

# *“I look at this book and I see my country”*



*Onward, upward,  
may we ever go...*



**Address by Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana  
To launch the book, ‘GUYANA’ published by Hansib Publications**

**DATE: 8 July 2006. VENUE: Meridian Pegasus Hotel, Georgetown, Guyana**

A gala reception to launch the much-anticipated book, GUYANA was held in July 2006 at the Meridian Pegasus Hotel in Guyana’s capital, Georgetown. The event was attended by more than four hundred invited guests and was broadcast live on national television and radio.

Guyana’s President, Bharrat Jagdeo, was the keynote speaker. He was joined by Arif Ali, Chief Executive of Hansib Publications and Editor of the book, and Captain Gerry Gouveia.

Master of Ceremonies was Ron Robinson. The West Ruimveldt Boys’ Choir sang ‘**Born in the Land of the Mighty Roraima**’. Entertainment was provided by the Guyana Police Band and a group of Tassa Drummers. The event was organised through the Office of the President by Jennifer Webster, Permanent Secretary, Vic Persaud, Head of Protocol, Lt. Col. Francis Abrahams, ADC to the President, and Arif Ali.



## **OPENING REMARKS: Ron Robinson [excerpt]**

“I think that when you see this book you will say that this will, certainly, enhance any drive that we have with regard to tourism. It will place Guyana around the world as a conversation piece, and as a place that will be visited more and more. It is beautifully done. But let me not tell you about it; the Chief Executive of Hansib Publications and Editor of ‘Guyana’ is, of course, Arif Ali, and it is his brainchild. It was born out of his concept. Please welcome Arif Ali to tell you about ‘GUYANA’.”

## **SPEECH: Capt. Gerry Gouveia [edited; he spoke after Arif Ali’s presentation]**

“Arif, I want to tell you about the partnership between the public and the private sector. We don’t see this book as a Government book – not at all. In fact, we see it as a Guyana book. We see it as a book that was done jointly with the Government and the private sector. A partnership

that we don’t take lightly but one that is taken very, very seriously. When Arif spoke to me about this publication a few months ago, I was personally very, very excited and immediately pledged my support both in my personal capacity as Chairman of the Roraima Group of Companies and also as the President of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce. I was excited because during my time, when I served for the five terms as President of the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana, and even now as I serve as a Vice Chairman of the Guyana Tourism Authority, I always looked with envy at the other countries that had such a treasure. A pictorial and detailed, high quality souvenir publication; and I always wanted to strangle you Arif and say, ‘why don’t you come and do one for Guyana’. But I knew with all my heart that one day Guyana would look wonderful in a book like this; and today we have it. Thank you very, very much.

“The diaspora (for those of you who have been following the news) will see that we have





*Day by day in strength  
and beauty grow...*



been working very hard to tap into the resources of our Guyanese living overseas. We feel very strongly that some of Guyana’s greatest assets are the members of our diaspora and you have demonstrated that in no uncertain terms. Thank you very, very much for doing this wonderful work for Guyana.

“This publication provides an opportunity for the world beyond Guyana to see us in a positive light; and only God knows we need to project that positive light. So we have a real challenge and this book will help us tremendously... We have really suffered too long because of our relatively unknown status in the world. Today, this publication serves to fill that information void. But more importantly, not only will this book bring visitors to our shores, it will bring investors – and this country is open for investment. The investment criteria are there; the fiscal incentives are there for the private sector to grow. What we need is to get the word out there and this book will certainly help to let the world know that Guyana is open to invest and ready for tourism. Ready to offer a tourism product that is unequalled.

“It is my hope, Mr President, that this book will find itself in every hotel lobby; every library; the reception area of every office in both the public and the private sector; every reading room and in every bookstore. I would also expect that the Government of Guyana would furnish our diplomatic missions overseas (as well as international organisations) with copies of this remarkable publication. I would also like to urge Guyanese to use this book as a gift item to families overseas – send it to your friends as a souvenir of Guyana. I would urge you to seriously give consideration to the reprinting of this book since I have every reason to believe that it would be very popular with visitors to Guyana.

“Once again, I would like to thank you for this wonderful publication on behalf of the private sector and the country in general.”

**INTRODUCTION: Ron Robinson introduces President Bharrat Jagdeo**

“I think we in Guyana can proudly say that we have a President who has always supported moves such as this; a President who has thrown his weight behind any effort to promote our country in a positive way. I now have the honour of inviting our President, Bharrat Jagdeo, to address us”.

