



Address
By
His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali
President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana
On the Occasion of the 55th Independence Anniversary of
Guyana
2021.05.25

Honourable Prime Minister, Madam Chancellor of the Judiciary, former Presidents, Ministers of Government, Heads of Service, Members of the Diplomatic Community, Members of Parliament, Distinguished men and women in uniform, members of the media.

It gives me great honour and privilege, and indeed, it is a humbling time for me, to stand before you, to stand before the people of this beautiful country, Guyana and address you on the occasion of our 55th Independence Anniversary. Perhaps it is fitting before I move forward to observe the environment in which we are—an environment that straddles time.

We have the Appeal Court, an important symbol of democracy and the rule of law, we have our great Amerindian Heritage, we have our commitment to conservation, we have the old Pegasus and as you look beyond that you will see a feature of what the new and modern Guyana would be like with the new construction. And just in front of where I stand is the Marriot Hotel. Fifty-five years captured around our very surrounding.

My brothers and sisters of Guyana

Today or just a few hours from now is the 55th anniversary of our people's collective struggle for independence.

We hold this annual celebration to remind ourselves that our one nation has a joint history of oppression, subjugation and of exploitation.

We celebrate because a great victory was achieved by our fore parents, acting together to end colonialism, to fashion our own future, and to shape our own destiny.

No one race of our people achieved that victory.

People of all races did it collectively, as Guyanese born in this land and of this land, each the equal of the other, and each devoted to the common purpose of making of Guyana, a homeland in which all Guyanese could thrive and prosper.

Now, it falls to us to keep faith with them and all the great Guyanese of the past.

To do so, we must recall the spirit of common purpose that motivated them.

And in recalling that spirit, with pride and respect, we must commit to continue the journey they began, realising our hopes and aspirations for the future of our much-loved Guyana.

My brothers and sisters, we cannot recall the moment of Guyana's independence without also remembering the efforts of Venezuela to prevent it.

As we released ourselves from the colonial cord of Britain, the Venezuelan government sought to stifle our birth by falsely laying claim to two-thirds of our country.

They have spent the last fifty-five years of the independence of all of Guyana pursuing this claim.

But international law is not silent.

The International Court of Justice is the forum where the voice of international law will be heard, and justice will be determined.

As one people, with one united voice, and in spirit that will not be broken, we'll advance the validity of the one hundred and twenty-two year-old Award that fixed our boundaries.

In our continuing struggle, we are not without friends.

We deeply appreciate all those who have stood by our side - from the Caribbean, from the Commonwealth, from the America's and beyond.

The Venezuelans must understand that we sought no quarrel with them, and we do not do so now.

Our only wish is to live in harmony and cooperation with all our neighbours.

We hold out not a fist of war but a hand of friendship, based on respect for our borders and theirs.

But we will not be cowered, nor will we be bullied.

My Fellow Guyanese, it is not only in relation to protecting our territorial integrity that we must stand as one Nation.

Like every other country in the world, we are fighting an unseen, but ever-present enemy in the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than sixteen thousand of our people have been infected with the dreadful coronavirus and, sadly more than 360 of them have died.

We mourn those deaths and sympathise with the families who have lost loved ones.

I plead with all to help stop these deaths; stop the tears of anguish; stop the grief.

Your government has instituted measures to try to protect every person in Guyana, particularly our elderly and the vulnerable.

However, the active participation of all is required to deploy the protective measures of masks, physical distancing, hand washing and using sanitisers.

Already, 20 per cent of our people have been vaccinated.

This is a significant accomplishment in a world where less than 1 per cent of people in the developing countries have access to vaccines, and where recent World Health Organisation studies suggest that more than 6 million people have died globally.

We have already purchased thousands of vaccines, and we are sparing no expense in ensuring that we have enough vaccines to cover our full population 18 years and above.

Our objective is to ensure that we can inoculate everyone from this dreadful virus.

The length of this battle depends on how soon each of us is fully vaccinated, liberating ourselves to return to a high level of normal life, and protecting others from infection.

In the past, we have immunised generations of our people from measles, mumps, typhoid, polio, yellow fever, meningitis, hepatitis, and other communicable diseases, proving that vaccination save lives; vaccination save lives.

My brothers and sisters let us get vaccinated let us take each other and get vaccinated, so that we can return to normalcy as fast as possible.

I urge that we all recognise the value to our own lives, to the lives of our family and friends, to our livelihoods and to the betterment of our country by vaccinating to defeat the coronavirus, as we have defeated so many others in the past.

My brothers and sisters, while much of our health resources have been devoted to fighting the harmful effects of COVID-19, I assure you that our intention is to deliver the highest international standard of health care for every citizen of our country.

There is already considerable private sector enthusiasm for investing in modern hospitals, fully equipped with the latest technology.

Your government will partner with these private sector initiatives, to give to all Guyanese the high-quality medical care that each of you deserve.

What we are putting in place in medical care, we are also doing in education.

