

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
OF THE 21ST SITTING OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST
SESSION (2020-2021) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA HELD
AT 10.00 A.M.
ON WEDNESDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY, 2021
IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE,
LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P., Speaker of the National Assembly

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

Peoples Progressive Party Civic (38)

Prime Minister (1)

Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark A. Phillips, M.S.S., M.P., Prime Minister

Vice-President (1)

Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P., Vice-President (Absent)

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

Hon. Mohabir A. Nandlall, S.C., M.P., Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

Senior Ministers (17)

Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P. (Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni), Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip

Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation

*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P., Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance

Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P., Minister of Public Works

/...2

***Non-Elected Member**

2.

Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P., Minister of Health

Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P. (Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Minister of Education

*Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P., Minister of Home Affairs

Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne), Minister of
Agriculture

Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P., Minister of Amerindian Affairs

Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P., Minister of Labour

Hon. Vickram O. Bharrat, M.P., Minister of Natural Resources

*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P., Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce

Hon. Nigel D. Dharamlall, M.P. (Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam), Minister of Local
Government and Regional Development

Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P. (Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini), Minister of Housing and Water

Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Minister of
Human Services and Social Security

Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P., Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

Hon. Sonia S. Parag, M.P., Minister of the Public Service

Junior Ministers (4)

Hon. Warren K.E. McCoy, M.P., Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister

Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Public Works

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional
Development

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Minister within the
Ministry of Housing and Water

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***Non-Elected Member**

Other Members (14)

Hon. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.

Hon. Alister S. Charlie, M.P. (Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)

Hon. Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne)

Hon. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.

Hon. Seepaul Narine, M.P.

Hon. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.

Hon. Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.

Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.

Hon. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P. (Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice)

Hon. Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P. (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)

Hon. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.

*Hon. Sarah Browne, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs

*Hon. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture

Hon. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)

(i) A Partnership For National Unity + Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)

Hon. Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Joseph F. Harmon, M.S.M., M.P., Leader of the Opposition

Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.

Hon. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.

Hon. Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P., (Virtual Participation)

Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P. (Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni)

Hon. Dr. Nicolette O. Henry, M.P.

Hon. Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P.

Hon. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.

Hon. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.

Hon. Christopher A. Jones, M.P., Opposition Chief Whip

4.

Hon. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P. (Virtual Participation)

Hon. David A. Patterson, M.P. (Absent)

Hon. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P.

Hon. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)

Hon. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.

Hon. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P. (Virtual - Participation)

Hon. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.

Hon. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.

Hon. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.

Hon. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.

Hon. Ronald Cox, M.P. (Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini)

Hon. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P. (Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Hon. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P. (Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)

Hon. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica) (Absent)

Hon. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)

Hon. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)

Hon. Vincero H. Jordan, M.P., (Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice)

Hon. Dineshwar N. Jaiprakash, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne)

Hon. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P. (Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)

Hon. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P. (Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice)

Hon. Devin L. Sears, M.P. (Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice)

A New and United Guyana, Liberty and Justice Party and The New Movement (ANUG, LJP & TNM) (1)

Hon. Lenox R. O'Dell Shuman, M.P., Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly

Officers (2)

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A., Clerk of the National Assembly

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

COMMENCEMENT OF SITTING

The Sitting commenced at 10.16 a.m.

PRAYERS

The Clerk led in Prayers.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER-

The Speaker made the following announcements:

1. ADDRESSING THE TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES REGARDING THE INPUT AND OUTPUT FEED FROM THE MICROPHONE SYSTEM IN THE DOME.

“Honourable Members, we have quite a few announcements this morning. First, we have had a number of comments with respect to the input from Members into the microphone system and also the output. Several options are being considered. We had mentioned raising the microphones, which was one option. The second thing we are looking at deals with Members who have a problem when speaking with their masks on. The suggestion is that we put two podiums, one on either side, and the persons who have to speak would go to the podium and take their masks off. We are looking at that as another option. Of course, we would have to amend the Standing Orders to allow that to happen. So, those are with respect to inputs, for some clarity.

