

Journey to Freedom

Address by His Excellency Dr Cheddi Jagan, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, on the occasion of the 27th Independence Anniversary of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana at the Flag Raising Ceremony which was held at the National Park, May 26th, 1993.

Mr Chairman, Prime Minister and Mrs Hinds, Your Honour, the Chancellor of the Judiciary, Ministers of the Government, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Members of the National Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen, Comrades and Friends and, most especially, all the beautiful children of Guyana!

As we celebrate this historic day, let us pay tribute to our antecedents - the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution.

For freedom, the Americans and the Haitians in their national liberation revolutions overthrew British and French rule respectively and, for the social progress, the French and Russians in their social liberation revolutions overthrew the exploitative orders.

These revolutionary struggles for nationhood, justice and bread had worldwide impact after World War II, particularly in the colonial territories. Everywhere went up the shout - UHURU: FREEDOM!

The price for freedom was high. We are aware of the great sacrifices made by the Indian freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. That's why, no doubt, Nehru gave us solidarity in our hour of need: as Prime Minister, he expressed his displeasure at the destruction of the PPP Government in October 1953 by inviting me and L.F.S. Burnham to visit India and to address the Indian Parliament.

As we remember our international heroes today, let us do so without rancour, without pointing fingers, without casting blame.

One of the excuses for our removal from Government was our support for so-called "Mau Mau" terrorism in Kenya, for which leader Jomo Kenyatta was jailed and detained. I was fortunate later to greet him at London Airport when he visited England as Head of Government of Kenya.

Ghana led the way of Africa's freedom in 1957, with Kwame Nkrumah as Head of Government - the same Nkrumah, who, like Gandhi, Nehru, Kenyatta and others, had been earlier persecuted and jailed.

Incidentally, his invitation to me in 1957 for Ghana's



President Cheddi Jagan delivers the keynote address during flag-raising night at the National Park to mark Guyana's 27th Anniversary of Independence. Seated at his left are First Lady Mrs. Janet Jagan and Prime Minister Sam Hinds.

independence celebrations freed me from the chains of colonial tyranny, which had restricted my movements to Georgetown. For breaking those restrictions, I had earlier been jailed. We can certainly draw some conclusions from humankind's struggle for advancement.

These are:-

1. freedom is indivisible; unity and solidarity are essential for success;
2. there can be no advance without struggle; and there can be no struggle without commitment and sacrifice;
3. a correct theoretical/ideological framework which provides the necessary provision for the building of optimism and confidence in the future - a vital ingredient for the necessary political sacrifices to be born, and for future successes.

It is that optimism, that confidence which must have sustained Nelson Mandela in prison for more than two decades. And as I had put it on his release: Yesterday's so-called terrorist is today's hero.

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In today's interdependent world and information age, whether we are in the North, South, East or West, growing poverty is a common denominator. In this context, there is no place for the imperial arrogance of the past. We need a genuine partnership based on sovereign equality. Yes, we need partners, not adversaries.

And let us also remember our own heroes. For Cuffy,

a monument has already been built. Let us also honour the real heroes, not those who signed the Proclamation but those who struggled before May 26, 1966 to make Independence a reality --- those who launched that Political Affairs Committee in 1946 and the first National Liberation Political Party in 1950, many of the leaders of which have been forgotten and by-passed during the past 27 years. There is a nexus between Cuffy in 1763, 1946, 1966 and October 5th 1992. The lessons of the past must be a guide for the management of the present and for the planning of the future.

I wish to say that I have decided to give national awards this year to 3 categories of persons: those who struggled for independence; those who fought for the restoration of democracy, and those who have served our nation and society with distinction.

In this regard, I want to express our deep gratitude to the governments of the United Kingdom and Canada, the US Congress, the National Democratic Institute, the United Nations, the Carter Centre, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and others overseas, who played a magnificent role in the restoration of democracy to our nation.

It is now 222 days our Government was formed and, as you are aware, our transition was marred by difficulties, but we did not flinch.

Our immediate challenge was to restore internal confidence, which was necessary for the resumption of external financial assistance to our cash-strapped state.

This renewed confidence reaped dividends. By the end of March this year, our gross international reserves stood



Commonwealth Observer Group.

at US\$191.5 million.

