

# Official Report

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2012) OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN*

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24<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 12<sup>TH</sup> July, 2012

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*The Assembly convened at 2.12 p.m.*

## PRAYERS

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

## PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Report was laid:

1. Audited Financial Statements of the Central Housing and Planning Authority for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2011. *[The Minister of Housing and Water]*

**Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Ali]:** I wish to congratulate the staff of the Central Planning and Housing Authority (CHPA) and the staff of the Auditor General's Office for ensuring that the hallmark of transparency and accountability is represented here with an up-to-date audited financial statement of the Authority.

Thank you very much.

## REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following report was laid:

2. Report of the Standing Orders Committee *[Chairman of the Standing Orders Committee]*

## ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

**Mrs. Garrido-Lowe:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These questions for the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs are pretty urgent and it is from the people of Kwabanna I am asking it on their behalf.

1. Can the Hon. Minister state what the arrangement in place for the granting of extensions of lands in Amerindian titled lands, in general, with respect to Kwabanna in Region 1 in particular is?
2. Also, did the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs agree to a concession to be granted to a Chinese company in Kwabanna, Region 1?
3. If so, does the Hon. Minister not agree that this violates the first come first served policy of the Ministry?

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I have observed that the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs is absent. If no one is deputising on her behalf, I would ask that a record be made of those questions and sent to her for her response.

**Ms. Teixeira:** I just want to say that Minister Pauline Sukhai is at an international conference on Indigenous peoples overseas. She is regrettably not here at the moment.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. The questions will be sent to the Hon. Minister for her reply as soon as she can do so.

**Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon:** Mr. Speaker, this is a question for the Hon. Minister of Public Works. And it arises out of an urgent situation at Kumaka out of the North West District.

Whereas, the residents and business persons at Kumaka in the North West District have suffered serious losses when the river level in the Aruca River rises and tops over the bank;

And whereas revetment works previously undertaken have failed to provide the residents and business persons with the protection necessary from the rising river level of the Aruca River.

Could the Hon. Minister say when the works currently being undertaken at the Kumaka Waterfront will be completed and at what cost?

**Minister of Public Works [Mr. Benn]:** Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of rising water levels of the river at Aruca. There is no rise in the water level that I have discerned. I want to, since this is a question without notice, take some time to explain for the Hon. Member. My understanding, initially, was that this was a question relating to the Wharf at Kumaka and just to clear up any confusion, with respect to that, there are no works being undertaken with respect to the Wharf.

The revetment area on the left bank of the Aruca River just below the Wharf at Kumaka is under constant threat from the River. It is on the outside bend of the Aruca River at that point and maybe, in hindsight, for perhaps a large number of years where the fishermen's wharf on the area there was established was perhaps not the best area to have constructed the initial wharf. So the area is under attack and retreat from the River. Over a number of years, we have been trying to get capital funds to address the problem there – the problem being the erosion of the Aruca River's left bank. The initial difficulty even when we acquired some \$20 million in 2010 and then \$40 million in 2011 to do works there, had principally to do with large business squatters who had built considerable buildings on the river bank there which, in its first interval, is pegasse soil- very soft place. Even when we were trying to work with the Local Government Regional Democratic Council in the area to have those persons removed, there was considerable delay in getting those persons moved. Their presence resulted in a delay in the start of the project and in greater erosion than was anticipated in the original designs to address the situation. In fact, I had to go there personally to speak with some business persons who were refusing to move even though there were large cracks running between the buildings, cracks preliminary to the embankment failing into the River. There was no effort or support that we could have gotten at the local level in terms of the Local Government, no proper support even with the police at that time, and, in fact, I had to fly men from Georgetown to remove those persons, to demolish their structures. That was done but it delayed the project by about seven months.

Subsequently, the works started. There was delay in equipment and we recognised early on – in October of last year – that more works will be required. Over the period of the Elections when the operators had to demobilise from the area, there was filling of the revetment which was put in place with material which was inappropriate and without the tie-back from what is called king-

piles on the river side and anchor piles on the landward side which resulted in the revetment slowly failing into the river. We decided then at the beginning of the new year that we would have to, of course, retreat the revetment further landward, up against the road. In the meantime, the works were being delayed and interrupted either by equipment failure or by persons and interests who wanted to go back there to sell.

I want to say that the position of the Ministry is that we would not allow a return of those people onto the river bank. It puts at risk their businesses, themselves and the infrastructure. And I am aware that the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development has been making arrangements for the relocation of those persons to what is called a marketing tarmac area. I believe it has started or has plans to start to raise the level of that area where people could properly, safely and in good order do their businesses.

At the present time, what the Hon. Member may have been referring to – rising in the water levels – may have been related to high, spring tides. Those spring tides will normally flood the road at that level. Our intention is to raise it at a level where there will be no flooding of the road but we will always have to ensure that we do not burden the area which will increase the forces which will cause the area to fail. The soils are naturally weak.

In terms of continuing the project, we have, over the past week, taken up steel sheet pilings to drive the revetment in completion at both sides to the depth of 40 feet. The king piles spacing has been reduced to ten feet and the anchor piles spacing is, I believe, now at 20 feet or 25 feet to have what is, in effect, an embankment revetted on both sides, supported mainly on one side so there will be access to the Stelling. The area is compromised, as I said, because of the length of time in which the project was able to become mobilised. We have to replace the machine we have there and we are converting it to what is properly a river defence project. We hope that within two months we will get this problem fixed. Within two months we hope that we will get the project finished, the material... [Member: What?] It is much more technical than it appears on the face of it. Otherwise, we will have to dig out all of the materials there at great expense and do other things. Two months is the current schedule.

## **INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING**

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

## **DEEDS REGISTRY (AMENDMENT) BILL 2012 –BILL No. 11/2012**

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Deeds Registry Act.” *[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]*

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

## **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

## **BILLS – SECOND READING**

## **CIVIL LAW (RIGHTS OF PERSONS IN COMMON LAW UNION) BILL 2012 – Bill No. 10/2012**

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the rights of persons in a common law union in intestate succession.” *[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]*

**Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]:** Thank you very much, Sir. It is a distinct pleasure to begin the process of piloting this Bill through debate in this Hon. House.

The physical size of this Bill does not, in any way, give the accurate illustration of the impact and the far-reaching ramifications which will flow when it eventually becomes the law of this land. In short, this Bill seeks, for the first time in the history of our country, to accord to a spouse in a common law union the right to access benefits under the laws of intestacy.

The past of the common law union has been a long and arduous one. In England – and I go to England because it is from that jurisdiction that we have inherited our legal system – the church having the deep influence that it has, the influence hitherto was even more profound, influenced the ways laws were crafted. Even though the common law union existed perhaps from since the dawn of civilisation, beginning, of course, in the Garden of Eden, for those who believe that society evolved that way. Notwithstanding the longevity of the existence of the common law union, it was never recognised for centuries in the British legal system and, indeed, in legal systems elsewhere. Indeed when one examines the legislation, one gets the distinct impression

that there was a clear intention not to recognise the common law union, the spouses of that union and the products of that union. And all the laws and the common law, of course, were all conceived, designed and crafted not to recognise the common law union.

There was legislation, for example the Bastardy Act, which describes children born out of wedlock as illegitimate and did not confer upon them the rights which children born in wedlock enjoyed at law. There were the rules of intestacy which provide for how the assets of a deceased person will be distributed upon death in the absence of a will and the priority of the persons who are entitled by law for those assets. And in the rules of intestacy, there is the wife – and it is clearly said that the wife, under the rules of intestacy is confined to a legal wife or a legal husband...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I am hearing some background noises that are distracting from your speech.

**Mr. Nandlall:** So am I, Sir.

There were the rules of intestacy confining the beneficiaries only to lawful spouses and making no allowance and no provisions for spouses of a common law union to access the properties or the assets of a deceased person upon death. Then of course there was the order of priority. And the rules of intestacy says that when the deceased dies, the first to apply is the spouse, meaning the legally married spouse, and that spouse is entitled to one-third and the second to apply are the children and they are entitled to two-thirds. In the absence of a spouse or children, the next in line are the parents of the deceased person and if there are no parents, the next in line are the siblings of the deceased person. There was a whole elaborate scheme designed to deal with how properties will evolve in intestate succession but no allowance being made for the common law spouse. That was the legal and legislative landscape of England which we inherited and we continued, even after Independence, along those lines. It was left, therefore, to the innovation of judges - and they must be credited for this – to use conventional legal principles and concepts and equitable principles and concepts to pacify the harshness which the law meted out to spouses in a common law union and to children in a common law union. And this judicial activism is what led to concepts like “trust”, “estoppel” and so on being employed to find ways and means of granting some form of legal redress to an unfortunate situation because both in England, and

even more pronounced in our country, was a large number of common law unions and children of those unions.

Indeed our system is peculiar because of its historical evolution where we have people coming with different culture and religious background and those religions permitted the common law union and recognised the common law union. For example, there is the Nica Ceremony for Islam and the Maro wedding for the Hindus and unless those marriages, though recognised as valid ceremonies of marriage, were registered under the Marriage Act, they did not assume the legal status of a marriage and, therefore, the spouses to those unions remained common law spouses.

Therefore, the judges began the process and began a silent revolution by which they started, in this judicial activism to which I refer, to confer recognition upon common law spouses and children of those unions. But Parliament could not have continued to take a position of non-recognition. As a result of societal pressure and as a result of the judicial activism, Parliament's position started to wane. We saw bit by bit and pieces by pieces, a dismantling of the position of non-recognition of common law spouses and children of those unions. The Children Born out of Wedlock Removal of Discrimination Act 1983 was the first Act promulgated by this Parliament that began the legislative revolution of recognising common law union, in this instance, specifically the product of those unions and it sought to put on equal footing for the first time in the history of our country the children born out of wedlock and the children born in wedlock. Necessarily, it had to repeal the Bastardy Act and then seven years passed and in 1990 we had another ground breaking piece of legislation, that is the Married Person's Property (Amendment) Act No. 20 of 1990 and this Act for the first time recognised, by statute, the common law union and laid down a definition of what a common law union is. Indeed, in so doing it expanded the definition of a wife and expanded the definition of a husband to include a single man or a single woman living in a common law union for a period of five years and more. And it accorded to those spouses or persons of that union all the proprietary rights that a legally married spouse was entitled to under the law, including the important concept of matrimonial property.

There was a situation where the Married Person's Property (Amendment) Act of 1990 corrected the historical wrong that was committed against common law spouses by conferring upon them the right to access matrimonial property in the same way that the legally married spouse was entitled to all the years. What it did not do, however, was to extend that right to the position

where the spouse dies and it did not extend to cover up the eventuality of where one spouse dies, what the position of the other spouse is. And the legislation being silent in 1990 on that fundamental issue, what governed the situation in that vacuum was the rules of intestacy. And when one goes back to the rules of intestacy, the anachronistic definition of a wife remained and the wife under the rules of intestacy was confined only to a legally married woman and husband was confined to a legally married man.

Therefore, this Bill seeks to correct an omission which ought to have been corrected perhaps some 20 years ago.

*2.42 p.m.*

This Bill will benefit people right across this country. It has been lauded by the Women's Group as a great victory for women, and that is indeed true. To confine it only to a victory for women is taking a very myopic view of the impact and ramifications which are going to flow from this Bill. Men are equally going to benefit and so are the children of those unions.

Therefore, we now can say that in relation to common-law unions, we have perhaps a complete legislative network and framework which covers every eventuality. Clause 2 of the Bill defines the common-law union again and confers upon the spouses of that union the right to benefit under the laws of intestacy. As I said earlier, the current position is that those spouses under that union do not benefit. Clause 2 of this Bill ensures that they benefit.

Clause 2(2) recognises only one such union. The reason being is that we could not and cannot take the position of recognising more than two unions. If we do so, we would be taking common-law unions to the other extreme, to the extent that we would be lending our imprimatur to adulterous unions. I do not think as a society we would want to go that route. In my consultations with groups representing women, they raised the fundamental issue and an issue of practical importance, what happens, and what will happen and whether this Bill affects the situation where there is a legally married couple, but for all intent and purpose they are living separate and apart and the marriage has suffered an irretrievable fracture. So that, the woman lives in Queens, New York, or in Bronx, New York and the man lives in Guyana or vice versa and then cohabits in the face of a subsisting marriage, but one that exists de jure only and not de facto and begins to cohabit with this woman or man in Guyana. What is the position? To recognise that spouse who



is the new cohabite will again put us in the position where we are condoning adultery. One may argue or condoning bigamy, obliterating or professed allegiance to polygamy. I do not think that we want to go that route either. **[Dr. Norton: That is my culture.]**

When that was explained to the Women's Group, the Read Thread, Mrs. Cathy Hughes was there, the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana (CIOG) and various other organisations. WPO was there. The Church was there as well. I think they understood and they accepted my explanation and they accepted my position which...

