***Transcript of His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, Feature Address at Opening Ceremony: Agrofest (Barbados) 2022 - Greening Together Ah Caribbean Thing***

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**H. E. President Ali**: ***Transcript of His Excellency Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, Feature Address at Opening Ceremony: Agrofest (Barbados) 2022 - Greening Together Ah Caribbean Thing***

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**H. E. President Ali**: Thank you very much. My dear sister, Prime Minister Mia Mottley, members of the Cabinet, members of the diplomatic community, distinguished public servants, our priceless farmers, members of the media, my respected elders. Good evening.

I’m very pleased to be here today to join in this very important festival, Agrofert. Indeed, Barbados is nice, and speaking after such a beautiful rhythm is a very difficult thing.

I also want to make one claim; there is a ripe mango over my head. If it falls, it is mine.

But we are meeting on very difficult global circumstances; circumstances that have created havoc in many economies, empty shelves, the rising cost of living but more importantly, the shortage of food supply. Amidst all of these challenges, here in Barbados, you must be proud and grateful for the tremendous leadership you have in your Prime Minister, an outstanding CARICOM leader and someone who I draw great inspiration and motivation from.

Her commitment to Regional Food security is unbelievable, and that tells you a story. The issue of food security for this region cannot be looked at from a border perspective because each one of us in this region, each country comes with a different challenge but each one of us brings a unique opportunity in creating the solution and that is why over the past months, building off of the Prime Ministers charge of 25 by 2025, building off earlier initiatives like the Jagdeo initiative, we have been putting a lot of energy in bringing agriculture and food production at the spotlight of this region’s development, and why are we doing this? Why is it so important that as a people, we in this region understand that agriculture must be at the centre of what we do?

As I speak to you today, one of the most recent headlines in The Economist is about the coming food catastrophe. Only last weekend we saw headlines in international news of a military mission for baby formula. We’re seeing headlines across every single country about empty shelves and rising costs for food. Wheat price is forecasted to increase by 40% but worse than this increase is the ability to supply, and we know in this region like many other developing economies, when there is a shortage of supply, we are not the top priority for the demand that exists. That is why we have to fix this, and we have to fix it as a collective.

We have to understand that the challenges that will come will impact us the most and our only tool to mitigate those challenges is increasing our own production, removing sometimes the thoughtless impediments to trading between ourselves, to sharing between ourselves and opening up opportunities through which we can sustain ourselves in a reliable manner. For sure, the more than 100% increase in fertilizer costs; the 30% increase in input for feed supply will continue to put pressure on prices.

So we have to do a few things. Not only must we produce more, but we also must change our consumption pattern. We must look more towards what we produce, and as farmers and government, as private sector and distributors, all of us must be part of this process. We cannot safeguard the people of our country unless each of us give a bit. For the largest distributors in the region, you have to see ourselves more than distributors now. You also must be part of the production process. You must expand your business model to be part of the production process. If we don’t do this, then we cannot reliably secure and sustain the present business model.

Our business model must change. It is only when that business model change that we can pull all the segments of our society together. If we distribute more of what we produce we will help to break the cycle of consumption that comes from extra-regional sources and you have an excellent opportunity now, because governments in the region as Minister Indar pointed out, are ready and willing to embrace you on this journey, to embrace and support you on this journey of transforming our food infrastructure, our food value chain.

We are already working on a master plan for the region to enhance our food production system, our support system for the farmers but we also are conscious that the immediate need is also to secure supply whilst we are building our productive capacity, whilst we are building our transportation and logistics system. We have to look at markets that can sustain our supply in the immediate future because there is a major food catastrophe coming.

That is why Guyana and Barbados, and today I just want to spend some amount of time, I assure you not too much of your time, to elaborate a bit on this model that we are seeking to create with Guyana and Barbados. It is a model, Prime Minister Mottley and I, we are convinced that once we can show the results of this model; it is a model that can be replicated all across the region to create a win-win scenario and position for all of us, but we cannot see ourselves as competitors, we cannot see ourselves as opposite side of the same wicket. We have to see ourselves as a singular collective, a singular partner working together for one common goal and vision, that is, to give the best possible opportunity to the people of our country, to bring prosperity to the people of our country, to put food on the tables of our people in this region at a less cost, at a sustainable cost and in a healthy, in a much healthier fashion.

