

National Assembly Debates

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2006-2009) OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT CHAMBER, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, BRICKDAM, GEORGETOWN

PART I

97th Sitting

14:00H

Thursday 6 August 2009

SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (1)

The Hon Hari N Ramkarran SC, MP

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (41)

(i) *People's Progressive Party/Civic (40)*

(ii) *The United Force (1)*

The Hon Samuel A A Hinds MP (AOL)

(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)

Prime Minister and Minister of

Public Works and Communications

The Hon Clement J Rohee MP

Minister of Home Affairs

The Hon Shaik K Z Baksh MP (Absent)

Minister of Education

The Hon Dr Leslie S Ramsammy MP

(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)

Minister of Health

The Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett MP

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

(R# 9 - U Takutu/U Essequibo)

Minister of Foreign Affairs

¹The Hon Dr Ashni Singh MP

Minister of Finance

The Hon Robert M Persaud MP

(R# 6 - E Berbice/Corentyne)

Minister of Agriculture

The Hon Dr Jennifer R A Westford MP

(R#7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)

Minister of the Public Service

The Hon Kellawan Lall MP

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development

*The Hon Charles R Ramson SC, MP

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

The Hon Dr Frank CS Anthony MP

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

The Hon B H Robeson Benn MP

Minister of Transport and Hydraulics

²The Hon Manzoor Nadir MP

Minister of Labour

The Hon Priya D Manickchand MP (AOL)

(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)

Minister of Human Services and Social Security

The Hon Dr Desrey Fox MP

Minister in the Ministry of Education

The Hon Bheri S Ramsaran MD, MP

Minister in the Ministry of Health

The Hon Jennifer I Webster MP

Minister in the Ministry of Finance

The Hon Manniram Prashad MP (AOL)

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

*The Hon Pauline R Sukhai MP (AOL)

¹ *Non-elected Minister*

² *Elected Member from TUF*

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Minister of Amerindian Affairs

Mr Mohamed Irfaan Ali MP

Minister of Housing and Water

Mr Donald Ramotar MP

Ms Gail Teixeira MP

Mr Harripersaud Nokta MP

Mrs Indranie Chandarpal MP

Chief Whip

Ms Bibi S Shadick MP

(R# 3 – Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Mr Albert Atkinson JP, MP

(R# 8 - Potaro/Siparuni)

Mr Komal Chand CCH, JP, MP

(R# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Mr Bernard C DeSantos SC, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mrs Shirley V Edwards JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Mohamed F Khan JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Mr Moses V Nagamootoo JP, MP *(Absent)*

Mr Mohabir A Nandlall MP

Mr Odinga N Lumumba MP *(AOL)*

Mr Neendkumar JP, MP

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

³Mr Steve P Ninvalle MP

Parl’y Sect’ry in the Min. of Culture, Youth and Sport

Mr Parmanand P Persaud JP, MP

(R# 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Mrs Philomena Sahoye-Shury CCH, JP, MP

Parl’y Sect’ry in the Ministry of Housing and Water

³ *Non-elected Member*

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Mr Dharamkumar Seeraj MP

Mr Norman A Whittaker MP

(R# 1 - Barima/Waini)

Dr Vishwa Deva Budhram Mahadeo MP

Rev Kwame Gilbert MP

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (28)

(i) People's National Congress Reform 1-Guyana (22)

Mr Robert HO Corbin *(Absent)*

Leader of the Opposition

Mr Winston S Murray CCH, MP *(AOL)*

Mrs Clarissa S Riehl MP *(Absent)*

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

Mr E Lance Carberry MP *(Absent)*

Chief Whip

Mrs. Deborah J. Backer MP *(Absent)*

Mr Anthony Vieira MP *(Absent)*

Mr Basil Williams MP *(Absent)*

Dr George A Norton MP *(Absent)*

Mrs Volda A Lawrence MP *(Absent)*

Mr Keith Scott MP *(Absent)*

Miss Amna Ally MP *(Absent)*

Ms Cheryl Sampson MP *(Absent)*

Mr Dave Danny MP *(Absent)*

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Aubrey C Norton MP *(Absent)*

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr Ernest B Elliot MP *(Absent)*

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Miss Judith David-Blair MP *(Absent)*

(R# 7 - Cuyuni/Mazaruni)

Mr Mervyn Williams MP *(Absent)*

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

(Re# 3 - Essequibo Is/W Demerara)

Ms Africo Selman MP *(Absent)*

Dr John Austin MP *(Absent)*

(R# 6 - East Berbice/Corentyne)

Ms Jennifer Wade MP *(Absent)*

(R# 5 - Mahaica/Berbice)

Ms Vanessa Kissoon MP *(Absent)*

(R# 10 - U Demerara/U Berbice)

Mr Desmond Fernandes MP *(Absent)*

(Region No 1 – Barima/Waini)

(ii) Alliance For Change (5)

Mr Raphael GC Trotman MP *(AOL)*

Mr Khemraj Ramjattan MP *(AOL)*

Mrs Sheila VA Holder MP *(AOL)*

Ms Latchmin B Punalall MP *(AOL)*

(R# 4 - Demerara/Mahaica)

Mr David Patterson MP *(AOL)*

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

Mr Everall N Franklin MP *(Absent)*

OFFICERS (2)

Mr Sherlock E Isaacs

Clerk of the National Assembly

Mrs Lilawatie Coonjah

Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

PRAYERS

[The Clerk reads the Prayer]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Late Start of the National Assembly

Honourable Members, I apologise for the late start this afternoon. This was due to some housekeeping matters of an urgent nature which had to be resolved before I come out to the Chair. Thank you.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

By the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development (Chairman of the Special Select

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009
Committee on the Local Government Commission Bill
2009 - Bill No. 22/2009)

*Report of a Special Select Committee on Local
Government Commissions Bill 2009 - Bill No.
22/2009*

**MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS
OR SITTINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY AND
MOVED BY A MINISTER**

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 57 (2)

By the *Minister of Home Affairs*

BE IT RESOLVED:

*That Standing Order
No. 57 (2) be, was and is
deemed to have been*

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

suspended with effect from and including 30th July, 2009, and that the Second Reading and remaining stages of the Local Authorities (Elections) (Amendment Bill 2009 - Bill No. 21 of 2009 on the said 30th July 2009, was duly passed in compliance with this Standing Order;

**BE IT FURTHER
RESOLVED:**

That suspension of the aforesaid Standing Order No. 57 (2) remains in effect up to and including 6th August, 2009, to enable the Second Reading and remaining stages of the Local Government Commission Bill 2009 - Bill No. 22/2009, to be passed in compliance

PUBLIC BUSINESS

(i) GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS - Second Reading

**ITEM 1 - ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE
(NO. 2) BILL -Bill No. 32/2009**

Published on 2009-07-08

*A Bill intituled, an
Act to amend the Summary
Jurisdiction (Offences) Act
and the Motor Vehicles and
Road Traffic Act to extend
and specify the meaning of*

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

*property and increase the
penalty for damage to
property*

The Speaker: Honourable Members, we can now proceed with the Second reading of the Administration of Justice (No. 2) Bill - Bill No. 2/2009, published on the 8th July, 2009.

The Honourable Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

Hon Charles C Ramson: Cde Speaker. I am glad that the opportunity has arisen finally for this little effort to be completed, but with your leave, Cde Speaker, I wish you would permit me this opportunity, albeit unscheduled and uninvited, to contribute to the recent spate of pronouncements on the relevance of one or other of the Standing Orders relating to Motions in this our National Assembly.

I find this necessary in the light of some level of obfuscation emanating from various pieces of oral and written communications, and as the constitutionally regarded principal legal advisor to the Government, of which I am part, I wish to lend my voice to that spate.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

On Thursday, 30th July last, we witnessed a most unfortunate episode following Your Honour's ruling on a Motion to suspend the business of this House, purportedly on a definite matter of urgent public importance, as is in relation to Standing Order No. 12. Your ruling is now history, and I daresay correct, for the reasons advanced by you. I later drew to your attention Standing Order No. 26, which deals with a Motion's admissibility, a *sine qua non* for any debate upon its substantive contents. We lawyers would recognise that there is a bifurcation of the process or procedure before certain things are done procedurally or accepted procedurally.

The episode itself was unfortunate in that it was characterized by demeaning petulance, which is *serpiginously* becoming the vogue in the context of our conventional adversarial engagements. Cde Speaker, Your Honour's tolerance was stretched to an unprecedented level by the shenanigans of Members of the PNCR-1G, more particularly by the obnoxious peregrinations of Mrs Volda Lawrence, who is a Member of this House, and you will notice I did not call her Honourable on this occasion, unto this side of the House for the purpose of sprinkling a white substance on the floor and on the bench at which we Government MPs sit. Perhaps the time has come for you to implement some measure of penalty for breach of privilege in accordance with Standing Orders 32 and 90.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Cde Speaker, more alarmingly, the Honourable Winston Murray, a lawyer, made an egregious pronouncement in the letter columns of the 1st August 2009, consequent upon your decision to allow the Second reading of the Local Government (Elections) (Amendment) Bill 2009, to which he had raised a rather untutored objection, based on Standing Order No. 103, sub-rule 8.

