

I join you, wherever you are at this moment, in saluting our nation, on the historic occasion of her 29th birthday.

It has become customary for us when our Independence anniversary comes that we take time off to reflect on the struggles leading to our Independence, from the days of resistance to the arrival of the colonialists, through to the 1763 Rebellion, through the birth of the Political Affairs Committee in 1946 and the genesis of the People's Progressive Party in 1950, to independence in 1966.

It is a time when we reflect on the trials and tribulations since 1966, the continuing struggle for making our independence meaningful to all Guyanese. It is also that time when our ultimate goal of becoming economically independent comes into sharp focus, and when we seek guidance and courage to face the challenges of an ever-growing interdependent global community.

We cannot and should not belittle or sell short the importance of independence. It is that first important step towards freedom, without which we could not describe ourselves as a sovereign nation or a Republic.

Let it be clear, as I said last February in my address on the 25th anniversary of the Republic, that this administration has absolutely no intention of lessening the importance of the Republic. Republic Day and Mashramani, as well as other important landmarks in our historical development, will remain important dates on our calendar. What we are as a people and a nation, is not the result of any single event. We have been molded as a nation as a result of a long historical process and from diverse sources. So let us see ourselves as part of each other and when in September we mark Amerindian Heritage Month, it will be an occasion for all of us to be involved. And in August when we observe Emancipation Day, all Guyanese of different cultures will say: "This is part of me."

As we celebrate our 29th anniversary of independence, we are very pleased to have with us on this occasion our neighbours from Suriname, whom I urge you to join me in welcoming in our own Guyana way.

Although our different colonial masters taught us to speak different languages, we in Guyana and our Brothers and Sisters in Suriname marched along the same routes to independence. Each of our histories feature rebellions against colonialism. Each of our histories tell stories of brave people of several races who stood shoulder to shoulder in pursuit of freedom and independence.

The British flag was pulled down here nine years before the Dutch flag was pulled down in Suriname. But today, we are both still neighbours, both fighting for economic survival in an international economic climate that is not always sympathetic and accommodating to developing countries such as ours.

We in Guyana are prepared to share experiences with our Surinamese neighbours. We look forward to a strengthening of our traditional ties of friendship. We look forward to the speeding up and early conclusion of the several bilateral cooperation projects that will cement closer our historical, traditional ties of friendship and cooperation, which have been forged by our respective peoples even before they

were formalised by our respective governments.

Once more we say welcome to you, our friends from across the border, as you share with us these historic moments of our 29th independence anniversary celebrations.

My Fellow Guyanese,

With the restoration of Democracy in our country in October, 1992, the past two-and-a-half years have witnessed a rebirth of confidence, optimism and vigorous productive energies among the vast majority of our population. It has been a wonderful new beginning for the nation, both at home and abroad. We have put in place sound economic policies based on the involvement of all our people and with their welfare and the nation's sovereignty, first and foremost in mind.

I have been faithful to my promise of giving you a government that is fully accountable to its electorate, free from corruption and transparent in all its financial and business affairs and the upholding of all your rights and freedoms won through sacrifices. But your Government is not satisfied to leave this to chance. That is why, very shortly we will be introducing "Integrity Legislation" with wide-ranging applications and retroactive clauses, to ensure that all high-ranking public servants and holders of other high public office, including the President himself, are accountable to the people.

A new era has begun in Guyana, one in which honesty, integrity and service to the people have been the hallmarks. We did not fight for 28 years for the restoration of democracy merely to boast that we now form the Government. This administration won Office to ensure that all Guyanese are given the chance for a better life right here in the land of their birth.

Our growth figures over the past two years have been impressive. And last year, with a growth of 8.5%, which was higher than was projected, we recorded the second highest growth rate in Latin America and the Caribbean. There was not only continuing growth in our economy, but also a massive all-inclusive drive to rehabilitate our shattered infrastructure and rebuild the basis for sustained growth.

We have rehabilitated many major public facilities such as the roadways in Demerara, Berbice, and Essequibo. We are working frantically against the ever-pounding sea in an attempt to seal all breaches and reinforce existing sea defenses along our very lengthy coastline marked by the Atlantic Ocean.

We are working with equal urgency to dig new wells, run new pipe lines and rehabilitate old ones in order to improve the delivery of potable water to our many urban and rural communities.

