

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
[VOLUME 7]

**PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE THIRD PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE
CONSTITUTION OF GUYANA**

90th Sitting

2 p.m.

Friday, 12th March, 1976

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Speaker

Cde. Sase Narain, O.R., J.P., Speaker

Members of the Government – People’s National Congress (49)

Prime Minister (1)

Cde. L.F.S. Burnham, O.E., S.C.,
Prime Minister

(Absent)

Deputy Prime Minister (1)

Cde. P.A. Reid,
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Development

Senior Ministers (9)

Cde. H.D. Hoyte, S.C.,
Minister of Economic Development

*Cde. H. Green,
Minister of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

(Absent)

***Non-elected Minister**

*Cde. H.O. Jack,
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources

*Cde. F.E. Hope,
Minister of Finance

*Cde. S.S. Naraine, A.A.,
Minister of Works and Housing

*Cde. G.A. King,
Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection

*Cde. G.B. Kennard, C.C.H.,
Minister of Agriculture

*Cde. C.L. Baird,
Minister of Education and Social Development

*Cde. F.R. Wills, S.C.,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice

Ministers (5)

Cde. W.G. Carrington,
Minister of Labour

Cde. S.M. Field-Ridley,
Minister of Information and Culture

Cde. B. Ramsaroop,
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House

*Cde. O.M.R. Harper,
Minister of Health

*Cde. C.V. Mingo,
Minister of Home Affairs

Ministers of State (9)

Cde. M. Kasim, A.A.,
Minister of State for Agriculture

Cde. O.E. Clarke,
Minister of State – Regional (East Berbice/Corentyne)

***Non-elected Ministers**

Cde. P. Duncan, J.P.,
Minister of State – Regional (Rupununi) **(Absent)**

Cde. C.A. Nascimento,
Minister of State, Office of the Prime Minister

Cde. M. Zaheeruddeen, J.P.,
Minister of State – Regional
(Essequibo Coast/West Demerara)

Cde. K.B. Bancroft,
Minister of State – Regional
(Mazaruni/Potaro)

*Cde. W. Haynes,
Minister of State for Consumer Protection

*Cde. A. Salim,
Minister of State – Regional
(East Demerara/West Coast Berbice)

*Cde. F.U.A. Carmichael,
Minister of State – Regional (North West)

Parliamentary Secretaries (8)

Cde. J.R. Thomas,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of National Development

Cde. C.E. Wrights, J.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Works and Housing

Cde, M.M. Ackman, C.C.H.
Parliamentary Secretary,
Office of the Prime Minister, and Government Chief Whip

Cde. E.L. Ambrose,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture

Cde. S. Prashad,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Co-operatives and National Mobilisation

***Non-elected Ministers**

Cde. J.P. Chowritmootoo,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Education and Social Development

Cde. R.H.O. Corbin,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Office of the Prime Minister

Cde. M. Corrica,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Works and Housing

Deputy Speaker (1)

Cde. R.C. Van Sluytman, Deputy Speaker

Other Members (15)

Cde. L.M. Branco
Cde. E.H.A. Fowler
Cde. J. Gill
Cde. W. Hussain
Cde. S. Jaiserrisingh
Cde. K.M.E. Jonas
Cde. M. Nissar
Cde. L.E. Ramsahoye
Cde. J.G. Ramson
Cde. P.A. Rayman
Cde. E.M. Stoby, J.P.
Cde. C. Sukhu, M.S., J.P.
Cde. C. Sukul, J.P.
Cde. H.A. Taylor
Cde. L.E. Willems

Members of the Opposition – Liberator Party (2)

Mr. M.F. Singh, Leader of the Opposition
Mrs. E. DaSilva

OFFICERS

Clerk of the National Assembly – F.A Narain

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly – M.B. Henry, AMBIM.

12.3.76

National Assembly

2.05 – 2.15 p.m.

2.05 p.m.