Cde Speaker, your comprehensive and comprehensible response in those columns on the 5th August last, ought to be added to the training manual for students of Parliamentary procedure. Permit me to endorse your ruling as being not only erudite and impeccable, but one which would withstand microscopic and forensic scrutiny, notwithstanding the belated reference to Standing Order 57(2) in today's letter columns by that honourable gentleman. I can assure you that I have had occasion to deliberate on the language of the Standing Order, and it is certainly permissive and not mandatory, so the procedure that you adopted, albeit somewhat obscure, was nevertheless legitimate.

Perhaps I shall remain, Cde Speaker, a Member of this House for such time that it may return to the halcyon days of the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s, when debate, and I stress the word *debate*, was predicated upon familiarity with the Standing Orders, rather than the fractious and concrescence opinions of a dissolute Opposition, and Cde Speaker, I am reminded of the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

extraordinary perception of Arthur N Schlessinger Jr, when he wrote in his book *A Thousand Days*:

*Some people enjoy the comfort of opinion
without the discomfort of thought.*

Permit me, Cde Speaker, now to proceed to the Administration of Justice Bill (No. 2) in the ordinary course of the House's business, and I wish to say this as part of the Second reading of this Bill. Undoubtedly, we have been experiencing a certain measure of uncontrolled and uncontrollable wanton waste in relation to the use of the roads, and it is that which is the source of the concern that has been resolved by the drafting of these two pieces of legislation or the amendments to two pieces of legislation that are already in existence.

As is said in the Chapeau to the Bill, it is an act to amend the Summary Jurisdiction Offences Act and the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, to extend and specify the meaning of property, and an increase of the penalty for damage to property. There was need to have two amendments, or amendments to two separate Acts, because we are faced with a new set of circumstances which, when these Acts were promulgated, had not been foreseeable.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

First, I wish to deal with Section 2 of the Bill. It says, it relates to Section 61 of the Summary Jurisdiction Offences Act, and the Bill seeks to repeal that Section, and to enact in its place the provisions, which are reflected in the Bill. Perhaps if I were to be permitted to refer to the principal legislation, which is the Summary Jurisdiction Offences Act, Chapter 8:02, a perusal of the contents, the arrangements of sections, would indicate that it is divided into several parts, and the part with which we are concerned here is Title VI, *intituled Malicious Injury to Property*. It begins at Section 47, but we are only concerned with Section 61, and if I would be permitted to read for the benefit of the Assembly Section 61 as already enacted, you would see there is a subtitle called *Supplemental Provisions*. It is called *Supplemental Provisions* because the specifics that were dealt with earlier, it was not possible to have complete itemization beyond what is contained in 47 to 60.

With your leave, Cde Speaker, I will read Section 61 unamended.

Everyone who lawfully and maliciously commits any damage, injury or spoil to or upon any movable or immovable property, either of a public or private nature, for which no punishment is hereinbefore provided, the damage, injury or spoil

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

done, be it an amount not exceeding \$200, shall be liable to a fine of \$150 or to imprisonment for three months.

At first blush, it is obvious that that Section is an anachronism. It is outdated. It would not be useful to maintain it as it is on the statute books, so it is that which has given life to this amendment which is before this Honourable House. In the marginal note to the extant legislation, there is a note which says *injury not specially provided for*. You will see that in the amendment that is being sought, there is a reference to *recovery of damage to property*: that means dealing more specifically with what property is identified in this amended section.

So it identifies, the amendment identifies firstly, what kind of injury or damage, and it further identifies the property by way of a specie, and that specie is itemized as any road, road structure, bridge, walkway, rail, traffic lights installation or equipment, drainage structures including culverts and water supply structures, and if you were to read the entire section, you will see it includes what is already in the existing legislation: *any movable or immovable property, either of a public or private nature*.

So before I go to the penalty that is attached, specifically we would wish to authorise, whether it is by way of police enforcement or by way of the Ministry of

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Works, that the particular items of property identified in the amendment would be amenable to oversight, and we would be able to reach out and collect whatever compensation is necessary for the replacement of the damaged items. So if any damage is done to any of those itemized pieces of property, the fine shall be not less than \$30,000 rather than \$200, rather than \$ 150, but not more than \$50,000, so the fine is between \$30,000 and \$50,000 and to imprisonment for ten months, whereas the current legislation allows for imprisonment only for three months.

So Cde Speaker, we have, as it were, brought it into the 21st century; brought the section from 1954, because the last amendment to that section was in 1954. We have moved it from the mid-20th century to the 21st century, the first decade of the 21st century. And not only should there be a criminal penalty attached; whoever is the person responsible for the damage shall bear the cost of the damage, injury or spoil to that property. Unlike the current legislation, there is no such provision in the current legislation, but the amendment makes provision and captures what this side of the House, that is the Government, wishes to put in place to ensure that there is a little more respect for the various pieces of property that form part of the roadway.

So Cde Speaker, the whole objective is merely to enlarge and specify the areas of concern in the light of

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

the wanton destruction by minibus drivers, motor car drivers, lorries and other users of the road.

It is not much different with respect to Section 3, to Clause 3 of this Bill, which deals with Section 101 of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, save and except, as you will see during my presentation that there is an addition, which removes it from the requirement that there be a commission of an offence. Under Section 61, there must be the commission of an offence, but in the amendment that is presently before the House, or is at present before the House, in Section 101, subsection (1)(a), no offence needs to be proved. I shall deal with subsection (1) secondly.

Section 101(1)(a) reads thus, and this is completely new, as I said:

If by reason of any act or conduct of the owner, a driver of a motor vehicle, any damage is caused to any road, road structure, bridge, walkway, rail, traffic lights installation or equipment or drainage structure, including culverts and water supply structures, the road authority may cause such damage to be made good, and may, either before or after the damage is made good, recover the estimated or actual cost of the damage from the owner or the driver of the motor

vehicle, by use of which the damage was done.

You would have seen, Cde Speaker, that there is no reference to the commission of any offence. You could be completely not guilty of any offence, but in the course of your use of the road, if damage is done to any of those pieces of property, which comprise the environment in and around the roads, you will still be responsible to make good the damage, either before or after the road authority steps in, and the road authority is not the police in this case.

And you would have noticed too, Cde Speaker, that we are not only concerned with the person who actually does the damage; there is the entitlement of the road authority to attach the blame for whatever damage was done to the owner of the vehicle, so it is not a defence to claim by the road authority that he was not driving the vehicle, or he did not actually do the damage. So this section is completely new, and it is to ensure that whatever monies are spent in improving the environment, the environment would be protected by compelling persons to use the road in a manner that would not cause the damage captured by this subsection.

Quite the reverse in Section 101(1), the marginal note for which reads *Recovery of damage to roads, bridges, traffic lights and other structures*, but this is predicated

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

on the commission of an offence, as in Section 61 of the Summary Jurisdiction Offences Act, and it reads thus:

If by reason of an offence against this Act, any damage is caused to any road, road structure, bridge, walkway, rail, traffic lights installation or equipment, or drainage structure, including culverts and water supply structures, the road authority may cause such damage to be made good, and may either before or after the damage is made good, recover the estimated or actual cost thereof from the owner or driver of the motor vehicle by the use of which the offence was committed.

And it may be pertinent at this stage for me to read the corresponding and actual extant legislation or legislative provision. What I read to you was the proposed amendment. Now the extant legislation says this, *recovery of damage to road or bridge*, so it was only in relation to a road or a bridge that any action could be taken by the road authority. It reads thus:

If by reason of an offence against this Act, any injury is caused to any road or bridge, the road authority may cause such injury to be made good, and may, either before or after the injury is made good, recover

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

*the estimated or actual cost thereof from
the owner of the motor vehicle.*

You will see that we have included in the amendment, the proposed amendment, the driver, but the owner... you will see how this is so dated, this current legislation... the legislation that is in existence only envisaged the owner driving the vehicle. The reverse is true generally these days. It is not the owner who drives the vehicle and causes the damage, it is those errant drivers.

So this subsection says that you can recover the cost or estimated or actual cost from the owner of the motor vehicle by the use of which the offence was committed. Well, you still have to prove that an offence was committed in subsection (1), as opposed to subsection 1(a). So it is completely new, this subsection 1(a), to which I referred earlier, and there is not much of a difference, except that there was an expansion of the species of property identified, and which would be caught in the net. Those other itemized pieces being bridge, walkway, rail, traffic lights installation, equipment or drainage structure, including culverts and water supply structures.

So Cde Speaker, that is in essence what it is proposed, or what is the reason for seeking to have this amendment put in place, and that is in effect what is set out in the Explanatory Memorandum, which the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Honourable Members can read for themselves, but I thought that it might be somewhat helpful if I were to take them to the current legislation and the history behind our effort to put in place what would be requisite to ensure that the objective is achieved. I thank you, Cde Speaker. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Honourable Member.

The Honorable Minister of Home Affairs

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker, I rise to support this Bill that is before this Honourable House, in connection with damage to public property under the Administration of Justice Bill (No. 2) Bill of 2009.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works plays very important roles. On the one hand as the Ministry responsible, together with the Guyana Police Force, for enforcement of laws under the Vehicle and Road Traffic Act, and the Ministry of Public Works as the road authority for public roads, et cetera. So that the spirit of this Bill that is before this Honourable House seeks to enhance the roles of these two sister ministries in ensuring that public property is not only protected, and sometimes it is difficult to do so because it is not possible to have a

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

presence whenever an accident takes place that damages public property, but at least to have the requisite legislation in place to take the appropriate action when such damages do take place to the type of public property that is described in this Bill.

