

[OPINION & COMMENTARY]

Ready, set, republic by Jamaica 70



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IN THE months leading up to Jamaica's 60th year of Independence, a renewed sense of urgency emerged for Jamaica to become a republic. Understandably so, as it symbolises and affirms maturity in our sovereignty. But, after 60 years, are we mature as a people?

The missed opportunity to transition to a republic prior to the Queen's diamond jubilee as head of state for Jamaica, especially coming off the heels of the euphoria of the Jamaica 50 celebrations; is an indictment on us all. The inroads lost in the last decade must be swiftly, intentionally and specifically recalibrated to set us on a path to achieve republic status by Jamaica 70, ending the British monarchy as head of state of Jamaica.

Our economic reality is indicative of poor foreign policy and trade relations with our head of state, and strong dependency on debt capital to run the operations of the country. As it stands today, Jamaica's fiscal policy is to make the country attractive for debt-raising purposes, all at a cost to the social welfare of our people.

The lack of adequate fiscal space in the national Budget for sustainable social intervention is the direct reason for the high level of crime in Jamaica; and by extension, suggests that it is the



The fact that the Queen remains the head of state, Jamaica is in a unique position to strengthen relationship with Great Britain. VOICE PHOTO

only antidote.

Philanthropy specific to working capital needed to transition sustainably to a republic; and a new trade relationship, with some element of exclusivity, which can once again allow Jamaica to compete viably and earn much-needed foreign exchange through exports.

With the advent of Brexit, and the fact that the Queen remains the head of State, Jamaica is in a unique position to strengthen relationship with Great Britain, to harness opportunities for both

philanthropy and a new trade relationship.

The path of least resistance to secure those opportunities lies in a good dose of humility and penitence, which I believe serves the national agenda best at this time, given our current economic and social circumstances.

Unceremonious announcements about Jamaica's intent to become a republic, further underpinned with aggressive calls for reparations for slavery, are antagonistic to the short- to medium-term greater good. Accordingly, it would be in

line with the Jamaican adage, 'You haffi tek time tek you han outta lion mout'.

The opportunity to take advantage of this unique position that Jamaica finds itself in at 60 years independent, technically remains available, and is worth serious and tactical exploration.

BACK-OFFICE SYSTEMS AND SOFT COSTS

The Government should strongly consider the use of financial resources for the modernisation of our back-office systems and

soft costs needed to support the human resource framework for Jamaica as a republic, and in doing so:

1) Put our law makers to work – Adjust all existing laws for efficient enforcement, in order to be used to effect social change and a sustainable tool to fight crime and;

2) Invest in back-office support – Acquire and expand human and administrative resources and facilities to remove the bottlenecks in the judicial and penal systems through the creation of more courts; more rehabilitation prisons; and more social welfare support in the form of gender-specific boarding schools, in lieu of boys' and girls' homes.

GROWTH STRATEGIES FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Sugar, cement, banana, coconut, cocoa (chocolate), bauxite and alumina are some of the main industries that enhanced Jamaica's GDP from the inception of Independence. They were used as geopolitical tools to create mutually beneficial partnerships in foreign trade, but are now either completely wiped out, sold to foreign entities in a way that levies little or no direct benefit to the individual Jamaican, or sold on the futures market in order to pay the country's debt today with natural resources earmarked for tomorrow, a recipe for fast and furious depletion of our natural ores.

The country must adopt a tangible growth strategy

that removes dependency on these traditional industries, by having the legislature create an investment climate for Jamaica to become a financial services hub within the global space. This should make it very attractive to the top 25 global banks to be domiciled in Jamaica; and, by extension, will draw large Fortune 500-type global companies to invest and do business.

As member of parliament for Western St Mary, I called for Jamaica to become a republic during the 2014 Sectoral Debates. The P.J. Patterson-led administration of 1994 created the first draft legislation for Jamaica to become a republic, which eventually was passed by the Lower House of Parliament, but was never successful at receiving the full two-thirds support of the Upper House of Parliament.

Once the legislation is passed by both the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament and enjoys the full support of the Opposition of the day, it will then be voted on by the people by way of a referendum.

This is an entrenched requirement within the Constitution for Jamaica to become a republic.