PRAYERS

MOTIONS

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO.23 (3)

Cde. Speaker: Cde. Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: I beg to seek leave under Standing Order 83 to move the suspension of Standing Order 23 so as to move a Motion of condolence to the widow and relatives of the late Joseph Aaron, Member of Parliament.

Cde. Speaker: Leave is granted.

The Prime Minister: I beg to move the suspension of the Standing Order.

Cde. Speaker: Cde. Prime Minister. Leave is granted, you may proceed.

DEATH OF CDE J.N. AARON

“Be it resolved that this National Assembly records its deep regret at the death of Cde. Joseph Nathaniel Aaron, Member of Parliament, and pays tribute to the service which he rendered and directs that an expression of its sympathy be conveyed to his sorrowing widow, children and other relatives.” [**The Prime Minister**]

The Prime Minister: Cde. Speaker, you will forgive me. I was a little unsure whether you did not have to out the Motion for the suspension.

Cde. Speaker, it was about 47½ hours ago that I spoke to the late Cde. Joseph Aaron, Member of Parliament about a number of matters which pertained to the Party organisation, and then about three hours after, I spoke to the Cde. General Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister about certain arrangements we were going to make hopefully so as to fully extend some of his energies. Then, about half past ten night before last, while I was at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the

People's National Congress, my phone rang and the Chief Whip came over afterwards and whispered into my ear that Cde. Aaron was dead. I was severely shaken and I was shocked.

After I got over my shock, like those who feel helpless in the face of death, I felt angered that death should have struck a friend, a colleague, and a comrade of mine with so little, if any warning. I sought something finite against which to direct my anger and I thought of the idiot who left his truck parked on a highway unlit. Upon more careful reflection, neither railing at death nor being angry with one who is as careless as was the owner and driver of that truck could bring back a dear friend.

He died when he was about 47½ years old, an age which, even in Guyana, is considered young. I had known him for well over 20 years. He had been my political colleague and my friend during that period. He was not a polished gem who had been through Academia. He was not one who learned affection for his fellow workers out of books. He was a rough hewn stone. He was educated in the school of life. His dedication to the cause of the worker, the little man, came out of experience and a gut feeling. He was a man of strong friendships towards those who with him sought to promote the cause, and of equally strong hostility towards those who stood in the way of the advancement of the movement.

His loyalty was inflexible and undying. I recall the days when my own political fortunes and those of the People's National Congress were at the lowest ebb. He continued to believe. He continued to fight when at the time there seemed on the horizon no hope for the material success of the group to which he voluntarily belonged. He was a fine man though he was not an angel, for angels are impossible to find on this planet. There are others who might have known him for a shorter time than I but I think they will all attest to his high intelligence, his absence of hypocrisy and diplomacy, his sincerity and his manliness.

We are told that there is a time to be born and a time to die, but, Cde. Speaker, we ask ourselves why the time of a young man should come to die before he has, so to speak, fulfilled his mission. Those who are religious will say that we shall meet again in heaven but since many of us are not anxious to die in a hurry, it will be a long time before we meet. The only consolation I can find at the moment is not the consolation which John Donne found when he

said: “Death, thou shalt die.” That was an empty boast. The only consolation I can find at this moment is that our late Cde. Joseph Aaron left behind a memory and a story of how an ordinary man, a worker, could fight for the cause of socialism and the upliftment of his people against fearful odds. And, perhaps, he was lucky enough to see on the threshold what he fought for, for over 20 years.

On behalf of the People’s National Congress Members of this Parliament, Cde. Speaker, I should like to ask first of all that we show our regret at his passing, not merely our regret but our deep regret, put on record our recognition of the services which he has rendered to the Parliament, to the Party, to the country, to the working class, and that we forward our expression of sympathy to the sorrowing widow, children, and other relatives of our now departed Cde. Joseph Nathaniel Aaron.

2.15 p.m.

Cde. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Singh): Mr. Speaker, I would like to associate myself and, indeed, associate my Party and this side of the House with the sentiments expressed by the Hon. Prime Minister. I have known Mr. Aaron in this National Assembly as a young, vibrant and forceful member, never afraid to speak up with the courage of his convictions. To have had his life out short so suddenly and under such tragic circumstances is, indeed, very heart rending. We in the United Force, we on this side of the House would like to support the Hon. Prime Minister’s resolution and would like especially to tender to his sorrowing widow, his children and his other relatives our very deepest sympathy.