If you move around the country, Mr Speaker, in Georgetown, in the city as well as outside of the city, in many parts of the country, where hundreds of pieces of public property could be found, built by the State, the government, and you talk to people, people are very concerned about the wanton destruction of public property as a result of reckless driving, careless driving, drunken driving, because when these properties are damaged, in many instances it affects the residents in the community. And as a result of these residents being affected, because the infrastructure is destroyed and in many cases gone, the residents turn to the administration to fix it or to replace it, and all of this has a cost. Now the question is: why should the administration bear the cost, when the administration was the institution that spent millions of dollars, if not billions, because when you look at the Budget and the amount of money that is spent on roadways, bridges, culverts, billions of dollars, public funds, to put these infrastructures in place, and then all because of reckless driving, careless driving, drunken driving, whatever, these properties are destroyed, and the State now has to turn back to use

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

public funds to repair, in many instances, what it just put in place.

Some of these pieces of infrastructure are not even a year old, and they are destroyed. Nobody turns to anyone else but the State to fix these pieces of public property. They do not turn to the private sector. They do not turn to the NDC or the RDC. They do not turn to the church. No! Whenever the President turns up, Minister of Government, Minister of Finance particularly, he is confronted, or they are confronted with these sorry situations, which in many cases, justifiably so, residents appeal to have them addressed. They were not destroyed by the residents; they were not destroyed by the villagers. Someone from outside the village, and in cases also, someone from inside the village destroyed this thing, which is the collective. And you know in the Constitution, Mr Speaker, there is a provision which gives the people of this country the right to protect public property. That is in the Constitution.

Now, Mr Speaker, it is therefore for justifiable reasons that this Bill is before this House. I do not think this Bill emerged out of someone's figment of imagination, or someone conjuring up a belief that *let us* enhance our Parliamentary agenda by laying this Bill in the House. This is a Bill that has come out of what is happening in our country.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Mr Speaker, we did some research, and what we found is that between 2005 and 2009, over a five-year period, there were eighty-seven reports of damage to public property by motorists. In 2008, there were nineteen instances where motorists damaged public properties and thus far, in 2009, there are nine recorded instances of damage to public property.

I have with me a newspaper clipping, Mr Speaker, of the Guyana Chronicle, Saturday, August 1, where it is reported three friends were killed in an early morning car crash on the East Bank, Providence. It is reported, Mr Speaker, by the police, that at 1:15 in the morning, a group of youths took control of a vehicle after having a few drinks; they went somewhere to play pools, and were returning home when the person who was in control of the wheel slammed into the base of an electric pole on Providence, East Bank Demerara. According to the newspaper report, they had taken the vehicle without the knowledge - one of the boys had taken the vehicle without the knowledge of the father, and as a result of that accident, three persons died. This is as recent as August 1st this year. Well, our sympathies go out to the parents of the deceased; we are sad because three lives have been snuffed out at a very young and tender age. But at the same time, while we sympathize and empathize with the families, I would just wish to make passing reference, not to emphasize too much on the loss of the public property as the key issue, but the lives

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

is much more important. I do not want it to be misconstrued, that I am paying attention to public property and not the lives of individuals, but for the purpose of the discussion, Mr Speaker, I am making a reference to a recent case where, as a result of this accident, public property in the manifestation of an electric pole was damaged.

Now, Mr Speaker, that was one of the most recent of the nine reported cases where public property was damaged in 2009. Nineteen of the incidents reported, Mr Speaker, interestingly, happened or took place between nine in the evening and twelve midnight. The other occurrences, most of the occurrences I should say, were at night, and few during daylight hours. So we see a pattern. We see a pattern.

Mr Speaker, thirty of these damage to public property, or thirty of the eighty-seven reported cases, were described, or could be described as damage accidents; sixteen as minor accidents; two as serious accidents, and three were fatal accidents. In respect to property damaged:

- Twenty-one were GPL lamp poles
- Forty-nine were traffic lights
- Eight were GT&T poles and

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

- Five bridges.

Of the eighty-seven reports, Mr Speaker, in seventy-three of the cases the drivers were charged; in eight of them, the drivers repaired the damaged property that is restitution, sorry, they repaired it themselves, and in five of them, the drivers paid for the repairs. There was one inquest that was ordered by the District Magistrate.

Mr Speaker, the cost, particularly of the traffic lights - a cost to the Government as a result of traffic lights damaged between 2007 and 2009 - \$7.8 million. And of these thirty-six cases, only \$140,000 was the sum that was paid back, restitution so to speak, by persons who damaged public property. So we can see the big difference, which the State has to carry, or the charge which the State has to carry in repairing these damaged traffic lights.

Mr Speaker, I think a clear case has been made out that justifies, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the passage, the support and the passage of this Bill. I think it will put the Ministry of Public Works, under my colleague Minister Robeson Benn, the road authority, and the Ministry of Home Affairs in good stead in ensuring that not only are steps taken to situate these penalties within a legal framework, but to also ensure that the appropriate penalties are levied through the courts, and

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

if possible, through out of court settlements with the offenders to ensure that the State's interest is not only protected, but covered in terms of cost.

I therefore, Mr Speaker, commend this Bill to the House for its approval. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Honourable Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, are there any further comments?

Hon Charles R Ramson: Cde Speaker, in keeping with the protocol of declining, where there has been no serious engagement, adverse engagement of the presentation of this Bill, I would decline to have the last word ...

The Speaker: ... and you ask that the Bill be read a Second time.

Hon Charles R Ramson: ... and I move that the Bill be read a Second time.

The Speaker: Thank you very much, Honourable Member.

Question put, and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009
IN COMMITTEE**

Bill considered and approved

ASSEMBLY RESUMED

**Bill reported without Amendment, read the Third
time and passed as printed**

**ITEM 2 - LOCAL GOVERNMENT
COMMISSION BILL 2009 - Bill No.
22/2009 (published on 2009-06-03)**

*A Bill intituled, an
Act to establish the Local
Government Commission, as
provided for by Article 78A
of the Constitution, to
provide for the
Commission's functions and
procedure; and for
connected and incidental
purposes*

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

The Speaker: Honourable Members, the next item on the Agenda is the Local Government (Commissions) Bill.

Hon Kellawan Lall: I would like to ask for it to be deferred.

The Speaker: I understand this is being deferred, Hon Member, until after the Motion.

Hon Kellawan Lall: Yes, thank you.

Bill Deferred to a later stage in Sitting

MOTIONS

ITEM 3 - 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION

WHEREAS the Members of the National Assembly of the Ninth Parliament of Guyana at this Sitting of the Assembly note that 26 July 2009 marked the 56th Anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Barracks in Cuba, which is regarded as the defining moment of the

*Cuban Revolution that triumphed on 1
January 1959;*

AND WHEREAS over those five decades the Government and people of Cuba have made tremendous strides in the development of their country despite the imposition of the economic embargo by successive United States Administrations;

AND WHEREAS the Government and people of Cuba in spite of daunting constraints have maintained international solidarity with developing countries by continuing to offer development assistance to countries in the Americas, Africa and Asia;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Cuba has rendered consistently valuable assistance to the Government and people of Guyana, over these five decades and more especially since the inception of diplomatic ties with Guyana in 1972, particularly in the areas of tertiary training in education specifically

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

in health; providing highly qualified health care practitioners for over 30 years to Guyana's health care system; the inclusion in "Operation Miracle" of thousands of Guyanese who have benefited from eye surgery and treatment in Cuba; the extension of assistance of medical academic professionals and provision of educational equipment for the UG School of Medicine, and, the provision of expertise, human and technical, and major material resources that have allowed the construction, equipping and operationalising of the four regional hospitals for the benefit of Guyanese;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Guyana has consistently supported calls and actions at all regional and international fora for the cessation of the United States economic embargo on Cuba;

AND WHEREAS in recognition of the recent reversal of the 1962 Resolution which had expelled Cuba from the Organisation of American States (OAS), note is taken that the Government of

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Guyana continues to support full involvement of Cuba in the activities of the community of nations at both the hemispheric and international levels;

AND WHEREAS Guyana and Cuba share common interests and concerns primarily in the areas of sustainable development, economic equity and social justice, equitable trade relations and the concern for the vulnerability of smaller economies;

AND WHEREAS Guyana's call for a New Global Human Order adopted by the United National General Assembly in November 2000 is similar to those adumbrated by the Government of Cuba towards equity and justice;

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly conveys to the Cuban

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

*Government and
people
congratulations on
the 50th Anniversary
of the Revolution;*

**BE IT FURTHER
RESOLVED:**

*That this
National Assembly on
behalf of the
Guyanese people
conveys its deepest
appreciation to the
Government and
people of Cuba for
their sacrifice and
unstinting support
given to our
Government, people
and country over
decades and;*

**BE IT FURTHER
RESOLVED:**

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

*That this
National Assembly,
while being
heartened by
statements made by
President Barack
Obama, encourages
the United States
Administration to
advance efforts to
improve and restore
normal relations with
Cuba.*

The Speaker: We can therefore now move to the Motion on the 50th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution.

The Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs

Hon Carolyn Rodrigues-Birkett: Mr Speaker, it is not very often that we come to the National Assembly to consider a Motion paying tribute to another land. Perhaps this is so, Mr Speaker, because in order to do

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

so, the country must have gained that recognition and importance.

In addition, Mr Speaker, the interests of countries change from time to time; governments change, and so do their policies and interests. In some cases, friendships are short-lived for different reasons altogether. As Lord Palmiston, the English statesman once remarked, Nations have no permanent friends or allies. They only have permanent interests.

Mr Speaker, for Guyana and Cuba, it has been a bit different. Our interests and our friendship have remained the same for decades, notwithstanding the pressures [*Applause*] that were brought to bear. Our friendship is therefore a deep and special one and it has stood the test of time. Notwithstanding the threats that permeated our societies in the 1960s, 1970s and even 1980s, we have stuck together, fighting for the same cause - a just society for our peoples.

Mr Speaker, the PPP/C Government wants to place on record our appreciation and thanks to Cuba for being a friend and indeed a fighter for a just cause, and we feel that today is the appropriate time to do so. I am therefore extremely pleased to present this Motion in my name, on the occasion of the 56th Anniversary of what we can call the defining moment of the Cuban Revolution.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

In doing so, I also want to acknowledge the presence of the Charge d’Affairs of the Embassy of Cuba in Guyana, Mr Pedro Ortega Cardenas. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, the PPP/C is pleased to commemorate, celebrate and associate itself with the - as I mentioned before, the 56th Anniversary of what is considered to be the beginning or that defining moment of the Revolution. As you are aware, Mr Speaker, on July 26, Cuba commemorated the 56th Anniversary of the attack on Moncada Baracks in Santiago de Cuba. The armed attack was carried out by a small group of revolutionaries, led by Fidel Castro. This event has been widely accepted as the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, since notwithstanding its failure to achieve its goal at the said time, it has resulted in international attention and support for the movement led by Fidel Castro in Cuba.

Mr Speaker, Fidel Castro and his men were imprisoned following the attack on Moncada. In 1955, two years later, the mothers of a group of prisoners launched a campaign to free Castro and the other persons imprisoned with him. Also a group of political leaders, editors and intellectuals signed a public appeal demanding, and I quote: *liberty for the political prisoners*. Owing to the mounting pressure, the Cuban Congress passed a Bill granting amnesty to political prisoners. Mr Speaker, the date of the attack on the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Moncada Barracks became the name for Castro's Revolutionary Movement, *Movamento 26 de Julio*, or M26-7, which eventually toppled the government of Batista in 1959.

Mr Speaker, it was during the incarceration of Fidel Castro that he wrote the famous speech titled *History Will Absolve Me*, which later became the platform of the 26th of July Movement, detailing plans for the reform of Cuba. Such is the man, Mr Speaker that even being imprisoned did not distract him from planning the reforms for his country.

Mr Speaker, the 26th of July Movement was re-organised in Mexico in 1955 by a group of eighty-two exiled revolutionaries, including Fidel Castro, his brother Raul Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Their task was to form a disciplined guerilla force to overthrow Batista. This they succeeded in doing on 1st January, 1959, when Batista fled Cuba, and the troops of the 26th July Movement marched into Havana. We are therefore now celebrating fifty years of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

Mr Speaker, after Fidel Castro gained control of Cuba, the 26th July Movement was joined with other bodies to form the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution, which in turn became the Communist Party of Cuba in 1965. Mr Speaker, it took special courage to survive the many systemic attacks on the Revolution,

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

and as such, this was a courageous act by Fidel Castro and the people of Cuba in their determination to rid their country of corruption, economic exploitation and injustice. Despite the unjust economic embargo imposed by the United States of America since 1962, the longest in modern history, the spirit of the 26th July Movement, and the Cuban Revolution, live on.

Mr Speaker, I mentioned earlier that the relationship between Guyana and Cuba is a special one. Perhaps this is an underestimation. Our close collaboration and cooperation with Cuba predates the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972. Long before 1972, Guyana and Cuba shared common interests and offered support to each other. Our late President Cheddi Jagan and the PPP was, and continue to be, a staunch and unashamed supporter of the Cuban Revolution. *[Applause]* Mr Speaker, it is no secret that the relationship and the support that Dr Jagan offered to the government and the people, the Cuban people and vice versa, and the ideals we both shared, ruffled feathers in other lands, to put it mildly, and resulted in various machinations by men afar to keep him out of government.

More than that, Mr Speaker, our relationship with Cuba is somewhat linked to the contention by Venezuela that the 1899 Arbitral Award, which settled our boundaries, is null and void, and which still exists today. Both Presidents Jagdeo and Chavez have spoken about this

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

historical truth. President Chavez went even further, to acknowledge that this was a ploy of the United States Administration of the time. At a press conference during his official visit to Guyana in 2004, President Chavez stated that the attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s combined to produce stilted relations between Guyana and Venezuela. He said, and I quote:

The attitude at the time was to sow the seeds of distrust among the Venezuelan military men and women. They used to tell us that we should try to avoid another Cuba. What they meant was that Guyana could have become another Cuba. Those were old imperialistic strategies, whose purpose was to divide us or push us towards armed conflict.

With such an admission, Mr Speaker, indeed times have changed. Mr Speaker, you may ask where is the evidence. Well, Mr Speaker, I have some with me. I have with me documents that were recently declassified by the State Department of the United States of America. With your leave, Mr Speaker, I want to read excerpts from some of these memoranda.

In a memorandum dated 13th January, 1965, from Daniel F Margoles to his superiors in the United States, titled *Venezuela Asks US Intercession In Settling Guyana Boundary Dispute*. This is what it said:

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Another noteworthy development in this situation is the number of recent confidential reports indicating that the Venezuelan military are very sensitive to the boundary problem. They view the possibility that British Guiana may become independent under a pro-communist government, as opening the way for a Castro beachhead on the continent. They are also apprehensive because of the proximity of British Guiana to Venezuela's developing iron and steel and hydroelectric complex in Guiana State. There are indications that the military have already prepared a contingency plan for the seizure of the area by force, should this seem to them necessary at some future time.

Mr Speaker, it is the response to this that is interesting and the response on 28 January 1965 from the United States in a memorandum titled *Again Venezuela Asks US Intercession In Settling Guyana Boundary Dispute*. Here is what it said:

With respect to your Recommendation, No. 3, this question may no longer be raised with you by Tujeura Parris, since the Jagan threat has been removed, at

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

least for the time being, and the government of Venezuela appears to be in close touch with Burnham. Should the question arise, perhaps informally, I agree that you should say to Tujeura Parris, the Venezuelan that we certainly would not stand idly by if the establishment of a Castro beachhead in British Guiana appeared likely.

Mr Speaker, with the release of these documents, one does not have to extrapolate, since it is very clear why the contention of Venezuela regarding the arbitral award was raised, but more importantly, Mr Speaker, why notwithstanding the evidence before them, and the advice they received from their own, the United States at that time saw it fit to adopt a particular approach. I submit it was in part because of our friendship with Cuba.

Mr Speaker, Guyana's friendship and cooperation with Cuba transcends governments. Both the PPP now the PPP/C and the PNC, maintained close ties with Cuba throughout the period of the Cold War and thereafter. Notwithstanding the fact that we are a small nation, struggling to find our own place in the world following our independence from Great Britain in 1966, in 1972 Guyana, along with three other independent Caribbean states, Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago,

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

broke free of the US-orchestrated isolation of Cuba in the hemisphere and established diplomatic relations with Cuba. This was a further demonstration of the level of solidarity reached between our two countries.

Mr Speaker, this represented a consolidation of our friendship, and provided the foundation for the further development of fruitful relations with Cuba, based on mutual respect and cooperation. Mr Speaker, Guyana and Cuba share similar views on many issues, including sustainable development, economic equity and social justice, equitable trade relations and the vulnerability of smaller economies. Guyana's call for a new global human order, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, is similar to Cuba's call towards equity and justice. Indeed, Mr Speaker, Cuba co-sponsored two of the three resolutions on the new global human order, passed in the United Nations General Assembly in 2002 and 2007.

Mr Speaker, the Government of Guyana firmly supports the cessation of the United States economic embargo on Cuba, and continues to advocate this position as all regional and international fora. We did not delay when we saw what we believed to be winds of change flowing from the direction of the United States of America in the person of Barack Obama, then President elect. Guyana supported the decision by CARICOM Member States to convey to President Obama, even before his

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

inauguration, the hope that the lifting of the embargo against Cuba would be given high priority by his administration, after our own Head of State remarked, President Jagdeo, and I quote:

The embargo is the last vestige of the cold war, and has no place in our world today.

Mr Speaker, our voices were once again raised in support of Cuba at the Summit of the Americas, recently held in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government of Guyana has also consistently called for Cuba's full involvement in hemispheric and international activities, and joined with member states of the Organisation of American States at the General Assembly of that body held in June this year, to support the reversal of the 1962 OAS Resolution that had expelled Cuba from that organisation.