Second, is the audio feed. My apologies for starting late this morning. We were meeting with the technical team and dealing with this issue. Apparently, two of the monitors that feed to the lower level of the Dome were off. They are now on, so we might hear a little better. A backup option is the headphones on your tables. If you plug the green jack into your headset, you will also hear the feed directly through an earphone. If you have problems listening, this is an immediate solution that the technical team has come up with not so long ago. That will help with the quality of the feed coming in and your audio going out this morning”.

2. REPORTS ON THE PROCEEDINGS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY MEDIA HOUSES

“I have given permission for the media to have two representatives in the Dome, whether they be the video/cameramen or reporters. That will happen sometime this morning if it has not already taken place. I want to give a special caution to the media with respect to reporting on the procedure/proceedings in the National Assembly. In the Dome, the Speaker hears the persons speaking. The media is allowed in, but to personally assign comments and heckles to Hon. Members of this House, I feel the media opens itself to being sued. Had I been sitting at the bottom and see in the press a comment being attributed to me, I would ask that press person to find the evidence. Standards change. I think that it was the Honourable Sanjeev Datadin and the Honourable Attorney General, who said that the law is a living thing and that society lives and changes. I remember in the 1950s when a popular singer held a certain part of his trousers that it was considered very vulgar, but when Mr. Michael Jackson did it everybody followed.

I spoke with the President of the Guyana Press Association, and I made known my concerns about the reporting of what is happening in the National Assembly, and about responsible reporting. In my history of covering and visiting parliaments, there was a big issue when the Parliament of Canada first opened itself to being televised live. In 1988, while conducting a Youth Parliament in Bermuda, no cameras were allowed in the Chamber; none. The Parliament of Bermuda had given us permission to use the Chamber but had to pass a special resolution in that Chamber to allow us to use a camera in that House. That was in 1988. I have visited almost every Parliament in the English-speaking Caribbean, and I have seen responsible reporting and I have seen also how Standing Orders have changed”.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE-

For Written Replies

1. POLICE PERFORMANCE

Member Asking: Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.

Minister Answering: The Minister of Home Affairs

1. Could the Hon. Minister say what methods are used by the Ministry in monitoring and evaluating police performance in relation to crime solving?
2. Could the Hon. Minister also provide the results of the monitoring and evaluating of the said performance in the last three (3) months?

(Notice Paper No. 36 (Q18 Opp.18) published on 2021-02-01)

ANSWERS

1. “The Ministry has a Crime Observatory, Statistical and Research Unit which examine, track and assess both directly and independently, Guyana Police Force data and performance. A Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation unit evaluates achievements against key performance indicators. Computer routines, surveys and mapping are employed in the assessments.
2. An examination of the data for the past three months shows that the Guyana Police Force was able to reduce serious crimes by 21.9%.”

2. COMPLAINTS MADE BY PRISON INMATES

Member Asking: Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.

Minister Answering: The Minister of Home Affairs

1. What is the investigation process for complaints lodged by prison inmates on mistreatment in prison?

8.

2. How many of such complaints have the Guyana Prison Service received since the 2nd August, 2020?
3. Of these, how many are repeated complaints and how many have been found to be justified?
4. In the justified cases: what action has the Guyana Prison Service taken?
5. What independent avenues are there for prison inmates to lodge such complaints?
6. Has the Government considered setting up independent oversight mechanisms to investigate and address these complaints?

(Notice Paper No. 37 (Q19 Opp.19) published on 2021-02-01)

ANSWERS

- (1) “Complaints are made to the Duty Officers who then refer those unresolved to the Officer-in-Charge. This is done daily. On the formal weekly visit OIC, or as necessary, individual concerns are addressed. During quarterly formal visits and hearings by the Director of Prisons matters are further reviewed. Requests to meet and raise matters with the Prison Visiting Committees for interventions are made and accepted. There are Inmate Complaint Committees, comprised of Orderlies, who meet fortnightly with the OIC. The Prisoners Welfare Officer is constantly available to address prisoners’ concerns, additionally.
- (2) Four hundred and thirty-seven (437) complaints were received for the period.
- (3) Complaints were not repeated but similar in case. Few complaints were said to be justified.
- (4) Departmental or Criminal actions were undertaken against those accused.
- (5) The Prisons’ Visiting Committees are available for lodging of such complaints.

9.

- (6) The Director of Prisons or the Minister can appoint special committees to investigate complaints. Members can be drawn from the Prisons Visiting Committees, the Inter Prisons Visiting Committees, the Agriculture Board, Training Board, Recruitment Board or the Sentence Management Board. These considerations are underway.”