**Mr. Speaker:** Dr. Norton, it is not too late for an amendment to the Bill you know.

**Mr. Nandlall:** I advocate it. So, that is the reason why clause 2(2) is expressed in its present formulation. Clause 3 seeks to amend the Family Dependence Provision Act to reduce "seven years" to "five years" wherever the words appear. For completeness and for Members of the Assembly who are not lawyers, the Family Dependence Provision Act is another landmark legislation which was passed by our Parliament in 1990. That is an Act that provides for persons to make an application to the Court for adequate provisions out of the estate of a deceased person if that person feels that the deceased person by virtue of his will or under the rules of intestacy did not make adequate provisions for that person.

There are different categories of persons who can make applications to the Court to benefit under that legislation. The categories include the legal wife, the children, and any person who was dependent upon the deceased person immediately prior to his/her death and the common-law wife as well. It is in that legislation that common-law union was defined as a union of seven years standing between a single woman and a single man.

I looked and I searched but I could not have found any explanation as to why when the man or woman is alive the common-law union is defined to be of five years duration, but when he/she dies that common-law union fetches this heavy burden of a two year extension. It becomes so that you have to satisfy a seven year period. That incongruous situation, I could not have found any rational reconciliation. I thought it best to use this occasion to bring consistency to our definition of what a common-law union is. That is why we are reducing it in the Family Dependent Provisions Act from seven years duration to a five years period, hence the purpose for clause 3 of the Bill.

In a nutshell, those are the benefits that our country and our people will derive from this Bill. I have no doubt that every Legal Practitioner in this House, every social worker in this House and every politician in this House, as we go out to execute and discharge our various and varying functions we would have been confronted with a situation where a common-law women or a common-law man has been left out in the cold as a result of the present construction and present formulation of the rules of intestacy. So, when you now go out and you are met with such a situation, you can proudly say that you have voted in favour of a Bill to correct that injustice.

I thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]:** May it please you Mr. Speaker. This afternoon we have a grand opportunity to join Minister of Legal Affairs, the Attorney General, the young and energetic, Mr. Anil Nandlall, who is this afternoon going down as acting on behalf of a Government who is friendly to women. I know this Bill is gender neutral. This Bill is gender neutral, but we would be hiding our heads in the sand if we did not recognise that the persons who would benefit most from this piece of legislation, once enacted, would be Guyana's women. This afternoon I invite the National Assembly as my learned friend, Hon. Nandall, just did to join us and declare ourselves in this House, openly and proudly, to be a House who would support Guyana's women.

Article 149 (D), says:

“(1) The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or equal protection and benefit of the law.

(2) The State shall, for the purpose of promoting equality, take legislative and other measures designed to protect disadvantaged persons and persons with disabilities.

(3) Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms guaranteed by or under this Constitution or any other law. “

We have this guarantee in our supreme law, the Constitution, of this land and yet we had this grave inconsistency in our pieces of legislation which proved difficult for persons every single day. When Minister Nandlall spoke, I did not get the impression - he was very holistic in his presentation - but what I did not hear from him is something which lawyers who practice in this

field will tell you, and that is, when I was in practice, not a single week went by without mostly women, I would say all women, suffering because this piece of law was inconsistent. The piece of law I speak about is the law that says that if you are not married to each other, a party cannot benefit from the estate of a deceased spouse. Most of those applications, or most of those persons who suffered were persons who came to the Legal Aid Clinic. Legal Aid Clinic acts for persons who cannot pay the regular fees. So, it was not only women, but poor women who were suffering because of this law.

What is this law saying? Very clearly it is saying, if you are a single man, and I prefer to use one example, living together with a single woman or a single woman living together with a single man and you have been living together for more than five years, and you have not married under the Marriage Act, i.e. to sign papers officially, and one party dies then the other party can benefit if that party who dies did not leave a will. You could apply to benefit.

A practical example is that if John were living home with Mary and they are both single and they have been living together for forty years and John dies after Mary invested her entire life, worked in this marriage, brought up children in this marriage, worked in a field, contributed to buying the house and keeping it clean, contributed to decorating it and bringing up these children, contributed to making the man all that he was and all that he became because she loved him and she cared for him and she pampered him. If he dies and they did not get married, then she has nothing to get, except that she has a good lawyer who would struggle under Family Dependence and Provision Act (FDPA) which does not entitle her to something; it leaves the Court with discretion to award her something. That is the height of unfairness.

We know in our country that persons choose to live home and shack up. I would say that this House should not take that choice away from people. We also know that many persons, particularly Hindus and Muslims, have entered into a marriage believing themselves to be married because they did all of the religious rituals that were required to be married. They lived together in good faith believing themselves to be husband and wife, and that husband dies, the wife has nothing to get sixty years later. That is the height of unfairness. I do not believe anybody here would say differently.

What is even worse is that during the course of the lives of those persons, John and Mary were married and twenty years later they decide to split up, and they are both alive, they could have come under our Married Persons Property Act. Mary could come under that Act and benefit depending on whether she worked outside of the home in which case she would be entitled to half of what the parties owned. If she worked in the home, she would be entitled to one-third with discretion to the Court to award more than one-third. During the lifetime of the couple this woman would be entitled, but as soon as he dies, not only does she suffer the vulnerability of being without a partner, but as soon as he dies, the State, this legislation and everybody throws her aside and says we have nothing to do with you, we want nothing to do with you, we will not protect you. This afternoon we have an opportunity to correct that. I am saying that we must correct it.

I have heard some discomfort expressed by certain members, not members of this House, but expressed by citizens, that this Bill somehow or the other encourages parties to live together rather than to get married. I do not believe this Bill encourages that. Right now Guyana recognises that we have common-law unions and Guyana caters for common-law unions. Guyana, in the Married Persons Property (Amendment) Act says a spouse is a single man living together with a single woman for more than five years. So, we recognize this and we cater for it. We were just leaving these widows really to the hands of faith after their partners died by not passing this piece of legislation.

I believe this piece of legislation will do nothing more than to make women more equal. We have signed the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. It is an international convention that Guyana signed and ratified since 1979. That convention prescribes that we must do all that we can as a nation to ensure we bring equality to our women and that we attain this equality which we seek to do here today. The reason for that - these things are not formulated or signed by our country in a vacuum - is because we understand that the only way that we can progress as a country is if we take care of more than half of our population, our women. So, this afternoon I take great pleasure in supporting this Bill and recommend to the National Assembly that we vote for this unanimously, which will send a message right across Guyana.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister I noted your comments, those given at the United Nations (UN) earlier during the week with Minister Webster. I have the verbatim transcript, actually. Ms. Teixeira, I realise you were there as well.

**Mr. Bond:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak briefly on the proposed Bill before this Assembly. Let me begin first by saying that it is commendable. I must say that the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Attorney General should be congratulated on this effort to bring forth what both Ministers spoke very fluently about, the travails of women in these unions for a number of years stretching back to the Civil Law Act of Guyana.

We have reached the point where women are rightfully on the fore burner of all that we do. Under the Civil Law of Guyana Act, chapter 6:01, I think it is section 5, sub-section 1, only a legal spouse had rights to claim intestacy. Therefore, a common-law spouse as we know them had absolutely no rights to a deceased estate if he/she died without leaving a will. Their only claim was through the Act No. 22 of 1990, the Family Dependence Provision Act. I think that was section 2, sub-section (a)(i)(2).

We have moved at a quantum leap with this legislation, and that is why it is commendable, not only the reduction from seven years to five, but also for a number of reasons for which I shall just give a few comments as to how we may have tidied it up a bit on clearing up certain issues. For example, under the Act 22 of 1990, a party who entered into a void union in good faith, I think that is section 3 of the FDPA of 1990, that person could have claimed for provisions from the deceased estate. However, with this, the now Civil Law, Rights of the Persons in Common-law Union Bill No. 12 of 2012, we are not clear as to whether or not – I heard the Minister addressing that scenario where it will be a single man and a single woman where the person enters into the union unwittingly. We find provisions under the FDPA. However we do not find provision here under this Act. It is a very narrow definition.

Also, in a situation where we find the two persons living together, I also heard the Minister state a scenario where the persons were overseas, to address that we would have had to say, “Living continuously together”. For example, a person in common-law union may not necessarily be from the same jurisdiction or the same areas, but there is still that union. I think that consideration should be given to this context. Also, in regards to section 2 of the Act, there are a

number of provisions in the Civil Law of Guyana Act which do not deal with widows or widowers. In my humble opinion, an amendment to the Civil Law of Guyana Act which would have stated that in common-law unions the spouse is entitled the rights as a husband or wife in this instance. An amendment to that Act would have been sufficient, or might I say, a bit tidier.

Also, I see the Act is referred to as Family Dependence Provision Act, chapter 12:04, but as we know, it is officially referred to as chapter 22:90.

**Mr. Speaker:** It was since assimilated into the body of laws.

**Mr. Bond:** It is a minor observation, Sir. Nonetheless, I do believe that with regards to the points I raised, that this is an Act which I am sure all of Guyana will accept. I do in closing state that we have moved leaps and bounds in ensuring that person in common-law unions are given the rights that they still enjoy.

Thank you Sir. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Nandlall (replying):** Thank you very much Sir. Let me take this opportunity to thank Minister Manickchand and Hon. Mr. Bond for their kind contribution. I move that the Bill be read for a second time.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

*Bill read a second time.*

*Assembly resolved itself into Committee.*

*Assembly in Committee of Supply*

*Bill considered and approved.*

*Assembly resumed*

*Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, thank you. We have now come to an important part in our order of business and agenda for this afternoon. I notice that one of our honoured guests, Mr. Corbin, has arrived with some members of his delegation. I propose that we suspend for five minutes to

allow for our other honoured guest and his distinguished family... we will suspend for five minutes so that we can greet them and then resume. Thank you.

*Sitting suspended at 3.16 p.m.*

*3.18 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 3.18 p.m.*

**MOTION TO HONOUR THE LONG AND EXEMPLARY SERVICE OF FORMER MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MINISTER, MR. REEPU DAMAN PERSAUD, O.R., TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

WHEREAS this National Assembly acknowledges that the Parliament has been served with honour and distinction by outstanding leaders and Members of Parliament over the many decades;

AND WHEREAS on this day, the National Assembly duly honours two long serving Members of Parliament, Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., and Mr. Robert Corbin;

AND WHEREAS Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., served as a Member of Parliament for the Peoples' Progressive Party from 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1965 to 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2006;

AND WHEREAS during this period, Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., served, inter alia, as Chief Whip, Deputy Speaker, Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, Chairman of the Constitution Reform Select Committee and Leader of the House;

AND WHEREAS over a 14 year period he unstintingly served in high public office in Government as Vice President, Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs;

AND WHEREAS Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., was and is recognised for his unparalleled knowledge and skills on the conduct of Parliament, parliamentary rules and procedures, norms and conventions which were most particularly needed when he guided this National Assembly with a steady and fair hand in periods which are now considered critical and historic with regard to the evolution of our country's present day constitutional and parliamentary architecture;

AND WHEREAS this House is of the unanimous opinion that such exemplary and dedicated public service to one's country must also be recognised by this National Assembly and in doing so call on present day Members of Parliament to emulate such selfless dedication and commitment,

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly pauses in its deliberations to pay homage and to honour this long serving Member of Parliament, Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., who has by example created an unchallenged legacy of leadership and integrity in public office;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly recognises and congratulates Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, O.R., for his sacrifice and service to Guyana and its people for decades and further recognises that he continues to do so beyond the walls of these Chambers as a politician, a religious and cultural leader.” [*Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Mr. Hinds*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Prime Minister you may move the motion that is standing in your name.

**Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Rohee]:** Mr. Speaker, I wish on behalf of the...

**Mr. Speaker:** Has there been a Cabinet elevation?

**Mr. Rohee:** No, not at all. I have not been struck by red carpet fever Mr. Speaker. I am simply to move on behalf of the Hon. Prime Minister the motion standing in his name to honour in the National Assembly the long and exemplary service of the former Member of Parliament and Minister, Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud Order of Roraima (OR).

I believe that the motion in this regard is indeed a true reflection of the spirit and honour that should be extended to a person who has dedicated his life and work to the people of Guyana both inside these hallowed Chambers and outside as well.

It would take I believe a considerable amount of time, days, weeks perhaps, months if not years, to reflect on the life and work of Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud. But the time bound practice of what we are expected to do in the National Assembly prevents us from spending long hours in



this House unless it is a matter that attracts the entire nation to such an extent that the people would wish to wonder on the matters that are holding the attention of Members of Parliament.

As we are gathered here this afternoon, I believe across the political divide the sentiments ought to be common, ought to be consensual in respect of the honour which we are about to bestow on the Hon. Former Member of this House Reepu Daman Persaud.

Maybe his father, Pandit Durga Persaud, who had a similar calling being a Pandit himself, a North Indian Brahmin and an indentured immigrant, had the foresight to name his son Reepu Daman, which means conqueror of enemies.

