

*Leave of Absence*

*Friday, October 25, 1991*

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Friday, October 25, 1991*

The House met at 1.40 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have granted leave of absence to the Member for Couva South (*Mr. Kelvin Ramnath*), from today's sitting.

**FAITH REVIVAL MINISTRIES WORLD OUTREACH (INC'N) BILL**

Bill for the incorporation of the Faith Revival Ministries World Outreach and matters incidental thereto, brought from the Senate [*Mr. Patrick Manning*]; read the first time.

*Motion made*, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Arima Borough Council for the years ended December 31, 1981 and December 31, 1982. [*The Minister of Justice and National Security (Hon. Joseph Toney)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of The Custodian of Enemy Property for the year ended December 31, 1987. [*Hon. J. Toney*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Custodian of Enemy Property for the year ended December 31, 1988. [*Hon. J. Toney*]
4. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of The Custodian of Enemy Property for the year ended December 31, 1989. [*Hon. J. Toney*]
5. Report of the Auditor General on the Accounts of The Custodian of Enemy Property for the year ended December 31, 1990. [*Hon. J. Toney*]

*Papers 1 to 5 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*

## ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Oropouche Constituency  
(Visits)**

**67. Mr. Trevor Sudama** (*Oropouche*) asked the Minister of Works, Infrastructure and Decentralization:

- (a) Could the Minister state why he refuses to respond to my letter to him of June 3, 1991, requesting him to have on-site visit with me of certain critical highways, drainage and bridges problems in my constituency?
- (b) Could the Minister state what is the policy of his Government with respect to requests from duly elected representatives of the people in the House of Representatives for the addressing of problems brought to the attention of the Government?
- (c) Could the Minister state why he visits the constituency of Oropouche at the instance of those who are not duly elected representatives but chooses to ignore the duly elected representative when such requests are made by the latter?

**The Minister of Works, Infrastructure and Decentralization (Dr. The Hon. Carson Charles):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister has not refused to respond to any letter from the Member for Oropouche.

Members of Parliament are entitled to make requests of Government on behalf of their constituents and it is Government's policy to address such matters as effectively as possible, within the constraints of available human and financial resources.

The Minister does not ignore the duly elected representative and has in fact visited the constituency of Oropouche several times in the company of the Member for Parliament, as well as in the company of other persons from time to time as was appropriate.

**Mr. Sudama:** Could the Minister explain why he could only respond to a letter of mine dated June 3, 1991, on August 8, fully two months and one week later, only after I had filed this question in Parliament?

**Dr. Charles:** The Member has written me many times before and the Member has had many visits many times before.

**Mr. Sudama:** I am asking you why it took you two months to reply to me. Is that the manner in which you operate your ministry? You take two weeks and one month to respond to the duly elected Member of a constituency, or is it discriminatory attitude on your part?

*The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Patrick Manning (San Fernando East):*

**BWIA (Financial Losses)**

**74.** Could the Minister of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism kindly state what were BWIA's financial losses, if any, for the following years:-

- (i) 1988;
- (ii) 1989;
- (iii) 1990; and
- (iv) 1991 to date?

**Point Fortin Refinery**

**75.** Could the Minister of Finance kindly state:

- (a) How much of the US \$260,000 loan recently obtained from the Inter-American Development Bank will be spent on upgrading the refinery at Point Fortin?
- (b) What modifications are to be carried out to that refinery?

**The Minister of Justice and National Security (Hon. Joseph Toney):** Mr Speaker, I respectfully ask for a deferral of question No. 74 for another week. The hon. Minister of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism is indisposed this afternoon.

I also ask for a similar deferral of question No. 75. The answer to that question is not yet ready and I am asking for a further deferral of one week.

I must tell you that I spoke to the hon. Member before on this matter.

*Questions, by leave, deferred.*

**ORDER OF BUSINESS**

**The Minister of Justice and National Security (Hon. Joseph Toney):** Mr. Speaker, I seek your leave to have the second reading of the Faith Revival

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Ministries World Outreach (Incorporation) Bill, 1991 after which we shall continue with the debate on the motion which was moved by the hon. Member for Oropouche.

**Mr. Manning:** This is a very strange method of dealing with Parliament's business. I would have expected the hon. Minister to consult. I would not have objected. It would take just a matter of a minute or two to dispose of this particular bill. I wonder if there is a problem.

**Mr. Toney:** This is exactly what I am suggesting.

*Leave granted.*

**FAITH REVIVAL MINISTRIES WORLD OUTREACH (INC'N) BILL**

**Mr. Patrick Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that a bill for the incorporation of the Faith Revival Ministries World Outreach and matters incidental thereto, be now read a second time.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.*

*House in committee.*

*Clauses 1 to 9 ordered to stand part of the bill.*

*Question put and agreed to, That the bill be reported to the House.*

*House resumed.*

*Bill reported, without amendment; read the third time and passed.*

**1.50 p.m.**

**INDIAN ARRIVAL DAY**

[Second Day]

*Order for resuming adjourned debate on question [August 23, 1991].*

Be it resolved that this House recommend to the Government that May 30 be declared a National Public Holiday to be known as INDIAN ARRIVAL DAY.  
[Mr. T. Sudama]

*Question again proposed.*

**The Minister of Food Production and Marine Exploitation (Dr. The Hon. Brinsley Samaroo):** Mr. Speaker, it has been quite a long time

since this debate started. It ought to have continued on the third Friday of last month, but at that time we were informed that the mover of the motion, the Hon. Member for Oropouche, was in hospital in India being ministered to by a Minister of this very caring Government, as a result of which the debate could not be held on that day, which is why it was put off until today.

For this reason—the long time that has elapsed between our last discussion of this matter and today—I crave your indulgence to spend just a few moments in bringing us up-to-date on the arguments that have been postulated so far, after which I shall continue with the arguments which I had started on the last occasion.

The major argument that was postulated by the Members for Oropouche and Naparima was that the date of Indian arrival in Trinidad and Tobago, May 30, 1845, be commemorated as a public holiday since it was the day when Indians started coming to Trinidad and Tobago. These two hon. Members continue to argue that for many years now, that day has in fact been celebrated so we might accept the *de facto* celebration of that day as an official holiday for Trinidad and Tobago. The Member for Naparima argued further that there are many holidays in this country which are of a eurocentric nature, for example, Corpus Christi, and that one of these eurocentric holidays should be removed from the calendar and Indian Arrival Day substituted. That was the gist of the major arguments presented by hon. Members on the other side when we last spoke. Our argument is that we, on this side, do not at all deny the importance of May 30 as a day when Indian bondage started in this country.

**Mr. Palackdharrysingh:** A point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member is misleading the House. I never argued that one must be removed. I have argued that there must be a review.

**Dr. Samaroo:** Our argument on this side is that we do not deny the importance of May 30 as a day when Indian bondage started in Trinidad and Tobago; nor did we argue against the need to have some commemorative day, particularly for a group of people who came to Trinidad and Tobago and who made such a significant contribution to the development of this nation. However, the argument on this side was against the commemoration of that significant occasion on May 30. Our view is that the beginning of the enslavement of the East Indian population is nothing to celebrate. It was the date of the start of a new system of slavery, when Indians were forced into a long period of labour which went on from 1845 until they were emancipated on January 1, 1920.

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**Mr. Palackdharrysingh:** I simply want to enquire from the hon. Member whether or not he recognizes there was no one single point of East Indian liberation. There is no prospect of pinning down a particular day.

**Dr. Samaroo:** Such a statement betrays an enormous ignorance of history. One can say by the very same token that there was no particular day when Africans were emancipated because a number of them got manumission; a number of them had others pay for their freedom; a number were given freedom during the time of slavery because they operated very favourably in the interest of the master and therefore, African slavery was continuous. Groups of Africans, from time to time, were liberated and the very same thing happened with the East Indian population. It did not all start in 1845 and end in 1920. In the same way that the Africans were enslaved and there was periodic freedom for groups of Africans or individual Africans, exactly the same thing happened with the East Indian, the Chinese, the Europeans and the Portuguese, who also were brought here as indentured labourers. I shall continue this line of debate in a little while.  
*[Interruption]*

I do not want to give way to these uninformed questions, Mr. Speaker. If he is ignorant of history, then he must ask and we will tell him, but he keeps making these inane objections all the time. He must rise on a point of order. I am sorry to say that.

I am indicating to him that in the case of African slavery, Chinese indentureship, Portuguese indentureship and East Indian indentureship, it was continuously phased. What happened on January 1, 1920 is that Indian indentureship came to an end for all time and that is why we are saying that is the day on which we should be commemorating liberation. If there is anything to note about May 30, 1845, it is that it was a day of sadness and mourning; it was a day of grief for the Indian community in this country and therefore it should not be a day of celebration. That is the major argument we are postulating on this side. We argued further that those who promote such a day, that is May 30, have a servile perspective of history. Those who argue for May 30, seek to celebrate their own degradation, lifting a shameful episode in our past, to an act of tremendous celebration. One must have a servile mind if one wishes to celebrate the beginning of one's slavery.

**2.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, what we proposed instead was a celebration of the date of the end of indentureship which is January 1, 1920. That was a day that is worthy of

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celebration. In doing this we would be adopting, as I indicated on the last occasion, a truly liberation perspective on history. January 1, coming as it does at the end of indentureship, would be a time for people of East Indian descent to be very proud of. It would be a time when that section of the population: Hindus, Muslims, Christians, must celebrate the struggle of a people against tremendous odds. When these people came they were placed generally on some of the worst lands in the country—the plains of Caroni. In those days the plains Caroni was not the continuous area of arable and prosperous land that we have. It consisted of a series of areas of land connected to each other by vast areas of swamp. The East Indian population came and they joined up that part of Trinidad, bringing their ancient experience from India and so we have the plains of Caroni.