3. TRAFFICKING IN ILLEGAL DRUGS

Member Asking: Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.

Minister Answering: The Minister of Home Affairs

From 2nd August, 2020 to 31st December, 2020:

- a. How many persons were arrested for Trafficking in illegal drugs?
- b. How many have been prosecuted?
- c. How many resulted in convictions?

(Notice Paper No. 38 (Q20 Opp.20) published on 2021-02-01)

ANSWERS

- (a) “Thirty-five (35) persons were arrested for trafficking by the CANU.
- (b) Thirteen (13) of these persons were charged and prosecuted.
- (c) Four (4) persons have been convicted thus far.”

4. SOLEMN CRIMES

Member Asking: Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.

Minister Answering: The Minister of Home Affairs

1. What is the number of serious crimes that have been investigated since 2nd August, 2020?
2. How many persons have been prosecuted for the aforementioned period?
3. What is the number of convictions broken down by the different types of crimes reported from 2nd August, 2020 to present?

(Notice Paper No. 39 (Q21 Opp.21) published on 2021-02-01)

ANSWERS

- (1) “Three hundred and seventy-three (373) serious crimes were investigated.
- (2) Two hundred and sixty-seven (267) prosecutions were undertaken.
- (3) The number of convictions remain a work in progress awaiting judicial reviews.”

5. THE GUYANA POLICE FORCE STRATEGY ON ROAD SAFETY AND THE ROAD TRAFFIC LEGISLATION

Member Asking: Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.

Minister Answering: The Minister of Home Affairs

1. What is the Guyana Police Force strategy to raise greater public awareness of road safety and reduce traffic accidents amongst both road users?
2. Are there plans to review and strengthen the present Road Traffic legislation?
3. If yes, what are the timelines for the review and strengthening of the Road Traffic legislation?
4. If no, why not?

(Notice Paper No. 40 (Q22 Opp.22) published on 2021-02-01)

ANSWERS

- (1) “The Guyana Police Force has an ongoing education program through the print electronic media, lectures to drive of private and public transportation, lecture to schools. Working with the Ministry of Public Works, the National Road Safety Council and other stakeholders to erect traffic signs, road marking etc. Placing speed humps where necessary and maintenance of roadways, enforcement is done on a 24- hour basis with mobile and foot patrols with the focus on hotspots through spotting exercises, driving

under the influence of alcohol (DUI) exercise and speeding to reduce accidents on our roadways.

- (2) New legislation is needed. A revision of the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act Chapter 51:02 needs to be done immediately to amend and introduce new laws to curb traffic lawlessness and adjust to the changing society. Statistics had shown an increased in the number of vehicles imported into Guyana and increase in accidents due to inattentiveness, speeding and driving under the influence of alcohol. This is caused because fines and penalties are small and ineffective hence fines on all categories of offences should be increased by 100 percent being ticket and charge offences.”

6. AGREEMENT WITH CORMAC GROUP LLC

Member Asking: Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, M.P.

Minister Answering: The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation

The Government of Guyana through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation on December 28, 2020 entered into a six-month Agreement with Cormac Group LLC to provide lobbying services on behalf of the Government and by extension the people of Guyana. The Contract was signed by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ms. Elizabeth Harper.

In this connexion:

1. Can the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs provide the criteria used for the selection of the Cormac Group LLC?
2. Can the Minister map the various foreign policy scenarios that informed the choice of the specific firm?
3. Can the Minister indicate the procurement process utilized to hire Cormac Group LLC?

12.

4. Can the Minister indicate whether other firms/groups were considered, the names of those groups/firms and indicate also the considerations which gave Cormac Group LLC the competitive advantage over the other firms/groups?
5. Can the Minister indicate to what extent will there be overlap with the functions of foreign service personnel, particularly personnel in Washington D.C?
6. Can the Minister state whether our Mission in Washington D.C is equipped to adequately represent Guyana's interests? If it is so, why did the Government deem it necessary to hire Cormac Group LLC? If not, what are the actions being taken to equip the Washington Mission with the required resources?
7. Given that the terms of the contract indicate that representation is being made on behalf of Guyana, can the Minister say what reporting mechanism has been established to inform the people of Guyana on the progress with the tasks assigned (save those with national security implications)?
8. Given that the Legislature is a branch of Government, what mechanisms are being put in place to ensure that the Opposition Parties in the National Assembly are engaged in this process with Cormac Group LLC?
9. Can the Minister undertake to update the Foreign Relations Sector Committee on Quarterly basis on the progress made by the Group?

