

Something to be Proud of

by Janet Jagan

Bill Gates, co-founder of the massive firm Microsoft, and one of the world's richest men has commented that education is the most important way to achieve success in a person's life and for the good of the country in which he/she lives. He suggested that in our region of the world it is most important to improve the high school system and the universities.

We can be sure and proud of one thing – that is that our educational system is getting better and better every day. Under the PPP/C government enormous changes in the advance of good education have taken place. An excellent and recognized evaluation comes from the yearly United Nations Human Development Index. The most recent index, 2007-2008 shows that Guyana has moved-up from a 103 rating to 97, ahead of Jamaica, but behind most Caribbean countries. We still have a lot of "catching-up" from the poor position we were left in during the pre-



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vious PNC administration. The Index measures life expectancy, education, infant and child mortality, pure water supplies, etc.

In education, the Index pegged our gross enrollment for primary, secondary and tertiary education at 85%, "comparatively higher" than countries with a high Index rating. Good for Guyana!

This tremendous improvement in education over the years since the restoration of democracy in 1992 is due to many factors. The first task of the new PPP/C government was to repair the hundreds of falling apart schools that had been totally neglected for years and to build new ones in areas

where the need was the greatest. Next, of course, was to raise the standards of teaching and to make a positive thrust to train teachers. In earlier PPP administrations, teachers' training had started in areas away from the central Teachers Training College and had succeeded in training teachers to fill the many vacancies in schools. This had been discontinued during the PNC regime.

Training teachers, which has been greatly accelerated under the PPP/C is one task. Holding on to them is another. In the English-speaking developed countries like England and USA, their own teachers have been leaving the job in large numbers, seeking more lucrative jobs. For example, a BBC news report noted that more than 250,000 qualified teachers in the UK no longer work in that profession. In fact, thousands who train and qualify as teachers never go on to teach in schools. This is the reason why so many teachers are lured to work in the UK and USA, where much the same thing is happening. Thus, we lose

many of our trained teachers to the First World countries which don't care about the results of solving their prob-

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However, despite the problem, our government is solving the teacher shortage by tripling the teachers being trained. A recent report by the Education Minister said that the number of teachers being trained currently will increase by three fold over the next five years. Also, better conditions and better pay are being provided to teachers, a recognition of the vital role they play in our society.

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Greater emphasis is being placed on science and technology. The Minister has urged teachers to place more emphasis on science subjects like Chemistry, Biology and Physics and advises students to write on these subjects at the CSEC exams. In a changing world where science and technology are so important, Guyanese stu-

dents must have the opportunities to know these subjects to the fullest.

New schools in the interior areas, especially secondary schools are being established to give interior children the same opportunities as those living in the coastal areas. And new schools are going up where there are population shifts due to new housing schemes, as is the new Diamond Secondary school which recently opened.

All Guyanese have every reason to be happy about the positive development of our education system. All of our schools are open to all of the nation's children. There is no segregation and school busing to create racial balances. Teacher training is open to every adult qualified for entry. Our country's education, by all and any standards, is acceptable. Yes, we have problem, but these are being overcome, one by one. The education provided to all our children is on a par with most countries and we can and must be proud of our achievements as a nation.