We have re-constructed or rehabilitated many major public facilities such as the Timehri International Airport, Fire Stations, Police Stations, Hinterland Airstrips, and the New Amsterdam,

Rosignol and Parika Stellings. Many schools and Health Centres are also being rebuilt or repaired.

Our electricity situation, which caused so much disruption in our productive and personal lives in the past, has generally stabilised over the past two years. We have even gotten to the point of providing electricity to residents who never enjoyed such facilities before, as was the case with the GEC Plant at Anna Regina which I commissioned earlier this month. This is the second new plant opened by PPP/Civic, the first one being the 11Mw station at Garden of Eden. We have many more plans for rural electrification, with Leguan Island being the next to see lights for the first time before the end of this year.

In our Housing drive, we have cleared thousands of acres of state land for distribution in the form of house lots to first-time owners. This programme is taking place in many parts of the country. What we need most urgently is the involvement of private financing to make low-cost housing a reality for thousands of Guyanese who are badly in need of such housing. The Carter Centre-associated Habitat for Humanity, which I contacted in Atlanta, USA will later this year start their housing programme for the needy. And the Caribbean Development Bank and the International Development Bank are considering soft loans for low-income families.

The major pillars of our economy, with the exception of bauxite, have performed exceptionally well, with rice and sugar each actually surpassing the targets set. A number of Government ministries, agencies and private enterprises are actively working on a programme to restore Linden to a place of prominence in our national economy. The other mining sectors and non-traditional exports have also been major contributors to our improved economic picture.

We have done so much in such a short space of time, that an IDB Report described Guyana as "a small country with big ambitions" and as "a shining example of a country on its way back from the abyss". Yet, there is still much to be done in order to make the lives of ordinary Guyanese more meaningful and more comfortable.

In the tasks ahead, we welcome the involvement of local and foreign investors and the contributions of all Guyanese. We are grateful to those institutions and countries which showed an appreciation of our accumulated problems and which have been of great assistance to us in our recovery. While these have played a critical role in providing much-needed financial assistance to upgrade our physical and social infrastructure, our achievements would not have been possible without the Guyanese people rallying to the call of our nation.

True development, as I have noted elsewhere, has to do with the reduction, and even the eradication of poverty, disease, homelessness, ignorance and crime among the general population in a country. It also has to do with the fostering of positive values among our people, especially the younger generations, and the creation of pride, confidence and an innate connection to their communities, their native landscapes and their country. Only in this way will they use their energies and

creativity for the benefit of those around them and be persuaded to stay and build their homeland for this and the next generation.

In this regard, I have been impressed by a comprehensive programme being developed under the theme of "Rediscover El Dorado - Visit Guyana Year 1996". It sets out to showcase Guyana, not only as a country of natural beauty, but of cultural and popular festivals and the heartland of thousands of Guyanese spread around the world, who may now be interested to return home under the improved social, economic and political climate created during the past two-and-a-half years.

It is high time that we encourage the flow of Guyanese the other way, coming back home rather than leaving. We should all become active supporters of the "Visit Guyana Year Programme" and encourage Guyanese abroad, not merely to return home for a holiday, but to return home to join us in the noble task of building our country.

Our mass media agencies, both private and state-owned, should become part of this effort to create programmes, documentaries and pictures which reflect the reality and uniqueness of our people, our landscape and our lifestyle.

I would like to encourage private enterprise in Guyana to become more involved in development projects and generally in the promotion of Guyana as a place with a sound investment climate and a place of human and physical beauty which all can enjoy. We need to promote ourselves much more than we do now and that job should not fall to government alone, since every citizen has a stake in the progress and prosperity of our country.

As we face the beginning of the 30th. year as an independent country, we need to focus on a number of urgent and important tasks which we must address in order to prepare ourselves for the new millennium that will soon be upon us.

That preparation can be summed up in a single word - Education -- education in all its facets and diversity. We have to look at every field of activity - the Arts, the Sciences and particularly Technology.

Technology now rules the world in fields as varied as Agriculture, Telecommunication and Medicine. We cannot allow ourselves to fall so far behind (as we did in the Industrial Revolution) that we become passive, uninformed users of technology others would wish to "dump" on us.