Cde. Speaker: Comrades and Hon. Members, I too would like to associate myself with the remarks you have made. I, perhaps, will miss him much more than any one of you, for he has always relieved the seriousness of the contributions with a levity which only I can appreciate while sitting here all the time and listening to such serious discussions. I will sorely miss him and as a mark of your indications of the Motion which I will now put. I will ask you to rise for one minute’s silence. The Motion is:

“That this National Assembly records its deep regret at the death of Cde. Joseph Nathaniel Aaron, Member of Parliament, and pays tribute to the service which he rendered and directs that an expression of its sympathy be conveyed to his sorrowing widow, children and other relatives.”

All persons present stood and observed one minute’s silence

Motion carried.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT

Cde. Speaker: Comrades and Hon. Members, we are meeting here at this time, as we determined by the President by an Order which was made on the 12th February, 1976 and published in the Gazette on the 14th February, 1976, for the purpose of electing a President of Guyana. Only one candidate, Cde. Arthur Chung, has been nominated, in his case for re-election as President. As required by the Constitution, his Nomination Paper was duly signed by him and by more than three elected Members of the Assembly. In fact, six persons signed. The Nomination Paper was delivered to me on the 21st February, 1976 and the particulars were published in the Gazette on the 28th February, 1976.

The Assembly will now, therefore, proceed to elect a President by secret ballot. I have had thirty – nine ballot papers prepared, one for each elected Member of the Assembly as each elected Member is entitled to a single vote. However, as we have unfortunately lost a Member by sudden death, by accident, only thirty-eight ballot papers will be made available. Each elected Member will mark on his ballot paper an X as appropriate, fold the ballot paper and, as his name is called, drop the folded ballot paper in the glass jar which will be taken around. The ballot papers will now be distributed to the elected Members present.

[Ballots papers distributed]

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2.25 p.m.

Cde. Speaker: The ballot papers have been distributed. Cde. Clerk please call the Members' names.

[At this stage names were called and Hon. Members cast their ballots.]

Cde Speaker: The Clerk and the Deputy Clerk will now separate the ballot papers as necessary. **[Applause]**

Comrades and Hon. Members, 37 ballot papers were distributed and 37 votes were cast. All 37 elected members have voted in favour of the candidate nominated, Cde Arthur Chung. **[Applause]**

As Cde. Arthur Chung has received the votes of more than half of all the elected members of the National Assembly, indeed he has received all the votes of the elected members of the National Assembly, I have great pleasure in declaring the said Cde Arthur Chung to be duly elected by the National Assembly in accordance with Article 30 of the Constitution, to be the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

Cde. Leader of the House we will take the suspension now. The sitting of the House is suspended until His Excellency the Cde. President arrives.

Sitting suspended at 2.32 p.m.

2.55 p.m.

On resumption –

The President-elect and his wife escorted by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition entered the Chamber.

The Oath of Office administered to his Excellency the President by the Chancellor.

Their Excellencies the President and Cde. Doreen Chung took their places on the dais on the Right and Left, respectively of the Speaker.

Cde Speaker: Cde President, as presiding officer of the House I wish to exercise the privilege of speaking first and of expressing on behalf of all the Members of Parliament our pleasure and warm satisfaction at your re-election as President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

[Applause]

The five years since your first installation have passed all too quickly. They have been full and eventful years, years in which this country has embarked on the fundamental structural reforms of building a socialist society out of the unhappy legacy of the colonial past.

During this period years has been a threefold responsibility. As the first President of the Republic of Guyana it has been your task to project into the minds of our people the meaning of a Head of State who derived for the first time from within our own society and which exemplified in a concrete way that the highest office in the land was within the reach of any of our citizens.

But your second responsibility has been even more onerous. It was to ensure that the office of President symbolized, above those differences which are a natural part of any society, our oneness as a nation and our national unity.