Mr. Speaker, these were people who lived under some of the worst conditions imaginable, plagued continuously by hookworm, lack of privacy. It was a time when every attempt was made to smother and suppress their religion. It was a time in which they were paid their bonus on the plantation, not in money, but in rum to make them into alcoholics and thus denigrate the population.

**Mr. Speaker:** You speaking time has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. J. Toney*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. Samaroo:** It was a time in which the Indian population was sent to open up and put under active agricultural cultivation, areas that were under forest cover, such as the Montserrat Hill and those vast areas of what used to be impenetrable forest in the area of Tabaquite. Yet, in spite of these conditions of servitude, their spirit was never killed because of the fact that they had come from two of the highest civilizations that the world had known: Hindu and Islamic. Mr. Speaker, in that regard, I am sure the Member for Laventille would agree with me that the tremendous contribution of the Muslims to the development of the society has still to be chronicled and we must use an occasion like January 1, to bring that information.

**Mrs. Donawa-McDavidson:** Would the hon. Member like to be more specific in his contribution?

**Dr. Samaroo:** Mr. Speaker, as it happens, I have just written a fairly lengthy publication on that particular issue. It is now with the publishers and we expect

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that book to be coming out anytime now. But what I can do is give her a copy of the draft that I have. So whereas the Member is saying my research has not reached that point, it has reached and has passed that point. In fact, it is being published.

But to summarize for the benefit of the Member for Laventille, Islam was brought to Trinidad and Tobago, as she has indicated, by Africans. But unfortunately, because of the heavy hand of colonial oppression, Muslims were hung; they were quartered. Every attempt was made to wipe out the religion. Their names were changed and, therefore, after about 150 years much of the African /Muslim presence in the Caribbean had been wiped out. It remained only in small pockets, for example, in Laventille and in the Paramin hills where a number of black Muslims had gone to escape the oppressiveness of the plains down below.

From 1845 there was a new wave of Indians: Islam. That group of Indians came to Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean and most of their significant contribution has remained with us. I refer, for example, to their emphasis on learning: "The pen of the scholar is mightier than the sword of the warrior." That is why Islam has made a tremendous contribution to the development of education throughout the Caribbean as they did in the eastern areas.

The Islamic contribution can be seen in the emphasis that they have placed on the equality of women—Sura Four, as the Member for Laventille would agree with me, which is a whole expostulation on the equality of women. We must, on January 1, celebrate the introduction into this country of a system of jurisprudence which the Muslims brought to this country based on unique principles of equality. As a former member of a religious order, in fact, as a former priest, I thought the Member for Naparima would have known all these things. But I think he needs to be taught them today. Possibly he knows about the Presbyterian Church and Presbyterianism but it is very important for him, as well as for others, to learn about the Islamic and Hindu contribution to the development of this part of the world.

January 1, must be celebrated as a day when the Muslims started off in 1845 in waging *jihad* against the forces of evil in this part of the world and when one speaks about national heroes, one has to speak about people like Haji Rooknudeen who was working to spread the torch of Islam in the North as well as Abdul Aziz Meah who was doing the same thing, along with many others.



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One can spend many hours in expostulating on the very significant Islamic contribution to the development of Trinidad and Tobago, but the point I am making is that Muslims came as part of the larger Indian body that came as indentured labourers from May 30, 1845, and you do not start celebrating what they did on the day of their slavery. You have to wait until the day of their emancipation and look back at the tremendous contribution they have made, so that must stand as a milestone, as a watershed for the present and the future generations of this country to look at.

Mr. Speaker, in other words, one can summarize this whole contribution of the East Indian community, Hindus, Muslims, as well as Christians, by citing from Shakespeare:

"Sweet are the uses of adversity, which like a toad, ugly and venomous, wears yet a precious jewel in its head."

They turned their adversity to advantage, but one cannot look at this turning of their adversity to advantage by starting off on the day of their slavery. One has to look at it, on the other hand, from the day of their emancipation when one can look back and see how they converted this adversity into good fortune for themselves as well as for Trinidad and Tobago.

### **2.10 p.m.**

So that, Mr. Speaker, we have to look at the history of constant struggle waged by the East Indians as we think in terms of celebrating their emancipation on January 1. We have to talk about the Cedar Hill strike of 1882, in the very constituency, I believe, the present constituency of the Member for Naparima from which he intends to run very quickly, because he understands that he does not stand a chance there so he wants to go back to the plains of Caroni. *[Interruption]* Of course, I am going back to Nariva.

So we have to look at the Cedar Hill strike of 1882, which was part of that whole struggle for liberation waged by the East Indian community against the oppressive system of neo-slavery to which they had come in 1845. We have, at this time of celebration, on January 1, to look at the way in which Hindus and Muslims tried to celebrate the Muharram festival in San Fernando in October, 1884, and how they came in procession, showing a real bond between the Hindus and the Muslims as they sought to come to San Fernando in order to celebrate the Tazia festival. We have to see the brutal oppression with which that was suppressed: 12 of them were shot on the spot, and 106 of them were shot and

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immediately hospitalized. A number of them died afterwards. Yet, that kind of brutality that we saw in the Muharram festival did not diminish their spirit. So that Muharram has continued from that time into today as a signal of celebration of that particular group of Muslims on that particular occasion.

It is a time, Mr. Speaker, when one has to talk about the hunger marches of the 1930s, and the strikes of the sugar workers, from 1930 to 1934, in the plains of Caroni, the areas of Central Trinidad, which they themselves had created, all of which culminated in the strikes and disturbances of 1938, which was a marking point, a staging point for the emergence of democracy in Trinidad and Tobago. All of this was begun in that period of the 1930s. It is a time in which our researchers must go back into that past and now recount countless acts of heroism, some recorded, some unrecorded, but all to be brought in a celebratory occasion on January 1.

So, in order for the celebration to be meaningful, it must now trace that history. The whole nation must witness that continuous use of adversity, from 1845 to 1917, now removed, now changed to positive advantage. That is the kind of argument that we are postulating on this side. I think that summarizes very concisely the difference in thinking between the people on this side and the people on the other side: one continuing with a servile perspective, the other looking at the liberation point of view in celebrating the emergence of the people.

There is another dimension, I think, Mr. Speaker, which I ought to bring to your attention, and that is that indentureship was not peculiar to East Indian labour; Europeans and Chinese came here as indentured people. They, too, were subjected to the same degrading conditions of indentureship as the East Indians. Therefore, when we look at January 1, 1920, we are looking at a date that celebrates the end of all indentureship; we are talking about Chinese indentureship, we are talking about Portuguese indentureship, we are talking about the French Creoles who were brought here as indentured labourers. We are looking at a total cessation of a period of indentureship of many peoples.

Therefore, the celebration of the end of indentureship, January 1, 1920, must be used in Trinidad and Tobago as a means of welding the different segments of the nation, each learning to share in the experience of the others, the positive things that the others have brought over their own period of indentureship or of slavery; each sharing in the glorious past, the highlights of the cultures that these peoples brought with them.

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This is very important in Trinidad and Tobago, if we are to move toward that much desired goal of welding our peoples together, and creating a bond between us, so that we can have a true Trinidad and Tobago, rather than what a number of us tend to do at the present time: see each other as separate units, and seeking to highlight the separation. Our own view on this side since it was the end of indentureship for many more than Indians, that factor should be used to weld all our peoples together.

So that the mover of the motion must understand that these other types of indentureship preceded Indian indentureship. What happened on January 1, 1920, is that there came an end to all forms of indentureship: Indian indentureship being the last of the stream of those who were brought here as indentured people. Therefore, January 1 ought to be an occasion for bringing together a whole cross-section of the people, a whole cross-section of the national community in common celebration of the historical struggle against the enslavement of one group of human beings by another group. That is an epochal event in history, when, finally, people were prevented from enslaving other people, something that started with the enslavement of the Africans who were brought, first to the Caribbean around 1610, and now we come to 1920, when that whole range of slavery, from African slavery coming right down to East Indian slavery came to an end. So that, on that day, the African population also must join in this celebration, because it is a celebration that completed their own emancipation in 1838. That is the broad perspective that we must take in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker, if we are to use history to our advantage; if we are to use the glorious events of struggle and of contributions to that past towards the welding of a nation together with one common destiny.

So that on an occasion like this, one builds a society on the positive contribution of each one of its constituent parts, and not on the negatives of the culture of those people who came. So we build a nation on shared and mutual respect for each other, rather than on hatred and on antagonism. That is the larger perspective which we, on this side, all share, and it is based on that philosophical interpretation of this event of history that we are now saying that one ought to celebrate January 1, rather than May 30. The fact that people have been doing it in the past is not necessarily a good reason for us to continue it into the future. If we have been doing it in the past, it is because all the necessary information that is now available was not at that time available. Now that the information is at hand, then it is necessary that such information be brought before the gaze of the

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public of this country so that we can all join in celebrating on this particular occasion.

The two major theses which we on this side have been putting forward are, first of all, that one should replace that mentality of servility with one of liberation. That date of the start of Indian slavery must, if anything, be a day of mourning, not a national celebration. The day of liberation, on the other hand, must be like the celebration of Divali: from darkness into light. January 1, 1920, represents that movement from darkness into light that Divali symbolizes. That is the thinking that must now inform whatever we decide in this particular regard.