Let us focus on the two words just briefly – conqueror and enemies. In life it is said that we must always strive for excellence in whatever the endeavour we pursue. We all know that in striving for excellence we encounter obstacles along the way. We either shy away from those obstacles or we confront those obstacles. In studying the history of Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud it was clear that he never shied away from the obstacles that were thrown against him either by dint of his class background, his religious background, his social background, or his political background. At all times it was seen that he stood firm and confronted those challenges.

The enemy comes in various forms, hues and shapes. In every one of the categories I mentioned earlier - socially, politically, religiously - we are bound to confront an enemy at some point in time. But the question is - what is the nature of the confrontation? What is the nature of the enemy? In any event the enemy will usually reflect evil. The Gandhian adage is “non-cooperation with evil is a sacred duty.”

**Mr. Speaker:** Did you use it when you were on the Corentyne?

**Mr. Rohee:** I believe that Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, following the leanings of his father, Pandit Durga Persaud, calmly and purposefully pursued this path in life. Born on 16<sup>th</sup> January, 1936 at Plantation Diamond, Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud was to spend most of his life, that is to say his political life, taking a resolute stand against negative forces that cast a shadow at that time over our beloved country. It was the time when Guyana was ruled by the British. British colonialism was the dominant social, political, economic and even cultural force in our country.

Any individual born in the conditions of a plantation, living in logies, would not take long to understand what challenges they must confront, and what path to life they should take. There are many in our country today who are not aware, regrettably, of the conditions under which many of our parents and fore-parents grew up in this country. Very few are aware of the conditions under which people lived in logies, the tenement yards and the type of houses that existed at that time. But as we know, reading the biographies and autobiographies of many outstanding personalities both in Guyana and the Caribbean, and reflecting what Martin Carter said about coming from the nigger yard, it does not necessarily mean that because one comes from such humble background that one would not rise to prominence in one's country. This is precisely where we stand today in recognising the contribution made by Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud.

Childhood days brings back pleasant memories notwithstanding the conditions under which we grew up. We only have to read the biographies and the autobiographies of many of these great leaders who reflect on their childhood days and their school days to see the extent to which they enjoyed living and playing with friends, neighbours and even family. What is also equally important is the simplicity and modesty that characterised these individuals who sprung from such modest and humble beginnings. That simplicity and modesty is not only for a moment in time but for a lifetime; it takes them through their entire life.

Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud spent his early years with his sisters Mahadai and Chandroutie under the watchful eye of his widowed mother Jasodra. After his Dad had passed away they were left to fend for themselves. And in fending for themselves, the task before them, or the means to do that, was to sell vegetables at a marketplace and in the village where they grew up. The family lived not only in diamond but at Hague on the West Coast of Demerara, La Penitence and Albouystown. Note the neighbourhoods in which this family grew up – Hague on the West Coast of Demerara, La Penitence and Albouystown – all working class neighbourhoods, which by their very nature influenced the upbringing of this particular Comrade.

He attended Grove Anglican School and subsequently came to Georgetown attending Trinity High School. For those of us who are acquainted today with the Grove Anglican School – if it still exists – and with the Trinity High School, we would know from certain books published the social strata of the persons who attended those schools. In addition to attending those schools, Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud, at a very early age, took the opportunity to attend private evening

classes. But like in the life of many who lived in those days -the power and influence of politics- the ferment of political life with so many champions of the struggle against colonialism, like Cheddi Jagan, Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow and others that were to come. It was in those days that Reepu Daman Persaud met with this powerful and towering figure, Mr. Cheddi Jagan, who made an immediate impression on young Reepu Daman Persaud. We are told that in 1953, three years after the People's Progressive Party was established in 1950 Jagan was speaking at a public meeting in Grove at which young Persaud was present. He heeded the call by Dr. Jagan to assist in the elections campaign which was at that time growing and developing a momentum. I understand that young Persaud made a comment to his friends who were standing with him listening to what was said at the meeting – as was common in those days. He made a joke to his friends when he said that one day he will come to this very village and speak like Jagan. Little did he know that years after such a pronouncement was to come to pass. He was a mere 17-year old at that time. He threw himself wholeheartedly with gusto and zest, full of energy, into the political struggles only to find himself becoming a candidate for the same area in which he grew up on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1964. In those days there were constituencies, and young Persaud defeated the PNC candidate Mr. John Fernandes who had come from the upper strata of society. This again was another manifestation of how the struggles were unfolding because here was a man coming from a working class background, here was a man coming from a village that was dominated by working class ferment and politics. Because the people in the country were identifying with that type of struggle it was only natural that they would throw their weight behind a person who was associated with that type of struggle. John Fernandes came from the property class, the class that worked hand in glove with the British. In the anti-colonial struggle the Guyanese people, united at that time against racial and political lines, wanted to get rid of the property and plantation classes. It was in the vortex of that struggle that Mr. Persaud found himself being triumphant against Mr. Fernandes. But the ways of politics is very interesting. Mr. Fernandes whom we were told is a “likeable fellow”, congratulated Mr. Persaud on his victory without any venom or bitterness. He expressed encouraging words to the young man after hearing him speak publicly telling him that he had a bright future in politics.

Young Reepu Daman Persaud wrote that the subjects he used to study were British History, Constitution and Economics. We are told that he loved those subjects. But continuing in the same line as I have been portraying Mr. Persaud thus far - with so many young people, with so

many families affected as a result of economic deprivation and not having the necessary resources - he was unable to pursue his most cherished dream which was to become a lawyer. But Mr. Persaud, undaunted as he is today, channeled his efforts in a closely associated field becoming eventually a lawyer's clerk. He is quoted as saying that law fascinated him and applied his mind. People around him said he had the flair to become a good lawyer. In fact he became very popular among his fellow law clerks and even became the Vice President of the newly formed Law Clerks Association. From the vice presidency he moved to the presidency of that Association. Interesting enough, in a strange twist of events, he was called upon to lead a delegation of the Association to meet with Mr. Forbes Burnham. After the presentation we are told that Mr. Burnham, who at the time was at Clerk and Martin, told young Persaud that he was very impressed with the presentation he made. It was the years he spent as a law clerk that put him in good stead to become one of the best Members of Parliament this House has ever seen.

While a Member of Parliament he was a shadow Minister for Legal Affairs, and though not a lawyer he represented his portfolio well. He spoke on legal issues during the times of Sunny Ramphal, Fred Wills and Keith Messiah. In fact I have seen letters of commendation from Dr. Mohammed Shahabuddeen to Mr. Persaud.

Those of us who were youngsters in the days when Mr. Persaud was very active in this Parliament, many of us who sat in these very Chambers, would know that he was blessed with an eloquent and articulate manner of speech. Being a Pandit, of course, like every pastor, they are usually blessed with those talents. And he used this gift as a Pandit, as a politician, as a Minister, and President of the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha.

Even in his early days the record would show he would drive around in a motor car with a loud speaker/hailer at the top announcing films that would be shown in the various movie houses on the East Bank. He had a short stint in this respect and even became the manager of a cinema, subsequently becoming a taxi driver and then President of the Hire Care Association – all lowly beginnings.

In 1959 he was elected the General Secretary of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha after many years of helping to strengthen and organise that body. In 1965, the 18<sup>th</sup> May, he was elected as a Member of the National Assembly at the age of 28 and he spoke many times in this House.

During those days Mr. Persaud spoke on 56 Bills, 33 Motions between 1965 and 2006. He participated in 37 budget debates in these Chambers.

I have with me some excerpts from the Hansard which reflects the wide range of subjects on which this comrade spoke. He spoke for example on public security when in 1966 speaking on the release of the detainees from City Hall he said:

“We see from the terms of reference of the tribunal which was set up that all you can do is listen to a person for a whole day and when they are finished they can make a recommendation to the governor who will have the right to say whether or not he will accept the recommendation of the tribunal. Could this be fair? Is this justice? Further, when one examines the legal process one finds very clearly written that a delay of justice is a denial of justice. Such are the principles and maxims of justice. Today in British Guyana I make bold to say that there is no such thing as justice, freedom is restricted, and if this government continues in this way then in a short period in British Guyana we will have complete dictatorship with wholesale suppression of freedom of expression.”

That was said in the National Assembly in 1966.

*3.48 p.m.*

On the question of culture, a debate took place in the National Assembly on the question of the Coat-of-Arms for an independent Guyana and this is what Mr. Persaud had to say on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, 1966 when discussing what the Coat-of-Arms should be, he said that:

“We should enter into independence with the minimum of disputes.”

He said that:

“We were asked to accept in this House, sometime ago, a National Anthem approved by the National History and Arts Council.”

From the explanation given by the Hon. Member, Mr. Benn and his presentation of tangible proof in the form of a stuffed Canje Pheasant. In other words, the Speaker ruled that the Canje Pheasant be brought into the House so they can see exactly how this stuffed Canje Pheasant

ought to reflect itself on the Coat-of-Arms of an independent Guyana. The stuffed Canje Pheasant, having been seen in the House, he said is clear evidence of the fact that the National History and Arts Council is not a competent body to deal with matters of this nature.

So that even on the question of the Coat-of-Arms, in these very Chambers, which we are seated in right now, a debate took place to settle what we now have inherited as the Coat-of-Arms of Guyana. Mr. Persaud was very descriptive in his presentation on this matter. This is what he had to say:

“The Coat-of-Arms had been criticised in detail, but when one looks at the Lotus, which is depicted, it will be seen that this is really a disgrace of art. I have seen school children drawing better than this. It is no credit to the persons who prepared it. The part that is supposed to depict the rice looks like blackeyed peas, perhaps the Minister wants blackeyed peas to be on this in order to confuse the residents at Black Bush Polder.”

He says that:

“The Canje Pheasant is a false bird; a false stem. And according to Mr. Stoby, the Jaguar resembles lions.”

I mentioned those just to give a snap shot of what Mr. Persaud was capable of speaking to during the debates in the National Assembly.

There were serious divisions in the Hindu communities in the 60's. In 1969, he left the Maha Sabha because of the serious political divisions that took place in that organisation. He was thrown out of the organisation because of his refusal to support the People's National Congress (PNC) and Mr. Forbes Burnham. He was badly beaten, locked up and treated heinously, especially in the Essequibo Coast. Hundreds of people from Essequibo had turned out to support him. Pandit Persaud received from the Hindus across Guyana, who were responsive to his tireless crusade of promoting Hinduism and culture and he was usually the target of many violent acts. Many stood at his side through those dark days when he fought for their rights and solved their problems at a personal cost.

Mr. Persaud joined the People's Progressive Party (PPP) at a very early age and many would ask the question, for us to explain how could a religious leader, a pandit, belong to a party known as a communist party? How are these two reconcilably for a religious leader, as was then described of the PPP, being a communist party? But, this is simply because this inability to understand the nature of the People's Progressive Party; the nature of the principles of the People's Progress Party; the nature of the philosophy of the People's Progressive Party that led to this serious ideological and philosophical distortions of how a "communist party" could have religious leaders of the type of Reepu Daman Persaud playing a leading role at all times and even up to now in the organisation. This is what has baffled the enemy. The enemy that I spoke about earlier, that comes in various shapes, forms and use. The People's Progressive Party has never ask Mr. Persaud to denounce his religious beliefs; to remove himself from his religious beliefs, because there was always the accommodation for persons with religious persuasions to belong to and be active in the People's Progressive Party.

Pandit Persaud is the founder and President of the Hindu Dharmic Sabha, which was established in 1974. He has served this organisation for 38 years and continues in this capacity up to this day. Many, who could not reconcile their political with the religious beliefs, fled this country during the days of the dictatorship and went to seek their fortunes in other lands. Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud remained steadfast and never left the shores of this country to seek his fortunes in other lands.

Mr. Persaud has served under the Presidency of Cheddie Jagan, Janet Jagan, Bharrat Jagdeo and now of Donald Ramotar. So while we declared at one time, "there was no place for Donald"; while we made the hallow claim that, "there was no place for Donald"; a part from him now acceding to the Presidency, there is a place for Reepu Daman Persaud. This Comrade has a wealth of experience and knowledge and is still very sharp in his thinking; still contributing to the leadership of the People's Progressive Party. His sobering and calm temperament has always been useful in the leadership of the party and in the Cabinet.

He is the proud father of six children, two sons and four daughters and a grandfather of two beautiful granddaughters. Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud is married to Indranie, who has been a tower of strength and support with every step that he took.

He continues to live by the motto which he adopted from the Bhagavad Gita for the Hindu Dharmic Sabha:

“Action thy duty, reward not thy concern.”

In conclusion, the son of a humble indentured immigrant from India, Reepu Daman Persaud has made an indelible impact in all the struggles of this country and can be best known as a noble Guyanese son and patriot who has helped to bring our country to where it is today.