Mr Speaker, we have taken note of statements made by United States President Barack Obama, and the encouraging message announced by his administration. Today I want to, on behalf of the Government of Guyana, encourage the United States administration to advance efforts to improve and ultimately restore, normal diplomatic relations with Cuba. *[Applause]* But Mr Speaker, even as I do so, I want to recognise the resilience of the Cuban people, and to point to Cuba's sustained commitment to humanity, notwithstanding the embargo that has brought hardships on the people of

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Cuba, and the many challenges the Government and people of Cuba have faced and continue to face, Cuba has not been deterred. Cuba has helped, and continues to help, many countries in Africa, Asia and of course Latin America and the Caribbean in immeasurable terms.

My colleagues after me, I am sure, will outline or detail some of these as they relate to Guyana. Suffice it to say that as outlined in the Motion, Guyana has benefitted extensively from cooperation with Cuba in areas such as:

- scholarships for Guyanese students to acquire medical training,
- provision of health care assistance such as the Operation Miracle Programme,
- the deployment of Cuban medical professionals to assist in Guyana's health sector, and the provision of technical expertise as well as material resources, to assist with the construction, equipping and operationalising of four regional hospitals, which are of tremendous benefits to the Guyanese population.

Mr Speaker, if there is one country that can be singled out for not only providing their human resources to assist in building our country, but also in the expansion of our own human resource base, especially in the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

health sector, hands down, it is Cuba. [Applause] More than that, Mr Speaker, I am almost sure that this can be said for many of our Caribbean and some of our Latin American neighbours as well. Small wonder, Mr Speaker, why President Obama remarked at the Summit of the Americas, and I quote, he was having a press conference, and in response to Scott Wilson of the Washington Post, about the Summit, this is what President Obama said:

One thing that I thought was interesting, and I knew this in a more abstract way, but it was interesting, in very specific terms, hearing from these leaders who, when they spoke about Cuba, talked very specifically about the thousands of doctors from Cuba that are dispersed all throughout the region, and upon which many of these countries heavily depend. And it is a reminder for us in the United States that if our only interaction with many of these countries is drug interdiction, if our only interaction is military, then we may not be developing the connections that can, over time, increase our influence and have a beneficial effect when we need to try to move policies that are of concern to us, forward in the region.

He went on to say:

And I think that is why it is so important that in our interactions, not just here in the hemisphere, but around the world, that we recognise that our military power is just one arm of our power, and that we have to use our diplomatic and development aid in more intelligent ways, so that people can see very practical, concrete improvements in the lives of ordinary persons as a consequence of US foreign policy.

Mr Speaker, President Obama could not help but notice Cuba's presence and influence in the region, and of course recognise that things could be done differently. I guess Cuba has taught a lesson there. He probably thought too, Mr Speaker, how could they do this, notwithstanding the embargo.

Mr Speaker, I am not unaware of the challenges presently facing the Cuban people. The global financial and economic crisis has hit the country very hard, resulting in a reduction of economic growth this year, and the government has had to take stringent measure to address this situation. The 2008 hurricanes wreaked havoc on the country, causing severe destruction and adding to the problem, but Mr Speaker, Cuba will not falter. The several hurricanes which have crossed

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Cuba's path over the years can never be equaled by fifty years plus of an economic embargo. *[Applause]*

Mr Speaker, as I close, I want to congratulate the Government and people of Cuba on the 56th Anniversary of that defining moment of the Cuban Revolution, and of the 50th Anniversary since that revolution triumphed. I also want to say on behalf of the government, thank you to the Government and people of Cuba, for being a true friend to Guyana and for all the assistance they have given us as we both work towards improving the lives of our peoples. We in Guyana remain inspired by the ideals of the Cuban Revolution, and are committed to providing continuous support to the Government of Cuba and the people of Cuba, in their efforts to pursue economic and social development free from outside interference. *Viva Cuba!* Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Honourable Minister of Public Service

Before you begin, Honourable Member, I, with your permission and leave, we will dispense with the suspension at four o'clock today. This might be or expected to be our last session before the recess, and usually on these occasions, there is a wider variety of beverages available, and that being the case, I think that you would much prefer, with the exception of Mr Nadir,

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

who does not partake, I think you would much prefer us to have one-ended debate before you proceed for tea, in the event that you are unable to return. *[Laughter]*

Proceed Hon Member ...

Hon Dr Jennifer RA Westford: Mr Speaker I will take that into consideration, when I am looking at the length of my speech.

Mr Speaker, like my colleague before me, I rise to add my contribution to the Motion before us, entitled *The 50th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution*. Much has been written about the Cuban Revolution over the years, and depending on the author's ideology, different slants have been given to those stories. What cannot be disputed, Mr Speaker is that Cuba and its people have contributed internationally to the social well-being of people; *[Applause]* whether it be in Latin America, Africa, or in the Caribbean, the Cuban humanitarian emissaries can be seen at work.

Mr Speaker, even though the Motion deals with the 50th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, it is impossible not to speak about Commandante Fidel Castro, who is synonymous with the Revolution. *[Applause]*

On 13 August 1926, Fidel Castro was born to Angel Castro and Lena Luz Gonzales in Oriente Province.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

He was one of seven children. Fidel progressed through schooling from primary to high school, and in September 1945 enrolled as a university student in Havana's law school. As a high school and university student in Havana, Fidel witnessed the institutionalized corruption and nepotism that characterized the government of the day. While at university, Fidel became politically active and participated, or to be more exact, organised protest activities against the government that was accused of suppressing the people and their welfare. During one of those protest activities, Fidel was hospitalised with severe injuries as a result of a police beating.

He also visited Colombia in 1948, where he offered solidarity to his political activist counterparts.

In September of 1950, Fidel graduated from law school and started a private practice. His practice focused on representing the poor and underprivileged people of Havana.

Fidel continued his political work with the mass organisations and gained extensive publicity during the fall of 1951, when he organized demonstrations against the government for its plans to evict and tear down the housing units without compensating the dwellers.

[Irfaan, take note!]

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

From his boyhood days through his political activism in 1952, Fidel Castro developed an independent mind and a determination to gain respect from the people he encountered, but although Fidel's vehemence may have earned him an audience among the poor, Mr Speaker, it did not endear him to the leading political actors, which resulted in his friends fearing for his life. A pivotal activity in the history of Cuba, Mr Speaker, is the attack on the Moncada Barracks, which occurred on 26 July 1953. Following that attack, eighty men were taken as prisoners by the Batista army. The men endured brutal torture and even death at the hands of their captors. For example, one man's eyes were gouged and presented to his sister. Fidel was sentenced to fifteen years in prison on the Isle of Pines on 5 October 1953 for his admitted ... *[Pause]*... Sorry, Mr Speaker, Fidel was sentenced to fifteen years in prison on the Isle of Pines on 5 October 1953 for his admitted role in that attack.

On 15 May 1955 Fidel was released from prison as a result of a general amnesty, which was offered by the Batista government, but Mr Speaker, if Batista believed that amnesty would have quieted the opposition, he was wrong, particularly with regard to Fidel Castro. Fidel vowed to continue the struggle on behalf of the Cuban people.

On 7 July 1959 he left Cuba for Mexico to avoid persecution by the Batista regime. While in Mexico,

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Fidel organised the *Vienteseis de Julio Movement* as a force to return to Cuba with the intention of ousting Batista.

Based on his earlier experiences, Fidel came to understand the political corruption and skewed socio-economic disparities within Cuba. So too did most Cubans, and Castro capitalised on their demand for reform, in order to lead a successful revolution that would result in a new Cuba.

On 2 December 1956 Fidel Castro, along with eighty-one others, returned to Cuba aboard the yacht *Grandma* to begin their revolutionary war. Fidel and his group continued that guerilla warfare against Batista until Batista fled Cuba for the Dominican Republic in the early hours of 1 January 1959.

When he came to Havana in 1959, Fidel did not bring plans on how to establish a new Cuba, only socialist ideas. Over the years, the path to a socialist Cuba confronted many obstacles, but Fidel remained focused upon the ideal. Fidel led a revolution that vaulted him to political power by 1964. In foreign affairs Fidel became a maverick who gained international prestige for Cuba. It must be noted that during this period, the imperialist propaganda machinery was at its best. People were said to be jailed without reasons being given and personal property was confiscated for poor people, just to mention a few of the deliberate slander, but Mr Speaker,

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

the most repeated propaganda was that the Cuban regime was atheist.

All of these allegations, Mr Speaker, were far from the truth.

Can a government which enshrined in its constitution the right of citizens to freedom of religious affiliation be deemed as atheist?

Can a government that has legally recognized the organization called the Cuban Council of Churches be deemed as atheist?

Let me mention, Mr Speaker, that there are fifty-six religious denominations actively participating in Cuba. Just to mention a few... *[Interruption: 'You were there?']* ...Yes, I was there, and I have currently 754 students *[Applause]* who openly practice their religious preference and go to church whenever they want to do so. Just to mention a few, Mr Speaker:

- we have the Roman Catholic Church
- we have the Seventh Day Adventist
- we have the Jehovah's Witnesses
- we have the Anglicans
- we have the Methodists

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

- we even have the churches that they call in Cuba the Santeria Churches

and they are all free to practice their religions.

To crown it all Mr Speaker the historic State visit of no less of a person than Pope John Paul II in 1998 was a State-sponsored event. Mr Speaker, it is pellucid that mischief was afoot and still is afoot, by the enemies of the Cuban Revolution. I must also mention Mr Speaker that one of the most significant religious holidays, Christmas Day, is also a national holiday in Cuba. I therefore cannot see Mr Speaker how the cap of atheist can fit the Cuban Government.