**BHARRAT JAGDEO, PRESIDENT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA**

“Thank you, colleagues of the Cabinet (those who are here), Arif, members of the Diplomatic Corp, ladies and gentlemen. First of all, let me say that I am extremely pleased to be here and, for Arif’s sake, I think I need to give an explanation. [During Arif Ali’s presentation, he had remarked on the number of empty seats that were ‘reserved’ for Ministers]

“You were launching this book in a bad season, and I have just come back from the fields; I have had five meetings today; I have participated in a graduation ceremony; and I rushed back to be here. You almost missed me. So I am sure that my Ministers would [also] be busy out there working, fulfilling other responsibilities. That is the first point I want to make. The second point is, yes, the idea of this book started a long time ago – and Arif has been very persistent. I think he spoke with every President starting with Cheddi Jagan. And, yes, we could not afford the book at that time; and you would see, although this book is a wonderful book, it is pretty expensive, too. So we could not afford it at that time. The economy was in a different shape. But even now you may want to ask, ‘what has changed?’ When Arif came to see me about a year ago, I said to him that we will do this book but we are only ordering a particular quantity so we have to find other sponsors. This is why I am very pleased that the private sector readily filled that gap. Those who participated willingly and those who we called, they all made a significant contribution to the publication of this book. It is a joint effort and I want to thank all of you for it.

“It is an incredible book. I only saw it last night and had to sign some eighty copies, so I just browsed through it. [Copies of the book, autographed by President Jagdeo, were presented to the forty companies who supported the project; the writers; the photographers; the Prime Minister, Sam Hinds, and other dignitaries]

“It’s a book that reminds us that we live in a country of breathtaking natural beauty, with spectacular heritage sites, unmatched hospitality and a diverse, wonderful, multicultural people. I am very pleased and very proud to live in this country – and to be its leader – and I am sure that all the people here, when they see this book, it will be heart-warming for them, too. I want to thank Arif for this wonderful piece of work.

“Arif is internationally renowned and he spoke to you of the struggles he has had in another country [Arif Ali is based in the UK] to change the situation there. Although things are better in that country, and many others, we still have to continue that struggle, because racism still stalks

the world. Wars are fought because of intolerance and because people do not respect and understand each other – their culture, their background and their history – and there is too much bigotry in this world. Whilst those things remain with us, the struggles you have had, and the struggles that we all are engaged in, will have to continue.

“But, Arif, I am very pleased that you could just come up here and talk about the shape of your foot. Normally, people would not do that. [During Arif Ali’s presentation, he referred to the fact that he had wide feet because he did not wear shoes until he was in his teens]

“But sometimes, we are even ashamed of our accent; we want to adopt [other] people’s accents because, somehow, we think it makes us better people, and more modern, and we would be more accepted. From that perspective, I am glad that you mentioned that [your feet]. We are a unique people. We are different from other peoples. We have our weaknesses but we have our strengths, too, and we should all be proud of our upbringing and our past. I am very proud of you, too, because you are Guyanese and you have been serving another country, and the world.

“This book will lure you into a fascinating adventure, one that comes with the discovery of a land rich in history and culture. This book is alive in the quest to surmount the challenges of development. You are not going to see just all the best buildings, like in a tourism marketing video. You are going to see the reality of life in Guyana: the shacks, the people walking around the streets without shirts, the donkey carts. It is who we are, it is our way of life and the book portrays that. This book will open our eyes to the beauty of our country and lead us to [better] appreciate our homeland – especially for those of us who live here.

“I spent Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in Regions 7 and 8 going up the Pomerom River and then just branching off into the Mazaruni. The rain was falling and the raindrops were huge. Your first instinct is to cover up, and then, after some time, you just allow yourself to be soaked. But this is a feeling of being alive and happy that you’re there and you’re part of this. It is a feeling



that you cannot have on the coast. I was sitting in a guesthouse in Lethem at 5.00 in the morning with Gerry Gouveia and a few others watching the sun rise over the savannah with the mountains in the background. You feel your heart expand. This is the country that we live in. You don’t get that feeling every day in the hustle and bustle of the city. But I wish more of our people would have an interest, and I hope this book will stimulate that interest, and then they would have the experience of going out there and being part of this wonderful country. I hope that this book will reawaken in us a sense of nationalism and pride... a positive nationalism, so that we can work together to improve this country. I hope that it will serve to bring our people together because it speaks about our shared heritage, all of us sharing this land together. I hope that it will reinforce these bonds and I hope that someday every child will have the opportunity to see all of the country in its spectacular beauty.

“Secondly, I am hoping that this book serves to change our image abroad. This is the first time we are going to have a substantial, substantive piece of work done by a non-politician or one of our editors. Often, politicians have a partisan view of the world and even when they promote the country they tend to change things to suit their particular outlook. Our newspaper editors also, in many ways, are more concerned about selling newspapers than presenting a balanced, wholesome picture of this country and its beauty. This is the first effort where we have a book that is not about politics and not about making news. This book is just about Guyana and its people. It does not try, as I said before, to polish things up; it shows it in its natural state.