(Notice Paper No. 53 (Q35 Opp.35) published on 2021-02-02)

ANSWERS

- (1) "The Firm has a credible track record and is well known for its expertise in understanding and navigating the political processes in Washington.

13.

- (2) Among the primary roles of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in advancing the national development agenda are the promotion of Guyana's trade and economic interests and the pursuit of foreign investment. In this regard, the Government is focused on securing markets for its productive sector, encouraging joint venture partnership and attracting investment in the traditional industries of rice, sugar and bauxite to enhance the sectors and to improve our agriculture potential as well as to infuse capital into our social sector. With its advantage of bipartisan government and business contacts, the Cormac Group is well placed to provide openings for Guyana in the key areas of its development focus. These include information technology, international trade, transportation, energy and the environment, as well as healthcare and financial services.
- (3) The Government utilized the single source procurement method to hire Cormac Group LLC.
- (4) Other groups and firms were initially considered. It is not appropriate to provide those names here. Suffice it to say that the Government utilized the option of a precedent adopted by all previous administrations of Government to contract the services of one company above others given the particular purpose to meet its requirements.
- (5) There will be no overlap with the functions of the foreign service, particularly those in Washington D.C.
- (6) Guyana's Mission in Washington D.C. is staffed with extremely competent diplomats who more than adequately represent Guyana's interests. The Cormac Group LLC will consult closely with the Embassy in the conduct of its work.

14.

- (7) The Minister reports regularly to the National Assembly and also issues statements to the press on the work of the Ministry. The Ministry's outputs which will include results of the activities of the Cormac Group LLC will as necessary, form part of those reports and statements.
- (8) The activities of the Cormac Group LLC fall under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The Opposition Parties in the National Assembly have various mechanisms with which to gauge the results of the Ministry's Work Programme.
- (9) It is established practice that the Minister is invited to update the Foreign Relations Sector Committee on matters pertaining to Guyana's Foreign Policy. If the Minister is invited by the Foreign Relations Sector Committee to brief that Committee on aspects relating to its Work Programme in which the Cormac Group LLC is involved, he remains ready to do so."

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2021 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2021

Assembly resumed the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2021.

**(Moved by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
on 2021-02-12)**

The following Members spoke to the motion:

Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.

15.

Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P., Minister of Agriculture

Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

At 12.14 p.m. the Sitting was suspended for refreshments.

RESUMPTION OF SITTING

At 1.26 p.m. the Sitting was resumed.

Assembly resumed the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2021.

The following Members also spoke to the motion:

Hon. Alister Charlie, M.P.

Hon. Shurwayne Holder, M.P.

Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P., Minister of Tourism, Industry & Commerce

Hon. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, M.P.

Hon. Sonia Parag, M.P., Minister of the Public Service

Hon. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.

Hon. Dr. Vindhya Persaud, M.P., Minister of Human Services and Social Security

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

At 5.30 p.m. the Sitting was suspended for refreshments.

RESUMPTION OF SITTING

At 6.45 p.m. the Sitting was resumed.

16.

Assembly resumed the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2021.

The following Members also spoke to the motion:

Hon. Devin Sears, M.P.

Hon. Seeraj Dharamkumar, M.P.

Hon. Vincero Jordan, M.P.

The Prime Minister moved that the Sitting continue beyond 8.00 p.m. to continue and conclude the debate on the motion.

The Hon. Seepaul Narine, M.P., also spoke to the motion.

BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

The Honourable Speaker extended birthday greetings to the Hon. Lee Williams, M.P.

The Hon. Dr. Jennifer Westford, M.P., also spoke to the motion.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8.35 p.m., on a motion by the Prime Minister, the Assembly was adjourned to 10.00 a.m. on Thursday, 25th February, 2021.

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HON. MANZOOR NADIR, M.P.,

Hon. Speaker of the National Assembly

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.**

24th February, 2020.