The other thesis that I sought to postulate today, Mr. Speaker, is that one must extend this concept of freedom from indentureship outside and beyond the consideration of the Indian community alone, because there were others in the society, as I have tried to indicate, whose forbearers were also enslaved. Therefore, there must be the concept of sharing, which I am quite sure the Member for Oropouche would agree, is one of the milestones of Indian culture and civilization, the concept of sharing. Therefore, when you seek to share your own liberation with the liberation of others, then that is being a good Indian in the sense that you derive that inspiration from that particular philosophy, whether it is Hindu or whether it is Muslim. Because that principle of sharing is as common to Hindu philosophy as it is to Islamic philosophy.

This is why, Mr. Speaker, on the last occasion I moved an amendment to this motion and I indicated that we must substitute for paragraph 4, the following amendment:

“Be it resolved that this House refer this motion to the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to look into the question of public holidays and the report of the Constitution Commission;”

which Joint Select Committee was set up in 1987. As I indicated on the last occasion, the persons on that committee are Members of the House of Representatives: Mr. S. Richardson, Dr. E. Hosein, Mrs. G. Henry, Mr. T. Sudama—I do now know where he belongs, whether he is in this House, whether he belongs to this committee—and Mr. K. Valley.

What I was indicating on the last occasion, Mr. Speaker, was that the Member for Oropouche had made one suggestion, namely May 30; we on this side are making another suggestion, January 1. This Joint Select Committee of both Houses must now sit and listen to the arguments on both sides, before a

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conclusion is arrived at and that is where, for the moment, we shall let this question lie. The Joint Select Committee consisting of distinguished Members of both Houses, has been appointed and would look at the arguments of both sides. I give the Member for Oropouche the assurance that once that committee is sitting, I would appear and put before it these very views that I am putting forward today.

Mr. Speaker, I would rest my case at this particular point, indicating that we on this side have no objection to the commemoration, in some way, of the contribution that the East Indian community has made to the national wheel, the development of Trinidad and Tobago; nor are we disputing the importance of May 30 as an historical event. We are not disputing that at all; that is very important. What we are saying, however, is that, as a day of commemoration, as a day of celebration, that celebration and that commemoration must take place on January 1 of each year as a day when one truly recognizes the struggle as well as the contribution made by this very important segment of the national community. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mrs. Muriel Donawa-McDavidson** (*Laventille*): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. Member for Oropouche for bringing the thought of celebrations for the East Indian community, but would like to support the amendment to the motion made by the hon. Member for Nariva.

Mr. Speaker, today, I feel extremely proud to participate in this debate. First of all, I should like to indicate to this honourable House that festivals bring out the creativity and talents of the people. It is the reason, Mr. Speaker, you will recall, that during my period in the Ministry of Community Development, Sport, Culture and Youth Affairs, we very positively introduced the National Days and Festivals Committee. The objective of that committee was to allow all sectors of Trinidad and Tobago to participate together in festivals and as a means of educating people about the beauties in the culture of all groups of our country, thus reducing or removing once and for all, the division in our community.

As far as I am aware, Mr. Speaker, almighty God, in his wisdom, created one single race, and that race is the human race. As he created plants and trees and flowers, and so forth, and made them of different kinds: roses, anthuriums, daisies, lilies, *et cetera*, he created the human being in all parts of the world, in all shades, in order to provide beauty to all of his creation.

When the National Carnival Commission Bill was being debated, Mr. Speaker, I urged very sincerely that if not the National Commission, that this honourable House or the Government, very urgently see the wisdom of

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organizing—I thought at that time and I still share the view, whether it was a sub-committee of that committee, whether it was a part of another committee—that it was more and more essential that the festivals be properly organized and well-integrated. For, Mr. Speaker, that is only one way in which a nation or a people can be emancipated, and that medium is through education.

Education is limitless. Much of the information that we had many years ago is irrelevant in the light of the revelations of new information. Once upon a time we were told that Christopher Columbus discovered Trinidad and Tobago, when in truth and in fact, we know that it was among the first Muslims that came through Spain, *et cetera*, who made discoveries of these parts. *[Interruption]* What is wrong with celebrating that? It is a celebration, it is a festival.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you all the things that festivals can do. Apart from bringing out the creativity and the talent, we are talking about employment, we are talking about tourism, we are talking about creativity, we are talking about development, we are talking about industry.

I was looking at some magazines here today, *India's Perspectives* and everywhere in this magazine there is a festival. By the same token, based on these festivals, one sees people knitting, working at handlooms, doing handicraft, making ceramics; you name it and they are making it. China is another country that understands what festivals are all about. We took the pains, during the National Days and Festivals, to get films from China to show our various communities what festivals are all about in the development of people and in the development of the nation.

I am hoping, and I am sure, that the hon. Member for Oropouche on this one occasion will forget the partisan aspect and see the wisdom for the involvement of the whole community in his idea. The idea is, in fact, a good one. The occasion for that idea will not take way from Indian Arrival Day, because the more festivals, the better. But since we are talking in terms of national participation, I am going to lovingly ask him to consider that particular aspect of it and leave the campaigning for other occasions, because we have enough of that around the place. We should think of the tremendous benefit that this can bring to the entire country, and better yet, the genuine integration of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am always fighting with the Member for Nariva, but on this occasion I want to compliment him on his research as far as Islam is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, in 1950, if there was one citizen in this country who went through one of the most critical times, I was that person and I thrived on that. The criticism, the condemning and the lack of knowledge and information, I love. That was the time when in our country it was believed that Islam was an East Indian religion and that the very East Indians themselves did not have the knowledge. But we were rather fortunate in Trinidad and Tobago that in 1950—and I think it is good for the historical record to note—the presence of two of the world’s greatest scholars, who are now deceased, Maulana Sedik and Dr. Ansaro—and may the Almighty Allah shower upon them his blessings—made it possible for the knowledge of Islam to spread as it has today.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, our role—you and I—in the Islamic Missionaries Guild, bringing that kind of knowledge, particularly through Radio Trinidad, so that more and more people became aware of their background, their roots, their understanding about all the religions and coming to recognize that after all, there is only one religion in this world, and it is the religion of love.

If you are a genuine Christian practising the tenets of Christianity, that will take you to the root of love.

**Mr. Sudama:** Does that include born-again Christians?

**Mrs. Donawa-McDavidson:** I do not know what is a born-again Christian. I know that a Christian is a Christian and, like all other religions, every human person renews his commitment all the time. If that is what you mean by a born-again, that is okay. What are you? You are a good Presbyterian, and you know that the more you read your *Bible* the more you understand and the more you experience, so every day you are reborn.

As a good Muslim, Mr. Speaker, you know that every day when you read the *Holy Koran* you realize, “Wait, but I do not know anything.” You understand—this morning my sorrows; with hardship comes the ease. So every time you wake up and you review whatever belief you have, you know that you are renewed and you are born again. Because life is everlasting birth. In that context, yes, I believe in born-again Christians. *[Interruption]* No exclusion at all.

If I may continue, if you are a Hindu and you practise Hinduism, you would come to realize that it is one of the greatest religions but the bottom line still remains love.

A few days ago, I learnt that the Ganges River is named after an African man who came from Ethiopia and went to live in India. That article is from—Member

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for Nariva, you may be able to help me—Mr. Oswald Rogers, “1,000 facts about the Negroes or the Africans.” I am feeling good, Mr. Speaker. I hope that is available in government libraries, particularly to people of African descent at this time of their development where they are anxious and looking forward to some culture that they can hang onto.

My greatest happiness was when so many people of African descent started moving toward Islam, and I sincerely hope that the events of last year will not restrain those young people in our country who are searching for something cultural to hold on to, something that will help them to understand the evils of drugs in all its forms. So that the more education we get the better. Member for Nariva, please make that book available quickly. I will take the four corners—my first relationship with Dr. Williams was to make him a Muslim. My ambition was to convert the whole of Trinidad and Tobago to Islam. I am not sure whether my mission has started or has finished, you can better advise. But it is so important that all the religious people in our country really go down and understand, because I am not aware that any of them preach anything different. Jesus preached love and he said that man’s business on earth is “to know theyself”. Hinduism tells you that man’s only purpose on earth is for self-realization. Islam tells you your purpose on earth is to work out your own salvation.

The bottom line, therefore, Mr. Speaker, in giving my support to the bill—it is the Member for Oropouche, I want him to listen, but he is interrupting me. I am here supporting him. I want him to listen because on Indian Arrival Day he will need me in Cedros. I am supporting both: I am supporting the idea of the Member for Oropouche, and I am supporting the amendment to make it more meaningful.

I am saying to the Minister—that Ministry’s name is so long—that I want this Parliament to note that I have revived the National Days and Festivals Committee. We will be approaching the Minister soon to make sure that every assistance is given. I am not ready to name the gentleman who is chairman; when we talk to the Minister and he tells us how much money he will make available to revive that National Days and Festivals, so that it begins to function in time for the Emancipation Day, as proposed by the Minister’s amendment in January, I would give him the name—*[Interruption]* January is before May. The Member is missing the almanac.