In January of 1961 the United States of America severed diplomatic ties with Cuba, and in March imposed the much talked about trade embargo.

In April of the said year, the failed Bay of Pigs invasion was attempted with sponsorship by the CIA. As is widely known, Mr Speaker, the trade embargo created great hardships on the economy of Cuba, but the shrewd President Fidel Castro convinced his people to tighten their belts and forge on. This era, known as *el periodo especial*, or the special period exhibited to the world the resilience of the Cuban people. Worthy of note is that the international assistances that were provided to the Third World countries were not terminated. They were continued with the same rigour.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Without a doubt, Mr Speaker, we in the Third World have much to be grateful to Cuba for. Over the years, Cuba has trained at their expense, hundreds of thousands of professionals in various fields for our countries in Latin America, as I mentioned before, Africa, and the Caribbean, and I must say also persons from the Middle East, because I recall being in Cuba at the same time with lots of my colleagues from the Middle East.

Mr Speaker, Cuba has also provided, as was mentioned by my colleague before me, professionals to work in various countries throughout the world.

Under the circumstance, the honourable thing therefore, Mr Speaker, is for all of us as Third World countries to pledge solidarity with the nation that has given and continues to give selflessly to our development.

Mr Speaker, let me also reiterate, on behalf of the hundreds of thousands and to date, Guyana has benefitted from 2,220 professionals trained selflessly by the Cuban government ... *[Applause]* ... the People's Government of Cuba, and let me on behalf of the Government and all of those persons who were trained, say a great, great, big thank you to the people and the government of Cuba. *Viva la revolucion Cubana! Viva el pueblo Cubana! Viva Fidel! Viva Raul! Patria omuerte! Venteremos. [Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you Hon Member.

The Hon Minister in the Ministry of Health ...

Hon Dr Bheri S Ramsaran: Mr Speaker, colleagues ...

The Speaker: I would strongly advise you not to try any Spanish, Honourable Member [*Laughter*]

Hon Dr Bheri S Ramsaran: I would stick to the national language and indeed you will get things right today.

It is with pleasure I note among us, in the special gallery, the special chairs for special invitees, the Charge d’Affairs of the Cuban Embassy in Guyana. I note with some sadness that his term -his tenure - is coming to an end, and I do express appreciation for him taking time out to be with us here at this moment.

Colleagues, friends, this is a significant time, not only for Cuba but for Guyana. We have heard of the significance of the historic moment from the two speakers before me. I want to fast forward a little bit and come to the present, but it will be still linked with that revolutionary moment, the moment of 26 July so many decades ago, 1953.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

I would like to refer to 25 July of this year, when another symbolic thing occurred, a symbol which showed the unity of purpose between two small nations, and the commitment to high ideals which were born in those very first days of 1953. I refer to the occasion of the launching by His Excellency Bharrat Jagdeo of the National Ophthalmology Hospital in Port Mourant. We launched that initiative in health, an initiative to fight preventable blindness and bring better eye care to people in Guyana, right across the nation, at that particular moment, because the Government of Guyana and the Government of Cuba: the people of Guyana and the people of Cuba thought it symbolic that here, so many decades after the attack on Moncada, two small nations were able to put their effort together and mount this giant project.

Why did we do that, and why do I refer to it in my opening remarks, my very opening remarks in this intervention, is to show the resilience which was referred to by Dr Westford. Here it is, two nations, small, having their own challenges, having been forced to overcome those challenges in a hostile environment, international environment, were able to succeed.

The Ophthalmology Hospital at Port Mourant might seem small and insignificant against the wider tapestry of the historic moment we are now celebrating at this sitting, that is the 56th Anniversary of Moncada, and the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

50th Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, but it is symbolic in that it represents what were the ideals being fought for; what the young revolutionaries of that moment were aspiring for and the ideals that guided them.

As a matter of fact, looking at a publication by Ignacio Ramirez, when he had discussion with Fidel a few years ago, and published it in his book, he made significant references to the genesis of the ideas that propelled, that fuelled that revolution, and it is by no chance that it is so written, that the things some of us want to forget were indeed the basis for the revolutionary actions of those days. I see here, for example, in the discussion between the author and Fidel, when Fidel says clearly that the study of Marx, Engels and Lenin laid the basis for what followed.

By no means, colleagues, I want to tell you that the hospital in Port Mourant comes out of the ideals of Marx, Engels and Lenin, but what I want to tell you is that without that firm ideological preparation and commitment, there would not have been Moncada - the attack on Moncada Barracks - which started as the Minister of Foreign Affairs said, as the defining moment of the Cuban Revolution, which led to the success of 1959, and without that, there would not have been the signal example of the Cuban Revolution; there would not have been the inter- nationalism that the Cuban

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Revolution had demonstrated in its support for the people fighting for their freedom in Africa a few decades ago; and indeed, there would not have been the firm friendship between our two nations, which has allowed a blossoming of cooperation, for example, in the area of health. All of those things started from those kernels, those small ideas ... well, they were not small ideas: they were big ideas, but being studied and spread among each other, among a revolutionary corps in Cuba so many decades ago.

And I want us to reflect on that, because sometimes we seem to have thrown out the baby with the bathwater. We seem to have forgotten sometimes, in the changing environment, where it all started or from what basis it started. The current changes in the dominant force in the world, that is the United States, with the ascent to office of President Barack Obama, there might be some elbow room now for return to positive thinking, and it is at this moment, or it is this moment I am using to call attention back to these things that were happening in those days, and which we should reflect on now shamelessly. We do not have to beat our chests and wave a red flag, but we need to look at the historic truth and the roots from which it all started.

1953 saw a small band of dedicated Cuban revolutionaries taking on the bulwark of reaction in Cuba. In those days Cuba was the playground of the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

elite of the United States, and as such, the ruling circles of the island had been enjoying favourable support and relations with the United States. Because of that, developments subsequent to the attack on Moncada, which laid foundation for the 1959 Revolution, always caught the attention of the United States. The rest is history.

Because of that intense attention or intense attraction that the Cuban Revolution caused among the ruling circles in America, certain other things happened across Latin America. Support for certain other actions and certain other regimes on the part of the Americans became a feature of that period. Guyana, then British Guiana, fell in the same net. We know the story. The small nation of British Guiana, then inspired by the various achievements of other colonial peoples, for example, the successes of India, and of course the successes that were being seen in Latin America, Cuba included, also aspired to freedom under its own leaders. Our geographical position on the continent alarmed certain circles, certain reactionary circles, and because of that, a small nation received unduly harsh attention. The rest is history, but I can repeat a few basic points.

The first democratically elected government, led by Dr Cheddi Jagan, was overthrown, and I want to bring the connection here between events in Cuba and events in the then British Guiana. It might well be that had the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Jaganite government - the Jaganite administration - the party led by Jagan and his colleagues - had it not taken such a principled position on its relations with Cuba, principled positions, whilst still being a colony, while still not wielding absolute authority, and not even in charge of internal security and foreign affairs. There is a definite nexus between the harsh treatment meted out to the small nation with less than a million population, between that experience we had and our relations with Cuba.

We can say with some pride that we bore the brunt indirectly of some of the attacks on Cuba. The role that the reactionary circles then in Venezuela were enticed to play by the great powers is known, and it then helped to shape in a negative fashion our history: the reignited claim, the reopening of claims to territory was not by accident, and it happened at a peculiar period, when Guyana was on the verge of deeming its independence with a people united, with a united purpose. All of that was shattered, and it happened at that period when the young Cuban revolution was making strides and the Guyanese, the then British Guianese administration under Dr Jagan and the PPP unabashedly associated themselves with the progressive ideas.

Let us forward a little bit, friends and colleagues to the present. Cuba and Guyana have enjoyed very positive and fruitful relations, even before we officially launched

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

diplomatic relations and diplomatic missions in each other's countries. Presently, these relations are expanding and are being strengthened on already firm foundations. I would like to draw to your attention, and moreso to the attention of the media, so that it can be broadcasted across the nation and internationally, some of the achievements we have been able to record in the area of cooperation between Guyana and Cuba, regarding health services.

This again shows the progressive nature of the ideas that were sown in those very early days. Currently, we have an enhanced cooperation in health between Guyana and Cuba, and this is not to the benefit of restricted circles in the country; it is not to the benefit of any particular area of the country. It is across the board, and not only are persons of humble background benefitting from services that we could not provide prior to the enhanced agreement between Guyana and Cuba in the area of health, but it is also creating bonds between the two peoples, and at the same time introducing to our country a good work ethic in the area of health.

Let us reflect on the fact that many of other persons benefitting from these services provided by Cuban personnel at Guyanese health facilities are very much in recognition of the professionalism and the humility and the correct approach, the very high work ethic of this group. This has started to reflect too on the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

performance of our health care providers. Let me remind you that the enhanced cooperation in the area of health I refer to, came out of a historic three-day official working visit by President Bharrat Jagdeo to Havana, when he took along a small group of Guyanese professionals, including Dr Westford who was trained in Cuba as a doctor and who at that time was the Minister of Public Service. He also took along Dr Ashni Kumar Singh, now Minister of Finance, but then the Director of Budget, and of course, he took me along in my capacity of Director of Regional Health Services, and subsequently I was promoted to Minister.