That is what we are hoping to achieve through many initiatives that we are pursuing. But these initiatives will not see or bear fruit unless we enhance our trust of each other, and that is why at the level of the governments, we are trying to demonstrate that we want to create a trusting environment, an enabling environment in which we must work, trusting each other.

This is an important factor in advancing the relationship. It is because of the new dynamism in this relationship and this trust that I’m talking about that today we have more than 150 Guyanese participating in this Agrofest. We have more than 55 companies participating and this is only the beginning.

I assure you this relationship would get stronger and better and create a win-win position for Guyana and Barbados. Very soon, with the Minister of Agriculture from Guyana, who is also the Chair of the ministerial Task Force, we are working with Minister Indar in bringing a team from the State of Roraima, northern Brazil, to Barbados. They’re advancing technology in every sphere of agriculture and we want them to come here to work with your farming community, to work with your farmers, to work with your private sector, you7r distributors to see how we can do things better, and I assure you that all the plans that we have, all the ideas that we have will be done in total consultation and support of the people, the stakeholders in this sector. Because unless we have the full participation and buy-in of stakeholders, we will not realize the success we want to.

The relationship that we are building between Guyana and Barbados is to bring economic prosperity to both countries. We are not looking at winning in one area or creating a situation where we are carving out an area for you and an area for Guyana. That is not what we want. We want a holistic approach to this relationship with this development so that we create economic prosperity in every sector and in everything that we do together as one country, Guyana and Barbados.

This relationship must advance security, and we are not talking security in a narrow sense of physical security today, and I want to pause in recognizing our Prime Minister, Prime Minister Mottley for being not that we in this region needed an affirmation from anyone to tell us how influential she is, but you must recognize that the world has recognized the asset we have and I want to pause to recognize you and congratulate you on behalf of the people of Guyana, your extended family.

This relationship must advance security and we are not talking security in a narrow sense of physical security. Today, and I want to pause in recognizing our Prime Minister, Prime Minister Mottley for being and not that we in this region needed an affirmation from anyone to tell us how influential she is. But we must recognize that the world has recognized the asset we have, and I want to pause to recognize you and congratulate you on behalf of the people of Guyana, your extended family. But the security we are talking about in the Guyana-Barbados CARICOM model is how do we ensure that our people and our countries remain secure under the environmental threats and the threats of climate change? How do we remain viable and secure under the threats of food security?

So we are talking about security in the wider context. And the relationship we have embarked on is to advance security on all these different platforms. That security and this economic expansion and cooperation I speak of must be built also on a platform of respect and fairness. That is why not only at the level of the Prime Minister the level of the Cabinet, I have seen tremendous change and improvement in the relationship or the level of the private sector and technician and this is what is needed people to people contact people to people integration People to People partnership is what is going to cement this relationship moving forward.

Today, Prime Minister and I were discussing new ideas, and we said that it is important that we build the institutional mechanism to secure these gains that we are making right now. Because long after us, there will be those who will have to manage what we are building and it can be easily thrown away unless we cement these advances in an institutional way. So that is part of what we must do in creating this winning environment. Indeed, this new environment requires a new approach. It requires us to examine areas in which we have synergies. It requires openness and frankness in our conversation, but it requires also to be forward-looking. We cannot be thinking and working at the moment only. We have to be forward-thinking we have to understand the challenges of the future and build now the framework and mechanism that will mitigate against those challenges.

So the relationship is built on an innovative pathway that includes every segment of the society. I just wanted to speak a bit about this relationship because there are a lot of persons looking on at a development and evolution of this relationship between Guyana and Barbados, and I don’t want us to lose sight or to be motivated into some other narrative but to understand the context and the narrative through which this relationship between Guyana and Barbados is blossoming. And I’m focusing on Guyana and Barbados tonight because we are here to celebrate Agro Fest with you. We are here to launch a number of initiatives. As I speak to you, young people from Barbados are in Guyana receiving training in the agricultural sector in shade house development, shade house management, and they will return here to build shade houses and to manage shade houses and participate in the agricultural process.

At the same time, our Minister of Tourism and your Minister of Tourism are discussing ways in which you can help us to train 6000 young Guyanese in the hospitality sector. We don’t need to look beyond the region. We know the strength that you have in tourism and hospitality, and we are working with you so that you can support us in building this sector as the need is growing in Guyana. Whilst we sit here this evening Guyana is preparing to ship to Barbados our first tranche of shade houses, prefab in Guyana that will be assembled here by your young people who are trained in Barbados in one month to accelerate your agricultural development.

