

Guyana ruling party leads election

The Miami Herald
Aug. 30, 2006

GEORGETOWN, Guyana - Guyana's ruling party surged ahead of its nearest rival in Guyana's presidential and parliamentary elections, authorities said late Tuesday as they gathered ballots from the South American country's jungle interior.

With 65 percent of the votes counted, President Bharrat Jagdeo's People's Progressive Party, dominated by Guyanese of East Indian descent, had a lead of about 25,000 votes over the largest opposition party, chief elections officer Gocool Bodhoo told a news conference.

The two parties had been running neck-and-neck until returns came in from a heavily populated region outside the capital of Georgetown that boosted Jagdeo's party.

Final results from Monday's election were not expected until Thursday. Ballots were still arriving in Georgetown from remote areas near Guyana's borders with Suriname, Venezuela and Brazil.

Bodhoo said the main opposition People's National Congress could regain some ground because all of the votes had not yet been counted from its Afro-Caribbean stronghold in the capital region.

Opposition candidates had accused Jagdeo's government of corruption, discrimination against blacks and failing to stop a rise in drug trafficking in this former Dutch and British colony.

Bodhoo said voter turnout in the nation of 730,000 was around 66 percent - 20 points below the participation level in the 2001 elections that gave Jagdeo's party its third consecutive term in power. Pre-election surveys suggested Jagdeo would retain the presidency, but his party could lose its majority in the 65-seat parliament.

Election observers from Britain reported minor administrative problems at the polls but said they were not enough to "undermine the overall integrity and credibility" of the vote.