

September 25th 2020

Managing the Covid 19 Pandemic

Introduction

On March 25th 2020, Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves addressed the nation on the global pandemic, or Covid-19, as the World Health Organisation dubbed it. At that time the world as we know it, was thrown in a crisis from the virus. It touched the lives of people in countries near and far, particularly in the United States, where large numbers of the Vincentians reside.

As it was on March 25th, 2020, the country had only recorded one case of Covid-19, an imported case from the United Kingdom. However, the government of Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves, along with the Ministry of Health, have not been complacent in their approach to the treatment of Covid-19. In fact, the Prime Minister in his address on March 25th, outlined a series of measures in the fight against Covid-19, including a multi-dimensional approach to Covid-19, to include health measures, and an economic stimulus programme.

Since then, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has operated as if it has not been impacted in a serious way, by Covid-19. Life has continued as normal, people have gone to their jobs, schools have re-opened, and commercial activities have flourished in the usual way. From time to time the Ministry of Health issues some cautions in respect of people gathering for events like funerals and picnics, but by and large, life continued as normal.

Enter the NDP

The opposition party here, the New Democratic Party, not to be outdone, entered the fray with a series of pronouncements that made absolutely no sense. Without paying attention to the science around Covid-19, and without understanding what the ULP administration was going to do, the NDP proceeded to frighten the living day lights out of Vincentians.

The NDP informed the country that there will be two thousand deaths here from the Covid-19 pandemic, and that fifty thousand persons will become infected. They then called for an entire lock down of the country, nothing going out and nothing coming in. They said “lock it down tight, tight, tight”. They were prepared to subject the citizens of the country to a series of draconian measures, so as to make life difficult. They tried to use the fear factor generated by the presence of the disease to create a support structure for their attacks on the government, as well as hard

working officials from the Ministry of Health, and the Police Department. This did not work, since the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines preferred to listen to the messages from Comrade Ralph and his team.

Because of the attitude of locking down the country, the NDP was not prepared for the return of Vincentians who were working with cruise ships and the oil rigs in the gulf area. And so the NDP created a mass of confusion, and they managed to use some sailors in this regard. But the ULP administration had their plans in place, and the return of our sailors proceeded without any problems.

The ULP strategy

The battle against Covid-19 is first of all a fight to protect the health of all Vincentians, and the government has made the necessary decisions to better equip the public health system, to battle the pandemic. The government has also retrofitted and equipped a facility to serve as a 25-bed isolation centre for the treatment of Covid-19 patients.

On April 7th 2020, the government took to Parliament a recovery and stimulus programme with important provisions to better prepare the country to battle the pandemic. The ULP administration recognised that Covid-19 also affected the economy of the country, since certain businesses were forced to close, and people were without jobs.

And so a number of Vincentians were provided with small cash grants to help them through this crisis. Through the NIS, Vincentians have been assisted in a number of ways, to ensure that they will rise stronger from the ashes of Covid 19. The hospitality sector in particular, which has been severely affected by the pandemic, has been provided with a stimulus package.

Conclusion

Some employees have been laid off or being sent home because of the economic consequences of the pandemic, particularly in the hospitality sector. Indeed, the government through the Buildings Roads and Bridges Authority, BRAGSA, has been involved in a number of construction and repair work to government buildings in the State, as a way to further stimulate economic activity.

Many Vincentians have expressed approval for the way in which the ULP administration has handled the Covid-19 crisis. No one has died from the pandemic, and no medical worker has been affected. To date our country has recorded 64 cases of Covid-19, all of whom have recovered. It means that as of September 21st, there are no Covid-19 cases in the country. It also means that some four thousand, seven hundred and seventy four tests (4774) have been conducted in the country. Amazing!

There is no lock down process in our country, and people are free to go about their commercial activities. Our Argyle International Airport is still operating and we have been accepting flights from Canada, the United States and the rest of the region.

Government officials from the OECS and the Caricom group have marveled at how the ULP administration has been able to come to grips with Covid-19. The ULP has followed the science, act prudently on the medical advice of the professionals in the Ministry of Health, be guided by the sage advice from the WHO, PAHO and the CPHA.