

OPENING ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT DR CHEDDI JAGAN
AT THE 109TH ANNUAL DELEGATES CONFERENCE
OF THE GUYANA TEACHERS UNION. MARCH 14, 1993

Mr. Chairman, President and Staff of the Guyana Teachers Union, Distinguished Delegates, Observers and Guests.

I am pleased to have been asked to address you on this occasion of your meeting in conference. I greet you most warmly and cordially, and wish for you fruitful deliberations and happy outcomes from those deliberations - - happy for yourselves, for education in this country and for the future of this nation.

Let me repeat what has been said before: my Government, the PPP-CIVIC Government, regards education as one of the most, if not the most - important social mechanisms in the acculturation and socialization process of the nation's young people and children. What our nation will become and what tomorrow's adults will become will be due, in large measure, to the quality of education to which today's children are exposed.

It is not too much to say that the quality of a nation's life - - the values people cherish and live by; people's capacity to recognize truth, deal honestly and strive for justice; people's sense of accountability, their ability to solve problems, and to rise above themselves in pursuit of common, national goals - - is a direct reflection of the quality of education to which people have been exposed and which they have imbibed.

We believe that no programme of social, cultural, economic and political development, no attempt at developing a sense of national consciousness and national cohesiveness, no proposal to establish a sound ethical base on which to build a progressive and harmonious society, is possible without a sound educational programme. If our nation is to survive and become great in the 21st century, then

like Japan it must allocate more resources for education and research and for development of science and technology.

We see development as people-centred. When some speak of development, they see only foreign capital and private investment. We see also social capital and human resources. And when we talk of development, we mean "development with a human face." For us people come first; they are the centre of everything. And education is important for their all-round, holistic development. By people, we mean all the people of this country across the barriers of race/ethnicity, religion, gender, political affiliation, whether they live in the hinterland or on the coast, whether they are able-bodied or handicapped, rich or poor.

1993 marks 40 years after the first PPP victory in 1953 when we started the reform of the school system and 30 years after the establishment of the University of Guyana and the School of Agriculture. And this is the first year of rebuilding our economy and consolidating democracy. In both of these principal tasks - rebuilding the economy and consolidating democracy - teachers have a vital role to play.

There can be no economic development and social progress without political democracy and a skilled and technologically-developed work force. There can be no consolidation of democracy unless teachers inculcate democratic values and principles as they go about the task of "Moulding the Nation", which is the motto of your Union.

Your Government is committed to rebuilding the economy and developing the requisite skills for completing that task. To this end, we are committed to reforming and rebuilding the educational system. At the same time, we have to find ways to enhance the role and position of teachers and to improve their material well being

with the resources available and as the economy develops.

The government intends to pursue these objectives in the following way:

- (1) Increasing the allocations in the budget for the Education Sector;
- (2) Trying to overcome the problems of the inherited external debt of over US\$2 billion and the huge internal debt which together in 1993 is projected to cost G\$ 19.5 billion or 88 cents out of every dollar collected in revenues.

The theme of the Conference is Structural Adjustment and its impact on education in Guyana. This is an appropriate forum to address this subject and Minister Bisnauth will speak more on it. Suffice it to say that the Structural Adjustment Programme, referred to in this country as ERP, impacted negatively on education, on the economy, on teachers, and indeed, caused major dislocations among the people.

The PPP/Civic in 1993 consciously reversed the trend to adjust structurally the economy at the expense of our people and the educational and health sectors; it found ways to allocate substantially more resources in those areas.

You are aware that education has been in a state of crisis for a long time. Clear manifestation of this is evidenced by the following:

- (1) inadequate spending on books, buildings;
- (2) inadequate capital spending for rehabilitation and expansion of school facilities;
- (3) poor wages and conditions.

The end results were:

- (a) growing illiteracy/poor examination results;
- (b) high school drop out rates;
- (c) overcrowding;
- (d) out migration of teachers and other skilled personnel;and
- (e) low morale.

Spending on education declined from 17.6% in 1987 to 6.7% in 1990 and 9.1% in 1991. In 1991, Guyana allocated about half as much as Jamaica, Belize or Grenada in education at primary and secondary levels. Jamaica spends 4 to 5 times more per child than Guyana at the primary and secondary levels.

