

Guyana

Chinese stores wiping out those owned by local Guyanese

By Bert Wilkinson

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It has finally happened. A group of more than 60 business entities and owners of so-called mom and pop stores has written to Guyanese President Irfaan Ali demanding explanations as to what is the secret behind the emergence of hundreds of Chinese supermarkets and hardware stores opening up in local communities across the country, closing down local shops, failing to hire Guyanese staffers not applying mandatory sales taxes.

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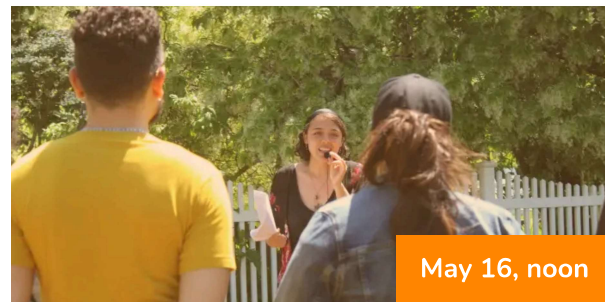
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Atlantic Avenue from Fourth Avenue to the Waterfront



May 16, noon

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Sent this week by the little-known Guyanese Business Owners Association, the missive complained bitterly about operating methods used by their “non-naturalized” Chinese rivals, noting that they offer consumer no automatic receipts of purchases, ignore adding value added or sales taxes to items, fail to display their tax identification numbers on documents, abstain from displaying product descriptions on invoices and often sell expired goods to unwitting consumers.

“These flagrant breaches raise questions about accountability and raise concerns about oversight by the relevant authorities. While we refrain from premature conclusions, we cannot help but speculate whether these non-naturalized Chinese businesses receive preferential treatment or special concessions. Thus, we



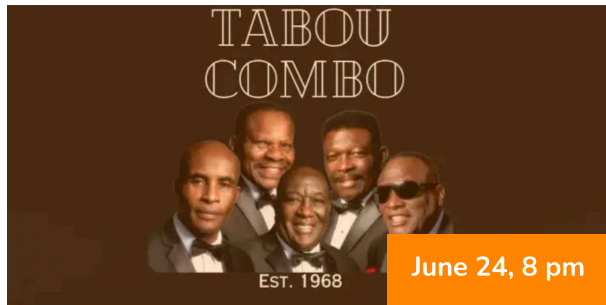
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seek clarification on this matter,” the group stated.

Their pleas for state intervention and explanations come weeks after opposition lawmaker Annette Ferguson had raised the issue publicly in a letter to local media, asking whether state and city agencies had conducted feasibility studies. “Did they consider the economic impact of these additional supermarkets, on existing small businesses run by Guyanese before granting the requisite approvals? Many small shop-owners are now without a source of income. They simply could not access capital to expand their businesses to compete with the Chinese. People have complained bitterly and have been asking, why is the government allowing this? How do they expect small shop owners and their families to survive”? she asked.

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Former housing minister Ferguson also accused the Ali administration of losing control of the economy, noting that “Chinese-owned companies have also been awarded many huge contracts to build the airport, at least one hotel, roads, and bridges. They are also in forestry and mining in a few regions. Given the huge share the Chinese have in the economy, it would be interesting to know whether they are paying their fair share of taxes. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer, despite the billions budgeted for “growth and development,” she said.

Meanwhile, in its letter to the head of state, the owners association made it clear that it is not against competition by others but demanded a high level sit down with state officials to discuss the issue as they wonder where the funding is coming from to establish nearly 400



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