A third responsibility which you have discharged with excellence is that of being an Ambassador of this country to the Governments and peoples of other countries. Here I wish to recall our satisfaction at the remarkable way in which you projected the aspirations and objectives of the people of Guyana during your visit to the Republic of India and the United Kingdom last year. **[Applause]** All these tasks you have discharged with distinction and in all of them you been ably assisted and supported by your charming wife, our First Lady.

On behalf of all Members of Parliament I wish to convey to you an expression of our happiness and to say that we look forward with pleasure working again with you in the period ahead. **[Applause]**

Cde Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Cde. President, Cde Speaker, may I, on behalf of the People's National Congress Members of this House, on behalf of the People's National Congress, and on behalf of the overwhelming majority of citizens of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, congratulate you upon your unanimous election as President of our Republic for a second term.

On this occasion, quite unlike the former one, there was no guessing or speculation. For, as you are aware, Cde. President, yours was the only name that was put on the ballot paper and it was a mere formality to ensure that the majority of those present and entitled to vote did so positively and in your favour. That too was a foregone conclusion.

If I may, with humility would observe, Cde. President, that I have known you and your better half for many years as a magistrate – in fact, as a student, practitioner, magistrate, a Registrar, a Judge of the Supreme Court, and then more recently as President. Throughout the period of our acquaintanceship, I wish to say that you have not changed. You have throughout the years – and the rest of the nation has noted it during the last six years – always behaved and conducted yourself with a quiet dignity.

It has been remarked that you have been on official state visits in recent times. That means, metaphorically, that you have walked with kings, but yet the common touch and solitude for the little man have remained very much a part of your philosophy, your way of life and your outward conduct.

It is sometimes assumed that a constitutional President has little or nothing to do except to act on advice and to officiate on formal occasions such as those attendant upon the presentation of credentials by representatives of foreign countries. But may I state for the benefit of the public particularly that a constitutional President, if he is to carry out his duties as efficiently and effectively as you have done over the past six years, has got to be *au fait* with everything of importance that is transpiring, has got on occasions to exercise a quiet type of diplomacy within and without the Republic, has got very frequently because of the objectivity which he can bring to bear to a given situation, to advise his chief executive the Prime Minister on certain facts which might have eluded the latter. If he is, as you have been, to be a good

President, he has got to assist from the fund of his knowledge and experience his Prime Minister by bringing very frequently a new point of view to the consideration of a particular subject. You know, Cde. President, that particularly within the last year or so how frequently your Prime Minister has been the grateful recipient of that type of advice.

3.05 p.m.

Your unanimous election today is proof, material and real of the acceptance of you as Head of State and the mature judgment of the people's representatives that you are the best person and you are most suited to carry on in that high office during the ensuing period. As has been remarked by the Cde. Speaker, you have presided over this Republic during a special period. Without attempting to question the judgment of the Cde. Speaker, I would say that you have presided over the Republic during a period not merely of reform but a period of revolutionary changes leading on eventually to the achievement of socialism in this country.

I have had the advantage of conversing with you, Cde. President, more frequently than many others and I know how near and dear to your heart is the establishment of a just, social system where the little man becomes a real man and where discrimination and exploitation cease.

For you, Cde. President, perhaps it has been an even more difficult time than it has been for me, because some of the old die-hards, as a result of the fortuitous circumstance that your official residence is identical with the former residence of the colonial governor, feel that to you they should entrust their fears about a system which seeks to bring justice to our people. And, I have noted with deep appreciation the way you have been able to turn them off and in some cases to convert them. May your process of conversion long continue. Congratulations!
[Applause]

