

**INDEPENDENCE DAY MESSAGE 2025**  
**“RELYING ON THE GENIUS OF OUR PEOPLE”**

by

**Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves**  
**Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines**



[Address on the Occasion of the 46<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence of  
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on October 27, 2025  
At Arnos Vale Sporting Complex]

Office of the Prime Minister  
Kingstown  
St. Vincent and the Grenadines  
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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

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PRIME MINISTER OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

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## **[FORMAL GREETINGS!]**

I thank President Irfaan Ali of Guyana for his kind gesture in deploying a contingent of his country's paratroopers to participate in a display of skill in jumping from the skies, thus adding richly to the overall ceremonials this evening.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Fellow-Vincentians:

On October 27, 1979, St. Vincent and the Grenadines reclaimed its independence from the British colonisers who had effected conquest and settlement of our magnificent landscape and seascape, consequent upon the Treaty of Paris of 1763, in a general carve-up of

countries in the Eastern Caribbean between two colonial European powers, Britain and France.

Immediately, the British colonialists wrenched our country from its own trajectory of autonomous development, and commenced an imposition of a colonial disorder upon our indigenous forebears, the heroic Kalinago and Garifuna people. In the process, the British remade our St. Vincent and the Grenadines and its population mix. The colonisers stole our forebears' lands; committed large-scale genocide against them; forcibly exiled some 2,500 of them to Central America; ripped over 60,000 Africans from their homeland between 1763 and 1807; transported them to our blessed land in cruelty and savagery, and enslaved 55,000 or so who survived the arduous, perilous journey; enslaved, too, their children until formal emancipation in 1838; and indentured Madeirans and Indians over a 43-year period after slavery's end were recruited to provide labour for the plantations and commercial enterprises.

Thus, in 118 years, the British altered forever the population make-up, economy, and governance of our St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

They embedded an alien cruelty and brute force into a hitherto tranquil and peaceful land, home of the peaceful Kalinagos. Colonialism was not a thinking machine; it was violence in its natural state; our forbears resisted heroically, but the prolonged resistance of over 30 years was defeated; our leader, Chatoyer the magnificent, was ambushed and killed in 1795. Evil had triumphed through superior military might, but the nobility and justness of the resistance have etched in our collective memory the virtuous essence that, in struggle, a strenuous life is preferable to one of ignoble ease. It is from that wellspring of resistance and owning our nation that the genius of our people continues to drink for uplifting purposes.

Our government is demanding justly, and compellingly, in concert with other CARICOM member-states, reparations for native genocide and the enslavement of African bodies. Today, even after 46 years of the reclamation of our country's independence, we still suffer markedly from the legacies of underdevelopment wrought by native genocide, the enslavement of African bodies, indentured labour, and the evil spirit of colonialism. The contemporary apologists of colonial over-rule absurdly, nonsensically, seek to draw up a contrived and

disingenuous balance-sheet in the jaundiced count of the British inheritances of the English language, the common law, the imitative constitutional and administrative arrangements of Westminster-Whitehall, and cricket, in a vain attempt to wipe away all the criminal sins of colonialism against humanity, Christian teachings, and international law. The struggle for reparations continues on all fronts. It is a great cause; and great causes have never been won by doubtful men and women. I am not doubtful of success on this and other strategic quests to uplift and ennoble further our future; never will we desecrate our future.

Fellow-Vincentians, out of the fever of our history, we have built a nation of high quality through our own efforts and the helpful solidarity of our friends and allies overseas, including some who have hitherto been our historical oppressors. What we have achieved thus far is absolutely amazing! To be sure, difficulties and challenges still weigh us down; they arise from our own inherent vulnerabilities and fragilities, from external and internal sources, and sometimes from nature itself which otherwise provides the basis for our sustenance. Taken as a whole, we have done pretty well; and we have a future of

immense possibilities, despite limitations, ahead of us. On this our 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our reclamation of independence, we have good reason to celebrate; and we are justified, overwhelmingly, to assert that we are on the right track.