“I hope that the book will also expand our effort in creating a huge tourist industry. It is in the fledgling stages. We still have a long way to go but by changing the image of Guyana, by getting people to be familiar with some of the things that we have to offer, we hope that this will give a big impetus to the tourism drive. Tourism is very important in our future. It is part of our effort to diversify our economy.

“Many of you are aware that the march of globalisation has not been kind to the developing world. Many countries in different parts of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean are faced with severe dislocations because of changes in the world’s economic and trading regimes; changes over which they have very little say. They are not sure as to what will fill the vacuum created by those changes. Most of us are in this state of turmoil and, not least, in terms of restructuring our economies. We in Guyana – given these concerns – think we have a clear vision of where we want to go. Essential to that vision is the restructuring of our economy, showing that the traditional



*Till at length we each  
of us may show...*





*What Guyana's sons and daughters can be.*



industries are internationally competitive, creating a whole new range of industries to add to the stock of wealth of this country and improve income and employment opportunities for our people. The tourism sector is one of the key sectors in this regard.

“The book also speaks about investment. It speaks about what we have on offer. It mentions the partnership between the government and the private sector. So, we hope that if people are more aware of the opportunities – which this book will help to do – then we may be able to attract the investment in those areas which are critical to the restructuring of our economy. We do not have enough investable resources in Guyana, although we do have good projects. The source of investment resources is limited and that was because, for a long period in Guyana, we did not accumulate wealth. We de-accumulated wealth; one of the few countries in this region that did that. Hence, the huge foreign debt; a debt that was the result of de-accumulation of the wealth and our desire to have the same standard of living. We could not sustain that standard of living so we borrowed. And today, that is why we are better able to spend a bit more money on tourism. This year we have about GUY \$80 million that the government has put into the tourism sector and we are spending a bit more money doing this because our debt servicing has come down from some 94 per cent of revenue to 12 per cent of revenue, and we are very thankful to the donors who have supported us. But do not forget it is not through donors’ efforts alone that we are here, because in the last ten years we repaid US \$1.1 billion. We repaid more money than we received in development assistance from all the donors combined.

“The book speaks about the poverty, too... and will constantly remind us that there is this challenge of overcoming poverty.

“More importantly, this book speaks about the openness of Guyana. It is a country that still has security challenges; it is still a fledgling democracy but it speaks about the openness of the country, the media, the policies, etc. I want to say to you that my Government will forever work at defending those freedoms, the freedoms that we enjoy today.

“People ask me sometimes ‘why is it that you tolerate all these criticisms; can’t you do something about these TV stations’, and I say, no. We may disagree with what they say but my Government will defend their right to say it. A section of the book speaks about the media and about what is happening in ‘media land’ in Guyana. I want to say that that also speaks about the openness of the country. We have a clear vision of where we want to take Guyana. There will be setbacks and problems along the way. Nowhere, in any part of the world, can we have a problem-free situation. But it is how we rise to these challenges, and how we confront, and how we can bring to bear all of our resources to confront them that matters. This book... can help to do the things that are important to bring our people together.

“If we allow this message not to remain hidden in the pages of this book, which is kind of expensive, and I am saying that again Arif, but we can make sure that the message gets out to all of our people.

“So I want to thank everyone: Arif Ali, his company, the private sector, everyone who has been involved from the Government and the private sector; all the contributors for this wonderful piece of work. Arif, your name will go down in history as helping to change the perception of this country. It is not that people don’t know about Guyana; ask them what they do know about Guyana and it is not accurate or it is limited. Now, hopefully, this book will broaden that vision, that outlook.

“I now officially launch the book, Arif, and hope that a lot of our people will use it productively and that lots of copies sell so you can make lots of money, too. That will encourage you to do more books on Guyana – without sponsorship, maybe. So this is the book; it is wonderful. [President Jagdeo holds up the book]

“I have seen some images [in the book] like someone on a bicycle carrying many plastic bottles; a mother in a canoe with her children; contented babies paddling [in the water] – that is what Guyana is about. **I look at this book and I see my country.** So please take the opportunity to go through it for yourself; I am sure that you will get the same feeling of pride and joy that I got when I browsed the pages. Thank you very much.”

**The second edition of Guyana will be available in 2008. To order / pre-order your copy of GUYANA (GB £25 / US \$50 / CAN \$50 / GUY \$9000), please use one of the following methods:**

**ORDER DIRECT** from the publishers (with FREE POSTAGE & PACKING worldwide)



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