Cde Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, Mr. President, it gives me very great pleasure today to extend our sincere congratulations on this side of the House and, indeed, the congratulations of my party, the United Force – **[Applause]** – on the occasion of your re-election to the high office of President of the Republic of Guyana. You have been our President for the

last six years. As our Head of State you have carried out your duties with a quiet dignity and dedication, and in your own inimitable manner you have endeared yourself to all our Guyanese people. And, I can assure you, Mr. President, that your dear lady with her ever-radiant smile has also endeared herself to all our people. **[Applause]** I am sure that she has been a very valuable partner to you in your sterling contribution to our young Guyanese nation. I would like to ask Almighty God to give you both the strength, the fortitude, the courage and the dedication, even in the face of obstacles, to make your second six-year term of office a memorable and a truly revolutionary one. **[Members: “Hear, hear!”]** You will note, Mr. President, that I said a truly revolutionary one. **[Applause]** Really and truly revolutionary. Perhaps not the pseudo revolutionary one we have been hearing about. Mr. President, we would like to ask Almighty God to bless you, your dear wife and, indeed, all the people of Guyana.

President Chung: Cde Speaker, Cde Prime Minister, Cde Chancellor, Cde Ministers, Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corps, Leader of the Opposition, Distinguished Guests and Comrades all:

I am profoundly grateful for the generous remarks made in your name by those who have spoken before me on this historic occasion of my inauguration for the second time as your President. I accept, with the greatest humility, the great honour which you have bestowed upon me. The goodwill and enthusiasm which this Honourable House has shown in re-electing me reflect a conviction on your part that my performance in the past has merited your continued confidence. For this, and for the many courtesies which you have extended to me and my wife over the past six years, I wish to thank you, as I do now, in all sincerity. I interpret the events of today as an indication of your willingness to continue your co-operation with us for a longer period.

I am particularly grateful to the Cde. Prime Minister not only for the kind sentiments he has expressed on this occasion, but for the consideration he has at all times shown me and my family throughout the term of office which has just concluded.

I have always looked forward to his visits from time to time. These have served to ensure that I was kept apprised of all the many activities of the Government. In this way I was able to

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enter into the joys of success as well as share the apprehensions and disappointments of the dark moments. I was able to see the unfolding picture of a country emerging from decades of an economic obscurity and poverty into one which holds the promise of a prosperous future for its people. I was able to witness at work and further appreciate the immense gift for constructive leadership of the Prime Minister whose inspiration and dedication have been largely responsible for the forward strides which Guyana has made. **[Applause]**

3.15 p.m.

I assure you that it was a great honour and privilege for me to serve Guyana in the capacity of President, and especially as the first President of the world's only Co-operative Republic – **[Applause]** – an infinitely greater honour has it been, Cde Speaker, to have served at a period which is undoubtedly one of considerable significance and importance in the life of our young nation.

It is clear that there have been notable changes in Guyana since the Republic came into being. One characteristic of life in the previous era was a pathetic eagerness to look outwards for ideas and inspiration, and to swiftly reject anything which emanated from within. The reliance of our people upon overseas sources for both material and abstract benefits was total. It is unnecessary to recount the measures by which this and other retarding attitudes have been corrected. Suffice it to say that the events of the past six years have instilled a fresh faith and lent a new confidence to our people, providing the levers to achievement, and engineering a spirit of pride in the outstanding results of the national effort.

The high values which we in Guyana place upon the dignity and rights of every person have dictated our thinking and actions, and have led to the adoption of co-operative socialism as our way of life. In the face of clear indications of endorsement by the Guyanese people, we have begun to institute those changes and adjustments which are relevant and appropriate to the establishment of this system. Life in Guyana cannot be the same again, but will be on a higher and richer plane and more in consonance with the religious beliefs which many of us profess.

I enjoyed the privileged position in 1971 and, again, in 1974 when I signed the Orders nationalizing the assets of the two foreign-owned bauxite companies. **[Applause]** My earliest contacts with those concerns were in the role of surveyor. Like many others, I was overawed by the magnitude of their outlay and operations. Like many others, I observed a lurking sense of insecurity and the absence of a spirit of pride on the part of workers. The wind of change which affects the conditions of men and nations everywhere has swept out the old and installed the new. Fundamental changes in every nation have drawn varying reactions from the peoples concerned, but our determination to control our own resources has met with the approval and acclaim of our entire population.