At the same time, our Government pursued relentlessly efforts to reduce our debt burden by way of rescheduling, conversion, and forgiveness. Just recently, we added to our modest achievement in this regard some US\$75 million in debt relief which we negotiated with the Paris Club.

There were other relief packages, especially from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Internally, inflation has been pegged, and actually reduced, in the first quarter of this year. We will spare no effort

to ensure that the cost of living does not rise; we are unequivocally committed to lowering it.

I am also told that the Treasury Bill auction rate dropped from 23 percent on December 31, 1992 to 14.77 percent at the end of April, 1993. Bank rates have fallen in response to this drop. While this downward movement can make credit more accessible to entrepreneurs, we have to monitor the situation to avoid any undue pressure on the exchange rate and, hence, on investments.

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On the production side, sugar was off target by 13.7% due to inclement weather and strikes. There was a plus, however, in the production of calcined bauxite by 23%; rice by 5.4%; timber by 35.4%; and non-traditional exports by 34%.

The bauxite entities are performing well financially. In other sectors of mining there is a new dynamism. The United Nations is assisting in framing model mineral agreements for gold, diamond, sand and stone. We see a substantial role for overseas private capital and a definite place for our local miners. We look forward to a collaborative and constructive approach towards the development of our natural resources consistent with the protection of the environment.

To meet the pressing demands for quarry production - for roads, sea defence and housing - Government hopes to resuscitate the Itabu/Teperu quarry complex.

It is hoped that a greater impact will be made on production, mainly in agro-industry and manufacturing, as a result of the wide range of concessions in areas of consumption tax and customs duties, which were announced in the 1993 Budget. Backward and forward linkages, overseas and local, are being developed in this vital sector.

Among our greatest priorities for resuscitation of economic life and sustained development is the repair of our physical and social infrastructures.

Our Government will:-

- (1) resurface the Georgetown/Timchri/Rosignol main roads for US \$23.4m;
- (2) rehabilitate roads, sea defence and institutional strengthening for US 21.5m;
- (3) reform the Public Service salary and employment structure in the sum of US\$10m;
- (4) rehabilitate the bauxite industry US\$6.5m; and
- (5) rehabilitate the Soesdyke/Linden Highway at a cost of US\$11.5m.

Later this year, we will begin the reconstruction of the

Essequibo Supenaam/Charity roads, and upgrading roads in Leguán and Wakenaam, as well as several feeder roads in Regions 3, 4 and 5.

Recently, I held an emergency meeting to discuss the acute potable water problem. We agreed to have a factual



Wife of Prime Minister Sam Hinds, Miss Yvonne Hinds pushes the button to start the pump at Canal Number One Polder during Independence Celebrations

report from the Guyana Water Authority about the situation in every district, especially about the condition of water pumps. A preliminary estimate for the replacing and repairing of pumps throughout the country is US\$6 million. Attempts are being made to raise this money. For Georgetown, we have advanced G\$20 million for alum for water clarification.

We are paying constant attention to the Guyana Electricity Corporation (GEC) and are determined to put things right, to ensure regular supplies of electricity and to reduce operating costs so as to scale down the huge subsidies you, the rate payers, have to bear. As you are aware, we have resisted increases in electricity rates to the consumers.

To facilitate interior travel and the transportation of products to markets, Government will rehabilitate the Kaieteur and Mabaruma airstrips and will upgrade Ogle airport. We intend also to upgrade the Parika and Rosignol stellings.

In river transport, our steamers Malali and Kimbia should be out of dry docks shortly. A weekly service to the North West District will be re-introduced, as well as a two-day per week midday service between Parika and Adventure.

As we did in the past, our Government will establish industrial estates around the country to remove regional disparity in the levels of economic development and to provide job. The East Demerara is one site already identified.

In spite of our many efforts in various spheres, we have had from some quarters, nit-picking, carping criticisms that we are not moving fast enough on a number of issues.

It is passing strange that some of the people who were critical of the past privatisation/divestment deals seem to be pressing us to move rapidly in the same direction. When in opposition, we condemned the indecent haste with which the former regime privatised our national assets at basement

prices, and in a manner that lacked transparency and was not in the national interest, we will not do the same. Privatisation and divestment must be approached with due care. I was not elected President to preside over the liquidation of Guyana. I was mandated by the Guyanese people to rebuild the national economy and restore a decent standard of life for all Guyanese. In all my political career, I did not succumb to pressure to serve narrow partisan interests; I do not intend to do so now. I will not surrender the interest of the nation for expediency or short term gain. In the PPP/Civic Manifesto we said: "The PPP/Civic Government will adopt a flexible approach on privatisation. It will be guided by our development goals and national and international experience. The process of divestment will be fully democratised and made transparent." The Government is proceeding in this manner.

