell on at least two little aspects of the omissions that they committed.

The President called upon us to condemn in no uncertain terms violence against any ethnic group and here again, I must apologise to Mr Nadir, I have not formally been able to convey my sincere sympathy for the atrocities that he was exposed to when he too became a victim of that type of action. As a matter of fact I noted that he has complained that his power to decide where he belongs was violated and was taken from him. I do sympathise with the gentleman.

But coming to the point which was studiously avoided by Members of the other side of the House and I wrote a little in the margin here, in my copy of the President's Speech in bold letters "SHAME". Now this is what the President said, and practically all of page 4 has been studiously avoided by my colleagues over the isle. This is what he said:

*We must all therefore condemn criminal acts and violence perpetuated against Guyanese because of their ethnicity.*

Mr Speaker, there has been a deafening silence from that side of the House.

Similarly, Mr Speaker, I took pains to point out one of the other inclusions in the President's charge, the call based on concerns of wide cross-sections of our population, both persons who voted for the PPP/ Civic alliance and persons who did not. There is need for broadcast legislation based on the fact that there is race hate and hate speech coming over the television.

Again, Mr Speaker, there has been deafening silence on the part of



May 24, 2001

our friends in the opposition benches. This speaks volumes but I would not go into all of the details. I heard some hot and cold blowings on CARICOM. I do recall that at one time Mr Kenny Anthony was hauled across the coals because he dared to what they said "intervene in Guyanese affairs". Now the President is being accused of not speaking enough about CARICOM.

I heard about a wage policy, but if we were to reflect a little, Mr. Speaker, on the facts we would see that the wages policy as enunciated in the recent budgets indicated massive percentage gains for the working people of this country. Let me just give you a few examples from the medical profession. A general medical practitioner received \$30,000 and some change in 1992, now \$50,000 - coming up to a hundred and fifteen per cent increases. I am not going to attempt to answer individual charges. The point is, I want to bring out that indeed this charge by the President has provided a very solid foundation and I am very appreciative of the attempt by Mr. Nadir to put it into three broad categories and I will put them in my own words. He said the category of *reaching out*. I would like to put it as the category of *national healing* and we really need that now. The possibility that we should see ourselves as instruments of shared-responsibility, the responsibility for ethnically engineered violence must simply be recognised by those who stoked it; and of course, the strong and third plank of the President's charge, that we *find innovative ways of building the economy*.

Mr Speaker, with those remarks, I would like to once again endorse the President's charge which was delivered to this House on the occasion of the opening of the Eighth Parliament on May 4, and call to your attention the Motion on the Order Paper as printed and I would like to have it be 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 Eighth Parliament of Guyana. [*Applause*]

**The Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member.

*May 24 , 2001*

Honourable Members, I now put the motion. Those in favour please say, Aye, those against, No. The Ayes have it. The motion is carried.

**The Speaker:** Hon. Members, I would like to note that the vast majority of speakers this afternoon were those from the back benches. I would like to note also that several new Members made their maiden speeches. I would like to congratulate all Members, in particular the new Members, who made their maiden speeches. *[Applause]*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Hon Reepu Daman Persaud:** Mr Speaker, permit me to move the adjournment of the National Assembly to Thursday, May 31, at 14:00 H.

*Adjourned accordingly at 18:37 H*

*May 24, 2001*

02/79

*May 24 , 2001*