Thank you Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Dr. Roopnarine:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. It is for me a distinct honour to add my voice to the tribute that we pay today to the long serving and very diligent former Member, Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud. As the Hon. Minister, Mr. Rohee has fulsomely provided us with the details of Mr. Persaud’s early days, I wish only to add that having been born in a logie on the Diamond Estate in 1936, this humblest of beginnings had clearly exposed him in his earliest years to the multiple atrocities of plantation life. It was no doubt what he saw around him that impelled him in the direction of the People’s Progressive Party, which in its earliest hours had established a tradition of defence and agitation on behalf of the most oppressed and the poorest of citizens, particularly on the sugar estates.

At age 21, in 1958 he was, as we were told, elected by the East Bank Constituency to represent them on the Party’s General Council, where he served without interruption for over half a century. He entered the National Assembly, then called the House of Assembly, in 1965 at a most, I would say, tragic and terrible period in our country’s history. He came to the House of Assembly after the murders and mayhem of 1964 and it was in this toxic environment that he, a young man of 29 was entering into the House. It was in every way a baptism of fire and we have heard and been given ample evidence of the ways in which over the years he mastered the Standing Orders of the Assembly and the Parliamentary Procedures. We have heard also and I thank Minister Rohee for providing us with excerpts from the Hansard, which gave ample demonstration of Mr. Persaud’s oratorical skills and creative interventions.

In a tribute I saw that His Excellency, Donald Ramotar paid to Mr. Persaud on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mr. Ramotar, His Excellency talked about his oratorical skills, the way in which he could be at



times emotional and at other times cool, collected, reasonable, but he always spoke with a strong sense of logic and a wealth of knowledge.

We have also heard that although he was not a lawyer by profession, having had to do with the deprivations that a young person coming from that background had to face, that he developed from very early on a love of the law. In the course of a debate on May 18<sup>th</sup>, of 1965, in one of his earliest contributions as a Member of Parliament, in the second reading of the Ministers, Members of the House and Special Offices Emoluments Bill, he did memorable battle with the then Minister of Finance, Mr. Peter D'aguilar. The issue had to do with his refusal to accept that the grand emolument of \$4000 was about to be paid to the Attorney General, Mr. Shridath Ramphal. The Hansard reveals that Mr. D'aguilar in the course of the debate launched a very derogatory and virulent attack on the former Attorney General, Dr. Fenton Ramsahoye, referring to him rather scornfully as Professor Ramsahoye, throughout his speech. In fact, he accused Mr. Ramsahoye and the PPP of "scoundreling" the nation's funds, sending Mr. Ramsayhoe and Mr. Sasenarine up to the Privy Council and expending vast amounts of money, and called him the most expensive Attorney General that we could imagine. In fact, Mr. Rudy Luck rose on a Point of Order and asked the Speaker to warn Mr. D'aguilar about the comments he was making and challenged Mr. D'aguilar to make those comments outside of the House. The Speaker, Mr. Allen, rules against Mr. Luck's point of order and declared that there was no breach of the Standing Orders. But in the course of his presentation, the young Reepu Daman Persaud could not justify paying the Attorney General \$4000, that princely sum, at a time when there was so much poverty in the land. And he spoke with great passion about this. I quote from the Hansard:

"Could Members of the other side of this House honestly say that every citizen in this country is going to bed with his belly full? I ask them to go to the East Coast and examine what is happening to the displaced people. I ask them to go early and find out how many children are going to bed without food. The adults may be able to starve, they may be able to do without cassava and milk, but I submit that the little children cannot do this."

This level of concern with the most deprived and the most dispossessed runs like a red tread through many of Mr. Persaud's Parliamentary presentations.

I do not personally have the advantage of long experience of Mr. Persaud's Parliamentary skills and acumen having only served for part of the Sixth and Seventh Parliament. I was able to observe him at much closer range on the Select Committee on Constitutional Reform that was established after the motion of December 1994, on the Review of the Constitution and subsequently on the Constitutional Reform Commission where he led the PPP team in our work on that Commission, the so called Herdmanston Commission.

The Select Committee that was established by the 1994 motion which was chaired by the former Attorney General, Mr. Bernard De Santos, did excellent work holding consultations in the far found regions. Unfortunately it did not complete its work as it was mandated to do by the second RESOLVED clause of the motion of 1994. The RESOLVED clause of the motion had said:

“That the Committee Report to the National Assembly before the date when national elections are next due”

This second RESOLVED clause was as a result of consultations that Mr. Persaud had had with the political parties in the House and we in the Working People's Alliance had urged very strongly that this particular clause be put in and it was put in. But then 1997, as we know, was a particularly traumatic year for the People's Progressive Party and for the nation. It was the year when in February, Dr. Jagan fell ill and later died on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, 1997. We of course as we know and remember observed that the funeral service was held here at Parliament Building on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March. This perhaps had a great deal to do with the fact that we did not complete our work as we should have done and we did not in fact, report to the National Assembly as we were mandated to do before the next elections. So the elections once again trumped the Constitutional Reform process and we entered the elections of 1997 without the kind of reconciliation measures that I think would have done a great deal to avoid the traumas that followed the 1997 election.

It was Mr. Persaud who piloted the motion to establish the Select Committee in 1994 and it was important, this Select Committee and this motion, because it was in effect that which launched our entire exercise to review the Constitution of Guyana. It was the first review, in fact, that we were going to hold since the 1978 Referendum and the 1978 Constituent Assembly.

In speaking on that motion Mr. Persaud had this to say:

“In contributing to a Constitutional document, in looking at Constitutional Reform, I think that it is incumbent upon those of us who constitute this National Assembly, to rise above narrowness and pettiness and to subscribe to something which will constitute a legacy for generations to come.”

These are words that I think are worth remembering as we embark on a new round of Constitutional review.

On the Constitutional Reform Commission (CRC) as leader of the PPP, team he marshalled his forces and exercised the whip with great vigilance and discipline. There was a particular occasion in the course of the debates, I do not know if that was the period when maybe the Hon. Dr. Frank Anthony was serving some time on the commission, I do not recall if he was there at the time or whether or not the Hon. Member Teixeira...

**Mr. Speaker:** ... serving a sentence following a conviction – serving time.

**Dr. Roopnarine:** Select Committees can resemble that sometimes. But on the CRC we had an exchange, it was a fairly heated exchange, having to do with the powers of the President and I remember Mr. Persaud blurting out that:

“just understand why I am going on the way that I am because this is something we inherited.”

And when I said, “Mr. Persaud the problem is not that you inherited it, my problem is that you love your inheritance so much.” And at this point, Mr. Persaud hurled his books off the table and his papers unto the floor. Persons were a little bit surprised because this was not, of course, Mr. Persaud’s usual way of dealing with matters. But I felt myself that there was something even then quite studied about this gesture. I did not feel that it had anything to do with a loss of composure or a loss of discipline. He did it and the books fell to the ground. We resumed the debate and in fact on the many proposals that were put to the Constitutional Reform Commission having to do with limiting the separate Presidential elections, a fixed date for elections and so on, we who advocated that were defeated and were in the minority.

Personally speaking, I think that myself and Mr. Persaud had a more comradely relationship in the periods prior to 1992, when our parties were in alliance, going back to the talks on the National Patriotic Front in 1977 and our work together in the Committee on Defence for Democracy in 1978 against the July Referendum and later on in the Patriotic coalition for Democracy that was established after the 1986 elections. In those engagements I think I got to know him a lot better and to understand I think a little better the combination of firmness and politeness that was part of the way in which he engaged political debate.

We also worked briefly in the Inter-party Committee on Electoral Reform that was established after in the 1992 elections and there was one particular occasion that I do recall when we were discussing the issue of Local Government Elections and we were meeting in the Ministry of Agriculture. The parties were there, this would have been in 1994, and we were discussing the holding of the Local Government Elections. I argued very strongly on that occasion, in that Committee, that before we rush into the Local Government Elections, it would be well to carry out some reforms of the Local Government system, in particular the issue of the District Councils that I argued at the time were really too large to be the smallest unit of local Government. This was an argument that was to re-emerge and made again at the Constitutional Reform Commission and later found its way into the task force that was established.

But in the course of the argument I think that Mr. Persaud was not un-persuaded by the arguments that we were making. He perhaps saw some little wisdom in postponing those elections until we had had a chance to do some fundamental reforms to the system. I say he was not entirely un-persuaded because he left the meeting and actually walked across the compound and went to see Dr. Jagan, relaying the sentiments of the Committee in relation to the Local Government Elections. He spent about, I would say an half an hour with Dr. Jagan and he came back and said no, Dr. Jagan did not agree and that we were going ahead with the 1994 Elections. Subsequently, the bill was brought to the National Assembly altering the District Councils and creating the National Democratic Councils (NDCs) and the Local Government Elections were held in that year. The work of Local Government Reform as we know in this National Assembly is still before us.

As it has been said I think fulsomely by the Hon. Minister Rohee, that in addition to his political work in and out of Parliament, he has emerged as one of the most outstanding, consistent and diligent religious leaders in the country. The Hon. Minister did touch on the contradiction, the doctrinal collision between the party and the temple and I myself wondered about this many times. But I think it is fair to say, I do not completely accept Minister Rohee's explanation about the climate of tolerance in the PPP having had to do with that. I think instead it really had to do with Pandit Persaud's own extraordinary capacity to harmonise this doctrinal contradiction or doctrinal collision, that he was able to do this smoothly and to recognise that in terms of his practice and his concerns, both as a pandit and a political leader, there was no contradiction in terms of what it is he was attempting to do.

In this as in many other areas, the immortal Gandhi had this to say:

“A religion that takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion.”

I feel certain that this is a passage among many of the passages of Gandhi that Mr. Persaud must know quite well. The words of the Mahatma are a good note on which to end this tribute, to a skilful and resourceful parliamentarian and Hindu teacher who has given such long and exemplary services to the nation. Explaining his gospel of swadeshi, Gandhi exhorted the Hindu priest: “It is for you the custodian of a great faith to set the fashion and to show by your preaching, sanctified by practice that patriotism based on hatred killeth and that patriotism based on love giveth life.” And on the great challenge still ahead of us in this National Assembly, the reform of the Constitution, Gandhi had this to say:

*4.18 p.m.*

“The spirit of democracy is not a mechanical thing to be adjusted by abolition of forms. It requires a change of heart.” In my view, these are sentiments which I believe would receive the unqualified endorsement of my friend and colleague, Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud. With those words, I wish to end this short contribution to the tribute that we fittingly pay to someone who has given a lifetime of service to the National Assembly and to the nation.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mrs. Garrido-Lowe:** The Alliance For Change is very happy to give a very short tribute to Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud. As a political personality, spanning over fifty years, commencing from the pre-independence era to present day, Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud has indeed earned his place in the history of this country. Many of us new parliamentarians have yet to learn about his countless stellar contributions to Guyana.

Coming from humble circumstances, experiencing poverty and seeing workers around him work very hard for just a pittance, it is no surprise that Mr. Persaud was part of the formation of the Dharmic Sabha and his tremendous contributions that followed through the years to this organisation are a testament to his care and love for his people and his dedication and devotion towards their upliftment. The Dharmic Rama Krishna School is another testament to that, an excellent initiative awarding scholarships to students who wish to further their studies.

As a parliamentarian, history will record that he was simply brilliant and what is so admirable about all this is tenacity, his focus, his willingness to work to reach such heights in his political career, and this is instigated by his genuine mission to push Guyana forward. Today we are in need of many “Reepu Daman Persauds” as possible. They are in very short supply.

Mr. Persaud has also made tremendous contributions to religious life in our society, to national life. He is a national leader in this country. The Alliance For Change is honoured to be part of this Assembly to honour this true son of Guyana’s soil. We also congratulate his family, his wife and children who have contributed towards his many accomplishments.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Rohee (replying):** I would like to, on behalf of the People’s Progressive Party, on behalf of the Hon. Prime Minister, in whose name the motion has been laid in this honourable House, and indeed on behalf of the people of Guyana, who have their representatives in this honourable House, to address our deepest gratitude and appreciate to them for the tributes that have been bestowed on the Hon. Member who served in this House for so many years and, in so doing, we wish to commend the motion for approval.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

*Motion carried.*

## **PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

### **MOTION**

#### **RECOGNISING THE CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PARLIAMENT AND GUYANA BY FORMER LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, MR. ROBERT H.O. CORBIN**

WHEREAS former Member of Parliament, Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin, who demitted office as Leader of the Opposition on January 15, 2012 after the just concluded General and Regional Elections, has formerly announced his retirement from National Electoral politics;

AND WHEREAS Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin, served continuously as a member of this National Assembly from August 2, 1973 to October 28, 1997 and from April 1, 2001 to January 15, 2012, totalling a period of 35 years 9 months and 26 days;

AND WHEREAS during the above mentioned period, Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin, served Guyana as Member of Parliament, Parliamentary Secretary, Minister of State, Senior Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and on one occasion was sworn in and acted as President of the Co-operative of Guyana;

AND WHEREAS Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin, also served during the above period as an Opposition Member of Parliament holding several shadow portfolios and retired as Leader of the Opposition;

AND WHEREAS Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin, made sterling and exemplary contributions to the debates, policy decisions and other activities of the Parliament of Guyana;

AND WHEREAS Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin, from his youth, also engaged in active politics in Guyana for most of his life, holding various offices in his party, the People's National Congress Reform, including the office of Leader of that party;

AND WHEREAS Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin, served Guyana in several other capacities before, during and after he was a member of this National Assembly such as Teacher, Public Officer, member of the Guyana Elections Commission, and member of the International Board of the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank and IMF;

AND WHEREAS the Members of this National Assembly have agreed that this body should recognise former Members, who made sterling contributions to the work of this National Assembly and Guyana, not only after their death but during their lifetime,

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly places on record its due recognition of the contributions and appreciation for the services rendered by Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin to the National Assembly, the Government and the people of Guyana for in excess of 35 years;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

That this National Assembly conveys to Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin its appreciation for the services he rendered to the people of Guyana both in and out of the National Assembly over the last thirty-five years.” [*Mrs. Lawrence*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, we will proceed with the second motion. A special dispensation was granted to the Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, under Standing Order 28 (3), to move the motion standing in her name this afternoon to honour Mr. Robert Corbin.

