Protecting our Environment

by Janet Jagan

Generally speaking, the various threats against the environment come mainly from the developed nations, their massive industries which belch poisonous chemicals into the atmosphere and the millions and millions of vehicles which pollute the planet.

Global warming, the climate changes resulting from uncontrolled pollution are the results of years of neglect of these major issues. At last, it appears that some attention is being paid to this problem which adversely affects the lives of those living on this earth. Unfortunately, the biggest offenders are the slowest to move in the direction of reducing pollution and while all peoples all over the world suffer from the results of this neglect, the poorer ones take the heaviest damage and suffering.

In Guyana, even though we do not contribute in any positive way to the world's environmental problems, on the contrary, we are part of those countries which help contain the growing threat to humankind. Our largely untouched forests provide a breather to the noxious gases being emitted by so many larger and wealthy nations. For this, we can be proud not to be the sinners in the rapidly growing hazards of the world's environment.

But within Guyana, we face another form of environmental problem which is extremely harmful to the nation. That is the almost uncontrollable wanton and careless soiling of our environment by waste and garbage.

One peaceful, beautiful Guyanese Sunday morning a friend took me for a ride in the Botanical Gardens, once the pride and joy of our country, known for its beauty and wide range of Guyana's flowers and plants.

No more!

It was shocking to see what has happened there. I am not exaggerating, when I say I saw more than 15 areas of refuse scattered all over, despite the presence of refuse bins. It was a disgrace! However, it was a reflection of what one sees in many parts of the capital city and elsewhere. However, credit must be given where it is due and many rural and interior communities can take pride in the cleanliness of their villages and settlements.

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The zoo, too, is no longer respected. In this example, the zoo is a reflection of Guyana's rich wild life. Many of the children's stories I wrote – mostly about animals and birds were inspired by those in the zoo. Now it is pitiful! One does not want to blame those responsible for it, but it takes years of repetition to pound that idea into a child's head. But isn't it worth it, to have a clean environment?

Guyana is a beautiful country and our city used to be splendid in its cleanliness and beauty with clean canals and streets. Not so today. I remember a period when we had an interim management committee made up of prominent and dedicated citizens who kept the city working and clean. But today, I wonder if they do the same in their houses.

What has happened to the psyche of the average Guyanese who until fairly recently, had respect for his/her community, and kept it clean and free from waste and garbage? I have often advised that a part of the school curriculum should be devoted to teaching children their various responsibilities as citizens when they grow up. Many countries begin this process early so that a child knows that he/she cannot and should not throw ANYTHING anywhere except in a place for waste disposal – a refuse bin, a waste basket, whatever and to hold on to the disposable item until he/she reaches one.

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