

President Jagan's address

THE following is the text of President Janet Jagan's

address to the nation, first broadcast on GBC at 17:00 hours yesterday.

THE time has now come for me to take a decision, which I have been considering over the past month.

When I became ill on the eve of my return from Rio de Janeiro Summit of leaders of the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, I spent a little time in hospital and then had medical tests in Trinidad.

From these, I was advised to seek further tests abroad, and then proceeded to the USA where I was under the care of a Guyanese doctor whom I have known since his childhood.

Despite the assurances that my condition is not life threatening, I found that my energy and stamina have been seriously reduced.

I considered at length and consulted close colleagues on the question of my continuing in office as President. It is now my firm and studied conclusion that I can no longer offer to the nation the vigorous and strong leadership that I had sought to provide during my 20 months as the lawfully and duly elected President of the Republic of Guyana.

I, therefore, wish to announce that I intend to resign my position as President and to fulfil the promise I made during the 1997 election campaign.

At the time, the PPP/Civic had announced the concept of the 'A' Team, made up of myself, Prime Minister Samuel Hinds and Finance Minister, Bharrat Jagdeo.

It was stated at public meetings and through campaign material that should anything happen to the President, clear cut means would be used to replace the President by the third member of the 'A' Team, Bharrat Jagdeo, with the Prime Minister retaining his position in the post allotted to the Civic component of the PPP/Civic alliance.

Therefore, I am overseeing the implementation of this promise to the electorate and am assuring all concerned that the responsibilities of good and strong leadership will be guaranteed.

I would like to remark upon the extreme goodwill and support which I received throughout my time in office.

The PPP/Civic government which I have led for 20 months has had several important objectives, many of which have been achieved with concrete steps

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in train to achieve others.

The foundation policies of the PPP/Civic administration have been clearly outlined by our first democratically-elected President, Dr. Cheddi Jagan.

His vision of a Guyana that is united, free and prosperous continues to define our work on behalf of the people.

His administration, in just four and a half years, succeeded in stemming the slide that was evident in our society for decades.

First of all, we have had the task of consolidating democracy which was won after a long and hard battle and which involved a great many Guyanese who may or may not support the PPP/Civic.

The protection of our democracy is vital for the development of our country. Its protection and deepening is a matter for all Guyanese.

We all cherish this new freedom and we must see to it that at all cost there must never be a return to authoritarianism and rigged elections.

The results of that part of our history are still here for us to see.

Secondly, it has been the objective of my government to rebuild the economic and social foundations of the society and to launch out on a development course which would see Guyana coming out of its under-developed state.

And, we intend to do so with the interest of the people at the centre of our strategy.

Our open economic system is intended to bring growth and human development. In building a new society we have sought to encourage genuine partnerships with the main players in civic society, especially the private sector and organisations of the working people.

What is of importance is that we have put Guyana back on track. There is more hope for a bright future. More and more people are using their creativity to create wealth and to be part of the process of nation building.

More and more people feel that they have a stake in this country and want to see it develop and flourish.

A glaring feature of our society, especially since the 1997 general elections is that we have not enjoyed the political peace so necessary for advancement and change.

But as an optimist, I know that these will come in time. I am encouraged by history, the past and present, here at home and in the world at large. We are not alone in being beset by unreasonable and uncivilised behaviour of an opposition that cannot accept the results of democratic elections.

It is nothing new. Reading American history recently I came across an

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episode in which the early President Thomas Jefferson was warned by his Attorney General that "because of the perverse, hostile and malignant state of the opposition, with facility of imposing on the public mind and producing excitements, every measure originating with the executive will be attacked with virulence". Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Yet such opposition was overcome and the USA went on to become a powerful nation. It is not my intention to compare the United States with Guyana, but simply reminding ourselves that an unreasonable opposition cannot hold back growth and development once the leadership and people stand firm.

My government, and myself, have been criticised for being too 'soft' and 'weak' as regards dealing with those who want to destroy our gains as a nation. Our attitude has been one of patience and we realised that the state and government, not the opposition or destructive elements, have the responsibility to see to it that the society does not descend into anarchy. We needed to have great political wisdom and prevent racial conflagration by finding new ways to solve the problems of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. The opposition, by now, must know the response of society at large to the destruction they have caused both to the economy and to the social fabric of the nation. As a politician with some 50 years experience in this country, I can assure you that such tactics can cost votes. And that is what they will reap - the wrath of the people.

The PPP/Civic government stands for development and people. I have brought all my years of experience to the highest office, and have sought to maintain the dignity of this office. It is important for our country to be led by people who have the wisdom to know what is the best in the interest of society. Dr Jagan brought dignity to this country. So did Mr Samuel Hinds. I am confident that the new President, Mr Bharrat Jagdeo, will do the same. He is youthful and has presided admirably over the important Ministry of Finance. I know that he is firm in dealing with government business and is not afraid to make decisions. His office requires that kind of firmness. He will be aided by many veterans in the field in politics and those who have experience in running the affairs of the country. I am indeed leaving a strong and united team to lead the country. And, of course, I am not going anywhere. I will be around to assist in whatever way I can.

The process of healing the wounds of our nation continues. This will take courage and strong will. To bring peace requires understanding and this must be done without violence or disruption of the daily lives of our people. There must be reasonableness and a will to find common grounds if there is to be peace, progress and prosperity. The future of this country is at stake and we cannot allow the iron fist to rule. We have had enough of that. Our task is to unite and to do this we must strive for better ethnic and cultural understanding and give assurances of security to those who feel insecure.

I wish to thank Prime Minister Sam Hinds who has been a constant support, my Cabinet colleagues, the staff of the Office of the President, the Commissioner of Police and Chief of Staff and all the other hard-working people in government. A special thanks to my colleagues in the PPP and its leadership who have walked with me and my husband all these years. I will continue to be in their company in coming years. I want to give a big thank you to all those people who voted for me and the PPP/Civic alliance in the last elections. I thank them for their faith in me and their continuing support. Lastly, I want to thank the thousands from all walks of life who have welcomed me in their homes, who have visited me in my office, who have

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written me and who have sent me photographs, messages of support and have kept me aware of the problems and aspirations of the Guyanese people. Meeting you, my Guyanese friends, was the best part of the job.

Long live Guyana.

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Cheddi Jagan Research Centre