



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

FEATURE ADDRESS BY

THE HONOURABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR, SC, MP

PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

AT THE

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S "FROM GOLD TO DIAMOND GALA"

WEDNESDAY 5TH DECEMBER 2012

HYATT REGENCY BALLROOM

7:00 PM

Salutations

- The Honourable Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, Minister of Public Administration and Mr Bachan
- Cabinet Colleagues
- Members of the Diplomatic Corps
- Head of the Public Service Mr. Reynold Cooper and Mrs. Cooper
- Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration Gillian Macintyre
- Ms Diana Mahabir Wyatt, Chairman of the Panel of Judges
- Mr Martin Daly, S.C. , Chairman of the Panel of Judges
- Honoured Awardees of the Public service awards for Excellence and service delivery
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening.

Introduction

Tonight's Gala Event, *"From Gold to Diamond"*, is an important milestone in the history of our Nation and the history of our public service.

They are both fifty years old.

I feel certain that I have the support of all of you here tonight, when I say that as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, I am extremely proud to be part of this Gold to Diamond journey.

I am optimistic that tonight we continue the journey started by this Government...a journey to a better tomorrow for future generations of our citizens, a pathway to progress and prosperity for our children and our children's children; and a journey from Gold To Diamond along a route that is forged from the love of liberty and illuminated, as well as inspired, by the fires of hope and prayer.

Tonight we rekindle the flame of independence as we move from our Golden Anniversary towards our Diamond Jubilee.

Tribute to honorees

Tonight is the intersection between our Golden Past and our Diamond Future.

In this one ceremony, we have honoured our fifty golden jewels of the first fifty years of national Independence, and at the same time, the seven forerunners to the citizen-centric "Diamond" standard that will

characterise the public service of Trinidad and Tobago in the years ahead.

We have recognized fifty distinguished public servants who represent the thousands who were an integral part of the history of our country.

You, who have been honoured here tonight, have gone the extra mile.

You have ventured beyond the narrow confines of your job descriptions and added extra value to the concept of public service.

From being a mere occupation or job, you have transformed the public service into a **profession**, dedicated to sustainable national development.

You have contributed to what this country is and will become in the far, and not so far future.

You are the solid gold on which we will build our pathway to the future, a future that is already on sound footing as demonstrated by our seven forerunners to diamond status.

Please congratulate all the awardees

The beginnings of our public Service

Fifty years ago, we became an Independent Nation and, as an independent Nation, with our own constitution, it was necessary to have our own organs of government.

One of these was the Public Service of Trinidad and Tobago.

Tonight we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of our Public Service.

Few people can imagine the transition from being good servants of the British Crown to loyal and proud citizens of an independent nation.

It was a time of hope.

It was a time of pride.

But it also was a time of challenges and changes.

There were long hours and stressful nights and days.

Reality had set in and the enormity of the task facing the public service was great and demanding.

However, our fledgling public service came through with flying colours.

We can look back with considerable pride to those few who stamped their mark on those early days – Solomon Hochoy who was undoubtedly the hero of the day but there were other heroes who carried the flag forward into the future.

William Demas, Doderidge Alleyne, Reginald Dumas, Frank Rampersad, Frank Barsotti – just a few of those who turned night into day so that this nation could stand proud and free.

They were the standard-bearers of our nation.

That banner of service before self, policy before personality, and principle before politics became the gold standard that we celebrate here tonight, as we pause in our journey towards the diamond standard of the future.

It is important I say respectfully for us to realize that in 1962 the Public Service was facing its most important and difficult decision.

Whatever direction it followed from then on, whatever pathway it took, and whatever decisions and plans it made at that time would have tremendous consequences for the future of our newly-born Independent nation.

It required of all the public servants to keep out of the day and follow a tradition of non interference.

Fortunately for us it chose the path of stability and sustainability. It kept out of the politics of the day and followed the time-honoured tradition of non-interference.

Our public officers served our country faithfully and loyally over the past fifty years.

They served the Government of the day and eased the transition process from Government to Government.

They carried out their duties faithfully and well.

They provided the best advice possible to those they served and ensured that financial probity and propriety were always strictly observed. They were challenged to serve the government of the day and ease the transition process from government to government. The public service has, at various times in our country's history, incurred the

ire of Ministers and Prime Ministers but, through it all, the men and women comprising the public service were required to provide the highest possible levels of cooperation and competence. For that we thank you for your commitment to Trinidad and Tobago.

The public service is challenged never to take sides regardless of who is in power and to ensure that the business of government runs as smoothly as possible. It is a task that is too often taken for granted and overlooked. (PM speaks of dedication of PS ad lib...content check to delivery) . Tonight it is timely for us to acknowledge it.

