

December 24th 2020

A JOYOUS CHRISTMAS THANKS TO GOOD LEADERSHIP

Introduction

The Christmas season is in full swing as evident by the hive of activity in capital city Kingstown, the presence of Christmas lights, glowing brightly in communities across SVG, the start of Sunday shopping, and of course the much loved Nine Mornings Festivals. But looking back just a few short months, the idea of this level of activity in our beloved country would not have crossed the minds of many as the coronavirus pandemic swept the globe with devastating and tragic effect. This country had already seen the cancellation of Easter festivities, the cancellation of Vincy Mass 2020 and the slowing to a crawl of night life with bars, restaurants and night-spots all having to reduce their activities as a result, some even closing temporarily. With Christmas Day just a day away at the publication of this article, let us reflect on the fact that Christmas this year for us is even remotely possible, while developed countries with their advancements in medicine and technology, and with the resources necessary to deal effectively with Covid-19, are preparing to impose another period of lock-down to curb the surging rate of new infections and a possible new strain of the virus. This ULP government has done well in managing the affairs of state through a most difficult time, we have done well following guidelines and doing our part. Let's take a look back.

The Terrible Drought

The year began with a significant reduction in rainfall, causing one of the worst droughts the country has seen in more than 70 years. This drought threatened our entire agricultural sector including crops and livestock but the Ministry of Agriculture, ably lead by Minister Saboto Caesar, took charge of the situation, addressing in a most efficacious way the plight of our farmers to ensure that all wasn't lost. The Ministry of Agriculture provided support to livestock farmers, providing daily feed and water for their animals, and those farming crops, also got support with inputs being heavily subsidised through the input warehouse. This swift and decisive action of the Ministry of Agriculture saved our agricultural sector and was very significant to the eventual benefits the farmers would reap in a short few month once the drought subsided. Domestic users also had to take tremendous sacrifices as water rationing became the norm, but the Central Water and Sewage Authority managed the situation well to minimise the inconvenience faced by domestic users, including transporting water to residents on the Grenadine Islands whose water supply in tanks had all but dried up.

Covid-19 Pandemic

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was still dealing with the effects of the worst drought in more than 70 years, when the World Health Organisation declared Covid-19 a pandemic and within a few short weeks, this country had recorded case number one and then number 2 with the latter casting a cloud of panic and fear over the country. The major cities of the world that serve as source markets for our tourism sector and much of what SVG imports began to experience spiking infection numbers and even deaths, promoting their local, national (including federal) officials to respond with a variety

of measures to try and contain the situation. Those countries with their major cities began to impose measures that ranged from curfews, to full shut-downs, banning out-going and incoming flights, restricting travel, making allowances for essential services and their workers. In the region, our neighbours also imposed curfew, and closed their borders in periods of lock-downs, all in an effort to protect the lives of their citizens.

This country lead by Comrade Ralph, activated the Health Services Sub-Committee under NEMO, chaired by the Chief Medical Officer, to devise SVG's strategy and advise the Cabinet on dealing with Covid-19. The Government employed a mixture of measures including wide-spread public education, good old-fashioned "boots on the ground" epidemiology and developed protocols that were communicated clearly to citizens. Noteworthy is the fact that this country didn't close its borders, didn't impose curfew nor did the government accept the advice of the opposition NDP to "use Chinese draconian measures and lock down the country tight as a drum".

The Government's approach made the following possible: the safe return of our seafarers to their families from cruise ships and other vessels, the export of agricultural produce weekly to Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, the opening of school for a 3rd term to prepare students for various external exams, and the holding of General Elections, characterised by massive rallies, that saw the ULP returned for a 5th consecutive term in government.

As the end of 2020 draws near, and developing countries prepare for more periods of lockdown, neighbouring countries like Grenada and St. Lucia are confronted by spikes in infection rates, leading to clusters and community spread of Covid-19, with the former preparing to impose curfew, SVG is preparing for Christmas Day. The daily massive crowds in Kingstown, groups taking in the lighting ac-

tivities at nights and the large Nine Morning audiences in Kings-town, Richland Park, Stubbs and Barrouallie, all bear testament to the great work of the government to properly manage Covid-19.

Conclusion

The confidence with which we approach Christmas Day 2020 is a far cry from the feelings of anxiety felt earlier this year as we navigated the early days of the pandemic. Driving through this country, the conclusion that SVG is in a bubble that removes us from the effects of Covid-19 may be drawn, when in fact it's really the confidence of the citizens of this country in the excellent management of the pandemic by our "Five Star" Government. The mood in this country is truly festive and the economic activity taking place is nothing short of remarkable in the context of the global experiences that speak of loss of revenue by governments leading to inability to meet salary obligations and even layoffs.

The ULP wishes all a very merry Christmas 2020, and reminds us to act responsibly while celebrating with family and friends. It was the responsible leadership of our government and our collective effort that made this possible. Let's not become complacent, as we still have a long way to go.

Happy Holidays!