Guyana and Guyanese must be assured of educational facilities that will allow everyone to attain the highest standard of achievement.

Since your government came to office 9 months ago, we have commenced the programme to award 20,000 scholarships to young men and women, to further their education.

We did not make an empty promise; we kept it.

And we intend to keep all our promise to the people of Guyana.

Free University education will be delivered, and schools' infrastructure will be improved to provide a conducive environment for learning.

Guyana must become a knowledge-based society, capable of competing with the best in the world; and other sectors have been affected in the past by the high price of energy.

Our private sector partners have rightly pointed to the adverse effects of this high price to the cost of doing business and to their capacity to market their goods abroad competitively, earning revenues in foreign exchange for the benefit of the country.

Your government will respond to this situation.

We cannot be a nation that produces oil and gas, earning considerable sums from it without passing on the benefits to all sectors of our society.

The cost of electricity must be reduced for both business and household consumption.

Therefore, government is carefully considering mechanisms by which the cost of energy can be reduced across our society by utilizing an appropriate percentage of our national earnings from oil and gas to do so.

These mechanisms will be presented to the nation, through the appropriate bodies, for endorsement.

At the bottom line, domestic consumers must be given relief and businesses should be rendered more competitive.

Our financial resources must be utilized to improve the quality of life for all our communities.

We fought for independence to give our people the quality of life of which they had been deprived.

If independence is to have any real meaning, it is to uplift our people from the ravages of limitations of the past, and to give them a better life with better opportunities under better circumstances.

My brothers and sisters, everyone should be aware of the considerable work upon which the government has already embarked in relation to building infrastructure throughout our country.

Our objective is to build connectivity to all parts of Guyana, by roads, bridges, telecommunications, air and river transportation.

Every part of our vast country should be accessible to all Guyanese so that we can all enjoy the marvels of its attractions in waterfalls, lakes, forests, and its flora and fauna.

We also need to build new communities further inland from our coastal belt to spread our population, reduce prices for land and housing, and ease traffic congestion.

In other words, we must use the land space with which we have been blessed as Guyanese to create new and improved living conditions, new areas of growth and development and new population centers.

That is why, apart from the infrastructure build-out upon which we are embarked, we will also establish a new City.

Government will incentivise the private sector and persons wishing to own their own homes to locate in the new City where government will also provide major facilities.

My fellow Guyanese, I have said it before, and I repeat it now.

This is an exciting time, with exciting prospects.

Every person in our society now has real economic opportunities to grow and develop, and to contribute to the enlargement of our national wealth.

I urge each of you to dream big.

Your government will support those dreams and help make them reality.

We are on the cusp of being an economically strong Guyana, with opportunities for growth and development of all Guyanese.

That is a cause to which I am personally and deeply committed.

It is why I have been travelling this country from the start of my Presidency, listening to individuals, to communities, to groups of all kinds, and acting on what I see and what I hear.

We want not only an economically strong Guyana, we also want a powerful Guyanese nation in which there is no distinction of race, no determination by colour and no differentiation by creed.

Let there be no doubt about it – just as we were divided and ruled in our colonial past, there are those who would divide us for their own purpose in the future.

That must not happen.

We must never allow that to happen.

Earlier this month was “Arrival Day”; ahead of us is “Emancipation Day”.

We all celebrate these occasions together as integral parts of the rich tapestry that makes us uniquely Guyanese.

We are all proud of our ancestral heritage – as we should be.

Our ancestors suffered greatly so that we could inherit this land in freedom.

Let us make them proud that their children belong to this new country built on their blood, sweat and tears, and on their creativity, their ingenuity and their recognition that, in the end, their success could only be the result of their unity.

In the course of our independent history, many persons have contributed immensely to the social and economic development of our country and to respect the contributions of those persons to Guyana and the wider global society.

On this 55th anniversary of our independence, it is right that we should honour some of these persons who have shown their devotion to Guyana and Guyanese, benefiting us all.

Therefore, national awards, for their outstanding contribution would be announced shortly.

It is only we ourselves who can either spoil Guyana's future or make it glorious.

Our country will not be built by the negativity or nay-sayers, poor losers, and the purveyors of destruction.

I ask you to remember that our Nation has endured and triumphed over colonialism and exploitation, our political differences, our social discord at home and challengers from abroad.

Yet, we are still here, still living together, still working together, still looking toward tomorrow.

It is our job to carry on this great enterprise.

Make no mistake about it, as long as we have faith in the future and the courage to seize the opportunities, our Nation is unstoppable.

The greatest of our perils is to forget our overriding oneness.

It must not be so.

I am determined that it shall not be so.

On this 55th anniversary of our independence, as economic prosperity surely lies before us, let us ensure that national cohesion strengthens us even more.

I urge that we pledge ourselves to each other and to the cause of our collective economic and social development.

Happy Independence Anniversary to all our Guyanese home and aboard.

God bless you and God bless your families.

Thank you very much.