



The World Today

STADIUM DIPLOMACY: CHINA- CARICOM RELATIONS

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Less than three years after Hurricane Ivan destroyed the Queen's Park Stadium, Grenada can proudly boast that they are one of the few completed venues ready for this month's ICC Cricket World Cup 2007. However, such a boast must have been tempered by the serious diplomatic incident, which took place at the official ceremony to mark the handing over of the Stadium by the Government of the People's Republic of China to the Government of Grenada. In what must be Grenada's most embarrassing moment since its independence in 1974, the Police Band played the wrong national anthem; that of the Republic of China commonly referred to as Taiwan. Probably, a better appreciation of the names might have avoided this faux pas.

Not surprisingly, the reaction of Prime Minister Mitchell was swift and furious. He attributed the grave error to an act of sabotage against his Government and immediately ordered an inquiry. If the charge of sabotage is proven, it should be stressed that it was not merely an act against the Government, but also against the people of Grenada, including those of the diaspora. The call for a thorough investigation is eminently reasonable because it is necessary to quickly move into damage control mode. Presumably, an appropriate apology would have been made and every assurance given to the Chinese Government that there would never be a repetition of such incompetence. No harm would have been done if the Grenadian Foreign Minister had communicated to his Chinese counterpart expressing his deep concern.

Clearly, it was the Police Band that played the anthem, but should one infer that the Police Band must be held culpable? It would be unreasonable to reach such a conclusion because members of the Police Band are indeed musicians whose duty is to play from the score sheet provided. On the other hand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs whose officials must be deemed to have known the importance of protocol on such occasions must have organized the function. The strict training of a protocol officer allows no room for error. Attention must always be paid to the smallest detail- to the point where it may be considered 'fussy'. On the basis of this argument, it was the duty of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ensure that the correct anthem was played.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Republic of China or Taiwan has long disappeared from the radar screen; therefore the blunder made in Grenada would not have been possible here. However, the major Foreign Policy move by Grenada in recognizing the Government of the People's Republic of China and severing diplomatic ties with the Republic of China, Taiwan is recent. Of course, the question of recognizing both does not

arise because the People's Republic of China considers Taiwan to be a renegade, breakaway province. It should be noted here that the issue is one of recognition of government and not recognition of a state. In other words, is Beijing on Mainland China the seat of the Chinese Government, or is the center of government located in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan?

This remained a major issue until the United States recognized the People's Republic of China in the mid 1970s. Thus, for all practical purposes Taiwan lost the diplomatic war of recognition. Until recently, Grenada was one of the few states that recognized Taiwan. The question that now arises is what prompted the Mitchell Government to switch allegiance, as it were. It could hardly be attributed to the fact that the population of Mainland China is far larger than that of Taiwan because this has always been the case. It is submitted that the donation of aid, in particular the rebuilding of the stadium was a significant factor in the change of policy. The People's Republic of China has now emerged as a colossus within the international political economy, thus enhancing its political and diplomatic clout, and increasing its economic weight.

As far as China is concerned, the issue of recognition may be considered settled. However, a strategic policy on China should assume higher salience on the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Foreign Policy agenda. Opportunities for Chinese trade and investment have grown. Equally important, China can be seen as an important regional ally on certain international issues. Within CARICOM, a great deal of energy is being expended on the creation of a Single Market and Economy, but the coordination of a Regional Foreign Policy arrangement, one of the principal objectives of the Caribbean Community should not be neglected.