I am suggesting that the very first celebration in 1992, be an amendment to his motion and then the second celebration, after Easter, Indian Arrival Day. More celebrations in Trinidad and Tobago, more tourists coming to Trinidad and



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Tobago, more work for all the groups to do, all the handicraft people will have items to sell, more and more people to come. I am hoping that somebody still will see the wisdom of my dream and keep the lights around the Savannah. If they do not want to light the trees, light the light poles. What is amazing, licks for so, Mr. Speaker, because they light up the trees around the savannah. But you know, since then, all of St. James is lit-up—all over the place—but you know any good idea does not come across—[*Interruption*] We do not have any electricity problems, do we? It was said to be the cause the last time. But funnily enough I have a little picture of the person who cut the wires. It had nothing to do with T&TEC. But the fact remains that lighting up in all its forms, festivals in all their forms, will help take away the negatives in Trinidad and Tobago.

**2.50 p.m.**

In giving support to this motion, and in appealing to my dear friend, the Member for Oropouche, Trinidad and Tobago will, in a real way, become the land of festivals, and festivals so diversified that they can equally be a tourist attraction where, from any part of the world, at any time of the year, citizens who would like to come to this country would see the wisdom of choosing the festival at the time.

Let me tell you what I just read here! They are saying, "Festivals of India in Germany". Mr. Speaker, would you believe it is a festival for one year. I am reading here from the September edition, 1991, *India's Perspectives*. They are saying that "this festival will take the form of films; of music; of dance; of drama"; there is something about festivals of "peacock in the desert; of exhibitions; of textiles", or something like that. They will have this very soon. Do you know what will happen to Germany in the year that they organize that festival? Can you understand the preparation in Trinidad and Tobago, starting from now, when people know what will take place in January; what will take place in February; what will take place for Easter; what will take place for Emancipation Day, and coming down to Christmas? It will give the young people diversification.

When the Best Village Programme started, it was in accordance with how we designed it. And this is something for the Minister to note; it was designed with festivals in mind. Each year the communities will be trained in one aspect of their development, whether it is one year for dance; another year for sport; another year for another activity, we would you go into the winning village, have a great festival and allow people to participate. When this happens, many young people

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will find activity, will be involved and the chances are that many of the negative things which are done in the country, at the present time, will be removed.

I lend my support to the amendment, and I have a strong feeling the hon. Member for Oropouche is convinced. If the House agrees to the setting up of a committee of the House of Representatives, I would have volumes to present to that committee in order to convince them to have that particular celebration. Mr. Speaker, how nice it would be to see on Emancipation Day, the whole East Indian community wearing caftans, and for Divali, the next section—white, green yellow—the wearing of sarees; real cross-culture, real celebration. Then life will be meaningful. It is so short; you do not know when you will be going. "Man is dropping dead like mangoes dropping from trees", so we may as well make full use of life, and there is no better way than becoming totally involved in all kinds of festivals.

I feel really good to know that at last the community is seeing the wisdom behind the National Days and Festivals, and I would also like to note the number of private enterprises and other institutions in this country which are now celebrating—in the banks—and bringing the cultures of Trinidad and Tobago to bear on all aspects of national life.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue to repeat, unless the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago understand that the independence of this country will not be complete until economic development at the root level focusses on culture in Trinidad and Tobago, then we cannot boast that we are an independent country, for, to date, all we have is political independence. I am sure that I will live long enough to be part of the completion of the independence of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

**The Minister of Labour (Dr. The Hon. Albert Richards):** Mr. Speaker, it was my intention to depart quietly from the turbulent political waters without making any more waves or being controversial in any way, and I am hopeful that my contribution will not elicit the normal spate of about 20 articles or get the Opposition forces incensed. Of course, there are no guarantees. I am in a very generous and a very benign mood and I shall be charitable to both Opposition forces.

**Hon. Member:** What about the Independents?

**Dr. Richards:** As an overture to the UNC—or rather I should make a distinction between the UNC politicians and the people of East Indian descent

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because the masses of people of East Indian descent have no animosity against any other ethnic group; they simply want to live in peace, work together, fete together, but what we have been noticing is that some of the politicians seek to inflame racist passions for their own political self-aggrandizement. The sort of overture I want to make, is to state categorically that I fully support the position that the outstanding success and progress of the Indians in this twin-island state should not go unnoticed or unheralded but must be recognized in more than symbolic fashion. I do not believe that one day per year is enough. I would like to suggest a week of celebration, perhaps on further reflection, even a month.

I know that the PNM people might be a bit jealous so I would like to make an overture to them also—and I was surprised that the Member for Laventille did not make it. I want to state categorically that I would advocate, fully support, and endorse, a public holiday on the birthday of the late Prime Minister, Eric Eustace Williams. He was an Afro-Trinidadian who took this country from the quagmire of colonialism and laid it on the impregnable rock of independence. I am sure that this advocacy on my part will raise many eyebrows because one does not expect such a benign overture to be made by people on this side. But, of course, there is precedent for this sort of magnanimity; one has only to recall the message of the present Prime Minister on the tenth anniversary of the death of the said Eric Williams.

I know that some racists and other myopic, vindictive souls would oppose this and allude to the corruptions of the last administration.

**Hon. Member:** That is what he is doing.

**Dr. Richards:** With respect to corruption of the last administration, let me say that while a leader is always held responsible for everything, he is not always blame-worthy. Sometimes his only crime is that he trusts the people around him; who are close to him, too much. Some of them will deceive him; they will misguide him; they will back-bite him. I am saying this for the guidance of all political leaders.

I presume I have provided much scope for speculation with these few remarks, and it would not surprise me to see a miscellany of articles appearing, claiming that I have jumped ship;

**Hon. Member:** Have you?

**Dr. Richards:** I am now aligned with the UNC, or the PNM; or I am a part of the Independent Heart Movement. But I am not of the “Foxian” mould. Quite

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frankly, much worse has been said about me. Suffice it to say, however, in joining the NAR, I did not take any vow to be vindictive, or hostile, or unnecessarily nasty to the Opposition. I do not think any of us here took any such vow.

Mr. Speaker, as has been my custom, I congratulate the speakers before me. I can say in all honesty, I have not heard a better contribution in this Parliament than that which was made by the Member for Nariva/Mayaro, on a subject which is fraught with so much emotion and passion. The hon. Member for Naparima was obviously well-prepared, rending the air with his high-sounding rhetorical flourishes. We are indebted to him for explaining to us the theological significance of the different religious holidays. One got the impression at times, however, that a little learning can be a very dangerous thing and the learning that he displayed on this matter, as on most other matters, has not been very much. Nonetheless, I think that he is one of the most respected members of his party, for his decency, and I wish to commend him for the serious approach that he takes as a Member of this august House.

With respect to the proponent of the original motion, the Member for Oropouche, he did not say anything to make me change my opinion of him. In fact, there were several links missing. That is nothing strange, nothing surprising, because, for all of the trappings and all of the paraphernalia or erudition that he affects, I have always had cause to question his capacity to reason.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I found his approach quite perplexing. He took pains to minimize the significance and obfuscate the dominance of the Indians in this beautiful nation of ours. I would have thought it more logical to boost justification for his motion, to advert to the significant contribution made by people of Indian descent in nearly every aspect of our national life. It is not merely agriculture, although their control of food from the ground to the table is noteworthy, and although it is an irrefutable fact that Caroni is their pre-eminent domain, their secret ground. In every link of their chain from the agro-shops, to the market stalls, to the groceries and parlours, their influence is hardly marginal. The poultry industry should not be forgotten.

The hon. Member for Oropouche did not advert to the hardware, transport, all of the quarries in the country, and the man renowned as the “mover of mountains”. Does he not know the contractors who get all the contracts for the highways, the schools, and the runways; and the workers of those contractors? Is the Indian not significant in the steel industry, or the motor-car industry?

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What about the newspaper industry? Does he not know the owners of the *Mirror* and the *Bomb*? What about the rest of the communication media? Is the Indian under-represented at TTT? Does he not see who gets air time, who does not; so that there are some people who feel that they must pay for ads in order to project the accomplishments of their ministries? Does he not see the commercials that feature middle-class and upper-class Indians with very polished speech and impeccable Oxonian diction? But then there are others.

What is the image projected of the African? An excessively fat woman—“coo-noo-moo-noo”, “stupidy” man—“Ah come to borrow.” “Doh sit dey, dat is he seat.” Does he not see Mastana Bahar going strong, while Scouting for Talent gone through; no more Holly Betaudier.

I would have thought it an excellent opportunity to project the accomplishment of the Indian in sport from Ramadhin to Ranjie Nanan.

In the world of steelband—I recall arrangers dated back to the days of Guinness Cavaliers, Hatters, and in more recent times, Renegades. Jit Samaroo bestrides the world of pan as a mini colossus.

In the world of calypso, one would have thought that he would have recognized the talents of Sundar Popo, Ricki Jai, Kenny J, Drupatee, and not forgetting Charlene Boodram.

In the academic and intellectual fields, myriads of names come to mind. One only has to look at the scholarship winners, the people going to medical school at Mt. Hope.

At least in the field of politics, he could have paid homage to the brilliant, dynamic, Senator from Oropouche, Sen. Rambachan, the man who saved his life in India, a man who, in the six months since he has been back here, has accomplished more for, and in the constituency of, Oropouche than he accomplished for all those years, fooling the poor people.

**Mr. Sudama:** Let the people of Oropouche decide that. Why is he not going back to La Brea? He should go back to La Brea. He is such a waste.

**Dr. Richards:** Mr. Speaker, I could enunciate many of the projects which are taking place in his constituency—no thanks to him: repairs to a number of schools; self-help in a number of places that never had water before; hard courts in many places; roads provided with oil-sand, gravel; not because of that hon. Member, but because of this Senator.