I am optimistic that with steady and tactical execution, Jamaica will become a sustainable republic by 2032, our 70th year of Independence; and along with it, a renewed sense of identity, a renewed commitment to economic independence, and fortified maturity as a people.

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Citizens and security forces in conflict



SSP Diaries

JAMAICA HAS had many opportunities to view social media video clips in 2022 to realise that its citizens and the security forces are at war in certain communities.

Lone police officers, taking on communities, brandishing and discharging weapons in what can only be described as a show of misguided power; soldiers being heckled by citizens in close proximity to patrols; soldiers and citizens fighting each other, more of a public brawl; police fighting with citizens while soldiers appear to merely observe the proceedings; soldiers using weapons as prehistoric clubs against women; citizens releasing persons detained in police vehicles having no fear of the implications; and citizens clearly displaying that they are not afraid to challenge the security forces under any set of circumstances, to name but a few incidents that I have seen.



There are clear indications that many of our citizens have lost respect for our soldiers and policemen. FILE

There are clear indications that many of our citizens have lost respect for our soldiers and policemen. Perhaps this is the result of years of close associations, abuse or simply the lack of respect and trust. In fact, my observations have revealed an evolution of sorts; soldiers have become more like the abusive police of old; the police in many instances are showing more constraint and maturity in actions than their military support. The end result of the behaviours described is that many of our citizens have become

emboldened, they no longer accept the authority of the police or soldiers for that matter.

The ability to establish law and order in many such communities is almost non-existent under the present circumstances. Law enforcement has lost its moral authority to enforce the law.

Where is all this leading? Jamaica has had ungovernable communities before. It appears that they may soon become the norm rather than the exception. In such communities the 'jungle justice' system prevails as the

void created by the lack of the legitimate State's authority is filled. Criminal gangs will expand their areas of influence until it effectively impacts all aspects of life and business as we know it. Here, there are no longer any 'territorial boundaries,' nothing and no one is off limits in so far as their sphere of influence is concerned.

Just think Haiti and its current challenges and you will get the picture. It seems this is the road we have embarked upon, and we seem to be going one stage further with legitimate organs of the State

becoming "ungovernable".

There are many things that need to be done to halt this downward spiral but I feel we have to start with some things that have been advocated many times over but never seriously considered. Implementing appropriate strategies to regain the moral authority of the police and soldiers captures the essence of the actions required. It starts with proper recruitment and selection strategies. As it stands, the security forces seem to be accepting more persons of questionable character and mavericks than persons capable of serving the nation in a desirable manner. Retraining, education and development of existing members must be done.

Behavioural sciences must be a part of the new curriculum. The forces need to have a thorough understanding of the people they serve and their culture, just as much as they must thoroughly satisfy the other competencies needed to be a peace officer or a military professional. They are not relating well to the people they serve.

The training, education and development foci must have a disciplined specific-to-task orientation and not be an attempt to create a hybrid from a jigsaw puzzle. Revisit the internal disciplinary codes for these organisations. They both came out of the colonial era, although they appear to have shed quite a bit of that mentality, there are still some lasting legacies, such as

the composition of police uniforms and the length of time it takes to deal with even minor disciplinary infractions in that force.

Community policing in the true meaning of the concept, and a proper understanding of the use of the organisations in question, must govern the outcomes to be derived from this introspection for the police and military, respectively. Good leadership and management of the State's resources is non-negotiable.

As a developing country, we must ensure that we put things in the right perspective as we chart the path to be recognised as truly developed. In the many decades of fighting crime, the military has become more and more subsumed by the police. This comes naturally from too much of a close and loose association over time. It has reached the stage now where the citizens of Jamaica can no longer differentiate one from the other, hence our present problems. This must change. The military should only be called upon as a last resort and not as an arm of the police force. Military deployments must be intensity-, and time-specific, and not something to be treated as the norm. This article does not address all that needs to be done but it represents some undeniable truths which must be addressed if our citizens are not to continue losing faith and taking matters into their own hands.

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Kingston Gleaner, August 11, 2022, Pg. 4, Kingston, Kingston, JM

<https://newspaperarchive.com/kingston-gleaner-aug-11-2022-p-4/>