Now, that small team had an intense discussion led by the two Presidents. In many instances, or many times of those three days, the workday lasted for several hours, sometimes more than twelve hours, and at that time, you must note that President Castro himself was on the old side, but he had the energy and the spirit to be asking questions regarding the needs of Guyana in certain areas, to be more exact, the area of health, and the area of education in the field of health. Colleagues, the cooperation has blossomed and we now have four full-fledged diagnostic and treatment centers. *[Applause]*

I want to take this moment, while we are recognising the anniversary of 26 July, the attack on Moncada ... I want to take this opportunity to say a little bit about those achievements - the achievements at Diamond, Leonora,

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Suddie and Mahaicony. Those would not have been possible without the Cuban Revolution. Had the Cuban Revolution not occurred, this would not have been possible.

Let me expand a little bit. Cuba not only assisted us with the construction of the facilities, whereby Guyana funded the construction and Cuba provided technical assistance in the form of architects and engineers, but Cuba is also helping us to train the necessary cadre, and this is a point I want to make: Cuba is giving us this support in training cadre, while they themselves have their needs.

At the same time, Guyana continues to lose trained, experienced and valuable health care providers to other countries, to be exact, the ABC countries. And this is the point I want to illustrate. Cuba, a poor country, has trained and currently continues to train, thousands of Guyanese health care providers, but Cuba, she has never taken from us a single health care provider. Never!

Here it is the country which is providing the resource, which is making the sacrifice to help us create the cadre, the necessary brainpower to staff the health sector, has never caused us to weep or to repent, or rather to be unhappy by the fact that she has taken or invited to her shores at our expense persons who we need to carry on our business, the business of providing health for the people. This is in contrast to what happens from other

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

countries, whereby valuable personnel, health personnel, especially our doctors and nurses, are aggressively and actively attracted or invited to depart these shores where they are so much needed to go to wealthier economies. That is a comparison I want to bring out, and I want the media to mull on it and to bring it out to the wider public, to the wider Guyanese, so that when there might be criticisms regarding the cooperation between Cuba and Guyana, when there might be the minor hiccups, these very positive aspects of that cooperation are noted.

Presently the expanded cooperation in the area of health was adumbrated during that three-day official working visit in February 2006, has resulted in other things beside the creation of the diagnostic and treatment centers I mentioned. It has resulted in the dispatch to Guyana from Cuba of complete medical teams to man these facilities in the first five years at least of their existence. That is a significant boost for Guyana; that is something that Guyana and Guyanese must forever be grateful to the Cubans for, for we could have built these facilities, but because of the continued and accelerating attrition of our staff to other shores, we would never have been able to exploit the very good, modern conditions at these facilities to provide adequate modern services.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

The Cubans have given us those teams, including doctors, nurses, technicians and health administrators. At each of the facilities I mentioned, we have approximately twenty-five to thirty Cubans, who are given a small stipend by the Guyanese government and provided for in terms of housing and utilities. Those are the persons who are making us proud at Diamond, Leonora, Suddie and Mahaicony. Those are the persons who are allowing us to take some pressure off of our main referral hospital, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. These are things that we now take for granted, but these are things we need to blow a trumpet about, and I am making a nexus between the ideals that fueled the attack on Moncada, and the present situation. It is a continuation between the two, and that is why we must forever see the link between the 26th July Movement and the achievements we have made here. The demonstration of the Cuban teams in Guyana of internationalism and commitment to their provision of the services they contracted to give.

I would like to point out too, that in a very far-sighted and visionary manner, the two Presidents at that meeting realized that Guyana, for the longest while into the future, would not be able to provide adequately qualified staff in adequate numbers to man these facilities, and if we had not taken special steps to start training our youngsters to become doctors, nurses and other technicians with the aid of Cuba, these facilities

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

could very well become white elephants. But that would not be, because another aspect of the expanded cooperation that I should use this moment, while we celebrate the 56th Anniversary of Moncada, and the 50th Anniversary of the Revolution, another aspect of the cooperation was the creation of a Faculty of Medicine for Guyanese only students. That is why Dr Westford can boast that she has over 700 Guyanese training in Cuba. What she did not tell you is that the vast majority of those are Guyanese from all walks of life, all ethnic backgrounds, all regions, all creeds and religions, all the hues and combination of hues, are studying medicine. The largest batch is studying medicine and already we are starting to see the positive results, both in creating cadres for Guyana, qualified cadres, and in bonding the two peoples together.

Let me tell you that already the first wave of Guyanese students prepared in Cuba are starting to return, and is starting to perform, to such an extent that they started to mash the bunions of certain senior reactionaries in Guyana, who have started to attack the programme, but I will not give credence to those old senior reactionaries with sore bunions by mentioning names or taking apart their attacks. I will allow the very performance of these cadres who are now entering the system, to prove that Cuba and Guyana have created a quality batch of young doctors.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Mr Speaker, let me remind you that on 15 July of this year, some sixty-six youngsters as just described, that is of all hues and combinations of hues, from all across the country, from all ethnic backgrounds, who are studying medicine in Cuba, and who have come back to complete their final year rotations in Guyana, under Cuban stewardship, Cuban professors and Cuban teachers, they sat their exams, and I can report to the nation that of the sixty-six who sat the exams, sixty-four were successful. That is an achievement. As a matter of fact, initial perusal of comparative data between the exams which were of the same standard and given simultaneously in several countries where this programme is in force, showed that Guyana came out on top. I stand to correction, and my good colleagues from the Embassy, the Charge d'Affairs might want to correct me, but I think my information is correct. Guyana came out with flying colours in a standardized exam with sixty-six persons taking it; sixty-four successful; I m told that the two who stumbled will have a second chance in October of this year.

But Mr Speaker, that is not all. If sixty-six or sixty-four new practitioners were not enough against the background of just under 300 Guyanese doctors already existing in the public and private sector, if that is not enough, only last week another twenty-nine arrived from Cuba, young, full of spirit, full of knowledge, another twenty-nine final year medical students who are

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

products of that faculty I spoke about, the faculty that was created for Guyanese only students in Cuba, coming out of the three-day working visit, the discussions between Presidents Castro and Jagdeo, twenty-nine more youngsters are back in the system and they will be attached to the diagnostic and treatment centers, New Amsterdam Hospital , Georgetown Hospital, West Demerara Hospital, to be under the stewardship of the Cuban medical training team in Guyana which is quite competent and which has full professors and associate professors in its ranks; they will continue for the next year their final rounds of preparation, which means, Mr Speaker, colleagues, that in a few short months, we will be adding a further twenty-nine young doctors to our system.

Just think about the math, which means that the diagnostic and treatment centers which are now staffed by Cubans are gradually being or would gradually be taken over as planned, as envisioned, as seen in the initial package, would gradually be taken over by young Guyanese who will continue to hone their skills under the senior guidance of the existing Cuban medical teams there. That is an achievement and I want to take the moment of the celebration of the attack on Moncada at this Sitting to bring this out.

But what I want to tell you Mr Speaker, colleagues, is that by our mathematics, and by the mathematics

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

coming out of Dr Westford's office, the Public Service Ministry, which is responsible for scholarships, and for the so-called Jagdeo scholars in Cuba, by her mathematics, in 2011, 300 new final-year medical students will be returning to Guyana. *[Applause]* Stop and reflect on it. What this already means, Mr Speaker, is that the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Public Service, is in the position to start the process of massive post-graduate preparation of our graduate doctors, whereby we will become less and less dependent, as unfortunate the situation now is, for our specialist doctors from overseas. Probably eighty or more percent of the specialists operating in the area of health in Guyana are now recruited from foreign lands. We hope that by this visionary package, this visionary initiative which started at that February 2006 three-day working visit, which caused us to have an expanded cooperation in the area of health, this visionary package will allow us to have our own indigenous cadre of specialists.

The process has already started, even before this Cuban programme, at the Georgetown Public Hospital, and while I am blowing the trumpet of the achievements of the Cuban programme, we must not forget the Georgetown Hospital, lest they feel left out. They too have been achieving, and I must use this moment to say that even before we have the... or we have created the opportunity to train our graduate doctors coming out of the Cuban programme to become specialists, the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Georgetown Hospital has in its own way started the process by training or adumbrating a postgraduate programme in the area of general surgery. The second batch is now being prepared. The first batch successfully passed their exams under the accreditation of respected Canadian medical schools and is now working here in Guyana, contracted to work two years post-graduate.

So while I am using this moment to recognise the great contribution of our Cuban friends and our support from Cuba in the area of health, I do not want to fall on the wrong side of our premiere institution, the Georgetown Hospital, which in a quiet way, is becoming a superior or a very excellent centre of training itself.

So Mr Speaker, colleagues, within a short few years, because of the solid and visionary foundation laid, Guyana should be having a very comprehensive and self-sufficient health sector. And this is not being parochial or restricted to the health sector at this time, when we are celebrating great and historic moments. It is because of the impact that this social sector will have on the wider economy, and so on. It is also a recognition that the social contract entered into between the ruling party, the PPP/C and the Guyanese public, in the document called the Manifesto to the 2006 Elections. Those promises are being fulfilled to the letter. Let us

go back to the sector in that social contract, that is ...
[Interruption]

The Speaker: Before you go to that sector, Honourable Member ... Your time is up.

