

Independence Address

by Leader of the Opposition Bishop Joseph J.S. Atherley J.P., M.P.

Fellow Barbadians, the honour and pleasure are mine, on behalf of the Opposition Team, my family and myself to congratulate Barbadians on the attainment of fifty-two years of nationhood. Further to commend this nation and people to the continued favour of God.

Barbados is a nation abundantly blessed of God. A people led by the hand and voice of His gracious guidance.

A major part of our celebration must be Reflection. In so doing, we realize that we have not achieved the level of development which we have attained without His significant help. We have not experienced the level of political stability we have without His sovereign hand. We dare not boast of the quality of health care, housing nor education without reference to that steady hand and sure Help.

That guidance, which has led us to this 52nd year beyond that historic night of 1966, when we raised for that first moment of pride our national emblem, is as imperative a need now as it was five decades ago. Both the imperative and the impulse of that guidance enabled us in the establishment of our institutions of governance. It facilitated us in the business of national decisioning. It assured of success in economic initiatives. It led us in the weaving of a cohesive societal fabric characterized by a sound value set, functional family frameworks and rich neighbourly traditions.

As we aspire to the achievement we contemplate over the next several decades towards our centenary, we need to resist any national posture which denies or defies the guidance we have relied on these past 300 years.

We deny and defy that guidance when we continue to perpetuate the institutionalized and systemic reality of majority poverty. We deny and defy that guidance when we devalue human worth and dignity. We deny and defy that guidance when we over embrace the secular while denigrating the sacred. We deny and defy that guidance when we mismanage and destroy our environment. We deny and defy that guidance when we discard or diminish the value and virtue of family, industry, community and take on the character of the inferior alternatives of cultural imports

The Lord has been the people's guide indeed. In His guidance we find the comfort of His presence and the counsel of His purpose.

Even while we celebrate with pride, our Reflection must admit of certain sobering realities:

There is immorality in any policy formulation construct which reinforces skewed growth and development; which facilitates the greed impulse of a favoured few while feigning an interest in poverty reduction; or fails to redress the systemic disadvantages of the majority poor.

Part of our sober reality is that we continue to expose our mothers, sisters, daughters to the erosion of their dignity through forced economic relationships, workplace exploitation and indecent wages.

Honest reflection suggests that we fail the morality test when we continue to boast of growing employment numbers while far too many experience the reality of persistent under-employment and the absence of job enrichment.

On reflection, we fall short of the morality threshold when we frustrate, stifle and put to death the aspirations of school leavers and graduates through a system that continues to prepare them annually for out-turn into a world of non-existent domestic opportunity. They then must settle for an unsatisfying and unfulfilling less –than-the-best fit. A best which we do insufficient to create.

But an equally important part of our celebration must be about Resolve. That we are “strict guardians of our heritage” invokes that spirit or resolve.

We must resolve to redouble our efforts to further solidify the foundations of a modern nation state, proudly standing its ground in the face of the battering winds of the varied global impulses and impositions.

We must resolve to settle for nothing less than a national community of productive, responsible citizenry.

We must resolve to further create a national experience of shared prosperity.

We must resolve to ensure the reinforcement of the fabric of our democracy.

Our people must more meaningfully be allowed to participate in and influence our mechanisms and institutions of governance.

We must resolve to build on an architecture and culture of justice such that all of our people are assured of the fairness of access to and benefit from legal, social and economic justice.

We must resolve to create new wealth-earning sectors and so widen our capacity to export and to better compete regionally and internationally. To develop an enhanced entrepreneurial class and culture. To fashion an expanded work opportunity context. One that is far more viable for a far greater number of us.

We must bring our majority population into meaningful income-earning experience while creating among our middle class the instinct to wealth creation.

Let us resolve not be satisfied in the comfort of an earned multi-room structure on a minimum five to eight thousand square feet of land, when the only seeming achievable reality for the abundant majority is ultimately a six-foot lot with an enclosed box house of equal dimensions – and that not owned.

In November of 1966 the name of most prominent mention was that of Barrow. Our now Right Excellent National Hero, the Father of our Independence, then cast a vision of a people taking pride of place in a global community of small-states. A vision of a people given to industry and crafting a self-determined destiny of success, prosperity and maturity. That journey continues. That vision lives on.

Fifty-two years later the name of most prominent mention is not Barrow but BERT. And here-in lies the challenge to further actualization of the Barrow vision. Bert presents the test of that maturity. The Bert context represents the threat to that prosperity. At the same time it is defined as being the vehicle in which we must now travel on route to rediscovery of our success chances.

But Berts reflect the institutional counter to self-determination. Berts are birthed in a context where there is the manifestation of persistent geo-economic impulse to dominate and determine the destiny of small developing states.

The Barrow vision was articulated in a context of positive anti-colonialist sentiment; of emergent nationalist impulse; of growing instinct for indigenously led governance mechanisms; of expanding educational privilege.

Bert constructs have emerged simultaneously with the threats to the re-fashioned neoliberalist impulse; the alternative values agenda; and the growing prominence of the new relativism.

The question for both the Barrow and the BERT generations was and is the same. What kind of nation state do we want to build? What kind of fate do we want to craft? What is the legacy we want to leave? What is the destiny we want to achieve?

May I suggest that as we celebrate; as we reflect; as we resolve; let us give greater actualization to the imperatives of Ownership, Opportunity and Openness. We must continue to craft a national community that Acknowledges God, Accentuates Growth and Aspires to Greatness.

HAPPY INDEPENDENCE TO ALL BARBADIANS AT HOME AND ABROAD