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**Mr. Humphrey:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member is misleading the House. Had it not been for the presence of the hon. Member for Oropouche in that constituency, and the desire, at all costs, to unseat him, the hon. Senator would not have made any effort in the constituency. So all credit goes to the Member for Oropouche.

**Mr. Richardson:** Humphrey logic!

**Mr. Humphrey:** Why do you not send Ganga to do something in St. Augustine.

**Mr. Sudama:** That will not help them; they gone through.

**Dr. Richards:** We have heard that type of logic before.

I would have thought that he would have noted the national acceptance of chutney music. It has now reached such a dimension as an art form that Anand Yankarran, the chutney king, received a medal. I must admit that I never heard of him before. But the point is, do you think that this would have occurred under another regime? More likely, it would have been Machel Montano, Melanie Hudson, Cro Cro, Sugar Aloes, Pat Bishop, or the Malick Folk Performers; maybe even Papa Rocky or Adrian Don Mora.

What about the tassa? Just as “buss-up shot” now vies as the national dish, it may well be that tassa has eclipsed pan as the national instrument. One recalls the controversy with the Tourism Development Authority in which it was thought that the steel drums were not fit to be the logo, so that Cro Cro was right to ask, “Where the hell pan reach?”

I did not fail to note that the PNM leader entered his last convention to the beat of the tassa drum—no pan, no “Watchman”—and I understand that the Member for Tobago East, the hon. Prime Minister, is also an accomplished tassa drummer.

The Member for Oropouche indicated that Indians are in the minority in the public service, and are under-represented in some other areas. It seems to me that this is a myth that has been perpetuated for far too long. I do not know the basis for his contention. But does anyone seriously believe that the Indian is under-represented in the medical, the legal profession, the professorial ranks of the University of the West Indies? I have been advised that the bogey of race has not escaped those hallowed turfs.

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**3.00 p.m.**

I do not know if the Central Statistical Office has any data on this. What I want to say is that any attempt to form an ethnic data base merely from adverting to names, is fraught with significant dangers. The majority of Indians now have—if not the majority, a large number of them—names as Kelvin, Trevor, John and Alan, and surnames such as Daniel, Patrick, La Guerre, McKenzie, Nicholas and Joseph. It should be pointed out also, that under-representation does not necessarily mean discrimination as they would like to suggest. It might simply be the result of desire, propensity and choice.

So while the Member for Oropouche was resorting to every manner of statistical distortion and contortion to downplay the dominance of the Indians, one could not help but note how many significant positions are held by Indians in this country and I am not talking about wives and girlfriends of Ministers. Apart from the Hon. Speaker of this august House, the highest position in the land, the President of the Republic is an Indian, the Ombudsman, the President of the Industrial Court, the Chairman of the Appeals Tribunal, the Chairman of the Public Service Commission, the Chairman of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, and the Chairman of the Constitution Commission. It seems to me that these positions are far more significant than the chairmanship of any state enterprise. You would think, Mr. Speaker, he would be happy to talk about the EBC since there is now an additional seating in Central, and in my own constituency of La Brea, the changes are certainly in the UNC's favour.

I know that people would be upset with me for extolling the Indians so highly and would probably point out that there were some unsavoury characters such as Boysie Singh, the Poolool Brothers, Teddy Mice, Niam Naya and Dole Chadee, but I do not believe in harping on negatives. In every race, there is the good, the bad and the ugly and you cannot judge an entire group by a few rotten apples.

The Hon. Prime Minister has been called a racist on several occasions, but the fact of the matter is that during the course of this administration, an Indian was an ambassador in Brazil, in Canada, in Washington, in Geneva, Barbados and in India, and throughout the life of this administration, as far as I understand, an Indian was the Minister of External Affairs. So you see, Mr. Speaker, as if to exorcise their ghosts, the biggest racists are the first to ascribe that character of others.

The question I have to ask is, why did the proponent of the original motion choose to downplay the dominance of the Indians of this country? It seems to me

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it is something to be proud of. Their accomplishments are all the more praiseworthy because they did not get anything on a platter. They worked for it; it was their spirit of thrift; it was their discipline; it was their ability to sacrifice, to live a little, to save much, to invest in their children. It was their cohesiveness and their willingness to help each other. Those are laudable attributes.

So, Mr. Speaker, what game is he playing and what is his hidden agenda? Could it be that out of deference to the two or three Africans in his party or was it a part of the campaign to woo Africans to make it appear that their party is a national party? I notice that the other Opposition party, the PNM, is embarking on a similar course, trying to woo Indians. They seem to be playing a game of who could ride the other race's back better. Everybody is trying to be like the NAR: cosmopolitan, catering for everybody. Their attempts, however, appear to be stilted and transparent.

The candour of the Member for Couva South is less hypocritical. He does not believe in any window-dressing. He tells it like it is. If you want to consider him a racist, so be it, too bad. "He ent care". African politicians are a lot different. They manifest their principled timidity. They seem to have lost the will to relinquish a posture of defence.

It seems to me that this devious stance by the proponent of the original motion has one aim and purpose, the retention of his party's political base through a carefully orchestrated scheme of political indentureship which has served them well historically. It is how they keep being re-elected. They have to keep telling the Indians, "you are being alienated; you are being discriminated against." That is their *modus operandi*, the way by which they survive politically. I hope that one day will come when people would be elected not by the texture of their hair, but on the basis of what they can offer by way of good judgment, common sense and the promotion of the national interest.

We have been bombarded with terms of alienation to characterize the lot of the Indian in this country. This is another myth, another lie that has been perpetuated for too long. It is a perverse and diabolic machination. It could only be the contrivance of those who sleep with the devil. Ask yourself, in what way is the Indian alienated? By what, from what and by whom? Are there schools he cannot attend? Are there public facilities he cannot use? Are there unions he cannot join? Are there places in which he cannot live? Is there a law preventing him from owning land as the Act of Cession in the Fiji Islands? Quite the contrary. It seems to me that the Indian either owns or controls more land in



Trinidad—and soon in Tobago—than any other ethnic group. Despite all the charges of racism heaped on the Prime Minister's head, this administration has given hundreds of acres of land to the Indian community for one purpose or the other. So we are bombarded by lies and even worse, those lies are taken beyond the national boundaries. At times, one sells one's body to survive in a foreign land. That can be forgiven. But to lie on one's birthplace and bring it into disrepute is to sell one's soul, and that cannot be forgiven. It is the act of the lowest vermin imaginable and the one who condones it is just as much a traitor.

### **3.10 p.m.**

We should eliminate tolerance from our national motto. It is proving to be our undoing. We have been much too tolerant with the traitors in our midst. The Member for Parliament for Port of Spain North says that the people should stand up against the drug dealers. I wonder what he has to say about those traitors in our midst.

The submission has been made that the institution of a public holiday to mark the arrival of the Indians will assist the Indians in going back to his roots—recalling Alex Haley's famous novel, *Roots*. I have no doubt that there is something uplifting in reliving a glorious past. Even if the past was not so glorious, there might be something of value in looking back at the depths from which one came, because I presume any sort of existential journey can serve to integrate the psyche, individually or collectively.

I cannot help but note that the Indian, of all people, has the least need to go back to his roots. He brought his roots with him. Unlike the African who came with what he had on his back when he was captured, the Indian had time to pack. So he brought his datwan and his dhoti; he brought his capra and his orhni; his geera and curry; he brought his roti and phoulourie; he brought his tawa and his tassa. He brought his music and his dance. He brought his own inimitable rhythm, which, to his credit, he maintains, regardless of the beat of the music.

He brought his language; he brought his names and held on to those names except in rare cases where he changed his name from “Totoram” to Trevor. “Totoram” is such a lovely sounding name, I wonder why the Member for Oropouche would discard it.

The Indian brought to the new world, his entire civilization; he brought his religion, philosophy, jurisprudence, arts and craft. He brought his world and stayed in it; insulating himself from the environment that was foreign to his mode

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of being. Holding tenaciously to his roots, he successfully resisted all pressure to transform and accept the modalities of the dominant Caucasian culture that he met here.

He alienated himself and chose not to integrate. But, what is the situation today? The realities are that he can go anywhere, he can do anything, he can become anything: President, Speaker or Chief Justice. So all this talk about alienation is pure political demagoguery which only enslaves the Indian's mind. As you know, Mr. Speaker, there can be no freedom if the mind is enslaved. So the Indian is now more a slave than he ever was. He is indentured by his own politicians.

What was Indian arrival day like for the Indians, perhaps, in May 30, 1945, that calls for celebration? If I am permitted to allow my imagination free rein, I would suggest that the Indians must have been tired, jaded and not too well; not in the best of spirits after the long journey. He would not have been of too friendly disposition as he envisaged the years of toil in the broiling tropical sun. There was no "time and a half" or "double time"; no National Insurance Board; no workmen's compensation; no union. So apart from the vision of finality, indentureship was not much different from slavery.

What seeds of friendship were sown with the African man that he met here, in those early days? Did they exchange any pleasantries, high fives; was there any offer to go drink a beer together? I doubt it. I presume they simply stared at each other with little communication. The Indian was on his way to work while the African was chilling out on the blocks, just as now. I presume if there were some hard courts as the Member from Oropouche is building now, they might have been shooting some hoops; their muscular torsos glistening in the sunlight as they leapt 10 feet for the rebounds. The African must have been a physical specimen of awe to the Indian. I presume, in such a circumstance, who could blame anyone for telling his loved ones to stay away.