Hon Clement J Rohee: So that the Honourable Member could continue on the sector, Mr Speaker, I would like to ask that he be given fifteen minutes to continue.

Put and agreed to

The Speaker: Proceed, Hon Member ...

Hon Dr Bheri S Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Thank you, Minister Rohee.

So that social contract also is reflective of the great ideals that came out of the PPP and that reaches back even to the 1950s, to the time of 1953 and the time of Moncada. It is a historic continuum. That contract which was entered into just in the run-up to the elections said, the relevant sector, that this administration, if elected, that is this PPP/C, if elected, to take stewardship of the administration, would comprehensively revamp the infrastructure in health, that we would provide small rural or hinterland hospitals where they did not exist, so that we can carry out, take forward those great ideals that we were

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

propagating for so many years. In other words, we are going to put our money where our mouth was.

That social contract, the manifesto, says great things that were supposed to happen in health. Like we said, *great things that were supposed to happen* in other sectors. Recall the Berbice Bridge, which was commissioned on 23 December last year. The health sector, or the Ministry of Health and the Government of Guyana, has delivered in the area of health, and we have been able to do so relying in a great measure on the internationalism and the support of Cuba. Without their support, we would not have been able to build and staff those facilities.

Let me remind you too, so that the media and the wider public can know this: Cuba not only helped us with the technical support, to design these facilities which we funded, but Cuba deployed to Guyana for the entire period of construction, architects and engineers, civil engineers, rather electrical engineers and others, to see that quality work was done by the Guyanese contractors. That is one of the silent points of the agreement that is not well known. Cuba also took a further step, while it itself had challenges.

Guyana, Mr Speaker, as should be known by now, has the capacity of biomedical engineers, that is, people skilled in installing, maintaining, repairing, expensive equipment as now found in our rural and hinterland

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

hospitals, equipment such as the ultrasound machines, the endoscopy machines, the equipment, the lab equipment and so on and so forth, the X-ray equipment and so on, equipment which are now found in rural areas, expensive, state-of-the-art equipment which previous to now, we did not have there. So Cuba, recognizing that, and recognizing its commitment to have these structures deliver quality service, dispatched to Guyana full-fledged, comprehensive skilled biomedical engineering team. This might seem a small point, but it shows the comprehensive approach to the support by Cuba, and it shows how much we do owe Cuba.

As a matter of fact, Mr Speaker, I am very much apprehensive that our good friends from Cuba might well have to continue giving us this support in the area of biomedical engineering for a long time now, because, although we are able to create, with the help of Cuba, the doctors necessary, we have not been able to start the movement to create the local capacity in the area of biomedical engineering. I suspect that Dr Westford is making the necessary arrangements to have our cadres trained.

But Mr Speaker, I will not go much more into detail. I note that you do have for us a variety of beverages, so that we can celebrate this moment, and I will not want to keep us much more from them. *[Interruption]*

The Speaker: Well we are trying our best ...

Hon Dr Bheri S Ramsaran: What I would like to point out, Mr Speaker, is one more significant project, which I started my speech with. On 25 July this year we launched ... to be more exact, President Bharrat Jagdeo commissioned the National Ophthalmology Hospital. That is a significant achievement. Hopefully, some 10,000 operations would be done yearly, hopefully we will be able to stretch, reach out to citizens of CARICOM Countries and Suriname to give them services in the area of eye care. This facility also is staffed by some twenty-five Cubans, and shortly more should be arriving. It is fully equipped as a modern facility, and will be able to deal practically with all eye diseases.

It was with great pleasure that we agreed with the Cuban Charge d' Affairs , who was then performing the duties of Ambassador, that we should use the moment of the Anniversary of Moncada to launch this facility. It was indeed symbolic of a change in the area of health, in the area of human endeavour, between two small countries, both of whom have been subjected to harsh conditions by the forces of international reaction.

I would like to also point out, Mr Speaker, that both countries shortly will be celebrating yet another anniversary of the loss of the Cubana aircraft. So many years ago Guyana lost its entire medical trainee group,

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

when some eleven Guyanese, all of whom were travelling to Cuba on a Cubana aircraft, were destroyed when international terrorism struck at Guyana and Cuba simultaneously. We would like to note that although Guyana cannot boast of the type of acute struggle Cuba has had to wage against international reactions, we too have shared in their pain, we too have been joint victims of international terrorism.

What is unfortunate, Mr Speaker is that some of the ... or the main perpetrators of this dastardly act of terrorism still walk free in the land of liberty. We hope that someday justice will be done. I would like to note too, Mr Speaker, that at this time, the two peoples or rather the peoples of Cuba and of Latin America are also anxiously following the fate of the Cuban five heroes now incarcerated in the United States, incarcerated because of their heroic efforts to counter terrorism against their homeland Cuba. This is not the moment to go into details of that matter, but I would like to link the two, where five patriots committed to the ideals which were brought forth on the world in 1953, with the attack on Moncada, continue to be unjustly incarcerated, and I do hope to use this moment to raise yet another voice in their favour, and probably urge that our National Assembly also look at this more aggressively and keep it on the front burner, so that those five sons now incarcerated and separated from their loved ones, will be given their rightful place in history as some of the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

continuers of the Moncada attack, this time against terrorism. So much is being spoken against or rather spoken of the war against terror. These are five warriors against terror who are being unjustifiably, in an unjust fashion, incarcerated.

Mr Speaker, I would like to close by repeating our admiration for the achievements of Cuba, especially in the area of health, which I have particular responsibilities for, and to express our continued appreciation for this small island nation in helping us to create a sustainable capacity to deliver this vital service to our nation.

I would like to add my voice to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who presented this Motion and definitely bring it to the fore, and say that we who have been associated with things Cuban and the Cuban relations with Guyana and Cuba, are quite happy to be once more part of these celebrations, and I do hope and, I do know, I definitely know, that we will move from strength to strength as we go on. Thank you. *[Applause]*

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

The Hon Minister of Home Affairs ...

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

Hon Clement J Rohee: Mr Speaker, whenever you think about Cuba, especially on an auspicious occasion like this, there is a famous song, sung by a very famous Chilean singer by the name of Victor Hara who was brutally assassinated by the Chilean junta in 1973, when the legitimate government of Salvador Allende was overthrown. And in that song Victor Hara says, *El familo es largo, y voy andar. Porque ... seguro, voy o llegar.* What does that mean? It means that the road is long, but I am sure that we will reach a destination, even though that road may be difficult to travel.

Mr Speaker, the revolution in Cuba triumphed at a time when the world was engulfed in the Cold War; at a time when witch-hunting was at its height, and countries that decided to chart another course, such as Cuba did, were found to be unwanted at that time in the world. It was a time when many felt that once you struck out on another path of social and economic development you could not succeed, and there were some who also felt that if you did not have the support of the then Soviet Union, your attempts would fail.

Cuba survived for a number of years when the Soviet Union, the USSR, the Eastern European countries, China, Vietnam, Korea, formed a social and economic bloc which gave each other mutual support and solidarity, but then as time went on with glasnost and perestroika, some of you who may be aware of that era;

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

first the German Democratic Republic, then a number of other Eastern European countries collapsed, then the Soviet Union followed. Today, what do we have in terms of countries charting a different social and economic path to development? We have China, which has its own peculiar path; we have Vietnam, we have Korea, that is North Korea, and we have Cuba.

The importance of this situation, Mr Speaker, is that while those bastions have all disappeared or changed their socio-economic path of development, this tiny country of Cuba with about nine to ten million people, situated just a few miles away from Miami in the great United States of America, continues to survive, and is now celebrating fifty years of its survival. The question is how come. What are the lessons, Mr Speaker, to be learnt from the Cuban experience? I have listed a few; I think the other speakers may be acquainted with much more than I am, but I believe when we look at examples such as Cuba, who have been able to survive under such extremely difficult conditions, I think you have to be able to go to Cuba to understand what that country is experiencing, what that country is going through, because there are some who speak rather glibly, rather romantically about the Cuban experience, and for understandable reasons, because the Cuban revolution attracts all kinds of people, and the most important thing is that they are there to support that project.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

But I want to feel, Mr Speaker, that there are certain important lessons that we have to learn when we look at the experience of a small country that has embarked on a particular path of socio-economic development, that has experienced a blockade, a trade blockade, an economic blockade, a financial blockade, for years. I do not know if many people understand what it is to experience a blockade. That is why sometimes when we look at the TV, they focus on the type of vehicles that still can be found in the streets of Cuba, the type of trucks, and they focus on that because they want to project that country as some quaint country far away in the Caribbean that is still living in the past.

That is an important point we would note, because I will make another point in the next couple of minutes, Mr Speaker. What are the lessons?

- The first lesson, I believe, is that we must commit ourselves to principled position - commitment to principled position. We have to live by certain principles, and a country must live by certain principles. An administration must live by certain principles, and Guyana, irrespective of the government that is in place, has proven that it can live by certain principles. The Minister of Foreign Affairs just pointed out the position we have adopted in respect of our border - the

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATES 6 AUGUST 2009

respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our border.

- And any country that has that same type of problem that we have imposes upon us the necessity to extend solidarity and support to that country, for example Belize, and this brings me to the next question of principle, lesson, that we must learn, which is solidarity, and support for countries, who have similar difficulties and problems like you have, as the one that I just mentioned.

Continued in part II ...(pg 81)