

December 15th 2021

OUR SOCIETY KEPT FUNCTIONING BY STEADY LEADERSHIP

Introduction

The unprecedented circumstances facing this nation currently have been the source of much anxiety and concern for its citizens and residents. Understandably, many questions are raised daily as Vincentians seek to get a grasp of what is happening as we move into a new year. The recent increase in Covid-19 cases announced by the Health Services Subcommittee within NEMO, and the continued threat of the La Soufriere Volcano eruption continue to present a metaphoric “double-edged sword” challenge to all of us. Tackling these imminent challenges in a manner that presents very little if any disruptions in living and production continues to be the number one priority of the ULP administration that is charged with leading this country. Unfortunately, those driven by naked partisan rancor are overtaken with glee, ecstatic with what they perceive as something blameworthy to put at the feet of Comrade Ralph and the ULP. This government, however, continues to adopt a pragmatic approach to the management of the challenges facing us and is confident that with the cooperation of each individual, SVG can get through this period.

Life Must Go on

The increase in Covid-19 cases has caused renewed calls by some, for the country to go into lock-down, or at least adopt some restrictive measures in an attempt to slow the spread of the virus. The government however continues to make decisions based on the available science, the prevailing evidence available and the advice of the professionals involved in the daily management of Covid-19. The uncertainty surrounding the possibility of an eruption of La Soufriere, when added to the challenges that the pandemic, present, and even more acute need for a mature, steady hand to lead in these times. The focus of the government is to ensure that life, living and production continue in a manner that presents the minimum risk to citizens, but at the same time allows for economic activity that sustains the lives its tasked to protect.

The revision of the protocols was a key step in achieving this, thus the protocol regarding quarantining arriving visitors is now 14 days in an approved facility. The government also strongly recommends the wearing of face covering in public, has placed a ban on amplified music in public places, or private place where the public has access, and recommends a maximum of 10 persons inside and 20 outside for gatherings. Employees in government offices are asked to wear masks while at work and the public is required to wear masks when entering government offices. All these measures are implemented to ensure that daily activities can continue but in a manner that provides for safe interaction between citizens.

The Ministry of Education, in carrying out its mandate has also had to make adjustments in order to ensure that the disruption to the education system is kept to a minimum. The opening of school was initially delayed by one week so that the Ministry could decide on the safest and most efficient method to allow for teaching and learning. It took the decision that students and teachers would employ the online mode of interaction as an immediate solution to get our nations students engaged in a learning environment that's safe. It must be emphasised that the provision of thousands of tablets to the community college, secondary schools and Grade 6 primary school students by this ULP administration is one of the main reasons we are able to implement online teaching/learning. Clearly the preference would be for face-to-face teaching/learning, but the circumstances dictate that necessary adjustments be made and our responsive government, through its Ministry of Education, has done just that.

The Threat of Volcanic Eruption

The La Soufriere volcano continues its effusive eruption with the growth of the second dome in the crater now extending to the crater wall. The team of seismic professionals lead by Vincentian Prof Richard Robertson continues to monitor the volcano's activity by installing various types of equipment at different locations in the country to record relevant data. The UWISRC has been monitoring La Soufriere since 1986 and has a wealth of knowledge and experience in this kind of work. The regular and timely updates provided by the team to the leadership of this country and the subsequent dissemination of this information to the citizens of this country is of utmost importance to the stability of our nation. Dr Gonsalves himself speaks to the nation at least 3 times per week, discussing the information in the context of the government's plans in the event that the mode of eruption changes to explosive. Anyone looking on from the outside would find it difficult to accept that this country is facing the threat of eruption from an active volcano, since the mood across the country, including communities closest to the volcano continues to be positive. From Fancy to Richmond, residents closest to the volcano carry about their daily activities mindful of the reality, but with a quiet confidence in the record on disaster management by this government. Farmers continue on their farms, fisherfolk ply their trade and the communities are as lively and vibrant even as we remain cautious and in a constant state of readiness.

Conclusion

Keeping our society functioning safely during this time of threats to our lives and livelihoods by an erupting volcano and a globally devastating pandemic isn't achieved by guesswork or knee-jerk reaction. One just needs to look at our neighbours to appreciate the significant difference in the response taken to managing Covid, in that while we are generally experiencing similar outcomes, those countries have experienced various levels of restrictions that have disrupted the lives of citizens and productive aspects of their societies. The economic fallout in those countries are causing great economic hardship, while offering no evidence that the restrictions imposed have

kept their citizens safer. The government continues to manage Covid-19, while we monitor the volcanic activity, with a patience and a calm, following the science, and crafting responses that allow for a functioning society for the benefit of all Vincentians.