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Guyana: Declining Birth Rate & High Emigration

by Barbara Khol

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At present, Guyana's population density ranks as the third lowest worldwide. On an annual basis, 17,000 people emigrate. According to US Embassy statistics, over the past fiscal year (October 1990 to September 1991), 11,863 immigrant visas were issued to Guyanese nationals. Immigrant visas issued in the October 1991-June 1992 period totaled 6,010. The birth rate has declined from 28.3 per 1,000 in 1988 to 24 per 1,000. According to Labor and Human Resources Minister Rabian Ali-Khan, the nation's population shrank by 1% between 1987 and 1991. Ninety percent of 751,000 inhabitants are concentrated along a 450-km. coastal strip. Most of the nation's territory (214,969 sq.km.) is uninhabited or underpopulated. Over 80% of national territory is covered by tropical rainforest. According to Yesu Persaud, head of the Private Sector Commission an umbrella group of business organizations, a generalized labor shortage exists, particularly in professional and technical skills areas. Bauxite, sugar and rice are the top foreign exchange earners. The government recently commenced a diversification program by opening up gold, diamond and lumber exploitation to private domestic and foreign investors. Although no plans have yet been developed for mass immigration, Home Affairs Minister Stella Ode-Alli describes the existing immigration policy as flexible. She said, "We are very, very open...especially as it relates to Caribbean nationals and immigrants interested in agriculture." (Source: Inter Press Service, 07/18/92)

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