

October 8th 2021

FOCUSED GOVERNANCE IN THE MIDST OF CHALLENGES

Introduction

The current public health emergency impacting the globe has been described in many ways, but the word most used and quite appropriately is “challenge”. What nations the world over have experienced in every aspects of their societies is nothing short of challenging. The Covid-19 pandemic has been an obvious challenge to the health system of countries, overwhelming them by creating acute shortages of human resource through illness of their employees, shortages in medical supplies, shortages in bed spaces among the challenges. There is no shortage of images of make-shift facilities set up in stadiums, using tents and many other temporary accommodations to deal with the sharp increase in infections that have resulted in hospitalisations and in too many cases preventable deaths. In this country, the government established early an isolation facility at Argyle to deal with the eventuality of hospitalisation of the critically ill in an environment designed to accommodate them. Since the recent spike, following the ill-advised and very reckless super-spreader event organised by the Public Service Union, the Teachers Union and the opposition New Democratic Party, the Argyle Isolation Facility (AIF) had consistently operated at capacity prompting authorities to put other measures in place. Two wards at the Milton Cato Memorial Hospital have been converted to “Covid-19 wards” with the further intention to convert a third ward to accommodate Covid-19 positive patients requiring critical care. This move would invariably reduce the capacity and capabilities of the MCMH to deliver other critical services to

clients needing care. As the number of active cases continue to increase to around 1300 and the number of deaths move from 12 that occurred over 18 months to 33 in just over 2 weeks, the gravity of the situation is made painstakingly obvious to all citizens. While the government continues to manage the Covid-19 emergency here admirably, and while it may appear that it's the only thing happening, the reality is, the ULP administration, lead by Comrade Ralph has a very packed agenda on governance that ensures that the work of the people is done and our country's economy is kept working.

Infrastructure Work Ongoing

Despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Comrade lead government has continued to function, managing our economy and ensuring that things are kept together. Work is continuing on infrastructure projects intended to aid SVG's adaptation efforts against the impacts of climate change. Work on the sea defence projects in San Souci, Georgetown and Caratal (which serves as both sea and river defence) continue even as there were minor delays during the explosive eruptions of La Soufriere. An extensive road repair program is currently ongoing, engaging a number of independent contractors throughout the country creating employment for many. The construction of facilities to temporarily house the students of the Sandy Bay Secondary School, the Grammar School, and the Girls High School and are almost complete to allow for students to return to the classroom as the health circumstances permit. The bi-annual road cleaning program occurred over the last 3 weeks, employing hundreds of individuals across the country in preparation for the re-opening of school in October. In Orange Hill, the government is finalising the construction of 27 houses that would be handed over to some residents in the red zone whose homes were damaged in the aftermath of the La Soufriere eruption making them inhabitable. The residents of Rose Place who would be displaced by the construction

of the modern port, are closer to moving into their homes, built for them by this government. All these continued, with the ones that started before the eruption suffering only minor delays during the period immediately following that eruption, but resumed promptly once the all-clear was given. The ability of this ULP government to multi-task, focusing on effectively addressing the impacts of the public health emergency facing this country, the impacts of the explosive eruption of La Soufriere, while maintaining the pace of capital projects is an indication of the quality of leadership provided by Comrade Ralph and his team.

Continued Support to Categories of Citizens

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government introduced a stimulus and recovery package that was intended to assist those workers whose income were affected by job loss. As the true impact of the pandemic was realised, the initial period of support was extended and the categories of workers expanded to include other categories of worker such as farmers. Following the eruption of the La Soufriere Volcano, displaced families and even more farmers were added to those who were offered income support to assist them during the very difficult period. The government has spent tens of millions of dollars in income support to various categories of workers and own account holders (at the NIS) in an attempt to cushion the impact of job loss and other forms of reduction in income experienced by citizens. This must be taken in the context of the significant loss in tourism revenue for the government and other losses in import revenue due to exemptions offered during the disaster period experienced by the central government. During this period however, the government has never once defaulted on any of its debts nor has it been late in the payment of salaries and wages to public sector workers. How this ULP administration is able to accomplish this is nothing short of remarkable, especially when considering that countries in

the region have found it difficult to pay wages on time, have defaulted on debts and are owing pensioners for up to three months.

Conclusion

Leadership is more critical during times of adversity and challenge, and this ULP administration lead by our wise and experience Comrade Ralph, continues to provide that solid leadership that has seen this country emerge stronger than ever after each challenge faced. These more recent challenges would be no different as we move forward confidently knowing “*what e’re the future brings, our faith will see us through*”.