**Mrs. Lawrence:** “Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens.” – Kahlil Gibran.

His humility, his indomitable strength in the face of adversity and challenges, his resolute calm in crisis, his leadership skills displayed over the years from his youth, his youthful and other experiences throughout Guyana and around the world, his religious orientation, his educational achievements, his vast knowledge of the history and development of both party and country and his political acumen have all served to fashion the honourable Robert H. O. Corbin, the former Leader of the Parliamentary Opposition of Guyana and the current Leader of the People National Congress Reform.

He has given distinguished public service for the past forty-seven years as a teacher, public servant, youth leader, professional social worker, politician, legislator, Minister of Government, Deputy Prime Minister, a member of the Guyana Elections Commission and he also had the



distinction of being sworn in and acting on one occasion as the President of Guyana. More specially, he served continuously as a Member of this National Assembly from August, 1973 to 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1997 and from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2001 to 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2012, when he demitted office as Leader of the Opposition and formally announced his retirement from national electoral politics. His service in this National Assembly spanned a period of thirty-eight years, during which he was an elected Member for thirty-five years, nine months and twenty-six days. I am, therefore, honoured and consider it as a privilege to move the motion standing in my name, entitled, “Recognising the Contribution to the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana by Former Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Robert ‘Hubert’ Orlando Corbin”. [Mrs. Backer: It is Herman.] ...Robert Herman Orlando Corbin.

In moving this motion it is incumbent upon me to make a few remarks, not because I knew him from birth, but because I just baptised him as “Hubert”. I have had the privilege of serving for several years with him in this honourable House and of working and travelling with him throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. There are several special moments in the history of a nation when the stars ordain the birth of outstanding personalities. Unlike the biblical events surrounding nativity, however, wise men are not available to predict greatness. We, lesser mortals, are left to evaluate their contributions, and after, sometimes, harsh and subjective analysis rush to judgement, most times, after they are gone to the great beyond. The words of Mark Antony, in Act III, Scene II of *Julius Caesar*, by the English playwright William Shakespeare, ring through, and I quote: “The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones”. The personalities are therefore obliged to depart the stage of life before acknowledgment and acclaim are conferred, if considered deserving. Regrettably, such posthumous activity deprives the beneficiary of the pleasure and appreciation of the conferment. Fortunately, this National Assembly has seen it fit to break with tradition, and it is commendable that we have decided today to give honour where it is due and recognise the contributions of two long serving Members of this House who gave yeoman service to their parties, this Parliament and to the people of Guyana. I speak of Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud and Mr. Robert Herman Orlando Corbin. We solemnly acknowledge their contributions, pay tribute in the appropriate manner and say “thank you for what you have done for your country”.

Robert Herman Orlando Corbin was neither amongst the first category of men, described by Shakespeare, as having been born great, nor deterred, by having greatness thrust upon him. On the contrary, he was born of humble parentage, in the Upper Demerara River, the mining town of Linden, on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1948, a son of Vice Dudley Corbin, a boatbuilder, tug captain and, later, bauxite worker and, his mother, Eva Augusta Corbin, who spent her spinster years working in the exclusive segregated servant quarters of the expatriate staff of the then Demerara Bauxite Company (DEMBA). Yes, Sir, he was born in a British colony at a time when the expatriate community at Linden, then known as Mackenzie, before we learnt of the South African experience, practised segregation. Indeed, Mr. Corbin has often remarked that it was that experience of segregated Watooka, where only the white folks could roam and native had to have a DEMBA pass to traverse, which fashioned his political outlook and helped to determine his political journey from youth.

As we review and evaluate his contribution, it would be reasonable to assume that he made a reality of or emulated W. Hawley-Bryant's composition, "The Song of Guyana's Children", and made the chorus of that song his personal anthem, and it states:

"Born in the land of the mighty Roraima,  
Land of great rivers and far stretching sea;  
So like the mountain, the sea and the river  
Great, wide and deep in our lives would we be;"

And the chorus, which I theme his anthem, goes on to state:

"Onward, upward, may we ever go  
Day by day in strength and beauty grow,  
Till at length we each of us may show,  
What Guyana's sons and daughters can be."

There is no doubt that Mr. Robert H. O. Corbin has illustrated by, his shining example, what a son of Guyana could achieve – could achieve, Sir, through study, dedicated service and hard work.

His early upbringing was rooted in the Presbyterian church where he spent many years actively working in the youth ministry of that church and in the Youth for Christ Movement while as a student of the Mackenzie High School. During those years he had an opportunity to meet and exchange views with young people of the Presbyterian church throughout Guyana. It is perhaps that exposure and his revulsion at the discriminatory and segregation practices of DEMBA, at Mackenzie, that motivated and shaped his active involvement in politics from his youth.

He became actively involved in the youth arm of the People's National Congress, People's National Congress Youth Organisation (PNCYO), later named the Young Socialist Movement (YSM), an organisation in which he spent all of his youth serving at every level, from an ordinary member to National Chairman, from 1966 to 1977. He was widely recognised as a youth leader, skilled in organising, mobilising and training young people for nation building. During this period he held positions of Executive Member, General Secretary and, later, National Chairman of the YSM. He also headed the party's youth cadet training and ideological programme at Cuffy Ideological Institute on the Soesdyke-Linden Highway, during which period he led several youth brigades to communities in Guyana to undertake self-help and community development projects. It was his work in this organisation which propelled him to the forefront of national youth leadership, gained him special recognition from Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham and obviously aided him when he was appointed Minister of Youth and National Service and later as Chairman of the National Mashramani Celebrations Committee for several years.

Indeed, he led by example, as I have been so often reminded by former members of the Guyana National Service who vividly remember his insistence in participating in the great march from Kimbia Training Centre through the Berbice savannahs to Georgetown in March, 1975, a distance of two hundred and seventy kilometres, despite, at that time, he had been suffering from an ailment in his right leg. Today, as I travel throughout the length and breadth of this country, I still meet people who readily identify with Mr. Robert Corbin, their cadre leader, and are all willing to speak of their many learning experiences and times of camaraderie shared with him.

His commitment to youth has never wavered and as he has stated, since his 2007 congress address to party members, it was this commitment that would have been a motivating factor for him to hand over the baton of leadership of the party he now leads.

This commitment is best captured in the words of a youth that were published in the letter column of the *Stabroek News* of Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2008, and I quote:

“His vision is consistent with needs of young people across the country, the vision of a better tomorrow. Evidence of his determination, commitment and passion for the development of youths is in the implementation of some aspects of the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) which has already benefited quite a number of youths and parents in many of our communities. His vision is second to none and includes all Guyanese regardless of race, creed or political affiliation to quench their thirst for a brighter future. His vision also speaks of a transformed Guyana, recognising that the onerous demands of managing this country require the collective effort of all, building strong families with healthy values, strengthening communities, enhancing our educational system and reducing the many ills in our society. It offers hope through opportunities for persons to develop themselves, intellectually, socially, culturally and economically. I am encouraging everyone to read his 2004 and 2006 congress speeches.”

This is the real vision of a true visionary.

Mr. Corbin made full use of his schooling at the Christianburg Government School and the Mackenzie High School, from which he graduated at sixteen years of age, in 1964, with one hundred per cent passes in all six subjects that he wrote at the London General Certificate of Examinations (GCE), but regrettably was too young to be classified as an interim teacher. He had to initially accept the lower paying appointment as pupil teacher because of his age. He soon left the teaching profession and joined the civil service as a Customs Officer, working in the long room and the waterfront.

The prohibition of civil service, being involved in politics, never deterred his activism in youth politics and he continued his involvement, despite the risk to his employment prospects. It is well-known in party circles that in 1968 the late Forbes Burnham identified him to be amongst the list of PNC candidates for Parliament only to discover, after submission of his name, that he

was not yet twenty-one years of age and too young to be qualified as a Member of this House. According to those who knew of this episode, Burnham remarked that his voice was bigger than his years. The *Hansard* will reveal that the vote to reduce the eligibility age to eighteen years was defeated in this House in 1968 to 1973 Parliament, but, by that time, however, Mr. Corbin was already twenty-five years of age when he first entered this National Assembly in 1973. It was not until after the 1973 Elections that the age of majority was reduced to eighteen years, under the leadership of Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham.

Mr. Corbin had, however, continued his education at the University of Guyana, graduated with social work and, by the time he had become a Member of Parliament, brought with him the rich experience of working as a social worker between 1969 and 1973 in many hinterland and rural communities of Guyana, promoting socioeconomic development. That experience obviously exposed him to the plight of the ordinary man and definitely shaped the manner in which he gave public service over the years in the many offices to which he was appointed, as Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. It is well known that he continued his education despite his parliamentary schedule and graduated from the University of Guyana with a Bachelor of Laws Degree (LLB) and from the Hugh Wooding Law School with the Legal Education Certificate (LEC) of the Caribbean Council of Legal Education.

Mr. Corbin's commitment to party, the PNC, now PNCR, is unquestionable. He has been a member of the Central Executive Committee of the People's National Congress for forty-two years and has served as its Senior Vice Chairman, General Secretary, Chairman and Leader. He was elected Chairman of the party at its biennial congress in August, 2000, and was returned at the biennial congress in August, 2002, for a further two-year term, but consequent upon the sudden death of Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte, former President of Guyana, he performed the functions of party leader, acting until he was elected Leader of the People's National Congress Reform at a special congress held on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2003.

Shortly after Mr. Corbin announced that he would not have been a candidate for the presidency at the 2011 General and Regional Elections, a publication in the *Guyana Review* of Thursday, April 29, 2010, stated as follows:

“One of only a handful of Burnham’s old guards still remains in active politics. Corbin, now 62, assumed the leadership of the PNC on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003, following the death of Hugh Desmond Hoyte on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, of the previous year. His accession to the office meant, among other things, a generational shift in the leadership of the PNC. Corbin, among others, has sat at the feet of Burnham as a member of the Young Socialist Movement (YSM), the PNC’s youth arm. Emerging as one of the *Kabaka*’s most trusted lieutenants, Corbin was rewarded with a succession of influential party and ministerial posts which pointed to the likelihood that he might one day lead the PNC and perhaps even acceded to the presidency.

The death of Forbes Burnham in 1985, as much as the PNC’s loss of power in 1992, radically altered the playing field and by the time Corbin became the Comrade Leader, having completed law studies at the University of Guyana and the University of the West Indies, the PNC was no longer what it had been two decades earlier. Loss of political power had been attended by an erosion of the grass roots party which Corbin, himself, had help Burnham build.

As party leader, moreover, Corbin did not come remotely close to inheriting the sheer authority which Burnham had enjoyed, or even the public which the more austerer Desmond Hoyte had managed to garner, much more, as a longstanding and well respected member of Burnham’s Cabinet than as a party functionary. If during the earliest period of his tenure his entitlement was not openly challenged, Corbin was compelled to settle for the reality that he would be first among equals rather than a supreme leader in the Burnham mould. Quite simply the part which he now led included at least a handful of contemporaries who would have felt entitled to be treated as equals.”

What the writer did not know was that Mr. Corbin himself frowned on the concept of maximum leader and, indeed, encouraged an atmosphere of full, frank and open debate among equals. Some felt that, perhaps, he was too liberal in his interpretation of this concept. I agree with the writer, however, who stated that:

“Arguable, therefore, there were certain particular expectations of Corbin when he assumed the leadership of the PNC”.

Anyone who remembers the atmosphere around this very National Assembly compound on the day of the state funeral of the late Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte would be aware that Mr. Robert Corbin held in his hand the key to stability within our society, or the door to open rebellion. He, however, placed Guyana first and stated clearly his goals and vision in his December 24, 2003, Christmas message. He stated:

“Ultimately it is the people of Guyana who must determine their destiny. As Leader of the People’s National Congress Reform I remain convinced that we can work together as a people to remove the scourge of racial prejudice and conflict and build a land where all Guyanese, irrespective of race, religion or cultural heritage can work together in peace and harmony for the development of our country and secure the future for the next generation.”