Over the years, the collective genius of our people has ensured that we have not only survived but thrived against seemingly insurmountable odds. Our resilience and creativity in life, living, and production have been a marvel to others. Repeatedly, we have been able to summon this collective genius and embrace fresh hopefulness, not despair; we have arrived at a settled commitment to triumph and advance, always in concert with a leadership that possesses the requisite energy and will, vision and skill, inclusive of its ability to draw out of our people their goodness, high-quality, and nobility which the people may not as yet know that they possess.

Our people's collective genius has built and improved home-made tools; fashioned beautiful music from steel drums; built lovely houses with abundant local material with the hands and brains of skilled carpenters and masons; produced tasty, nutritious foods and a

selective cuisine of quality; ploughed our land, traversed our seas, welcomed and provided quality services to our visitors; traded in goods; migrated and sent back remittances from abroad, in building our economy; danced, laughed, and entertained; engaged in sports and leisure; worshipped our God joyously in prayer and song; cared for our young, the disadvantaged, the elderly, and the infirm; and buried our dead with touching solemnity and a celebration of their lives.

In all these endeavours, and more, teachers have taught; leaders have led; parents have parented; our elderly have guided; our young have been growing gloriously; our public servants have served; our nurses and doctors have tended the sick; the police and jurists have helped to keep the peace; our farmers and fisherfolk have farmed and fished productively for our food and for export; workers have kept the wheels of industry turning and the construction sites are buzzing with activity; and our prophets have prophesied and taught us about the gift of God's amazing grace and mercy. Amidst all of this, our women have been exemplary as mothers, partners, producers; our rocks, our

glue that holds us together with our fathers; our women and men, simply and profoundly, have been history-makers.

It is from this collective, unconquerable source that we must draw, to build upon our existing strong foundations in life, living, and production, to shape and construct a first-world nation of a special type in our part of our Caribbean by 2040, within a period of fifteen years from now.

In this quest to uplift further our future and to enhance of our possibilities, everyone has a constructive role to play in disciplined, committed work and social solidarity. Central in this regard is a nurturing family in which the children's welfare is paramount. In the society-at-large, good neighborliness in every material particular is more than ever required for our nation's advancement; and the banishment of criminality and lawlessness must be an all-of-society priority. Our robust, competitive politics, too, must not descend into intolerance, hatred, bile, anger, hubris, and rank divisiveness. Particularly at this time of heightened political competition, it is



necessary and desirable that we aspire to civil discourses even as we robustly promote or defend our political stances or choices.

It is this genius of the people in communion with creative, strong, and visionary leadership that has brought us safely through some extremely, challenging circumstances over the past five years. We have been buffeted and battered by the ill-winds of the COVID pandemic in 2020 to 2021; the volcanic eruptions in April 2021; Hurricane Elsa in July 2021; the knock-on economic effects of the exacerbated global turmoil consequent upon the start of the Ukraine-Russia war in February 2022; Hurricane Beryl in July 2024; and the elevated price increases of recent months arising from the external convulsions in the global economy.

From all of these, relief has been effected; recovery and reconstruction have substantially occurred, and are still continuing apace. Yet, some proverbial wounds and scarring remain to be healed; many needs and wants are still to be fulfilled; and there still exist, inevitably, some dissatisfactions amidst abundant satisfactions. The demands for assistance by people who have suffered, to a greater or lesser extent,

from the slings and arrows of misfortune, continue to rise. Accordingly, although over 5,000 houses have been repaired or rebuilt by the government in the 16 months since Beryl, a highly commendable achievement, there are another 2,000 or so left to be satisfactorily addressed; similarly, even as my government has provided in excess of \$2.5 million in fridges, stoves, and washing machines to affected persons, there is a waiting list of over 2,500 persons to be helped in this regard. Every affected person or family knows that so long as I am Prime Minister, all these, and other reasonable, demands will be met. My government does what no other government in the world does or has done in these respects: When there is a natural disaster, we come to the people's aid fully, extraordinarily so, in rebuilding and repairing affected houses, rolling out a delivery of appliances, and providing a social safety net for the households. We take our guidance and inspiration in matters of this kind from the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Book of Matthew.

In light of all of these circumstances and ongoing commitments resident in our government's public policies to improve further,

markedly, our people's lives, living, and production, I hereby announce several attendant initiatives.