It seems to me that the embedded circumstances were such that the seeds of apartness were sown from the very beginning. I mentioned that to show the difference because happily, the passage of time has brought significant changes. Today I believe that each one of us, in our personal lives, has a half brother, a half sister, an in-law, a cousin, a nephew or niece who belongs to another ethnic group.

It is no wonder that the youths are rejecting the old prejudices. They are breaking down the old barriers. Unfortunately the politicians—or some

politicians—are not following in that trend. There is a voice of logic in the contention that on the basis of equity, if one race is given a public holiday for arriving here, why not a public holiday also, in the case of other races—Caucasians, Asians and Africans. The response of the proponent of the original motion to this is that there has not been any agitation by the other races. But if something is right and just and demanded by principles of equity, we should do it whether there is agitation or not.

### **3.20 p.m.**

I believe we should act on the basis of principle, and once we are operating under a clearly defined principle applicable to all, I would have no difficulty in giving my full support.

The Member for Oropouche has difficulty with the principle of equity because he does not want to add three or four more public holidays. He is reluctant to add even one more. What he suggests is the elimination of one of the Christian religious holidays. He picks on Whit Monday. He says that the Church leaders would have no objection. I do not care whether the Pope has no objection. I am a Christian and I have an objection. I am not willing to give up any. This does not sound very Christian-like but even the good Christian cannot compromise in certain things.

The resident self-proclaimed theologian from Naparima sees Boxing Day and New Years Day as having a similar status of theological inconsequentiality. So, these three could go for now; the rest later. I presume if and when they hold the reins of government; once they get started, they are not going to stop until they clean the entire slate. Their fanaticism is insatiable.

I am convinced that in a UNC Trinidad and Tobago, there would be no Corpus Christi and no Christmas; after they are finished with the Christian holidays, the Christian denominational schools would then be assailed. The signs are overt and ominous. I do not see how any Christian in his right mind can associate with them, much less vote for them. I see that some Christians are aligned with them. Some people crave the limelight at all costs. The only cost is themselves.

Let me come to the contention that instituting a public holiday would serve the national interest. Let us not forget that a Christian holiday is being considered for elimination to accommodate a holiday for Indian arrival. There are two aspects to this, race and religion. One has to consider the linkage between race and religion. The majority of East Indians are non-Christians; the majority of

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Afro-Trinidadians are Christians. So, while the non-Christian Indian should be delighted and ecstatic and justly so, the question is: What would be the reaction of the Christian African?

There are those who believe that the Afro-Trinidadian has grown so complacent and apathetic that he would not care less; or he may simply mumble under his breath in resigned acceptance; after a while he would be celebrating more than anybody else. He would be beating tassa harder than anybody; he would be redder than anybody with "abeer". He would be hand in hand with his Indian brother and sister. Everybody jamming to Anand Yankarran and D.J Laloo. That would be nice.

The pessimist however, proffers an entirely different scenario. It is based on the belief that the African man in this country is seething with bitterness, hostility and rage, because he contributed more than a fair share of blood and sweat in the plantations, now he cannot set foot in Caroni; on the ports, now all he does is bring goods for others to sell; in the public service to keep the country going, now he is criticized and maligned; in the oil fields to make the country rich, but he has been very poor; in the security and protective services, risking life and limb day and night, now he finds himself at the bottom rungs of the economic and social ladder.

No group has given so much to the building of this country and none has profited less. He is the one always carrying the banner of this nation; taking his pressure to Canada and the United States, but never being disloyal; never denigrating the country; never cries out for refugee status. He is disproportionately landless and homeless; he is under-represented in business; in the ranks of the wealthy and over-represented in jail; in the poor-house and in the corridors and valleys of vagrancy. He, more than anyone else, finds it difficult to get his children in a prestige school and when school buses stop running, he is the one who is affected. If his child reaches her fifth birthday in October, or November he has to wait until the child is almost six years to learn his ABC.

He finds it more difficult to get a bank loan; to get bail; or to escape from going to jail. He, more than anyone else, is the victim of unemployment and retrenchment and so he is forced to depend on the pittance of a "ten days" and even this is begrudged him. Some taxis refuse to pick him up; some stores refuse to hire him; some pubs refuse to admit him. He is insulted; he is humiliated; he is degraded every day of his life: going to work; at work; coming from work. Cro-Cro

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sees this very clearly. His calypso "Rise African Rise" is a cry of the soul, the soul of the African man in this country.

I have been listening to the Member for Oropouche and it is clear that anyone who dares to articulate the plight of the man of African descent, or plead his cause is stigmatized as a racist. Anyone who dares to stand up and tell it like it is may incur the wrath sometime of his own African colleague, who feels uneasy. Such is the fear they have of rocking the boat. They prefer that the sordid reality be kept under the carpet, because I presume they need votes to win the election; but I do not need any votes to win any election.

How else can one explain the deafening silence of the PNM while the Leader of the Opposition wages his wicked, perverse, bigoted and racist campaign of hate and destruction against the hon. Chief Justice, and not for the first time?

Every minute of every day Afro-Trinidadians are analyzing their lot in this country. They do not talk loudly; but they see clearly and they feel deeply and what they are talking about most of all these days is the unjust and unholy diabolical attack by the Member of Parliament for Couva North.

### **3.30 p.m.**

I know that he is a very brave man, totally unafraid, as those who sleep with the devil, so he leads a conspiracy to demean and denigrate any African of substance. I am sure he knows that when you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind. The lack of overt agitation should not be misconstrued. The subdued tones of the Afro-Trinidadian is not the silence of lambs. Some have reached the stage where they feel that they have little or nothing to lose and a man who has little or nothing to lose will have no compunction about risking it all. Such a man is dangerous.

There is a cauldron of inarticulate rage which is simmering precariously. There are times when a volcano is about to erupt and those who dwell in its environs, they ignore, to their peril, its slightly louder rumblings, the little puffs of black smoke and even the incipient trickles of hot mud.

**Mr. Speaker:** The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. J. Toney*]

**Dr. Richards:** Also, Mr. Speaker, in considering whether a public holiday for Indian arrival will in fact bring about the racial harmony and integration much

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desired by all of us who love this country, one cannot be myopic or dogmatic, because ethnic harmony has more to do with the building of trust, with cultivating mutual respect, with displaying sensitivity to the feelings of others than with one holiday more or less for one reason or another.

The year 1986 provided this nation with a wonderful opportunity to open new vistas of harmony and togetherness. Everything was possible then and many of us dared to hope and dream. The departure of the UNC elements forced or fated, ended those hopes and dreams and ushered in, once again, a reversion to *Apan Jaat* politics. We cannot continue like this because it is a dangerous course. We have to make the effort to be less selfish, to share, to be less parochial so that we can hope and dream once again, as a people, not as the Indian, or African, or Asian or Caucasian race, but as members of the human race. In this context, I totally support the view of the Member of Parliament for Nariva that January 1, should be commemorated as the end of indentureship of all races. It should be called "Heritage Day"—a celebration in heritage villages throughout the land. I am sure that those who have listened and thought carefully will support the amendment of the Member for Nariva.

**Mr. John Humphrey** (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Speaker, the last speaker contradicted himself throughout his contribution. It is amazing how someone who prides himself as an intellectual can be so illogical. Let me read this motion:

"*Whereas* May 30, 1845, is a highly significant day in the history of Trinidad and Tobago in that it was the day on which the very first group of indentured immigrants from India arrived in this country;"

Now, first of all, is that true or is it not true? The answer is, it is true. Perhaps, it should have been phrased differently and it should have stated, instead of "indentured immigrants from India arrived in this country", "the first citizens of Indian descent arrived in this country", would have been more appropriate. It has nothing to do with indentureship. It has to do with the fact that they arrived in this country. That is a statement of fact.

"*And whereas* May 30 is now widely celebrated and commemorated as a day of historic importance especially among the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are descendants of the indentured immigrants;"

Is that true or is that false?

**3.40 p.m.**

From my experience it is true. All over this country where Trinidadians of East Indian descent reside there are celebrations of Indian Arrival Day and whereas the recognition of May 30 by public authority as a day of national significance would serve the interest of national integration and patriotism, that is left to conjecture, but I agree with that. It would so serve national integration and patriotism.

*“Be it resolved that this House recommend to the Government that May 30 be declared a national public holiday to be known as Indian Arrival Day.”*

Mr. Speaker, I support that completely, not because it has any deep significance to me personally but because I recognize that day has deep significance to the vast majority of Trinidad and Tobago citizens of East Indian origin.

Now what do we have from the Member for Nariva? Again, priding himself as a great intellectual, a great historian—he is not a politician, and he has virtually admitted that—listen to what he said in his contribution about commemorating the day:

"The Indians of Trinidad and Tobago do not commemorate it because, I may say, until I pointed it out, this was a gap in our history."