Many of the problems and the tensions which form part of life for a small nation like Guyana will disappear when the other half of the world recognizes the right of even the smallest nation to choose its own way of life. **[Applause]** I firmly believe that this day will come before long. Cde. Speaker, my term of office has also seen substantial improvements and developments in a large number of fields.

In education, teacher-training facilities have increased, more and better schools have been built providing for a wider range of abilities and better related to the needs of the community. Basic text books are being supplied free of cost and tuition up to university level will be free from the next school year. Higher and technical education has been further subsidized in that the salaries of serving Government personnel are paid to them in full while they are undergoing whole-time studies.

In the field of housing, people and Government working together have been able to achieve spectacular results in some parts of the country.

In agriculture, there has been a great increase in production, and the Government itself has entered into some fields with a view to stimulating production and enhancing the possibility of the early establishment of agro-based industries.

New and improved roads have enabled people to push more deeply into remote areas; electricity services have followed quickly and life for the small man has changed rapidly. We

have also begun to possess our hinterland more obtrusively than in the past. I must make reference to my hope that the Guyana National Service would in time become a great landmark and asset. **[Applause]** Calm and stability have prevailed and having been at peace with our neighbours, we have been able to turn most of our resources into productive channels.

I will not easily forget the deep sense of national pride I experienced at the holding of the historic Non-Aligned Conference in Georgetown, nor the excitement of Carifesta.

I managed to survive the rigors of that system of procedures and restrictions which is known internationally as protocol. Despite its many irritations, it has stood the test of time and I believe serves the useful purpose of teaching the value of good order and discipline. You will no doubt agree that these are necessary in our society, especially at this period of transition.

It might also interest you to learn that in my endeavour to perform my duties well as a constitutional Head of State, I have found it useful to draw up a list of Do's and Don'ts. Among the Do's is one which reads, "Remember that you are not a politician." **[Laughter]** I believe I have successfully resisted the temptation to use the many excellent opportunities I have had for breaching this rule. I have also succeeded in toning down what I have had to say accordingly.

The story is however different with another of my Do's, that which says, "Remember to forget that you are no longer a judge." The Cde. Attorney General will perhaps tell you how delinquent I have been in this, although I rather suspect he would now prefer if I continued in my erring ways. There are also a number of Don'ts on widely varying subjects, including one which reminds me that progressive as the Guyanese people have always been, they are not yet at the stage of sympathizing with a corpulent President. My wife, of course, may have her own list. **[Laughter]**

Cde. Speaker, Cde. Prime Minister, Cde. Ministers, and legislators, the spirit of patriotism and service within you, your special ambitions for Guyana, and the many needs of the country, have impelled you to dedicate your abilities, your ideas and your unflagging energies to the service of our people in the accomplishment of a worthy, though formidable task, the task of

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ensuring the territorial integrity, the progress, and the prosperity of Guyana, and we realize that your personal sacrifices are tremendous.

The high degree of your dedication has fortified us in our hopes for ultimate success. Our admiration for your endeavours and our gratitude are unbounded. May you derive the strength to continue from the wells of inspiration which often lie beside the thorny paths of those who seek liberation, freedom, and true independence. The new Guyana which you have dreamed of lies in the distance before us. Let us enter her portals in unity, understanding, and peace.

Cde. Speaker, there remains little more which I should like to add at this time, except to commend you personally for your faithful public and social services.

3.25 p.m.

These your countrymen have recognised, witness the high honour which has been conferred upon you and which you richly deserve. Before closing, I should like to acknowledge the expressions of goodwill received from comrades within and beyond this House for which I am extremely grateful. I thank our distinguished learned Chancellor for swearing me in, and those of you who are not members of the House for your presence here today.

I wish you success in all your endeavours on behalf of our nation and people. I ask for your continued prayers for the well-being and prosperity of Guyana. **[Applause]**

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved: “That this Assembly do now adjourn to Thursday, 18th March, 1976 at 2 p.m.
[The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Leader of the House]

Adjourned accordingly at 3.25 p.m.