I’m identifying real projects, real projects that we are undertaking in just months of relationship to advance the progress and the ideas and the targets that we’re setting ourselves. We are working in an accelerated way to remove the hurdles that we have in our transportation and logistics, not only between Guyana and Barbados but further afield. We are already examining development partners and stakeholders that will work with us to help us to move limestone to Guyana to bring corn-soy to Barbados as imported cheaper costs to help the feed producers that will help the poultry, farmers, the livestock farmers. We are working aggressively on twinning our economies, starting with tourism.

And we are working and I’ve already discussed this with Prime Minister Mottley that we are working to create a link between northern Brazil and Barbados directly so that you can access millions of people as a new market for your tourism, especially off-peak. To do this, we have offered space to Barbados in our consulate office in the State of Roraima where Visit Barbados Barbados’s Tourism Authority would establish themselves to promote Barbados and advance your tourism product.

We are launching but let me finish with this tourism point. We are working on merging our tourism product and we are working towards operational efficiency and cost efficiency by marketing jointly, Guyana and Barbados, as a singular brand. In markets that we are, we will market Barbados in markets that you are. You will market Guyana. We are looking at creating a winning formula for both Guyana and Barbados. That is the objective. In all of this, we want to build prosperity and improve livelihood options for every single family in Barbados and Guyana.

We are launching the Barbados Black belly sheep program in Guyana with the support of Barbados. We are advancing this project. But I came here to tell you that Prime Minister Mottley and I have even advanced this idea one step further. We are setting aside 50 acres of land to be owned by young people as part of the Black belly sheep project in Guyana, 50 acres to be owned by persons with disability, 50 acres to be owned by single parent, women and importantly 50 acres that will be owned by your young people here in Barbados. These farms will be working together in an integrated way to supply the market here. We are working on training your butchers here so that they can do the best cuts and Barbados can work on creating that logistics hub of moving these products on along the market chain. These are the type of initiatives that will bring long-term and create a long-term sustainable relationship to what we are advancing and the path we are taking.

The Guyana Barbados food terminal is not only aimed at helping the farmers and helping the movement of produce. It is not only aimed at reducing the costs of food on your table, but it is aimed at developing an important transhipment hub for food here in Barbados to move on the different hotel chains and other Caribbean islands to move on to Miami. We must believe that we can do it. We must stop thinking narrowly that we cannot achieve these things. We understand that there are challenges and hurdles, but where in life that success came, you did not have to overcome challenges and hurdles. We are setting bowl targets. We are working on bold and innovative ideas. At the end of it, it is only bold thinking, bold initiative and pursuing those initiatives and ideas that will ensure we are successful in this challenging world at the end of the day.

We are also launching the Guyana-Barbados gold market. We are launching a housing program in which we seek to support the objectives of each other. We are working with the two private sectors, bringing the private sector together to look at opportunities in both countries to help us in capital formation, to deploy their capital, so we can help them to build their businesses as the first option. We are working to create a value chain for development. In one go with the embryo project from the State of Roraima, the artificial insemination, we can double the livestock in all of CARICOM in nine months every take a collective approach with the best possible breed of animal. The technology is there. The science is supporting it. We now have to embrace that science and technology.

There are many who will tell us our market is too small. But our market is not only the people in the region or a marketer tourists that come here. Our market is all those who we have trade agreements with us. We must stop thinking that we are too small to advance our products in those markets. We can differentiate our products. We can have the best of organic pineapples that carried twice the market value, but we have to be thinking people. The Caribbean in this region we are blessed with thinking people, but sometimes he spent too much time talking and pondering. Great ideas die because we spend too much time pondering and talking. We have taken the bold step of setting ourselves targets as regional leaders so you can hold us accountable to those targets. And we are not going to sit and wait to accomplish these targets. We need everyone to come on board and come on board quickly.

So you too have a responsibility. All of us have a responsibility in this era of change if we want to accomplish the targets we have set. And I am convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt like my friend from St Vincent, the Minister, the Minister from Barbados, Guyana, all of CARICOM and the leaders, we are convinced that not only can we achieve the target of 25 by 2025, but if we pursue this plan, we are going to surpass it by far by 2025. I end by saying together we have the greatest opportunity in our history to advance a path that will be forever remembered. It is up to us to embrace this opportunity or, once again, to let it slide to another generation high up for the first option.

I thank you and God bless you.