First, the assessment of the Ministry of National Mobilisation shows that some 660 deserving persons who had not received, as over 5,000 have received already for nearly a year, the Beryl monies of \$600 monthly support, will receive these monies in a lump sum of \$4,800 each for the eight months when these payments should have been made. This will cost the Treasury \$3.2 million, already budgeted for. These monies are expected to be on these persons' individual bank cards by the end of November 2025. Any others who were inadvertently missed by the Ministry's officials will continue to be sorted out, too, on an ongoing basis.

Second, the 2,704 persons who had been assessed to be in severe need, and who were paid additionally a Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA) of \$175 monthly for three months earlier this year, will be paid another 3 months' COLA for October to December. This Christmas COLA will be paid by the end of November 2025. This costs the Treasury \$1.4 million.

Third, a Christmas COLA will also be paid to all public servants, nurses, teachers, police officers, prison officers, and non-established employees in the central government as a one-off payment, tax-free, of 3 percent of the person's salary or wage for three months. This payment, too, is to be made by the end of November 2025. The cost to the Treasury is: \$3.0 million. Of course, additionally, my government will be engaged with the public sector trade unions on salary-related negotiations for a new round of enhanced salaries and allowances, for a three-year period beginning January 1, 2026, to be included in the Estimates for the year 2026.

Fourth, there is a bundle of announcements to be made in respect of public servants, police officers, nurses, and nursing assistants.

Nearly two months ago, the Cabinet decided that the 234 teachers and 159 public servants who are university graduates, who had submitted proof of their degree qualifications by September 30, 2025, who were not as yet appointed [at]on the appropriate "Graduate" salary scale, will be appointed with effect from November 1, 2025. The officials are

finalising all the administrative details in this regard. I expect that by mid-December 2025, if not before, their pay packets will reflect the salary enhancements consequential on such appointments. This will increase central government wage bill for the remainder of 2025 by \$500,000 for public servants and \$750,000 for teachers.

Teachers and public servants who submitted their degree qualifications after September 30, 2025, will be appointed from January 2026. The appointments of the graduate teachers will be in Grade F and E as applicable. The resulting vacancies arising from these Graduate Teacher appointments (30 posts of Teacher II and 46 posts of Teacher III) will be put in place to accommodate the promotion of Teacher I<sup>s</sup> who satisfy the criteria. As regards the public servants, those currently receiving the Graduate Allowance are to be appointed to the posts of Administrative Officer I and II in accord with the decision of the Cabinet in September 2025.

In respect of the Police Officers, Nurses, and Nursing Assistants, the payment of the Graduate Allowance will continue. In order to enhance salaries of these categories, a formal Review of their salaries and

allowances will be conducted beyond any negotiated increase between the government and the public sector unions for the three-year period 2026 to 2028 inclusive. These categories of public employees (Police Officers, Nurses, Nursing Assistants) have peculiar chain-of-command issues to be accommodated in the application of Graduate appointments. This, in part, demands a formal Review. The Education Revolution has thrown up some fascinating anomalies particularly among these categories of professionals.

Regarding the computation of Graduate Allowances for public servants and teachers there will be an immediate upward revision that will allow each university graduate to receive the equivalent of at least one full increment in the Grade G scale up to the maximum of the said grade. This is to take effect from November 1, 2025. I expect this increase will be in the pay packets of the relevant public servants and teachers by mid-December 2025.

This massive, immediate alignments, realignments, reforms, appointments, and enhancement of graduate allowances will, in total, cost the Treasury \$6 million for the remaining three months of 2025.

This is how a serious government goes about its business with substance, not ill-conceived gimmicks of those who have absolutely no clue about governance. My government has a stellar history of uplifting its employees in matters of education and training, housing, salaries, wages, allowances, retirement benefits, promotions, conditions of work, and enhanced freedoms at the work place and beyond, all within the context of strengthened social solidarity of our nation. We have been, and are, and will continue to be, undoubtedly, the government of, and for, the working people, including all employees in the central government. After all, we are a Labour government.