Delivering a speech on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 2004 to the 14<sup>th</sup> Biennial Congress of the party, he advocated that the warring major political parties “close the pages of the past and work resolutely for a bright and glorious future to bequeath a rich legacy to our future generations.”

*4.48 p.m.*

Additionally, Sir, his address articulated the desirability of:

“...a Government that is as broad based as possible and that is flexible enough to bring on board its platform for the reform of governance, all ideas, all realistic proposals, all patriotic elements and all who are willing to work with us for a better Guyana.”

Some have suggested that this was Corbin the statesman, Sir, while others have argued, Corbin the political strategist seeking not only to put his personal stamp on the leadership of the People’s National Congress Reform (PNCR), but making a gambit for a share of political power for the party.

Those close to him knew, however, that he had an unwavering commitment to national reconciliation and genuine national development, a vision that was not shared by some of the other parties in Guyana at the time and it was the pursuit of this vision that may have caused him to sacrifice political popularity at the altar of political necessity. Nevertheless, Sir, he strove continuously to espouse the idea of shared governance and actively pursue a “One Guyana”

platform to contest the 2006 General Elections which was the only elections he faced as presidential candidate. His failure to fully achieve success in 2006 did not cause him to divert from his cause and it was this driving commitment that eventually led to the formation of A Partnership for National Unity (APNU), prior to the last General and Regional Elections.

As one writer stated in the *Stabroek News* publication of Friday, June 15, 2012, under the caption, “APNU is a testimony to the leadership of Robert Corbin.” I quote, Sir:

“For those who are quick to judge and vilify I say, sometimes we have to demonstrate the capacity to take the high road and, as the saying goes, just ‘give jack he jacket.’

Mr. Corbin no doubt has made his share of mistakes, for it is human to do so, but we must acknowledge that he’s surely worth his salt. It is an irrefutable fact that he has spent many decades in public office, in which he served Guyana faithfully. His refusal to give up on the PNC in its most difficult times is unselfish and demonstrates his commitment to party. Mr. Corbin has been maligned and vilified many times over, but never quit on the country and party and has resisted the many temptations to seek greener pastures for his personal enrichment...and I ask his critics to judge objectively.”

Mr. Corbin’s own words speak for themselves and are reflected in his 2011 New Year’s Message to the nation as follows:

“...educational, social and recreational programmes for youth, including the reintroduction of the Guyana National Service; a Government that will ensure that public sector workers are paid wages and salaries that enable them to enjoy a decent standard of living; a Government that will take care of its senior citizens; in short, a Government capable of demonstrating the qualities of good governance and managing the affairs of our country in the interest of all Guyanese irrespective of race, religion or creed.

It is with this in mind that our Party has resolutely pursued the establishment of a broad partnership of the like-minded political forces as a first option to face the challenges of 2011. In this context I make bold to say that will all our efforts we can and will succeed in transforming Guyana. A new Government of National Unity, including the People’s



National Congress Reform will be able to put Guyana on a sustainable path of development.

As Guyanese, let us in this significant year 2011 make it indeed, a Year of Redemption.”

The services of Mr. Corbin to this National Assembly and other areas of leadership, upon his ascension to this National Assembly, were many.

**Mr. Speaker:** One minute, Hon. Member. Could someone ask for an extension of time?

**Ms. Ally:** I move that the Hon. Member be given fifteen minutes to continue her presentation.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

**Mrs. Lawrence:** An elected Member of Parliament for over thirty-six years, from August 1973 to October 1997 and from 2001 to 2011, Mr. Corbin held a number of ministerial portfolios. Those included Parliamentary Secretary - Cooperatives and National Mobilisation, Parliamentary Secretary - Education, Social Development and Culture, Minister - Youth, Sports and National Service, Minister - Regional and National Development, Minister - Local Government, Deputy Prime Minister - Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Deputy Prime Minister - Public Utilities and Deputy Prime Minister - Works, Communications and Public Utilities. He was also Deputy Prime Minister between 1985 and an Opposition Member of Parliament between 1992 and 1997. He was Shadow Minister for Works, Communications and Regional Development. He was reelected to Parliament at the 2001 General Elections and was elected Leader of the Parliamentary Opposition on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2003.

The robust and well reasoned contributions made by Mr. Corbin to debates over his thirty-five years in this National Assembly are well known to us and fully recorded in the *Hansard*. He, however, notwithstanding the heat of any debate, remained relatively calm and polite which disarmed many of his opponents. The immediate past Speaker of the House, Mr. Ralph Ramkarran, had this to say:

“I had the opportunity to observe him at close range for ten years while I was Speaker. He was an able parliamentarian and a skilled debater. Apart from these qualities, he was unfailingly courteous. This made it quite difficult for me to limit him or disagree with his

arguments. Whenever I did sometimes, bristling at my decision, he would graciously accept my ruling. Not always the case with other Members of the House.”

As a Member of this House, I recall his many initiatives, of which Mr. Ramkarran spoke, such as his attempt to have the Parliament meet urgently during the 2005 floods, his motions on the Lusignan Massacre and on the bankrupt Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO) issue to get the Government to repay money to those who suffered loss, to name a few.

As Minister, who reported to this House, he was also on the receiving end of criticism, but never failed to provide reasoned explanations.

He often reminisces that his experiences as Minister of Agriculture and the Development of National Dairy Development Programmes, under the then programme head, Dr. Steve Surujbally, and, more particularly, as Minister of Regional Development and Local Government, were among his most satisfying ones. On the other hand, he had mixed thoughts about the multifaceted challenges he faced as Minister responsible for the Guyana Airways Corporation (GAC) and the Guyana Electricity Corporation (GEC), now Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL). Among the pleasant memories, which he has shared with some of us, are those that he had as the head of national celebrations for Mashramani where he interacted with the many designers, calypsonians and other artistes on an annual basis and was exposed to the rich, cultural heritage which our nation offers to the world.

Sir, no one can dispute the fact that Mr. Robert Corbin was not an armchair politician. During his years of service, he travelled extensively throughout Guyana, acquiring vast knowledge of the needs, challenges and potential of the various communities and actively worked in many of them, promoting their development.

Despite his achievements in the many high offices held, he never lost touch with the common man. I have been privileged, Sir, to travel across the length and breadth of this country in his company and can testify to the number of Guyanese who remember him, not only as their youth leader or as Minister, but rather as Robert. The conversations can begin from shared youth activities to fishing, farming, hunting, sports and, most of all, the challenges of debates.

He has also ably led many delegations to various international conferences in pursuit of government and party, the earliest of which was as a member of the Guyana Delegation to the Non-Aligned Summit in 1970, held in Lusaka, Zambia. He has also effectively represented his party and country in numerous countries – Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas, and the Caribbean. Mr. R H.O. Corbin was also identified, Sir, with two other CARICOM Opposition leaders, by fellow Opposition leaders of the region at the CARICOM Heads of Government Summit in St. Lucia, some years ago, to represent, to that body, issues that affect opposition parties in the region. He recently concluded, however, that that was a ruse by Caribbean leaders to aid their colleague heads in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, at the time, and that the CARICOM leaders had absolutely no sincerity in their stated intentions. He also had the privilege of serving as a member of the Guyana Elections Commission and was, at the time of his demitting office, a member of the International Board of Parliamentary Network of World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

A few years ago he had to be medivac for treatment overseas and the media reported that he had died. The God whom he served throughout his life, however, was not yet ready for him and gave him renewed energy to continue. For this, many of us were relieved and grateful. Whether it was that experience or others which motivated his decision to retire from national electoral politics, we do not know. What he has publicly stated on several occasions, however, has been noted.

Mr. Robert Corbin, a practising attorney-at-law will no doubt continue to give service to Guyanese in other areas of human activity. But we, in this House, have been enriched from his many contributions while he served up to the highest level of the land.

It is in recognition of that service that I take pride and pleasure in moving the motion which is laid in my name.

Before I take my seat, however, Mr. Speaker, kindly allow me to suggest that we seek to adorn the halls of this Parliament, beginning from the stairway, with photographs of our Members whom we honour, leaving a legacy, Sir, not only in words, but by also adding face to them, as the Chinese proverb says, “What I see, I believe.”

Thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mrs. Hughes:** I rise on behalf of the Alliance For Change (AFC) to recognise the sterling contribution to this honourable House and the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, over a span of more than thirty-five years, by the honourable Robert Corbin.

As we have heard, Mr. Corbin has served this country in a myriad of ways - as an honourable citizen, as a Member of Parliament, as a Minister, as Leader of the Opposition and, also as I have just heard, as acting President of Guyana.

Our public records will highlight the high quality of his debates in this House and, especially as Leader of the Opposition. But the true measure of a man and, may I add, of a woman is not so much in times of peace and tranquility, but is seen in the times of difficulty when harsh decisions are made in challenge and turmoil. We recognise that the honourable Robert Corbin, as Leader of the Opposition, heralded Guyana through several of those dark and difficult moments.

We congratulate him, especially for his stewardship, commitment and service to Guyana through those difficult times. We wish him continued good health, success in the future and in all of this endeavours that he chooses to be associated with.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Prime Minister and Minister of Parliamentary Affairs [Mr. Hinds]:** I rise to join in recognising the contribution of our former colleague and Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Robert H.O. Corbin, to our National Assembly and to the political life of our country for over forty years. I do so on behalf of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and the Government and, thus, express our support for the motion moved by Hon. Member Mrs. Volda Lawrence.

Mr. Corbin has truly been a career politician, having joined the YSM in 1967, not yet twenty years old and, soon thereafter, and steadily, becoming an Executive Member and, in time, General Secretary and Chairman of it and simultaneously, in 1970, being elected to the Central Executive of the People's National Congress, now the People's National Congress Reform. We recognise his steady progress within his party and, in parallel, his service in this House, beginning in 1973 and ending with his retirement from Parliament in 2012. We recall the various portfolios that Mr. Corbin carried from the time, soon after, he entered Parliament with the PNC in Government on to 1992.

Having endeavoured, myself, on to about 1990, to stay a safe distance from politics and politicians, and even though I had read about Mr. Corbin in the newspapers, I did not become engaged with him until I came into this House in 1992. I have found him, since, to be a capable opponent on the Opposition benches, quickly putting together cogent arguments on a wide range of subjects, no doubt calling on his many years in politics and in Government.

We must commend Mr. Corbin. Whilst being full-time in politics, from an early age, but pursuing degrees at University of Guyana, on the side, as it were, and then taking leave from the National Assembly, from 1997 to 2001, to pursue formal training and attaining qualification as a lawyer, which must have been a longstanding personal aspiration...In this we can recognise and commend him for delaying personal growth for service to party and country.

Today is not for us a usual day. This is, indeed, not our usual meeting, pursuing our usual business in our usual contending ways. Today we are together in consensus. Today is an important, significant day. But today is not a day when we should be seen or think of ourselves as hypocrites, saying good things of leading opponents on the other side. Today could be seen as a day of truce, a period in *gool*, as we used to say when we were young and playing games; a day when we could see each other as individual citizens and allow ourselves the freedom to recognise the capabilities, the exploits and achievements of each other, even though many would be able opponents, such as Mr. Robert Corbin.

In the heat of our competition for votes and in our usual contentions, at times even acrimonious debates in the National Assembly, we could hardly be expected to recognise anything good in each other. Today is a day that we could recognise good in each other. We need days of truce, as today, when ordinary business is put aside and the usual rules of engagement do not apply.

A day, as today, allows us all, each in his own way, each in his own political party, to recognise that we are all in a common venture, pursuing a common yearning to bring better to our people, indeed all of the people of Guyana, and our country as we see it. Often, these yearnings to serve and to make things better have a common spring. I think that it is worthy of notice that both our legislators who we are honouring today had grounding in a religious organisation, an organisation, no doubt, of their parents which they received and accepted - the honourable Reepu Daman Persaud as a Hindu and Hon. Robert Corbin as a Christian, particularly of the

Scots church, Presbyterian faith. Indeed, the first time I heard of a young Robert Corbin, probably in 1965-1966, was from some other young people in the Scots church's youth organisation. At times I have been tempted to tease him and say that maybe it might have been a better path to pursue in the church, so at least we would not have had him on the other side to compete.

I refer to this to make the point that we know that at the level of rituals, practices and beliefs, Christians and Hindus are quite different and may be judged to be..., and even at times could be antagonistic. There could be antagonisms. But below that surface one can see much that is common in seeking to provide answers to the fundamental questions of life and living and extolling much the same virtues. For example, I have been struck from my early Christian upbringings and, more recently, maybe, listening at times to the Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud, that in both religions love and charity are extolled and can hold the place of being the primary virtue and what should be the primary pursuit of us is that we should love each other and extend charity to each other.