In our general approach to development, we are flexible and conciliatory. We are examining various options and seeking meaningful partnership with foreign and local entrepreneurs. We have an open door for free enterprise - more open than some industrialised countries and even some of our CARICOM partners.

In our approach to the private sector, we have a special place for local entrepreneurs. We earnestly wish to facilitate them in as many ways as possible. We need their involvement and need the assistance they may obtain from foreign financial institutions. But for us, development is not simply a technical/economic question. Development, above all, is about people, satisfying their basic needs, ensuring social justice, and empowering our people at all levels to take advantage of their creativity.

We don't intend to delay or hold back the allocation of land to anyone because of any past political involvement. We are reviewing land allocation against the background of denials and restrictions on the bulk of farmers in order to ensure that land is as readily available for the small and medium scale farmers, as for the large scale developers.

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Some attempts have been made to present the dispute between the telephone Company GT&T and the Public Utilities Commission as an indication of Government's opposition to foreign investment. This is deliberate misinterpretation.

We have repeatedly stated our need for foreign investment and an entrepreneurial climate that invites investment and rewards risk-taking, but national and consumers interests

must be protected. Neither GT&T nor any other public utility monopoly must expect to be free from regulatory practices and procedures, which are applicable in their metropolitan countries. We insist on a regulatory policy based on common sense, common interest and common goals. Since GT&T has raised their concerns in Washington, the US Ambassador has been fully briefed about the situation.

If it is considered mean to re-organise the foreign service, cut overseas travel and reduce allowances for attending conferences so that we can find money to supply our people not only with water, but pure drinking water; and to ensure funds for travel by magistrates to eleven interior courts, then, so be it.

As regards the selection of a Chairman of the Elections Commission, no provision had been made previously either under the old Constitution or by convention, for consultation with the Minority Leader. I have gone beyond the Constitution and consulted the Minority Leader. But this issue is dragging on; and local government elections are being unduly postponed. It is delaying administration by the people at the grassroots where development is being stultified by unpopular bodies which lack a sense of direction and will to solve our people's problems.

A bill, now being hammered out by the political parties for electoral reforms, will prepare the way for the long-delayed municipal and village elections.

As regards diplomatic representation, we are concerned with content, not just form. The PPP/Civic has bought a new dimension to politics, not simply keeping up with the Joneses - no reference to Ambassador Jones - and getting caught up in the rat-race of material consumerism. By example, we hope to inculcate new values - ethical, moral and spiritual - for the rebirth of Guyana. When we say that we stand for good governance, we mean a clean and lean government. We are determined to end corruption, whenever it appears. We make no excuse for making cuts in extravagant spendings. This has enabled us to abolish the means test for old age pensioners, and to increase expenditure for health and education by over 50 per cent.

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I want it to be clearly understood that the basic needs of our people - food, water, health, education, housing, elec-

tricity, a clean environment, transport - are our first priority. To raise funds, we propose not only to make savings but also to cut out the current maze of wasteful and overlapping agencies.

We are committed not only to efficient management, but also to good leadership - management and leadership not only from above, but also from below, from the grass-roots. For us, democracy means all levels in management and decision-making. Our people must build their own future.

One of our best initiatives was the establishment of a broad-based Citizens' Committee in communities, made up of representatives from all the political parties, religious bodies, businesses and professions. They have become involved against many anti-national and anti-social activities like crimes, corruption, smuggling and narcotics. They are initiating many self-help projects in education, health, roads, drainage and irrigation, sea and river defence and potable water. It's amazing how the people at Grove village recently circumvented bureaucratic red tape and put the non-functioning water pump in order.

In problem solving, there is need for more of this innovativeness and creativity, for new ideas, determination and courage. With our huge debt payments burden, we cannot afford to do things only in conventional ways, and constantly to be looking outside for financial help, technicians, managers, consultants and advisers. This is what independence is also all about - self reliance. First and foremost, we will fix what is wrong and strengthen what is right. I'm confident that together we can make Guyana No. 1.