Fifth, nursing assistants who retired before October 27, 2015, and were not beneficiaries of the decision to make their posts pensionable, will from today become pensionable going forward. This is a gift from the people and their government for a few dozens of elderly retired nursing assistants. An administrative process will be put in place to ensure payment before mid-December 2025.

Sixth, the matter of reducing personal and corporate income tax. In 2001, the top marginal rate of personal and corporate income tax was 40 percent. Over the last near-25 years, my government has reduced that level of taxation to 28 percent. Over the next five years, this rate will be reduced further to 22 percent, in stages, beginning with a reduction to 26 percent from January 2026; in 2026, this will cost the Treasury \$3.7 million in personal income tax reductions alone; the cost of the reduction for corporate taxes will be \$3 million in 2026. In 2001, the salary threshold below which no personal income tax was to be paid was \$12,000; my government has raised that threshold to \$25,000 annually. Over the next five years, that threshold will be increased to at least \$30,000, beginning with an increase to \$26,000. In other words, as of January 2026, there will be no personal income tax on an employee's first \$26,000 of salary, annually. More money in workers' pockets. This threshold tax alteration will cost \$2.2 million in 2026. All told, therefore, these personal and corporate tax reductions for 2026 will cost the Treasury \$8.9 million.

Seventh, with effect from December 2025, there will be an increase in the monthly public assistance payment as I had earlier pledged.



Currently, there are 4,646 persons on public assistance: \$280 monthly for those under 65 years of age, and \$300 for those over 65 years old. From December, all will receive an increased payment in public assistance monthly of \$360 in addition to an existing and expanding menu of social safety net assistance, including housing, rents, food packages, lump-sums for particular adverse events, medical and pharmaceutical support. To assist in cushioning expenditure as Christmas approaches, this increase in public assistance, will be back-dated to September 2025. So, for a person receiving \$280 in public assistance monthly, his or her payment from December will be \$80 more monthly, but at the end of November he or she will receive in addition to his/her regular \$280, a back-dated lump-sum of \$240 — the additional \$80 for each of the three months of September to November, inclusive. Similarly, those who are paid the regular \$300 monthly will get the back-dated lump-sum of \$60 for each of the same three months or \$180, and the increase to \$360 monthly from December. In other words, the public assistance increases will be backdated for 3 months, September to November; the back-pay is to be paid at the end of November. This increase in public assistance for the four-month period, September to December,

will cost the Treasury \$1.246 million; annualised, the cost is \$3.74 million.

Vincentians may recall that in 2001, when my government was elected, the monthly public assistance was only a miserly \$50; we have increased it some six times before this latest round of increases, and expanded the list to accommodate more persons, particularly the elderly, the infirm, or physically-challenged who are in need.

Any government has to be alert to the difficulty of increasing the monthly cash payment of public assistance above the minimum monthly payments for the pensioners at the National Insurance Services (NIS), which is arrived at subsequent to a periodic Actuarial Review as required by law. Currently, there are 1,910 pensioners at the NIS who are on minimum pension, out of nearly 10,000 pensioners overall on NIS; currently, those 1,910 persons receive the minimum pension of \$160 fortnightly or \$320 monthly; these persons would have contributed to the pension fund; so, it is unfair for them to receive less than the non-contributory public assistance. And no government can increase the minimum pension at the NIS unless it is

done through an independent Actuarial Review in accordance with law. These persons on minimum pensions rightly complain whenever public assistance payments exceed theirs.

So, I am correcting this until the next Actuarial Review. In addition to the minimum NIS pension of \$320 monthly, the government will pay through the NIS an additional \$40 monthly, to put them at least on the same footing as those who receive public assistance. Further, they too, will receive a three-month back-payment of \$120 for the months of September to November 2025. The cost to the Treasury for this support for the four-month period to the end of December, 2025, is slightly shy of one quarter of a million dollars. For completeness, I should point out that there is an attendant funeral grant for the family of an NIS pensioner.

Eighth, something more has to be done in relation to foster children. Currently, the foster parent, including those in respect of children in kinship care or institutional care, receives \$275 monthly for each foster child. This number is too low. There are currently 165 children in one form of foster care or another. Accordingly, there will be an

increase of \$125 monthly to \$400 from December 2025. A similar three-month back-payment of the increase, a lump sum of \$375, is to be effected for September to November. The cost to the Treasury of this initiative is almost \$100,000 for the rest of 2025.