Now, what is he referring to. He is referring to his proposal that the Indians instead of commemorating May 30, 1845, as arrival day should commemorate January 1, 1920. What is the reason? The reason is that as a historian he considers that more significant and I heard all of his colleagues supporting that position. Now, to me, a genuine politician would see what the people want and what the people are doing, expressing themselves in a very natural way and give consideration to that. That is why I stood up and asked him: Do the Indian descendants in Trinidad and Tobago commemorate anything on January 1? The only thing they commemorate on January 1 is New Years Day, like all other citizens of this country. They do not commemorate the date that the Member for Nariva wants to impose on them. It seems that the NAR Government would want to endorse that imposition. We heard from the Member for La Brea—what we should do is celebrate the birthday of the late Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams. I wanted to ask him but he would not give way when he was making his contribution: Is a birthday an arrival day or an emancipation day? Surely it is an arrival day. In other words you recognize on one hand, that arriving in this world

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by being born is an important date that is worthy of commemoration, but arriving in this country from a far distant land and staying in this country and helping to build this country, that is not significant. Totally illogical; but the point had been made by the Member for Nariva that the arrival is not important and yet his Government is making big issue of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the New World. They want to have a big show.

**Dr. Samaroo:** On a point of order. The Member is entirely incorrect. This Government is not making any big celebration of the arrival of Columbus. I wish to make that very clear. This Government in fact, does not adhere—Mr. Speaker, I am on a point of order. This is the kind of bad behaviour—*[Interruption]* The Prime Minister did not say that. A Cabinet committee was appointed and we have stated very clearly that we are not celebrating the arrival of Christopher Columbus and that quite clearly is the position of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. If the Member has another position or, if he wishes to state that we have another position then he must so state. While I am on a point of order, he should continue reading the *Hansard* where he asked me whether in fact, January 1 was ever celebrated and I said, yes. In fact, I myself have been invited in areas where—he must read the *Hansard* but he reads conveniently—

**Hon. Member:** Where?

**Dr. Samaroo:** In Couva, but he must continue to read and not read selectively.

**Mr. Humphrey:** I asked him: Do you commemorate it? And Dr. Samaroo said "I absolutely do. I go to centres all over the country and speak to the East Indian community. If the Member for Couva South were here he would tell you that he has been attending some of them". In other words, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Nariva is trying to persuade the Indian community to accept his proposal that January 1, 1920 was a more important and significant date to the Indian community than the day on which the first Indian arrived in Trinidad and Tobago.

The point I am making is that the Indians themselves want to celebrate Indian Arrival Day. They want to—and why is this Government out to deny them that opportunity? I am surprised to hear that the Government has now changed its mind about celebrating the quincentennial of the arrival of Columbus in the New World because I recall the Prime Minister making big issue of it and in fact, the reason it remained indelible in my own consciousness is that what I realized was,



that, the coincidence of elections and the period of celebration that was being planned by Europe, which Trinidad and Tobago would have joined, would have given the Government an opportunity to squander money for the elections which is the style of this regime. So I took note of it but I am glad that the Government has rethought this because Columbus' arrival in Trinidad did not help this country. It meant the end of two civilizations—the Caribs and the Arawaks.

Mr. Speaker, what did the NAR say about this issue in its manifesto at page 33? Under a section "Cultural Priority" this is what it said:

"The NAR's initiative in the area of culture will forever be inspired by the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of our society, and inspired by the cultural heritage of our nation."

Mr. Speaker, in other words, the NAR has recognized that we are indeed, a plural society, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and has pledged to so organize the resources as to give life to that recognition and yet we see them playing politics. It was the Member for Oropouche who came to this House with his proposal, which will be endorsed by the vast majority of East Indians of this country. The exception will be those in the NAR front line. But a vast majority will endorse it and from my knowledge, have in fact endorsed it.

**Mr. Wilson:** Would the Member for St. Augustine say whether the party to which he belongs recognizes that this society is a plural society?

**Mr. Humphrey:** Mr. Speaker, that is a question undeserving of an answer. In addition to what I just quoted when the NAR came into being and presented its manifesto which was fully endorsed by the vast majority of the electors of this country, who have all been betrayed, said this also:

"There can be little real and lasting progress in Trinidad and Tobago without a fundamental change in attitudes and outlook in the way we see ourselves and others and in the way we relate to our past. A cultural resurgence in the context of a new nationalism is required for a new thrust in social and economic development. In respect of national development the lifestyle of a people determine who they are and, crucially, how they perceive themselves. Self-awareness is a necessary pre-requisite to national pride, a sense of citizenship and a sense of belonging."

That is absolutely correct. But what do we witness? We witness that so-called politicians come to the Parliament and because the Member for Oropouche is seen as a thorn in the side of the ruling regime, they send Sen. Dr. Surujrattan

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Rambachan—as if he is the parliamentary representative for Oropouche—into the constituency with state resources to seek to undermine the Member for Oropouche and the reason they object to this motion is political. They do not want the Member for Oropouche to get the credit for moving the motion in the first place.

**Dr. Samaroo:** The Member for St. Augustine just said a little while ago that I am not a politician. He made that very clear. Now he is saying it is political and I am the person who made that observation. Could he clarify whether he is saying, “I am politician; I am not a politician, I am an academic or not an academic”? On the one hand he is saying, “I am not a politician, I am an academic” and then he says it is a political motivation. So why does he not clarify it for the House.?

**Mr. Humphrey:** Mr. Speaker, he is not a politician but it was a political act. If he was a politician he would seek to represent the interest of the majority and not try to impose his own ideas on the majority. It is quite obvious to me that the vast majority of the East Indian in this country celebrate Indian Arrival Day. It means something to them. In fact, I have seen monuments built representing the ship on which they arrived as part of their celebration. I have seen plays performed commemorating the event. It means something to the people. But on January 1, what exactly does the East Indian living in Trinidad view that date in relation to? New Years Day, a holiday that everybody in this country enjoys. You do not have to go to work. You can continue the feting. Everybody enjoys it.

**3.50 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, let us look at the public holidays in Trinidad and Tobago All of them. There are two different types of public holidays. There are religious holidays and there are national holidays that transcend them, and impact on all the citizens. The Hindus have Phagwa—it is a day on which the Hindus celebrate and whether it is an officially recognized holiday or not, the Hindus treat it as such. The Christians have Good Friday which is March 29, and Easter Monday on April 1. The Christians have Whit Monday, May 20; the Christians have Corpus Christi, May 30; the Muslims have Eid-ul-Fitr, which is some time in August when the new moon is sighted; the Hindus have Divali, which is a public holiday; the Christians have Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Mr. Speaker, in a population where there are two major minority ethnic groups, and two major minority religious groups, what we find is that the Europeans are a tiny minority, and the East Indians are a major minority, and the Africans are a major minority, almost in equal numbers, the Christians have six religious holidays that are celebrated nationally; the Hindus have one and the Muslims have one.

The national holidays that are not religious are: New Years Day, January 1; Labour Day, June 19; Emancipation Day, August 1; Independence day, August 31; and Republic Day, September 24. Now, all citizens regardless of religion, celebrate those holidays. I think, Mr. Speaker, if we are to achieve any semblance of equity and social justice in this country, we must give due recognition to the demands of the Indian community for a public holiday to be declared in celebration of Indian Arrival Day. I think that citizens who are not Indians, like myself, should be happy to join in celebration with the Indians of this country on that occasion.

As someone who has been in politics for a very long time, in fact, more than half of my life has been spent in struggling on behalf of dispossessed people and seeking social justice and equity in the society, I have had an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to get very close to the masses of the society and, in particular, the Indian masses in the society. I have attended their religious festivals, their prayers, their weddings, their funerals, and I have nothing but admiration for them. In fact, if it were not for the submissive and peaceful nature of the Indians in this society, I do not think that Trinidad and Tobago could boast of any kind of peace and harmony. I want to give credit where I believe credit is due, that the reason that this country has not erupted into a state of civil war is because of that quality among the Indians of this country.

**Miss Nicholson:** I just want a bit of clarity. Is the Member for St. Augustine saying that the Africans are not peaceful? I am not clear. I just want to get that clear.

**Mr. Humphrey:** You see, it takes two to fight, Mr. Speaker. One cannot fight. It is in the interest of the ruling elite to divide the masses. The division of the masses has been perpetrated by the ruling elite who have inherited their power and their privilege and their prestige from the colonial masters, who, in fact, sowed the seeds of division in this country deliberately.

I am saying that in my political association with the Indian people, particularly, I want to give credit to the Indians of this country for the fact that we have not erupted the way Yugoslavia has erupted. Yugoslavia is in a state of civil

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war. All the people are of the same race, but there are two different ethnic groups. There are different cultures, but the same race, and yet they are destroying each other and killing each other. It is happening in many parts of the world, but it is not happening here. Now, somebody has to get the credit for that.

**Miss Nicholson:** Only one side?

**Mr. Humphrey:** I am not going to give credit to the NAR politicians who, in fact, sought to use the very same technique of divide and rule at the beginning of 1988, because, Mr. Speaker, the politicians on that side are the ones who sought to inject racism in early 1988. I give credit to the vast majority of the people of this country who are going to reject the NAR Government because of the dashed hopes and dreams.

Mr. Speaker, the African masses of this society, in my view, have good reason to rebel, but not against the Indian masses, because both the African masses and the Indian masses are in exactly the same boat. They are exploited by those who have the power, and the agents in the Government of those who have the real power, people who are prepared to be puppets. Because you know who is in power today? Who is planning the economy of this society; who is calling the shots? Is it the African masses? Last year, just one year ago in July, what did we witness? We witnessed that the moment law and order broke down, the dispossessed and the deprived people went amok to help themselves to things that they were not being permitted to enjoy and to destroy property in demonstration of how they really feel. If you remove the coercive arms of the state, you will see how the people really feel.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to condemn any deprived and dispossessed group for standing up for their rights as human beings and demanding that they be treated as equals. We have a Government that takes a class bias in a period when this country is struggling to get out of the colonial mode and you have a Government that re-introduces it by inviting the multilateral lending agencies to come in *carte blanche* and to take total control of the economic life of the country, which is what has happened with this NAR regime. It is the World Bank that is determining the direction of economic life of this country and, in fact, all the citizens who recognize this betrayal have a right to rebel against this Government and to remove this Government by whatever means. They have a right to do it. Our people will wait until the elections to do it, but it will be done. If only we can have the elections, it seems to me that the Prime Minister is afraid

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to call elections. He is going to have to have it, because the term is going to expire sooner or later, and we are going to have to have elections.