According to the World Bank Report of April 1992, as much as 65% of all primary school teachers in Region 1,7,8, and 9 are unqualified. Over 30% of all secondary teachers in Regions 1,2,3,5,6 and 10 are unqualified. There are no data for Region 7,8 and 9 but one can draw informed conclusions. According to a World Bank Study, all of this is reflected in poor examination results - the number of students 15-19 years taking CXC/GCE declined considerably over the years; of all students taking exams in 1990, 13% passed English, 15% passed Maths, 12% passed Social Science, 22% passed Business.

Guyana in 1965 ranked third in the Caribbean. We now rank last. The task of rebuilding is formidable. Government has started to deal with it.

The total budget for the Ministry of Education and Cultural Development in 1992 was \$1.1 billion or 10.5% of all expenditure. In 1993, this has been increased to \$1.695 billion or 13.55% of all spending. In dollar terms this means \$542 million extra or 47.1% increase over previous years. This has been made possible by cutting out waste and extravagance in other areas and prudently redeploying resources.

There is also more funding available for capital works, and the IDB Programme, which has been stalled for so long, will finally get going in 1993.

Mr. Chairman, the vote for education in the 1993 Budget reflects this government's perception of the importance of education. You have to consider that vote in the light of the severe demands made on the national revenue by the onerous debt payments.

There have been increases in allocations for the regions, both under capital and current expenditures. Every region, from 1 to 10, will benefit from the increased budgetary allocations; and at every level, from nursery to primary, to secondary and tertiary. The University of Guyana will benefit; so too, will the Cyril Potter College of Education, the Adult Education Association, the Institute of Adults and Continuing Education, Technical and Vocational Institutions. Money has been voted to rehabilitate school buildings and teachers' quarters, and, very important, sanitary facilities in schools. Some of the increase will go towards making school buildings more secure and in purchasing basic teaching material.

Our intention is to work towards the provision of the kind of teaching-learning environment, that will lift the standards of education-delivery in this country.

But, whatever else we do, we recognize the crucial role of teachers in our educational process. They are our "foot-soldiers." Whatever the government's policy in relation to education, and whatever projects or programmes we may plan, without the commitment of our teachers to that policy and to the enthusiastic implementation of those programmes, things can hardly be maintained at an acceptable level, let alone be changed in the direction this government desires.

I know, that sometimes, teachers feel that the nation, whose children they serve, does not recognize the sacrificial nature of their service. I am aware that there is a feeling among teachers that the salaries they are paid, the conditions under which they work, the scarcity or worn-out nature of the tools with which they work, constitute a disincentive towards a greater commitment to quality teaching. It is common knowledge that trained Guyanese teachers have emigrated either overseas, or into the private sector, in search of the kind of salaries with which they can provide adequately for their families.

Let me say this: under the best conditions, the demands of education call for men and women of genius in the teaching service. Under difficult and inadequate conditions, the demands of educating and preparing our nation's children for life call for men and women of superlative quality. I want, therefore, publicly, to congratulate you teachers for having done an onerous job well. Truly, in keeping with your motto: you mould the nation.

My government recognises that where radical changes in education are contemplated, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, the need is felt for a consensual approach to education, rather than an adversarial one founded on political polarization or a polarization in relationship between government and teachers' union. In this regard, I will want to urge a collaborative effort between teachers and the administrators in the educational process on the one hand, and the government on the other hand. In this consensual approach, the beneficiaries will be our nation and our nation's children.

We recognize that teachers need a greater incentive in the form of increased wages and salaries. Nobody will dispute that. I am advised by the Minister of Finance that every effort is being made to access funds that will enable the government to offer an

enhanced wage package to teachers. We have given thought and are giving thought to some innovative ways by which we may offer teachers a better incentive to perform well in and out of the class-room.

We envisage a programme of training for teachers from pre-college, pre-service, institutional, in-service, through University, and beyond that, on-the-job. This will have to be spelt out in such a way as to promote step-by-step training and certification. We will want to couple with that the attempt to introduce, into our educational system, a method of promotion that will provide for job satisfaction and adequate remuneration in the school class-room, so that teachers, in order to earn more, will not have to aim at becoming administrators.

Imaginative teachers, I believe, will come up with exciting methodologies in the class-room, and will suggest and support innovative curricular changes-- all in the interest of the kind of training and education that will raise the standards in Guyana, and, at the same time, make that education relevant to our development needs.

My friends, let us together "MOULD THE NATION" and promote "Development with a Human Face."

Mr. Chairman, it is with great pleasure that I now declare open this 109th Annual Delegates Conference of the Guyana Teachers Union.

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