



THIS WEEK WITH THE PRESIDENT

FIGHTING CRIME; RE-ESTABLISHING MORALS IN OUR SOCIETY

TEXT OF INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT JANET JAGAN
BY JOURNALIST ROBERT PERSAUD

Robert Persaud: *In the next half hour or so I will be engaging President Janet Jagan on issues relating to good governance and moral values in Guyana. Madam President, welcome to our GIS/GTV "This Week with the President". The post elections' unrest has highlighted an intensification of lawlessness in our society. There have been daring killings, hijackings, armed attacks at municipal markets and acts of banditry in outlying communities. In the first term of this government great emphasis has been placed on good governance which includes protection of persons and property. Madam President what are your thoughts on the current situation?*

President Jagan: First of all I agree with you that there has been an increase in criminal activities. I put a fair percentage as spin-offs of the [opposition] demonstrations which took place for several days in the city. The lawlessness led to more lawlessness. We saw people attacked in the streets. We saw armed robberies.

We saw invasion of property. All these things happened.

And then there were the spin-offs. The criminal community was encouraged by the political lawlessness. But now this has got to stop! Our people demand better protection and the criminals must be chased off the streets. We have some plans and overall ideas on how to deal with this.

First of all we must have more civilian participation in crime fighting. We already have community policing in various parts of the country. But I think the civilian population has to be more involved. And I would go so far as to suggest that public spirited citizens must enter the fray if there are any more occurrences like we had two weeks ago. Everyone is involved and we have to protect ourselves.

Also I think that we must establish a Legislative Standing Committee to deal with matters relating to the security forces. I am hoping that this will be one of the early activities of the Parliament when it meets shortly.

We also have to look at the very practical question— the question of remuneration and benefits for our security forces, the Police Force in particular and, in general, the Joint Services. *This must be an urgent matter before us since the welfare of our security forces reflects the kind of professional work they can do. We also have to look very closely at better training for our security forces. We have to administer better recruitment methods and encourage more young Guyanese men and women to join the force. And, of course, we have to provide our forces with the up-to-date technology, equipment, as well as*



Strengthening professionalism for greater security

transportation and communication facilities. All these will strengthen professionalism which is the key to how our police and soldiers perform, so that they can reach out and protect all the communities in the country.

It is of course unfortunate that the political events helped to increase criminal activities but I am hoping that we can settle down and bring about what we were doing in our last five years, that is, the reduction in crime.

Persaud: *Now for a related question: Recently the Muslim Community in Guyana observed Eid-Ul-Fitr which ended thirty days of fasting during the Holy month of Ramadan. For Muslims this has been a month of devotion, generosity and re-commitment to moral/spiritual values. How do you see the role of Islam and other religions in Guyana in the development new morals and family values?*

President Jagan: I think religion plays a very important role here since over the twenty-eight years the PNC ruled the country morality and family values went sliding down hill.

My government will promote from all levels, family life. I think the Muslim community has set the highest standards and the highest goals in improving morality in our country and in stabilising family life. This has been quite an achievement.

The PPP/Civic believes in the freedom of all religion. We believe that religion is a personal matter and every man and woman must have the right to choose whatever religion suits that person or his family.

This was the standard set by the PPP. Some years ago I can remember when I was the Minister of Labour, Health and Housing, if you permit me to give this small incident, I was asked to declare open the new the Port Mourant hospital. There was a representative of only one religion to do the blessings on the building. I felt was something wrong there and I started talking about it. My Party came up with this position: all religions of the country are equal: One is not better than the other; all are representing views of beliefs of people.

It was this recognition that made us grant to the Christian, Muslim and Hindu religions equal status, and we started a tradition that whenever we officially opened whatever it may— a hospital, a school, whatever- we invited representatives of the three religions because we feel they are equal and the whole country must regard them as equal.