Ninth, the farmers are being accorded an especial benefit. The already subsidised fertiliser sold at the Input Warehouse will be further reduced in price by one-half, provided that the purchases are made by the farmers between October 31st and January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026, a three-month window. Up to 8,000 sacks of the half-priced fertilizer will be made available, subject to the usual controls. This is estimated to cost the public purse \$400,000. Fresh assistance of \$5 million will additionally be made for loans to farmers.

Tenth, the programme of assisting fisherfolk with acquiring boats and equipment will be ramped up. A further \$5 million is to be put to this venture from January 2026.

Eleventh, a special housing project is being launched, complementary to the existing ones, to address houses damaged or destroyed by

Hurricane Beryl. A Housing Emergency Repair and Outreach Fund (HERO Fund) is being established to address particularly urgent house repairs that have been inadvertently missed or unreasonably delayed, with a focus on rapid, community-validated interventions, for repairs below \$40,000 in each case. The initial Fund allocation will be \$3 million. I am sure that this initiative will, without bureaucratic delay, but in accord with all financial regulations, sort out some egregious cases. Depending on the facts on the ground, this Fund may receive replenishment as the circumstances admit.

The ULP government commits to repair, rebuild, and build at least 3,000 houses in the next five-year term. I am personally determined to see everyone, including young professionals, secure good-quality, affordable housing.

Twelfth, the decision has been taken to enhance further the financial support accorded to the schools owned and operated by the various religious organisations. The Director General of Finance and Planning has been directed to engage the religious organisations on this matter and report to the Cabinet thereon for decision-making.

Thirteenth, the VAT will be zero-rated on nine additional items of food, and adult pampers with effect from November 3, 2025; in other words, these items will join several other food items on which no VAT is currently imposed. For example, no VAT is currently being paid on chicken and turkey wings, backs, and necks, and on several other food items; in some cases, VAT is exempted. However, in looking at the list of food items on which there is significant consumption, in value terms, the Cabinet decided to take nine of them off the list for VAT payment. These items are: Other chicken parts such as thighs, leg quarters, and so forth; processed cheddar cheese; canned tuna; canned sardines; chicken sausages (all types); cereals; lentils; and categories of health drinks like Ensure and Supligen. Removing VAT on these food items and adult pampers will cost the Treasury about \$8 million annually, but continued, expected economic growth will cushion this loss to the Treasury.

This surgical approach, rather than a general swinging cutlass-or-axe approach, will better serve the consumer and the country. To begin with, a selected menu of items makes the removal of VAT on them far

easier for the Ministry of Trade, to monitor, than a general removal or a cut across the board of hundreds of commodities and services; thus, the consumer is likely to benefit in the targeted way in which the government has decided. A generalized, sweeping removal of VAT by one-fifth as suggested by some persons with absolutely no responsibility for governance, will result in a loss of revenue of \$60 million per year; this wide, general sweep of VAT cuts cannot be properly monitored; in any event, experience elsewhere has shown that sweeping, generalised slashing of VAT puts money in the pockets of supermarket owners and merchants, but does not result in a reduction of prices for the consumers. And if any government were to reduce VAT by \$60 million, it would have to increase other taxes on the people to make up for the revenue loss. Or it will have to cut necessary expenditure. The people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines can always rely on experienced, knowledgeable hands to do things sensibly and responsibly for the people's benefit.

Those who clamour for a reduction of VAT on domestic electricity consumption appear to be ignorant of the fact that nearly 90 percent of the consumers do not pay VAT on electricity because their

consumption does not reach over 250 units monthly, the level at which VAT is attracted. Mostly, the well-off people consume electricity above 250 units monthly; hardly anyone from poor or hard-pressed families pay VAT on electricity in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

In total, the cost, of the bundle of initiatives for the people's relief for the remainder of 2025 amounts to almost \$20 million, most of which is time-bound for the remainder of 2025. This package of targeted relief will assist directly thousands of persons. The initiatives set out for 2026 will cost the Treasury under \$35 million.