Our public servants performed their tasks under conditions that were dismal and even unhealthy.

The processes were laborious and time consuming; the technology was woefully inadequate; the salaries were low.

Yet they stuck to their tasks and performed them with conviction, determination, diligence and discipline.

During that time, there were stressful national events that challenged the capacity of the public service either to cope or to remain neutral.

These included:

- the fracturing of links with the British Civil Service;
- economic problems when increasingly sugar was no longer king; 1970 and the black power upheaval that almost split the nation apart; the subsequent oil boom and then gloom
- Republic status in 1976;
- the trauma of 1990 with the hostage-taking crisis- our Parliament and Television station held by armed gunmen, our Prime Minister seized and shot, citizens killed and a nation waiting to exhale
- an election tied at 18-18 in 2001.

During those anxious times, the Public Service was the glue that held our nation together

It was there for the country when everything seemed to be falling apart.

The public service was the rock of our independence.

It was the stabilizing force that kept the ship of state on an even keel.

Friends of the public service I say This is the gold standard that we are so proud of, and which we celebrate here tonight.

This is not to say that we are without challenges or that there is not room for improvement and upliftment of standards. But it is equally important to give credit where credit is due

A bright future beckons

Ladies and gentlemen, we are now challenged to journey to Diamond standards.

We can modify or change the archaic laws that still govern the public service procedures, but that by itself will not transform the public service into the professional institution it has to become or to enable it to cope with the growing demands and expectations.

As we become more citizen-centric, we can tell our citizens what is expected of them, but all the technologies are useless, just bits and pieces of cogs and wheels, until our citizens buy into the benefits and opportunities we are making available to them.

We can be as user-friendly as we want to be, but we need to convince the users first that what we are doing for them will be the best possible service, in the shortest time, at the lowest cost and of the highest quality.

That is what I see as the diamond standard.

The diamond standard cannot and will not apply to the public service alone.

Our institutions are so closely linked that the public service cannot achieve its transformation objectives unless the other institutions – the State, Public and Voluntary sectors – are also involved.

Every facet, every sector and every section must be involved in the transformation process.

Every citizen, including public servants, consumes services provided by the Government.

All of us here tonight and all of us everywhere in Trinidad **AND TOBAGO** have a stake in transforming the public service.

In this context, the journey from Gold to Diamond is a journey that the entire nation must take – not just the public service.

It is a pilgrimage to the future – a future that is sustainable, a future that sees us as self-sufficient both individually and collectively, and a future in which we fulfill the enormous potential that we have as a nation and as a people.

Ladies and gentlemen, this year, 2012, is our Golden Anniversary year. The year 2022 will be our Diamond Jubilee year as a nation.

On this platform of Golden service, we launch our journey to the Diamond standard of excellence that is the next milestone on our path to a brighter and more sustainable future for all.

Just over two years ago I gave as the mantra of my government the words –

“Serve the People! Serve the People! Serve the people!”

These have been my watchwords.

I have impressed it on everyone within my Government that serving the people is our task, our mission and our goal.

It is our objective and the standard by which we will be judged.

The people of this country will judge us by our actions and not on our communications, by what we do and not just by what we say.

On this platform of solid Gold that these exemplars of public service have built, we will now launch our search for excellence in service delivery.

We will pursue the Diamond Standard and if we all work together, public officers and the public they serve, private sector and state sector, all of us as one people with one destiny and one destination, we will reach the Diamond stage of development long before we celebrate our Diamond Jubilee.

But excellence is a moving target.

When we reach one goal there are others that will inevitably lie ahead of us.

We are a very resilient people.

Our ancestors survived slavery and indentureship, storms and shipwrecks, separation and loss to arrive and eventually settle here in Trinidad and Tobago. We are the descendants of people of courage who made the best of what they had. This is our heritage.

As we embark on the journey from Gold to Diamond, let us take pride in our past and in our people.

Even as we continue this voyage that started fifty years ago, let us keep our eyes fixed firmly not only on the distant future that sparkles ahead of us, like a diamond in the sky; but to the present moment which offers the opportunities towards that shining future.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, let me end with the words bequeathed to us fifty years ago, that will take us forward from Gold to Diamond.

These words have served us well for the past fifty years and will serve us even better in the diamond future: “Together we aspire; together we achieve.”

From this point of intersection, I now urge you to cast your eyes forward from Gold To Diamond.

Ladies and gentlemen, LET THE JOURNEY FROM GOLD TO DIAMOND BEGIN!