I want, while I am on the subject, to read a quotation from the late President [Dr. Cheddi Jagan] which expresses many things in this direction when he said, **“We are interested in creating a free Guyana, a new society, a society free from exploitation, a society of equality and brotherhood where truly human relationships will prevail.”**

I think this expresses what all of us want in this country: real



Setting high standards, Muslims testify before Constitutional Review Committee.

brotherhood and that is why I am so happy to congratulate the Muslim people of our country on this important religious holiday.

Persaud: During the past week two great and ancient civilisations, India and China, featured in the news. India celebrated her 49th anniversary as a republic and China introduced the Year of the Tiger. What significant do you attribute to these events and tell us how the efforts of the Indian and Chinese people have contributed to our struggle for self emancipation?

President Jagan: The Chinese and Indian sub-continent contributed to the making of our population. We have Chinese, Indians, Africans as well as others, in our multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-religious society.

I want to wish all Chinese citizens and residents of our country the greatest goodwill on this important occasion of their New Year. It is a lovely concept of naming an animal in each New Year. This time it is the Tiger, a very powerful and beautiful animal.

The Chinese people should be proud that they have conquered one of the greatest evils of all human kind, that of famine. I can remember when literally millions of Chinese people died every year from famine, but China has restored the country. China is now a country that meets the needs of all its people and is moving forward. In the next century I predict that China will be one of the very, very, important nations of the world.

India has celebrated her Republic Day only a few days ago and all are proud that India has done so well. I can say from the historic point of view that I was one of those involved in the struggle for Independence in Guyana and we gained a lot of inspiration from the Indian people. We adopted many of their views

and the spirit of Independence . Both India and China are important for us.

Persaud: During last week the SaskPower and GEC privatisation agreement did not come through. Where does your administration go from here?

President Jagan: Well, it was an unanticipated setback but we are right now in search of another arrangement to carry out management activities at GEC and also for joint ownership now that the Saskatchewan government has backed off.

I must say that my own personal opinion is that they lacked guts. They could have easily continued in the partnership with us but they didn't have the stamina to withstand a tough media. We live with a hostile media all the time; that doesn't mean that we're going to stop doing what we are doing, but apparently the media criticisms were too much for the Saskatchewan politicians. So, for that, I mark them down in my estimation, but we will overcome this and, who knows, we may get a better deal. We are right in the middle of looking and there are many possibilities.

But we are doing alright. I will take you back to 1992 when we took over the government. There were blackouts all the time; we could hardly live, and life was really rough. But under the late President we made heavy progress. We were able to achieve what we have now, not 100% electrical stability, but we are very close to it. Over the Christmas season I saw everywhere illuminated, and I wondered where the electricity came from. We didn't have any blackouts over the Christmas/ New Year period, which shows that our system is working.

I also think that GEC has done very well in rural electrification. I remember, and again I refer to the late President Cheddi Jagan, when he opened the first rural electrification plan in Essequibo in the 60s. But that plant was neglected and we have now opened another plant in Essequibo, electrifying all of Essequibo and the Islands. New lines are being extended all over the country so we aren't doing so bad where electricity is concerned particularly when one considers what the Government of Mr. Hoyte left us —total disaster!

Now we are examining every closely the option of Hydro electricity. Really and truly Hydro is the way forward. Our late President indicated a plan for Hydro-power many years ago but unfortunately the Burnham and Hoyte regime threw it out the window. But Hydro is the way forward. I may mention that a little Hydro power plant is in the process of being completed at Moco-Moco in the Rupununi.

We have also signed an agreement with an American firm [Texas Ohio] to improve electricity in Linden in a partnership with the consumers' organisation. So I would say on the whole that we are doing well in the electricity sector.

Persaud: During February our country Guyana will be celebrating its Republican status which was proclaimed in 1970. This year's Mashramani, as our celebrations

are called, is now in the air. What are your expectations?

President Jagan: I see Mashramani as a blending of the beauty of the different cultures of our society, woven together from the music, the dance, the costumes and the decorations of our people.

Each element of our society is putting something into Mashramani and I hope this year there will be happy and joyful celebration and also one in which all the people of our country will come closer together.

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Mash..... coming together.