

Brazilian miners are taking over in the interior

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Dear Editor,

I have been a miner for over thirty years. I have observed over the years the influx of Brazilian miners. If something is not done immediately, they would not only outnumber the Guyanese miners but also work out all our land without paying royalties to the government. If they were contributing significantly to our economy it wouldn't be a problem but they are not.

They enter through Lethem, where they get a two week or a one-month visa from the immigration there. After that they head for the interior in search of a job. Some of them after acquiring a reasonable amount of money, go to Georgetown to look after their work permit. To acquire a work permit they pay about \$75,000 for somebody to prepare one for them. After working for some time they buy a dredge and register it in somebody else's name, sometimes their reputed wife, sometimes a fellow Brazilian that is legal here and a good friend. I know of one Guyanese who has over thirty dredges registered in his name that are owned by Brazilians. When the mines officers or police visit this work site where these dredges operate, the dredge owner pays a bribe to them for the Brazilian workers that do not have their documents in order.

The majority of the land dredges in Guyana are owned by Brazilians. Most of their dredges are registered in Guyanese names. Most of their dredges are working on the areas of well to do Guyanese who hold the majority of mining land. They acquire this land with the assistance of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association (GG&DMA). They acquire large concessions under the pretext of doing large-scale mining whereas they are mainly leasing this land for a percentage of the production or a monthly rent.

They are not concerned whether these Brazilians pay taxes to the state or not. All they care about is that they collect their percentage or rent for their land.

Most of these workers on the Brazilian dredges are Brazilians. They only employ Guyanese for security reasons, and they would not receive the same salary or percentage as the Brazilian workers. The Amerindian workers are the ones who are being exploited the most by them.

These dredge owners would work their dredges until they accumulate a large amount of gold and diamonds. They then slip across the border back home into Brazil with their gold and diamonds. Back home they would either bank their money or invest it in a business.

Our government is of the opinion that they are foreign investors. They are not. The majority of people they employ are fellow Brazilians. They are not really creating employment for Guyanese, nor paying much taxes to the state.

In reality, they are foreign extractors. The only people that benefit from them are a few shop owners, the people that prepare their work permits and these rapacious well to do land owners who own the land they work on.

Even though land dredge mining tends to destroy the environment to mine the minerals, if it is done in a proper manner it can minimise the damage. However, these Brazilian miners are not operating their dredges in a proper manner as a Guyanese would. They are inflicting the maximum damage to the environment. A Guyanese if by chance while working they have to fell a valuable tree that can be used for making boards, would fell it in a way that it will be left on the dam, whereas a Brazilian would either junk it up or throw it in an old pit where it will be covered with tail end. A Guyanese would also make sure they fill back the pits they dug. The Brazilians don't normally do that. They are also in the habit of throwing mercury in their pits to assist in receiving a higher recovery of gold. That is one of the main causes of mercury pollution in the interior.

They are also disrupting the lives of our Amerindian brothers and sisters. The majority of Amerindians in the interior do not rear stocks, like cows, sheep, goats, or poultry nor do they have fish ponds. They depend on farming, fishing and hunting for food. Most of these trees that the miners destroy the wild animals used for food. When these fruit trees are destroyed they have to go deeper into the jungle to find food. That would make hunting more difficult. The rivers and creeks have been polluted by these dredges tail end. That in turn would either kill or chase away most of the fish. That makes it impossible to catch fish there. They have to go a farther distance to fish.

We should not sit back and allow these foreign miners to disrupt the life of our indigenous people with impunity. No Guyanese can go into any neighbouring country and disrupt the lives of their indigenous people.

Our interior is also filled with Brazilian prostitutes. They can be seen in large numbers in the mining districts. They don't have any medical reports or documents of themselves. They are believed to be the main persons responsible for spreading Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) in the interior. Our interior is also filled with shops owned by Brazilians. Apart from some Guyanese alcohol most of the other items in these shops are Brazilian goods. I doubt whether the rightful duty or tax is paid on these imported products. There are also Brazilian hucksters who go from camp to camp selling Brazilian products. Some of them even sell guns and ammunition that they smuggle across the border.

Guyana's interior over the years has been a place where the not so fortunate, the people without a proper education or skill can go and earn a living. You can

always secure a job even if it is self-employed.

I believe it should be reserved for unemployed Guyanese, who may increase due to the problems in the sugar industry.

Yours faithfully,

John Mc Knight

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