Fourteenth, as of November 11, 2025, the usual duty-free concessions on Christmas barrels starts, and ends on December 31, 2025. This initiative of my government, which brings so much relief to ordinary folks in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, has been copied by several governments across the Caribbean.

I again make a special appeal to the relatively small numbers of public servants, teachers, police officers, nursing personnel who had chosen not to take the COVID vaccine and have not yet returned to work, to



do so. The most of these government employees who have already returned to work have done so with all retirement benefits intact. This is part of my government's contribution to the healing of our nation which was convulsed by the deadly pandemic of COVID.

This year, five Sports' Ambassadors and eight Cultural Ambassadors are hereby appointed. The five in Sports are: Cornelius Stewart, former captain of the National Football Team; Mary-Ann Frederick, the distinguished netballer; Anthony Boyea, a legend in Lawn Tennis; Dr. Lennox Adams, a former national athlete, an enduring sports administrator, and a community sports' activist; and Lyndon James, former national cricketer, fitness trainer, and a champion of the Wellness Revolution. In Culture, the Ambassadors are: Joffre Venner, esteemed retired music teacher; Alex Barnwell, a well-known national and regional music producer; Lindon "Pablo" Lewis, sound and music engineer; Stephenson "Steve" Wallace, visual artist and film-maker; Shanique Stewart, an outstanding female artist; Akley Olton, film-maker of quality; Kingsley Collis, superb mas-band leader, nationally and regionally; and Dr. Richard Byron-Cox, novelist, writer of the creative imagination, and diplomat.

Fellow-Vincentians, as of today, the Victoria Park is officially renamed as “Independence Park”. The idea of our historic Park in 2025 still bearing the name of a nineteenth-century British Queen, who never visited St. Vincent and the Grenadines, is entirely preposterous. For me, this admits of no debate. As of today, it is now fittingly renamed as “Independence Park”. Four stands within Independence Park will henceforth bear the names of distinguished Vincentians who are no longer with us in our Earthly City, but who have deep connections, historically, with this Park: (i) The main traditional stand is to be named in memory of Alphonso “Alfie” Roberts, the first person from St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Windward and Leeward Islands, to play test cricket for the West Indies; (ii) the double-decker stand is to be named the Mason-Boucher Stand as memorials to the legendary fast bowler Frank Mason and two Bouchers — Paul Boucher, the esteemed groundsman at, and protector of, the Park for decades, and Rudy Boucher, arguably the best footballer this country has produced; (iii) the stand to the east is to be named in honour of the iconic mas-man Roy Ralph of Dragons fame; and (iv) the stand to the west is being named after Tanny Peters, an inestimable pan-man for

the ages. In the same vein, renaming of certain streets, sporting facilities, and buildings will be rolled out in memory of our distinguished personalities, now deceased, in all areas of life and production. This is all part of a national exercise to connect the past and the present with the owning of our future.

This process of renaming has now started. Over the next few months, the decolonisation of names and symbols in our country will accelerate. So, too, finally will there be additions, hopefully including women, to the list of national heroes to join His Excellency Joseph Chatoyer in that rarefied pantheon.

I conclude on a personal note: I have had the honour and privilege of being our country's Prime Minister for the past nearly 25 years, more than one-half of the 46 years since our reclamation of independence. I have always sought to do my best for my country and our Caribbean civilisation in love, solidarity, and commitment. Together, we have made our mark with some mighty deeds; still, there is much more to be done as we go forth, without any doubt, to achieve even greater things, including making St. Vincent and the Grenadines a first-world

nation by the year 2040, a mere 15 years away. Let us get on with it. We will succeed by relying on the collective genius of our people, and a leadership that is skilled, activist, experienced and wise, and who knows and feels the pulse of our St. Vincent and the Grenadines! Please, together, let us not leave behind any unfinished task. This is not a time for taking risks or chances with your future. The Lotto is available if you want to take a chance!

With the aid of a distinguished Ethiopian poet, Lemn Sissay, I tell you, our people whom I love dearly, in the particular:

“I have seen your greatness  
The strength of your will  
What it took you to get this far  
Is what will take you further still.”

Happy 46<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence, my beloved SVG! May God continue to bless us all!

Thank you!