As we honour Mr. Corbin today, and as I was preparing, I recall two of his speeches. One was on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dr. Cheddi Jagan's entering into this House, that would have been in 2007, and the other occasion, which was a special meeting, and not recorded, as I found out, in the *Hansard*, or any of our recordings, on the occasion of the unveiling of the portrait of Dr. Cheddi Jagan. Those two speeches I found very noble, and gracious, and worthy of greater notice, and still so worthy.

I would like to join in extending to Mr. Corbin our appreciation for the long years of service that he gave to this Assembly and to wish him well in other achievements in the future as he has retired from Parliament and, as the many newspaper articles seem to suggest, he may be retiring also from active leadership of his party. But he is still a relatively young person and, no doubt, can take a role now as a national elder, not for either of the parties which continue to rival each other for votes and for seats in this Parliament, but, maybe, as a national elder above the fray.

I would like to admonish him, though, that that place, where I heard a lot of them congregate, at the old colonial Georgetown Club, may not be the place. We need a new club. Maybe, he can found a new club for this new era in his remaining years.

I thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mrs. Lawrence (replying):** Sir, the sentiments expressed here by both the Hon. Mrs. Catherine Hughes and the Hon. Mr. Samuel Hinds in honour of Robert Herman Orlando Corbin is in keeping with all that we have had of his contributions to his people, the National Assembly and his party. I believe, Sir, that what we have done here this afternoon is not only honourable, but we have done the right thing, in indicating to our young people that there is hope, that there are others who have worked, who have given of their youth, for this country and to this National Assembly.

5.18 p.m.

So, Sir, I would like, on behalf of all of us, to congratulate Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud and Mr. Robert Herman Orlando Corbin for the forty-seven years he has given, not only to this National Assembly but to Guyana as a whole. I now commend the motion, in my name, captioned “Recognising the Contribution to the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana by Former Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Robert Herman Orlando Corbin.”

Thank you Sir. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, before I proceed, could I have a seconder for Mrs. Lawrence’s motion please?

**Ms. Teixeira:** I now second the motion.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, before I formally put the motion, I would like to add my own voice with a few words and to say that from time immemorial every people, every culture and every society have honoured those men and women who have served their country. In ancient times the Greeks were some of the first to recognise the vocation of politicians by placing a crown or wreath of bay leaves around their heads for favour. We in Guyana must be no different and this is why, at moments in our existence, we must pause to acknowledge and reinforce that which we hope to become our history. We do so by honouring our comrades and ensuring, of course, that we do not leave the recording of their contributions solely as the responsibility of others to come.

The national awards scheme was designed for such occasions but regrettably has fallen into distress. Separate and apart from that, however, this institution has chosen to give recognition to the long years of service of two erstwhile comrades. It must never be the case of my hero or your hero, but rather recognition that these honourable men have served their country, even at times with nuance point of view. If I have one regret about today's proceedings, it is in the fact that there was not one motion supported by Government and Opposition alike, and so I commend Ms. Teixeira for seconding the motion for Mr. Corbin.

Recently on the passing of artist Phillip Moore, we witnessed the tumult that surrounded the arrangements for his inevitable death and I, as many others, wondered quietly as to why more consideration was not given to these matters during his lifetime. Today we are not making that mistake. Today, therefore, the National Assembly of the Tenth Parliament of Guyana paid tribute to two long serving public servants and politicians. I hope that this would be the beginning of an eternal tradition in this House. Today, we honour two men who operated from their positions as opposites, but it is in the dialectic of the opposites that the nation seeks to have its best minds put into it higher service. I have worked with both men, alongside Mr. Corbin, firstly, in the People's National Congress and in many Committees with Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, most notably, of course, the Constitutional Reform Committees, numbers one and two.

I am concerned at times about the descent into incivility and character assassination that characterise much of our discourse within and outside of this Chamber. Ignorance and a lack of respect for self, others and institutions we serve may account for much of this. Members and their families are being castigated by Members of the opposing sides, and even Members are having their characters maligned by Members of their own parties. Let us resolve to accept that the nation and its political systems were erected on two pillars, and I dare to say that a third has been put into place by the people. Destroying one will lead to the destruction of all. That is the reality. The job of the Government must not be to destroy the Opposition and, of course, it goes without saying that the same applies to the Opposition, rather it must not be that it exists to destroy Government, but to present itself to the people as the better alternative. The book of Proverbs tells us "as iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another". Politics is a thankless, difficult, sometimes dangerous and oftentimes an unhappy job, but someone has to do it. In the words of Winston Churchill, "Politics is not game. It is an earnest business".



This afternoon's proceedings must not, therefore, be seen as a celebration only of the political lives of two men and twofold, sometimes, as they were, but moreover, as a celebration of labour, of love of country and of our democracy. Congratulations Hon. Members. [*Applause*]

I wish to thank all those who spoke to these motions, the proposals and, of course, behind the scenes, worked assiduously, the Chief Whips to whom I put this idea and the vision and they worked to make it a reality. I would also like to recognise the efforts of the Clerk of the National Assembly and his staff, particularly Ms. Onieka Walton and Ms. Darlene Marshall, in making today's event a reality.

With those words I would like to formally, now, put the motion that is before this House.

*Question put, and agreed to.*

*Motion carried.*

I wish, again, to congratulate all those who were associated with this motion. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Hon. Members, that brings us to the end of today's proceedings. I now invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move the adjournment motion.

**Mr. Hinds:** I move that the House be adjourned to Wednesday, July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the House is adjourned to the 25<sup>th</sup> of July; it is a Wednesday, where we will continue our regular business. Those who have received invitations please join us, after the proceedings, in the MPs lounge. Thank you very much Hon. Members.

*Adjourned accordingly at 5.25 p.m.*

## **PROCEEDINGS OF THE CEREMONY OF HONOURING FORMER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT**

*Mrs. Chandrapal chaired the proceedings.*

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Good afternoon everyone. Can I invite all of you to come forward please? We have a very short but simple and symbolic ceremony so I would like if all of you would come forward. This should not be very long.

Ladies and gentlemen, honourees, relatives of the two honourees, on behalf of the National Assembly, the Clerk, the Speaker and all of us here, we would like to extend to our honourees our words of appreciation for you being here. A lot has been said in the Chamber earlier, so we do not want to speak anymore. I know a lot of you are hungry and some of you are also tired. We have a symbolic ceremony which is going to be short, as I said before, and we would like to invite Mr. Sherlock Isaacs, the Clerk of the National Assembly, who would be making some remarks.

### **Remarks**

**Mr. Isaacs:** Thank you Madam Chairperson. Madam Chairperson, honourable Speaker of the National Assembly, Ministers of the Government, other Members of Parliament, members of the diplomatic corp, if they are here, Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud, Mr. Robert Corbin, staff of the Parliament Office and special invitees, good afternoon. Today I am delighted to extend, on behalf of the staff of the Parliament Office and myself, congratulatory remarks to two esteemed gentlemen for their exemplary years of service to the Parliament of Guyana. They have both made indelible marks in the National Assembly. I would not say much about their parliamentary record of service because that is a matter which was adequately dealt with by the other Members of Parliament. I would discuss their other parliamentary activities.

According to Howard .W. Newton, “People forget how fast you did a job, but they remember how well you did it”. Today we are here to celebrate a job well done by both of these gentlemen. I will deal with Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud firstly, since he is senior to Mr. Corbin by years of service.

Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud will always be remembered by us at the Parliament Office for his nationalistic, devoted, altruistic and spiritual attributes. In fact, my immense respect for his religious characteristics is manifested in the way I usually address him, that is, as Panditjee. Hereinafter, I will refer to him as Panditjee, as I did over the years. During Panditjee’s tenure in the National Assembly he saw, in Guyanese expression, “a lot of action.” Panditjee was there

when the mace was hidden and the sitting for that day had to be cancelled. He was there when Dr. Cheddi Jagan threw the mace unto the floor. Panditgee was there when Mr. Isahak Basir threw a glass at former Speaker, Mr. Sase Narain, and subsequently lifted Panditgee and placed him into the chair to preside over that sitting. Panditgee was also there when the late Dr. Cheddi Jagan threw the law books unto the floor. But do you know what? Unfortunately, Panditgee was not there when Mr. Robert Corbin threw the law books unto the floor. I am tempted to say “dash the law books” unto the floor. No, Panditgee had ceased to be a Member of Parliament by then. Panditgee did not tell me this story but I learnt from my predecessors that he was prevented from speaking in the House for over six months until he apologised to the then Speaker for some remark he made to or about the Speaker. Panditgee told me about other things but he did not tell me about this one.

My appointment as Clerk of the National Assembly, in 1992, was the beginning of an excellent working relationship between Panditgee and myself. Pandit was then Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House. That close relationship was maintained until he ceased to be a Member. He addressed me as *Shurlack* and treated me and my staff with unfailing courtesy. He has never been one to scowl at us. Indeed, from my personal experience, he was inclined rather to smiling with us. As Minister of Parliamentary Affairs he was responsible for the arrangement of Government’s business on the Order Paper, so we communicated on a daily basis. Due to the nature of our work we had many heated arguments with respect to parliamentary procedures and the Standing Orders. However, I must say that all of our arguments ended amicably with Panditgee saying, “*Shurlack, yuh still learning this ting boy*” and I saying “Pandit, I do not share your view”. I must say that I have worked with Panditgee and that he has a sound knowledge of parliamentary practice and procedure, and he knew the Standing Orders well.

Panditgee served the National Assembly thirty-seven years, four months and four days and he participated in well over one hundred debates in the National Assembly during which he spoke to, in excess of, fifty-one Bills and forty- eight motions. These are some of the remarkable highlights of the speeches made in the Assembly that I have uplifted from the *Hansard*. *Hansard*, dated 29<sup>th</sup> October, 1998, on the Rice Factories Bill, I quote:

“In any organised development, such steps are crucial and vital and, in the process of development, one is compelled to have the necessary legislation to bring about the kind of orderly and well-planned development”.

In addition, one can conclude that Panditjee had remarkable preoccupation in ensuring that elections were conducted in a manner that was typical of a democratic society. Speaking to the Election (Amendment) Bill 1996 he noted, and I quote:

“...the first time after the quarter of a century a voters list is going to be prepared and ready so well in advance for general election. It is the first time in a quarter of a century. Not only will it be ready and published, but it will allow adequate time for scrutiny so that pivotal component for a free and fair election will be in place.”

I now direct my attention to Mr. Robert H. O. Corbin, who has served the National Assembly for thirty-five years six months and three days. That is, one year, ten months and one day short of Panditjee’s years of service. Mr. Corbin and I shared a cordial working relationship with mutual respect. His cheerfulness, and natural friendliness, he has also earned the respect of the staff of the Parliament Office. He has been such a nice person, that at the end of his tenure as Leader of the Opposition, in January 2012, he promised my staff a fete. That fete is yet to come, Mr. Corbin.

Mr. Corbin, during his tenure in the National Assembly, also saw a lot of actions. He saw, if not all, most of the actions that Panditjee saw. He even had some of his own actions - action such as slamming the law book off the table. I believe that some of our law makers either love or hate those poor law books on the table. They always slam them to the floor when they are angry – Oh, those poor law books. Luckily Ms. Teixeira is in the back bench. I am sure she would have done some slamming herself.

Mr. Corbin also made history in the Parliament of Guyana by submitting at 12.10 p.m. on the 15<sup>th</sup> March, 2004, as far as I know, the longest ever suspension motion in the history of the Parliament to former Speaker Mr. Ramkarran. Some of you may be aware that the request for an adjournment of the Assembly to discuss a matter of urgent public importance is usually done in one or two paragraphs, three the most. Mr. Corbin’s adjournment motion consisted of six long typing sheets of pages and plus six resolutions. I could remember vividly Speaker Ramkarran

calling me about 12.30 p. m. on that day and exclaiming, “Sherlock, my God, have you seen that request from Robert Corbin for the adjournment of Assembly this afternoon? What is this man’s thinking?” When am I going to be able to read this epistle to give a decision by 2 o’ clock this afternoon? You know, I doubt whether Mr. Ramkarran was ever able to read Mr. Corbin’s entire motion to date. Or, as I told Mr. Ramkarran, it was not a motion, Sir, it was a booklet motion. The only man I believe that could have out written Mr. Corbin would have been my predecessor Mr. Frank Narain. Mr. Frank Narain would have written a book motion instead. I could remember Mr. Frank Narain writing a twenty-six page letter to the Chairman of the Public Utilities Commission, copied to Ministers of the Government, and I could remember, too, Minister Rohee almost screaming when he was given his copy of the letter on that sitting day. Minister came to me and said, “Sherlock, did you see this letter.” I said, “Yes, I started to read it since Tuesday”, and that was on a Thursday.

However, Mr. Corbin’s request was the reason for Mr. Ramkarran’s ruling on adjournment motions. I must say at this point that a few, I am tempted to say many, of Mr. Ramkarran’s ruling were as a result of matters raised by Mr. Corbin. He had Mr. Ralph Ramkarran busy.

