

Sir Shridath Ramphal, May 13, 2017, Georgetown, Guyana.

The Anthony N Sabga Caribbean Awards for Excellence have brought us here; but the ironies of history have ordained that we are here without Dr Sabga who passed on a week ago. It had been his idea that this 2017 Awards Ceremony should have been held here in Guyana, and he planned to have been with us. Some of us – on behalf of all of us – were with his family on Monday as they and Trinidad and Tobago said farewell to him, and gave thanks for the life of a truly illustrious Caribbean man. Tonight, in another part of the Caribbean we do the same - as we dedicate these 2017 Awards for Excellence to the man of excellence whose vision gave them creation – Dr Anthony N. Sabga. We have just shown by our moment of silent reflection our collective admiration of what Dr. Sabga's enlightenment has made possible,

In his immortal *Gitanjali*, Tagore wrote of a world

*Where tireless striving stretches its arms toward  
perfection.*

It was a world

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high.*

It was a world of EXCELLENCE.

It is in obeisance to that world of excellence here in the Caribbean that we are collected tonight for the conferment of the Caribbean Awards for Excellence for 2017. This is already the 9th time we have done so; but tonight is special among them in that it is the first time this Ceremony is being held outside the Awards' birthplace of Trinidad & Tobago – the home of the ANSA McAL Foundation that administers the Awards. In announcing the venue the Foundation said that the decision to host this occasion in Guyana “was taken for the number of Laureates it has given the awards programme and the region, and to honour the two Guyanese laureates awarded for 2017”. Guyana, I know, is proud to be host to this very select moment in the life of our Region.

When the Foundation, inspired and headed by Dr Sabga, launched the Awards in 2005 it represented a coming of age in

our region signifying that Caribbean people recognized and nurtured Excellence among their own in a special way. It was the first regional, non-governmental programme of its type offering significant tangible benefit to its Awardees. The goal of the Sabga Caribbean Awards for Excellence is both to *RECOGNISE* significant Caribbean Excellence and to *ENCOURAGE* and *SUPPORT its* furtherance. From Msgr. Gregory Ramkissoon of Jamaica, one of the first Laureates in 2005 in the category of Public and Civic Contributions, to this year's Laureate in Arts and Letters, the celebrated Conductor Kwamé Ryan of Trinidad and Tobago, the Sabga Awards for Excellence have reached out across the Caribbean to identify the truly worthy among us.

In doing so, the Foundation has relied heavily on the region itself through its Country Nominating Committees to identify the excellence within our midst. No laureate reaches the ultimate stage of selection by the Regional Eminent Persons Selection Panel (the EPP) save through country nomination. The EPP itself is a fully autonomous Panel appointed by the Foundation on a regional basis. I am its current Chairman,

having been a member from the outset. We have lost some of our eminent members (including my predecessors, Sir Ellis Clarke and Mr Michael Mansoor and, very recently, Sister Paul D'Ornellas and Sir Dwight Venner ,whose passing I recall tonight with great sadness). Most of my colleagues are here – and I ask them to rise to receive your acclamation.

In the beginning in 2005 there were three categories of Awards: Arts and Letters, Public and Civic Contributions and Science and Technology. For the last two Award cycles, a new category was added by the Foundation, responsive to the contemporary priorities of the region: Entrepreneurship. On any occasion, the EPP can decline to make an Award – as it has done this year in the category of Science and Technology.

From the outset, the Foundation's selection criteria placed emphasis on a candidate's *capacity for significant future achievement and likelihood to do so, being at a stage in their life and career where the Award could help them realise their promise and potential*. This now takes tangible form in the guidance to Nominating Committees that candidates should preferably be between 35 and 55 years of age; it is not a lifetime

achievement Award but one that identifies, rewards and nurtures Excellence that shines currently in the Caribbean.

In this respect, the Awards serve our whole region; for that *striving toward perfection* of which Tagore wrote is the cardinal need of the Caribbean as we seek to mark out place in a world that demands excellence as its standard for advancement. The experience of the Caribbean Awards for Excellence over the last twelve years demonstrates how extraordinarily rich is the talent of our Region and how constantly successful is that striving for perfection. If in any year we fail to identify it in any category, the fault is within the system of discovery. The gold is there, and we shall continue to search and find it.

A final word before we begin the actual Ceremony of conferment on this year's Awardees. The Awards will be conferred by the late Dr Anthony N. Sabga's eldest son, Mr Norman Sabga, himself in his own right a respected member of the business community of Trinidad and Tobago, and one whose personal management and Caribbean commitment, together with the generosity of the ANSA McALL Group of Companies, has made these Awards possible. These Caribbean

Awards are themselves an act of corporate Excellence and a model for our Region.