And we must try to get more from the money we spend. Since knowledge opens the door to success, and our key resource is higher education, we need, because of the limitation of funds, to innovate with computer networks and distance learning to the classroom, the school building, or a school district.



Carter Centre Team

Some Citizens' Committees also have been giving their communities a new look. Let us celebrate Independence with mass mobilisation for the cleaning up of our environment, our habitat.

I wish also to call for volunteers, especially housewives. There is much to be done in schools, hospitals and institutions. In addition to not having enough money to employ people, we also do not have enough skilled people.

employ people, we also do not have enough skilled people. This is the time to demonstrate our patriotism and humanity. Volunteer now! Send me your names. Let us get down to work and get the job done.

My recent visit to Kimbia for the first time brought home, in a very vivid way, the great possibilities of virtually leaping out of the many problems in our overcrowded coastal belt. Other areas like Kuru Kuru and Moblissa, on which millions of dollars were spent, are being examined. And our Amerindian Task Force, headed by Minister Vibert De Souza is formulating an action programme for a better life for our Amerindian communities. We propose to establish an Amerindian Development Fund in the near future.

Like the Citizens' Committee, the Trade Unions too must get more fully involved. For many, many years, there has been much talk about workers' participation. Now, Trade Unions have the possibility, with a progressive government, of putting theory and precept into practice. Set up management committees or Workers' Councils and confer with the manager on a regular, formal basis about management and decision-making. We need individual managerial responsibility but collective decision-making. Teamwork will be our guiding principle.

Soon in our legislative programme we shall deal with working people's issues - a Labour Code, Trade Union recognition, severance pay, etc. We have embarked on a programme to strengthen the Consumer Protection Laws and heighten consumers' awareness of their rights and duties. Towards this end, a Hire Purchase Bill is drafted and various aspects of consumers' protection are being examined. A Consumer Education radio programme is soon to begin. Additionally, we have provided a subvention to the Guyana Consumers Association to further the interests of consumers.

Our commitment to constitutional reform remains unshaken. A Cabinet Commission is looking at the framework in which a comprehensive constitutional review could be undertaken.

The travail of the Guyanese people is a saga of courage and defiance, of sacrifices and eventual rejoicing. We came through hard times, but came through we did. As one critic said of Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, "We see people growing and living; we laugh at their humour, share their griefs; and in the midst of it all, behold we are taught the lesson of honesty, justice and mercy."

The Advisory Race/Ethnic Relations Committee, headed by Bishop George, is actively at work. I wish to appeal to all to desist from exploiting race and ethnicity, and fears of racial/ethnic insecurity. Above all, Guyana today needs racial/ethnic healing and harmony. When my wife, myself

and others, started the independence struggle in the mid 1940's, we stood firmly on the side of our working people - all the people, regardless of race. Our anti-colonial struggle was not based on race/ethnicity, as in some countries, but on socio-economic issues. By 1953, we were well on our way to attaining national, racial and working people's unity. I am determined to retrace our foot-steps and build as a united nation for all our people. We must break down prejudices and barriers. Under this government, there will be no place for 1st class citizens, 2nd class citizens or 3rd class citizens - only Guyanese citizens. The hopes and aspiration of our ancestors and past generations to build our country into ONE PEOPLE, ONE NATION AND ONE DESTINY have come alive again under our new Government.

A sense of humility abounds today in Guyana as we accept October 5 as the new beginning of an era filled with hope and Guyanese spirit. There abound, too, a free air, free speech and a free Guyanese spirit. We must rediscover ourselves in this new freedom - a rediscovey of our rich heritage and all that make us uniquely and proudly Guyanese.

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This 27th Independence Anniversary will be incomplete if we did not rediscover and honour our contemporary heroes and heroines. To them all, Guyana owes its reverence and gratitude.

Let us reconcile ourselves with our history and so inspired, let us move forward in unity, goodwill and confidence to make our Guyana more beautiful than we have found it, and imperishable as a Nation as we enter the new century.

I look forward to your talent, your commitment and your dedication for us together to make a better future.

Let our actions unite us. We triumphed in restoring democracy on October 5. In rebuilding Guyana, we will also triumph.

**All Glory to Our Freedom Fighters!
Long Live Our Independent Nation!
Long Live the United & Free People of Guyana!**