

INTERNATIONAL

## Suspended US democracy project back on track

by **Bert Wilkinson**

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A U.S. government-funded leadership and democracy project that was suspended several weeks ago has restarted following assurances to the contrary, outgoing American Ambassador Brent Hardt said.

Following almost daily complaints from the Guyanese government about the U.S. meddling in local affairs, the U.S. suspended the \$1.2 million project after agreeing to talks with the government, which had said that it was uncomfortable with the project because it had little or no input in its drafting and wanted assurances that it was not aimed at manipulating the local political scene.

In remarks made by Hardt this week, he said that the project has restarted since last week, and its Canadian Director Glenn Bradbury is to be handed back his work permit after it was revoked by authorities in the heat of the row.

Both sides have agreed to an oversight mechanism, but no details about this were given. Bradbury had never left the country during the suspension period that began in early May.

"They are back on track. They have been back on track since last week, and IRI [International Republican Institute] is back at work, and so we are moving forward. There was always a belief in a highly partisan environment, that somehow we were seeking some political outcome here, and I've repeatedly made clear we have no interest in what party is ruling Guyana. That's entirely a matter for the voters of the country to decide," he said.

Presidential Advisor on Governance Gail Teixeira had openly said that the U.S. was channeling money to the opposition in a bid to remove the Hindu-led government from office, hence the Cabinet's simmering discomfort with the project, leading to its suspension and several round of talks.

The governing People's Progressive Party has traditionally been suspicious of U.S. activities in the country, blaming the CIA and other agencies for ousting it from government in the 1960s and for fermenting racial strife between Blacks and East Indians that led to more than 150 deaths during riots, as well as acts of arson and destruction of properties. U.S. declassified documents have confirmed this.

Some of the money from the project has been used to train civil society and non-governmental organizations in leadership and good governance.

The suspension came amid relentless pressure from the U.S. and other Western nations for authorities to organize and hold local government elections that were last contested in 1994. The government has given a plethora of excuses for not doing so, including a suggestion that the population is not ready or interested in these elections. Opposition parties and civil society groups say the government fears losing in the major urban centers and a possible carryover into general elections that must be held by late 2011.

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