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HM THE QUEEN'S VISIT TO GUYANA

**THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER AT GEORGETOWN TO THE
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS**

SUMMARY

1. A most successful visit which conveyed approval of the return to fully representative democracy, and recognition that Guyana had emerged from its international isolation. (Paras 1-2)
2. Intensity of preparations and build up of expectations. But the size and the enthusiasm of the crowds came as a surprise. (Paras 3-5)
3. A varied programme, including a brief visit to the interior and formal engagements in Georgetown. (Paras 6-8)
4. President and Mrs Jagan gratified. Local press reaction very positive. (Paras 9-10)
5. Her Majesty's visit has raised Britain's stock further. British exporters should seek to take advantage. (Para 11)

**BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION
GEORGETOWN**

2 March 1994

**The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd CBE MP
LONDON**

Sir

HM THE QUEEN'S VISIT TO GUYANA

1 I have the honour to report that Her Majesty The Queen and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh paid a most successful visit to Guyana from 19-22 February 1994.

2 The visit was imbued with a special significance for the Guyanese, being the first time that Her Majesty had come here since Independence in 1966. For President Jagan and his government there was a special pleasure and meaning in a visit relatively soon after their success in the election of October 1992 had returned the People's Progressive Party (PPP) to office after 28 years in political wilderness: a period which, they maintain, was due to the United Kingdom and United States having so structured pre-Independence elections as to preclude the country entering into independent nationhood with the PPP at the helm. Some government sympathisers even managed to read into the visit a tacit admission on the part of the British Government that a wrong had indeed been committed and needed to be expiated. If that was stretching interpretation beyond the reasonable, there was nonetheless a poignancy in Her Majesty's message to Guyana's parliament that democracy must respect the will of the people, freely expressed. Intended as a positive comment on the conduct of the October 1992 election, and an exhortation for the future, it could easily be construed as a criticism of the political order and rigged elections under the late Forbes Burnham and his People's National Congress since 1966. There was some surprise that The Queen had chosen to make a political point: but the point, taken in a variety of ways, went home and was welcomed by all except those who are identified with the old corrupt order.

3 The broader significance of the visit lay not only in its acknowledgement of the restoration of democracy, but in its signal that Guyana has emerged from the long period of pariah status to which Burnham had condemned it. Provided sensible political and economic policies are followed, it now merits all the assistance which the international community can muster for

of the Commonwealth. As one newspaper article put it: this was a foreign visitor coming home.

6 The programme had been designed to allow Her Majesty and His Royal Highness to sample a little of Guyana's beautiful interior as well as to carry out a round of more formal engagements in and near the capital. On their first evening the Guyanese treated them to a colourful and vibrant display of music and dance at the National Cultural Centre. This admirably depicted the multi-racial and therefore multi-cultural composition of the population and ended in the foyer with a calypso composed in honour of the visitors. A spontaneous gathering of the cast, and the crowds who had waited outside throughout the performance, gave a spirited send-off to the royal visitors. The following day was devoted to a boat trip up the Demerara River and along a creek through the rain forest to an Arawak Amerindian village. Santa Mission, where The Queen and The Duke were greeted by the Minister for Amerindian Affairs and the village "captain", laid on an enthusiastic welcome, the entire population of some 400 following the visitors on their tour. First, to what must surely be one of the smallest churches (some 25 feet by 14) where Her Majesty has worshipped and The Duke has read from the New Testament: built of rough wood and corrugated iron with a bell tower made from the up-ended fuselage of a light aircraft which crashed in the bush 50 years ago. The service had a simplicity and dignity typical of the Amerindian people of Guyana. So too, did the singing (in Arawak) and dancing of the schoolchildren, and the work on display at the handicrafts centre. Altogether a happy, informal visit which, I hope, will have focussed attention on the indigenous people without involving them in the tedious and self-centred politicking in which their so-called "representative" organisations so glibly indulge.

7 The royal couple went on to lunch at an eco-tourist resort which typifies the kind of tourist industry which Guyana should be encouraging: small, unpretentious, respecting its natural surroundings and introducing no discordant notes such as electricity generators. An excellent example of exploiting the beauty of the country while preserving it. Back in Georgetown that evening, Her Majesty and His Royal Highness met a range of senior Guyanese politicians and officials, together with representatives of the British and Commonwealth communities, at my Residence. I was particularly glad that both The Queen and The Duke were able to spend some time talking to the young VSO volunteers who have put so much into this country and whom President Jagan went out of his way to compliment in his own address to Parliament.

8 Monday 21 February was a long, full day. Following her visit to Parliament, The Queen went on to tour the unique wooden cathedral (packed with children and the Mothers' Union) and the National Art Collection at Castellani House: the former residence of Forbes Burnham now devoted to far less sinister

the more popular of its two radio stations entirely to live commentaries on each event (even cricket news was displaced). Apart from one perverse commentary which chose to focus on Britain's "racist" immigration policy, the reaction of the written press matched the popular mood of enthusiastic approval.

One week after the visit ended the two leading dailies are still carrying letters from readers expressing their gratitude to The Queen for having decided to come to Guyana.

11 If the visit was good for Guyana, and promises to stimulate more benefits in the future, it was also excellent for Britain. We are already identified as a (if not, the) major source of bilateral aid, which will encourage others to be forgiving of Guyana's debts, and the country with which, despite all the vicissitudes of the last thirty years, Guyanese readily identify. All the re-hashing of the events of 1953 and 1964, provoked by the release of 1963 British Cabinet Documents, has been effectively overlaid. I hope that British exporters will get the message that we are riding the crest of a wave and that they may have an edge over competitors who have the misfortune not to come from a country with Her Majesty The Queen as its Head of State.

12 I am copying this despatch to Her Majesty's Representatives in Belmopan, Kingston, Nassau, Bridgetown, Port of Spain and Washington, to the Governors of Anguilla, the Cayman Islands and Bermuda, and to the Head of the British Development Division in the Caribbean.

I am, Sir

Yours Faithfully



(D J Johnson)