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## Nandlall calls out APNU-AFC for xenophobic utterances

By Clestine Juan - April 6, 2024



*Attorney General, Anil Nandlall, SC*

## **–points to selective outrage by opposition, importance of addressing labour shortage**

ATTORNEY-GENERAL and Minister of Legal Affairs, Anil Nandlall, S.C., has called out the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU-AFC) for promoting paranoia, xenophobia, and racism in response to the government's decision to import 500 nurses from Bangladesh.

The move to import nurses from Bangladesh comes as Guyana grapples with a severe shortage of healthcare professionals, particularly at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), where the deficit of nurses reached approximately 600 by the end of 2023.

The decision to recruit Bangladeshi nurses aims to address this critical gap in the healthcare sector, with assurances that they will receive salaries equivalent to their Guyanese counterparts.

However, the APNU-AFC has objected to the government recruiting the foreign nurses. In response to these criticisms, the Attorney-General, during his weekly programme, "Issues in the News," lambasted the opposition, accusing them of exploiting racial and xenophobic sentiments to undermine the government's initiatives.

First, he highlighted the urgency of addressing Guyana's labour shortages, stating: "We have a dire shortage of a wide variety of skilled people and unskilled labour... Guyana has suffered from a 'migratory dream' dating back decades."

Highlighting historical migration patterns and the nation's extensive diaspora, Nandlall pointed out: "Guyana has had one of the highest rates of migration per capita on planet Earth... How come there is this great surprise and shock at the decision to import labour?"

However, Nandlall condemned the opposition's response, alleging that it was driven by "paranoia, xenophobia, and racism combined."

He accused the APNU-AFC of exploiting racial politics, stating: "The opposition politics has always been based upon ethnicity and race."

Nandlall drew parallels to past instances of racial tension, and drew parallels to former President Cheddi Jagan's opposition to the Caribbean Federation in the 1960s.

Nandlall recounted Jagan's principled stance against the Caribbean Federation, citing his objections based on the need for Caribbean nations to first establish independence and sovereignty before considering regional integration.

"When in the early 60s' before most of the countries got independence, or while they were getting independence, there was an attempt to build a federation of the Caribbean territories....

"Dr Cheddi Jagan, on the basis of established principles, which he made public, objected at the time saying that it is not the time... was widely condemned by the PNC. And what was the basis of the condemnation? The racism," Nandlall said.

He added: "They accused him of being a racist that he didn't want Afro-Caribbean nationals to come to Guyana and that is why he was opposed. That mentality has been with the PNC since they only see things through racial lens... that's why I'm saying their politics is always based upon ethnicity and race."

## **SELECTIVE OUTRAGE**

Regarding past immigration issues, Nandlall highlighted the opposition's selective outrage, stating: "About 20 years ago, when there was a large influx of Brazilians into Guyana... 25 years after the Brazilians have come, they have gone... Then when you have the Cubans, is the same argument... The only group that they have never objected to, in fact the only group that is supported coming to Guyana are the Haitians."

Nandlall provided statistics to support his claims, noting: "Between 2017 and 2018, 3,515 Haitians arrived and only 291 left... Over 4,000 Haitians came, they can't be found in Guyana... But they have a problem with the Bangladeshi coming... The racism is latent and patent."

He further accused the opposition of fabricating arguments to justify their stance, adding: "They construct and fabricate their usual argument of padding the voters list and that these people will eventually vote in Guyana... It is racism, xenophobia, and paranoia."

In response to claims being raised by the APNU-AFC, Nandlall stressed the government's commitment to ensuring fair treatment and compensation.

"The Bangladeshi nurses will receive the same salaries paid to Guyanese healthcare workers," he declared, refuting claims of disparities in pay or treatment.

Also, in defence of government's decision, he urged detractors to recognise the necessity of importing skilled labour to meet the demands of a rapidly expanding economy.

"The decision has been made... I don't understand the frenzy," he remarked, calling for a shift away from divisive rhetoric towards constructive dialogue and collaboration.

Vice President, Dr Bharrat Jagdeo, recently quashed the rumour being peddled by the APNU-AFC that imported labourers will be treated better than locals.

Dr Jagdeo pointed out the "fake love" that the PNC-R is showing to public servants.

Despite Guyana undergoing rapid development, the government has said on several occasions that there is a labour shortage.

Specifically, with there being the construction of 12 new hospitals nationwide, Dr Jagdeo stated: "We need more doctors, more nurses...we have to recruit people to work in these hospitals to make sure our people get the best quality care. We can't just build the hospitals and leave them there without staff."

In response to claims of allegation that foreigners will receive higher salaries than locals, Dr Jagdeo said, "any person who is recruited from abroad to work in the public sector, their conditions of service will be no better than what Guyanese get.... It will be comparable to what our people get for the particular skill."

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation had issued a statement in response to a letter that was circulating in the media regarding the recruitment of foreign healthcare workers.

The ministry was responding to a request from Sigma Engineers Ltd., issued the letter to confirm that the agency was authorised to recruit healthcare workers, with the view to addressing concerns raised by both the public and private sectors on the severe skills shortage in the health sector.

The Private Sector Commission has, on numerous occasions, according to the statement, requested the government’s assistance in addressing the need to fill the skills shortages not only in the health sector, but also in the critical sectors of construction, engineering, and services, given the expansion and growth of Guyana’s economy.

In this regard, the recruitment agency was appointed to liaise with relevant authorities from various countries to recruit healthcare workers including, but not limited to, Bangladeshis.

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