

# Welcome to Local Government Elections this Year

(Last article written by Janet Jagan just before her death on March 28, 2009)

The front page headline on the March 18, 2009 Guyana Chronicle made me “feel good”. Feeling good is a pleasant experience not felt daily by most people.

There is a photo of President Bharrat Jagdeo and Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Guyana’s renowned cricketer, at a reception in his honour at State House. Although I am not a cricket fan and know next to nothing about this most popular sport, I could not help but feel very proud of the achievements in world cricket of this son of Guyana. I guess this feeling of pride in a Guyanese who has made it to the top in his particular field of endeavour is natural. Everyone loves a hero and here is one who is young, popular, a “great” among the great, modest, inspiring and respected. My congratulations to Chanderpaul. May he succeed even higher in the expectations of his countrymen!

The other headline that made my day was that announcing that the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) had declared that local government polls can be held this year, i.e, by November 30, 2009. What fantastic news! A part of me had been in perpetual gloom over this unbelievable, and in my opinion, unnecessary delay in the holding of local government elections since the last one 15 years ago. When the PPP won elections in 1992, one of our pledges was to hold local government elections as early as possible and this we did.

This is one area of democracy that does not have the fullest attention it deserves. When the local government elections were held, it brought democracy back to the roots. It is my belief, but I won’t press it because I am more interested in local government elections this year than in pointing fingers and making accusations. But I do believe that the opposition party was terrified at the overwhelming PPP success at those elections and has since used every possible move to delay, delay, delay fresh elections.

However, not to dwell on recriminations and accusations but to deal with the reality that whatever happens, we will, at long last, have local government elections this year.

A lot of good work at the local, ground level, has been stalled because the democratic forms at the local level have been frozen. Many village lists of councillors have dried up, with no new names for councillors who died, or moved or had to retire. This has held back many local government councils which need fresh names of councillors – young, with bright and new ideas and space to clean out those unstable or poorly equipped for the tasks and responsibilities.

Free and fair, local government elections and widely spread Councils with leaders who live in the villages and housing schemes are part of the whole process of ensuring democracy in any state. We can now give a sigh of relief that after waiting so long, at last this basic of any democratic nation will be stabilized and constitute a regular part of national life. Never again should such a delay ever take place!