Mr. Corbin was also known at the Clerks’ table – I am talking about the Clerks’ table - as “Mr. Walkout.” I guess you are aware that we do have our own jokes at the table. I am referring to the Clerks’ table. He earned the nickname as a result of the many walkouts by the PNC during the Eighth and Ninth Parliament. At the table we observed that Mr. Corbin, when things were not in his favour, so to speak, would have packed his briefcase in a split second, looked over the table at his Members and hastily left the Chamber. He would have left so quickly that some of his Members, I believe, would have still been packing their briefcase when he would have been exiting the compound. A quick perusal of our records, since I became Clerk of the National Assembly, has shown that Mr. Corbin has the greatest amounts of walkouts of the National Assembly.

During Mr. Corbin’s tenure he spoke in excess of forty–two Bills and fifty–nine motions. These are some of the remarkable highlights of the speeches made in the National Assembly that I have uplifted from the *Hansard*. *Hansard*, dated Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2005, on the 2005 Flood, and I quote:

*“It would be arrogant for any political party to suggest that it alone has the solution to the country’s pressing problems; yet solutions there must be, and solution is within our grasp; but it is only by releasing the vast energies of our Guyanese people - those here at home and those in the diaspora, that we will turn the situation around and Guyana becomes the country our children deserve. We must act together to combat fear, to combat distrust and to combat despair. Let us face the challenges of the New Year with hope in our hearts, and yes, with love of our fellow citizens.”*

*Hansard* dated 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2007, motion on African Trade and Slavery, I quote:

“Let us hope, Mr. Speaker, that, in addressing the issue of rectification, we do not allow narrow political considerations to affect, or cloud our judgment of the wider picture, so that we can recognise that there is a job to be done, and also appreciate the tremendous benefits which such an approach can have to unleashing the potential of our villages, and particularly the young people of our villages in Guyana today”.

Speaker Ramkarran and I observed and agreed that both Mr. Persaud, Panditgee, and Mr. Robert Corbin were very skilled debaters who usually commanded the attention the Assembly when they spoke. We felt then, and we still believe, that they are among the best debaters, or speakers, as you may want to say, during their time in the National Assembly.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is not a farewell speech. I guess we will see Mr. Corbin. I hope these honourable gentlemen will come to see us at the Parliament Office at times, as friends, if only to look in and say “Hello Mr. Clerk.”

Madam Chairperson, please permit me to speak directly to our guests of honour. Honourable gentlemen, I am requested by my staff to convey our thanks and heartiest congratulations for the outstanding service you have rendered to the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana. We do wish you and your wives the best of luck and happiness in the many years to come. May the good Lord richly bless you, former Hon. Members Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud and Mr. Robert Corbin.

Thank you Madam Chairperson. [*Applause*]

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Thank you Mr. Sherlock Isaacs. You have provided us with yet another insight into the lives of these two illustrious sons of the soil who have both served their party, the National Assembly and the country very well.

### **Song**

Now it is my pleasure to call on Ms. Miriam Williams who will be singing a song to us, “Never give up and keep the dream alive.”

**Ms. Miriam Williams:** Even though your tenure has come to an end I will encourage you to really keep the dream alive - keep the fire alive.

*Rendition of song by Ms. Miriam Williams.*

6.03 p.m.

### **Presentation to Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud**

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Thank you Ms. Miriam Williams for such a beautiful and appropriate rendition, “I will never give up” and “keep the dreams alive”. I hope that we can all take that message even though we are not the honorees today.

Now it is my honour to invite Chief Whip Ms. Amna Ally who will be making a presentation to Comrade and honourable Member Mr. *Reepu Daman* Persaud. I think it is a token on behalf of all of us who are present.

**Ms. Ally:** Thank you very much Madam. Chairperson, honorees, Mr. Speaker, invited guests, comrades all.

In recognition of the long-standing, and outstanding, service of Cde. Reepu Daman Persaud, it is my distinct pleasure, on behalf of the Parliament of Guyana and, indeed, on behalf of all of us to present this token to him for forty-one years of sterling service given to the National Assembly of the Parliament Office of Guyana. I see here, engraved in this, “May 1965 to May 2006. It is my pleasure to present to you, Sir, this token.

*Ms. Ally presented token to Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud.*

## **Presentation to Mr. Robert Corbin**

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Thank you Ms. Ally for your presentation to honour honoree, Hon. Reepu Daman Persaud. Now it is my pleasure to ask the Government's Chief Whip, Ms. Gail Teixeira, to make the presentation to honourable Mr. Robert Corbin.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister, Members of Parliament, special invitees and our very special honorees, my comrade, not only Member of Parliament, Reepu Daman Persaud, but my comrade, and his lovely family and also Mr. Robert Corbin - I have to be formal tonight; I usually called you "Robert"; I do not know about all these, "Herman," "Orlando" - Mrs. Corbin and your family, and your friends, and all the well wishers.

It is a great pleasure for me to do this, and probably people will be wondering what am I really going to say; but I want to say this: I formally believe that being a politician and being a Member of Parliament is a great honour once one services one's country and that there is nothing shameful of being a politician. I notice now that the fashion nowadays is of people saying they are not politicians but they belong to political parties. I am afraid, I do not understand that. I think I must belong to a different era. I think if one belongs to a political party one will have a love for politics and one is going to end up being a politician and certainly being in the House, in this hallowed hall in our Parliament building, our beautiful building that we have come here, through a long road, but it is an honour to be a Member of Parliament and an honour to serve one's country.

I know Mr. Corbin that your path and my path crossed many times, long before 1992 and then post-1992 in this National Assembly, and I must say this that I enjoyed the level of debate. I said to Mr. Corbin - this is not to embarrass him – that I miss him in the National Assembly, because this amphitheatre, which is the Parliament, the amphitheatre of politicians, is where we do our thing, and we do our things sometimes best. This is where the cut and thrust, the wits and the arguments and the intellectual discussions really take place. It is not in the media. The media takes what we say and sometimes chops it up, and chews it up, and spits it out. At the end of it you do not quite recognise if that is really what you said. But for the parliamentarian, in this Parliament, despite the throwing down of different things, from time to time, the media and the public would be shock to see the way in which we relate to each other. Once we come off the



floor, some of us go and have a smoke, some of us have a drink, some of us gaff and eat - the relationship changes.

Mr. Corbin, I have known you for twenty-five...I am losing track because I have to be careful not to expose how old I am, because I am coming shortly up behind you. We will miss both Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud's and Mr. Corbin's contributions to this House. We missed them already - the level of debate, the level of sharp differences, but within certain realms of respectability and decency.

Mr. Corbin, it is a great pleasure for me, as the Chief Whip for the Government side, on behalf of the entire Parliament to be able to present you with two small tokens. Before I do that, though, I would like to say that the contributions that you have made to Guyana and the contributions of Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud are important and are written into the annals of our history. History will judge us all; but it also one in which in any other Parliament any Member of Parliament having served thirty-odd years will be of great high honour, respect and distinction, because parliamentarians, once they pass the first five years they are never sure if they are coming back again - names get drop off of list, names changed, people might not like them anymore, so they are dropped. Mr. Corbin to have hung in there for thirty-something years...I am coming up shortly. Do not worry. For Mr. Corbin and Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud to have served over three decades in this House, it is a real honour to both of you, an honour to our country, honour to us who were younger at one time and worked with both of you.

I know the two of you. The PPP/C's motion states that Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud continues to serve as a politician, cultural activist and a religious leader. I know Mr. Corbin that you will have a big events coming up soon and I am sure you will continue to play, if not a quiet hand, an important hand in the developments that continue to play in our country and in the political realm of our country. So Mr. Corbin it has been a pleasure knowing you and working with you. You and I had our own ding-dong arguments and I had the greatest pleasure of interrupting and heckling you when you were speaking, but I do not believe we ever took it personally.

Mr. Corbin, thank you, and on behalf of all of us I would like to give you these two tokens. One in particular - let me explain; it is beautiful - is the mace of Guyana and it was given to Comrade Reepu Daman Persaud and will be given to Mr. Corbin. It is gold; so it is okay. It was designed,

specially, for Guyana's Parliament. It is a replica of our beautiful mace in the Parliament Office. I believe the idea behind it is that all such persons who have served - hopefully, you do not have to wait all that thirty years - will be given this as a representation of that kind of badge of honour. I would like to recognise that this it is really a beautiful thing and so Mr. Corbin, I would now like to find a way to...

*Ms. Teixeira presented token to Mr. Robert Corbin.*

### **Song**

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Thank you Ms. Teixeira. Now we have from the Parliament Office Mr. Dillon Seetram who will be doing a tribute, featuring Mr. Francis Bailey.

*Rendition of song by Mr. Dillon Seetram, featuring Mr. Francis Bailey.*

### **Response from Honorees**

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** An excellent presentation, Mr. Dillon Seetram.

Now to the two honorees, I will allow you the opportunity to respond very briefly. You can tell us, in your way, how you are able to arrive at the point where we are.

It is my pleasure to invite honourable Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud.

**Mr. Reepu Daman Persaud:** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Robert Corbin, friends. I once made a speech in the National Assembly and the person who replied to me was Attorney General Dr. Mohammad Shahabuddeen. Do you know what his comments were to me? He said, "Reepu, you will know when to start but you do not know when to be done." That was his advice and I am following it up to now.

As you know the person who deserves all the praise today is the Speaker. When he called me and he spoke with me about this matter, I said that it is a good idea, people are remembering their colleagues, and it would go a far way and the function is here because of the Speaker. He summoned it; he asked us to meet and I am sure he used others for the committee, but it was his initiative.

As you know, I have been hearing a thing recently; things are not too pleasant in the Parliament. I want to say one word. When I look this afternoon and I observed people from varying parties speaking friendly and cordially, hugging and kissing, and loving, I say Guyana has all the potentials, all the materials to give us unity, harmony and love. You must reserve - Mr. Corbin and I should reserve - not doing what you should not do, to live good, be friendly with each other and follow the principles of all religions truth, [*inaudible*]. God bless. You do enjoy your evening. Thank you all. [*Applause*]

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Thank you very much Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud. We will surely miss you in the National Assembly, as was stated before. Now I have the honour to invite the honourable Mr. Corbin.

**Mr. Robert Corbin:** Thank you very much Madam. Chairperson, Hon. Speaker, Ministers of Government, special invitees, Members of Parliament. As you know, our days for speaking are over and therefore you forgive me if I break tradition and do not have to ask for an extension of time on this occasion. I would like to just use this occasion to say thank you to everyone, the Speaker, all of you Members of Parliament, who thought of and considered it important to hold this occasion for my good friend Reepu Daman Persaud and I this afternoon.

Reepu and I have shared many years in this National Assembly, ding-dong debates, but as Ms. Teixeira said that when we got out of the Chamber we always got on quite well until we came to discuss the issues at hand. I would like to see that in the future of the Parliament we bear that in mind that we are here to promote the welfare of the people of Guyana, and even if we should have differences of opinion, if we hold through to that objective, together we should find consensus.

I would like to also thank those Members of staff who have guided me. I glanced in the corner and I saw - he is somewhere around; I do not know where he disappears to - Mr. Frank Narain. I am sure I saw him somewhere. I want to say thank you to him. He is now the former Clerk of the National Assembly who is probably the longest serving Clerk in the history of the Commonwealth. It is in the world. I am guided.

Mr. Frank Narain, who many people do not recognise, I believe should be commissioned to write something about the history of this Parliament. I see him there quietly, but he gave us quite a lot

of guidance in the early years when we came to this Parliament before we became knowledgeable on many things. I would like to thank all the subsequent Speakers - Mr. Sase Narain, Mr. Derek Jagan, Mr. Winslow Zephyr and also the most recent, Mr. *Ralph Ramkarran* - who have all been very patient, even when sometimes we have breached the codes. I would like to thank also our families who made it possible for us to spend those numbers of years in public life at great personal sacrifice and risk. So I would like to place on record my dear appreciation to my wife Carol who was warned by Mr. Burnham, the late leader, on the night of our wedding that she must remember that she was marrying a man, who whenever would be missing, would be giving service to the people of Guyana. I thank her for being so understanding over the years of my service to the people of Guyana. I have no such excuse now, my dear. I want to thank my family and to thank all those who have helped us. To the staff of the Parliament Office, generally, I want to assure that there are more words in store for you when we meet at that occasion which I promised.

Thank you very much everybody and I really do appreciate it. I shall never forget this afternoon. Thank you again. [*Applause*]

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Thank you Mr. Corbin for your wise words and counsel. Ladies and gentlemen, may I invite you to give the two honorees a round of applause. Can I endorse with a hip hip! Hurrah? One, two three, hip hip!

**Guests:** Hurrah.

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Hip hip!

**Guests:** Hurrah.

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Hip hip!

**Guests:** Hurrah.

**Mrs. Chandrapal:** Thank you very much. I would now like to formally bring this part of the ceremony to a close and to invite all of you to partake in the refreshments that have been provided for all of you. Also I want to thank all those who are present here today. Good evening.

*End of ceremony.*