Our schools, technical colleges and particularly the University of Guyana must provide the guidelines and framework suitable for our own needs, environment, and culture. Technology, unless it is completely compatible with the society in which it operates, becomes the master rather than the servant of the development process. If properly harnessed in the service of mankind, science and

technology can eradicate hunger within a generation.

But returning to the broader question of Education, this Government has with each passing year significantly increased its spending in this vital area. The figures speak for themselves. In 1991, spending on education as a percentage of the national budget was 1.9%; in 1993, the PPP/Civic Budget expenditure for education was 6.2%; in 1994, that increased to 7.3%, in actual figures about 720 million dollars. This year we will spend on education about 1.35 billion dollars, an 89% increase over last year's expenditure. And next year we plan to increase that amount even more significantly.

Let me add that, because of our huge foreign debt, estimated at US\$2 billion, debt service payments are a severe constraint on our willingness to do more for essential services and our anti-poverty programme. Consequently, we have decided to defer payments of affiliation fees to many overseas organisations and to utilize the savings of about \$500 million each year until 1997 for assistance to school children in very concrete ways.

Incidentally, at the UN Social Summit in Copenhagen, I pledged to increase our budgeted expenditure on social services to 20 percent in 1997, two-and-a-half times the percentage of 1992, on the understanding that under the UNDP 20:20 Compact we would access another 20 per cent from the international community. This will provide a great leap forward in education, health, housing, pensions and so on. If our future workers are to become efficient producers, we have to lay good foundations now by adequately caring for our children and youths.

As we all know, however, expenditure of money is not enough. We need places like the University of Guyana, the Georgetown and New Amsterdam Technical Institutes and The Institute of Adult Continuing Education (IACE) to become the springboards for our leap into the 21st. century in the field of education and technology. We need teachers and professionals in many fields.

We also need to stem the brain-drain which has robbed this country over the past 30 years or so of many billions of dollars and many years of progress in some of our most vital fields of development. Partially responsible for this debilitating trend was the political situation in the country for about a quarter of a century. Now we are free again.

I, therefore, wish to send out an urgent and open call to the many qualified Guyanese now resident abroad to return home and join us in this most urgent and worthy cause of building a new Guyana with high ethical, moral and human values, while at the same time, providing a better standard of living for all. In the process, we will not only attract others to return home, but more importantly retain our young qualified Guyanese, already here. In the case of those who cannot return as yet, your help to your loved ones at home, your contributions to your communities, your assistance in any way will also go a long way until you are ready to come back home.

More than ever, I would like to stress the need for all Guyanese, from all walks of life to join

hands across Guyana, so that we can build this land and this nation of ours.

My Dear Guyanese People,

As we peacefully go about our daily lives and seek greater levels of contentment, there are times when as a nation we need to look at our country with the eyes of a visionary. We must have a clear vision of the future. We need to be able to look ahead as of today and see where we want Guyana to be in the years 2005 and 2020. We need to set goals and ways and means of achieving that vision and those goals. We must be dedicated to achieving our goals.

-- Let us put aside the petty, cheap politics, the useless rhetoric;

-- Let us loudly condemn the divisive tactics of fanning the flames of using race. Let us instead pay homage on this night to all those Guyanese over the centuries - from Africa, India, China, Madeira, the UK and other parts of Europe, and of course, our native Amerindians who were the first;

-- Let us all, as a nation of six peoples but one single nationality, as Guyanese, say to all those fathers and mothers:

\* We thank you for the land, the water, the sky and the beauty and richness that you have left us;

\* We thank you all for your strength and endurance for your courage under extreme hardships and your many sacrifices that have brought us this far; for the fact that tonight finds us on the Eve of our 29th Birthday as a nation.

What better symbols of Guyana's strength and ability to endure and triumph, under overwhelming circumstances and odds, can we have this night than these two brave, bold and beautiful, young people who are here with us. They are living symbols of our collective strength and ability to survive and to endure. Let us salute their bravery.

Fellow Guyanese! Let us, therefore, honour the work, the wisdom and the memory of our many ancestors and our rich and diverse heritage by pledging to work together, every single Guyanese and all friends of Guyana, for the peace, stability, growth and glory of Guyana.

As we prepare to hoist the flag heralding Guyana's 29th Independence Anniversary, I pledge the efforts and energies of this Administration to providing a better life for all Guyanese.

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