

Top Cop on personal mission to regain public trust for Police Force

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Commissioner of Police Seelall Persaud

With mere months to go before he ends his career as a lawman, Commissioner of Police, Seelall Persaud, is on a mission to help the Guyana Police Force regain the much needed trust of the nation.

Ever since a Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey placed the Guyana Police Force at the lower spectrum of public trust, shortly after he assumed office, the Top Cop launched a programme that was designed to reverse that trend.

Persaud is exuding quiet confidence that this can be achieved before he leaves office. The move to turn things around is taking place at a time when the Force is facing a major challenge with regard to trust, following news reports of a "Top Secret Document" that implicates one of its senior officers in alleged links to the criminal underworld.

But, if one were to pay attention to recent events, it is not difficult to see why the Commissioner should not be upbeat about the prospects. Serious Crime is on the downward trend and this is attributed to slightly improving relations with members of the public. The public trust situation is not unique to Guyana though, but Persaud believes that the local law enforcement agency could overcome all the challenges by sticking with the methods that are being currently employed.

"We know that public trust is one of the fronts that we have to continuously work on to develop and we have consciously taken a decision to do that," the Commissioner told this newspaper. In this regard, the force has introduced the social crime prevention programme, which has its prevention effects, since it is bringing police ranks closer together with members of the community to work on individual projects that will benefit all.

Starting in Albouystown, the programme has been expanded to almost every district where the police have a presence. Currently, all Divisional Commanders are required to submit their plans at the beginning of the year and it must include plans to deal with police/community relations among other policing matters.



The police have been intensifying efforts to reach out to members of communities like Agricola.

But there are those who feel that the police are not getting the full cooperation from the public in its crime fighting efforts. It was pointed out that many persons do not feel too comfortable giving information to the police; and there is evidence that members of the public have been confiding in influential persons rather than the established law enforcement agency.

But despite this, the Force has boasted that its recent six percent decline in serious crimes is testimony that they are receiving significant information from members of the public; after all the police cannot do it alone. As one senior officer pointed out, "People still love the police."

The Commissioner was not naïve to believe that the Force will command the support of all, noting that even 20 per cent cooperation rather than zero will help the force to some extent. "The thing is, we don't believe that we will ever achieve 100%. There will be people who have their own views...We at least try to say to them that we are fair in our words and our actions....our biggest driver is being professional," the Top Cop stated.

The biggest challenge however is to get the people on the frontline to act professionally. And this involves tremendous training, guidance and a surveillance system that sends up a red flag whenever things are not going well and treat with it in a way that is satisfactory.

When the Police Social Crime Prevention strategy started in Albouystown, the Commissioner chaired the Steering Committee and was directly involved. Since then it has been expanded to have Divisional Commanders take up leadership roles, then Sub-Divisional Officers and even down to Station Sergeants, who are now the frontline persons dealing with the communities. "We had a very, very senior religious leader who came and did a presentation on TRUST and what is TRUST to relationships," Persaud said.

The Force has even moved to appoint Community Relations Officers in each Police Division. "Like how we have somebody in charge of traffic in each Division, somebody in charge of crime, there is somebody in charge of community relations and this is at the officer level," the Top Cop explained. "It's a new front in policing...we are changing culture and the best people to put in charge of this area are the young officers like some of the soon to be promoted cadets," he added.

To regain the public trust, an organization like the Guyana Police Force will need committed and dedicated ranks and one way to guarantee that is to improve their welfare. And this is something that Commissioner Persaud seems committed to. He has overseen the formation of the Fallen Heroes Foundation which looks into the welfare of the off springs of those cops who were killed in the line of duty. The foundation, the first of its kind in the Caribbean, has received overwhelming support from a wide cross section of society and the government.