Mr. Speaker, we heard the Member for La Brea arguing that the East Indians came to this country—they had time to pack their bags, he said. The Africans came with whatever was on their backs and nothing else. But the Indians had time to pack their bags; they brought their culture, their cuisine, their mode of dress, their religion, their literature their music in song, in dance.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

They arrived with these things, which they have preserved, and yet he described that experience as akin to slavery, and that it should not be celebrated. Now, that is one of the inconsistencies of his contribution. If they arrived with these things then, quite obviously, they should be proud of their arrival. But he made a serious blunder, in my view, when he said that they opted for isolation.

The Indians of this country are not isolating themselves from anybody else in this country. I have been associated with leading Indians in this country, and I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that my association with one particular Indian in this country has been an experience that I relish. In my entire life, if I were to identify the most unforgettable character, it would have to be the political leader of the United National Congress who is always the brunt of racist attacks that come from particular people on that side. It was that same racism that broke up the NAR. Do not try to blame the former members of the United Labour Front for the collapse of the NAR. I was there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, who planted these articles? There were two articles that paved the way for the destruction of the NAR that very few of them built. Members sitting on this side are the ones who built that party. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this was a racist attack that came from people who are not brave enough to identify themselves. Let us just read at random. They say here:

“A crude attempt to sucker the Prime Minister. The fact that the men involved do not represent the true feelings of the Indian community. They really do not care as much about the welfare of the Indian population, nor Hinduism, nor cultural centers, as they care about gathering power into their own hands for their personal aggrandizement and profit.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the attacks were aimed at the Member for Couva North by that racist clique in the NAR, the man who, in fact, brought the unity into

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being. His entire political life has been concentrated on seeking to achieve racial unity, without which this country cannot move forward. As long as you keep the major races divided, that little class that rules will continue to rule in the tradition of the British colonial master.

That particular individual who was the brunt of those racist attacks, they say he was interested in power. So he came into the Cabinet and what he sought to do while in the Cabinet was to get power. But Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are so illogical, all of them, just like the Member for La Brea, but they cannot fool the people of this country. If he were so interested in power, would he have conceded it in the first place to the banished politician who was living in a state of total political isolation in Tobago?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I admit that I was the first politician to pave the way for the Prime Minister's re-entry into the politics of Trinidad. But before I went to Tobago to campaign in 1980, to assist him in winning the chairmanship of the Tobago House of Assembly, which brought him back into political life, I had a meeting with him and his wife and they agreed that we should adopt a campaign to assist him in coming back into national politics. So when I went to beg, I did not beg anybody; that was by agreement with your leader.

When the leader of the NAR gave the impression to this country that he was begged to come and take over the leadership, that was totally untrue; it was done by agreement long before the campaign even started. The Member for Tobago West is a beneficiary of all of the work, but she demonstrates the kind of ingratitude that comes out of total ignorance of the facts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I suspect the NAR Members of Parliament are going to seek to do on this occasion is to defuse the real effectiveness of this motion, because it does have political effectiveness for the simple reason that the motion has the support of the vast majority of the Indians of this country. There is no doubt about it. The sole exceptions are those who are in the NAR Government.

If the Member for Nariva, the intellectual and historian and professor, could come to this House with some supporting evidence that the Indians of this country endorsed his proposal, then we could take him seriously. But for suggesting that he has been, on occasion, on that date, to lecture, we cannot take that seriously, because we do not know whether he organized those lecture series, because he believes in it. But it is going to become an election issue, no doubt about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the advice I have to give them, if they are hoping to capture any kind of meaningful support, so as to win a single seat in Trinidad—

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which I do not think they will win—they should do, now that they have the power, what the people want, not to use the power to do what the people do not want; to stand up like men and women and take the vote on the issue now. Do not use the method of moving an amendment to avoid it and to evade it, which is what they are doing. Do not pass it to any committee for consideration. This is the Parliament. This is the House of the people's elected representatives. We have the power to do what the people ask of us. I am satisfied that the people are asking of us on this occasion, certainly a substantial part of the population, to declare Indian Arrival Day a public holiday in Trinidad and Tobago. I recommend to the NAR Government that they use their power to do just that.

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Justice and National Security (Hon. Joseph Toney):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Monday, October 28, 1991, at 10.00 a.m.

**Mr. Sudama:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you are aware, I have a motion on the adjournment which I wish to take up at this point in time.

**Mr. Butcher:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want some clarification from the Chair. I wish to know why the mover of the motion could not wind up at this stage and why do we have to adjourn.

**Mr. Palackdharrysinh:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. A motion to adjourn is not debatable in this House.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The Chair was just going to rule on it, thank you for helping me.

#### Picton Presbyterian School

**Mr. Trevour Sudama (Oropouche):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have come to this House to raise a matter on the motion for the adjournment with respect to the political game that is being played out in Oropouche as regards the building of a primary school.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thought that in their dying days, they would have, at least, tried to assist the children of this country to have proper accommodation, which has been requested by me in this House for maybe eight or nine years. I have been persisting in this request for the rebuilding of primary schools in my

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constituency—very deserving cases. The former Minister of Education, who visited my constituency in April of 1987, gave the assurance that these schools would be rebuilt as a matter of priority.

Today I have to talk about the hazardous, insecure, unsafe and unhealthy conditions which have existed and continue to exist at the Picton Presbyterian School in Diamond Village, and the grave risk to which pupils and teachers are being subjected on a daily basis to the extent that the parents, last week, kept their children away from the school, because of the hazardous condition of that school.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order to support that contention of the state of the Picton Presbyterian School, a letter was written by the Public Health Inspector to the Chief Medical Officer of Health on June 10, 1991. When the state of that school was examined, this was the conclusion: a letter was written on June 10, by Public Health Inspector, Mr. Deodath Maharaj, which in conclusion stated:

“The conditions found are not conducive to health and safety. Mr. Clive Pantin, former Minister of Education visited the school on April 24, 1987, in company with the Member for Oropouche and he promised that the school would have been rebuilt very soon. To date, nothing has been done.”

I therefore recommend that the building be inspected by the design engineer’s department to verify if the building is safe for occupation. Then, the Chief Medical Officer of Health wrote the Chief Designs Engineer, Ministry of Works and Infrastructure on this same structure, the Picton Presbyterian School and this is the content of the letter:

“Over the years, the school structure has been progressively deteriorating and no major work for improving same has been undertaken. It has reached a point where I fear for the safety of the occupants.”

This is the County Medical Officer of Health, writing to the Chief Designs Engineer, July 9, 1991:

“The structure has been progressively deteriorating and no major work for improving same has been undertaken. It has reached a point where I fear for the safety of the occupants. I would appreciate if you could make an early inspection of the school and advise me as follows: The present condition of the structure with regard to safety and suitability for continued occupation, whether it is economically advisable to repair the present structure or to replace the whole school building.”



So that the question of the unsafe condition of the Picton Presbyterian School has been officially established.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have raised that issue in this House from time to time during my tenure as the representative for the constituency of Oropouche. I want to go back to 1984, when I raised the question in this House. I have continued raising that question in the House. Over that period of time, I have asked the Minister of Education on no less than six occasions, from 1984 to 1991, about the position with respect to the replacement of the Picton Presbyterian School. Both the Picton and the Debe Presbyterian Schools are in the same condition.

**4.20 p.m.**

The, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in response to a question filed in June of 1991, this is what the hon. Minister of Education, the Member of Arouca South, had to say to me. What this reply constitutes is either a prevarication or an outright untruth. In other words, the Minister of Education, in the light of what we know now, came to this House to mislead and deceive this House. It is a very grave charge, but it's the style of the NAR Government. So it is nothing to which we have not grown accustomed. I want to quickly read this response.

"The Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-American Development Bank signed a loan agreement on March 26, 1987, for primary education."

"One of the prime purposes of the programme was to address the pressing problem of the shortage of primary school places by providing for the construction and equipping of 16 primary schools. The Ministry of Education subsequently sought the agreement of the bank to increase the number of schools to be constructed to 18, in the first instance.

During the execution of the project by careful management of the funds, sufficient savings were generated to allow for the construction of an additional 18 schools. Proposals for the construction of these schools were approved by the IADB in December, 1989. Picton Presbyterian School was not included in this list of 18 additional schools . . ."

This is the Minister of Education.

"The Picton Presbyterian Primary School has been scheduled for replacement since 1988."

under the auspices of the denominational board.

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"An architect's brief for the construction of a 420-place school was issued in August, 1988 to the secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Management, which has the responsibility for rebuilding the school with financial assistance of the Government.

You know, the arrangement is that the board puts 25 per cent, the Government reimburses 75 per cent and therefore those schools which come under the auspices of the board are so financed.

At this stage..."

in August 1981—

"the Board is required to have the preparation and submission of the design done for the replacement of the school. Based on these, and after approval, costings would have to be developed, tenders invited and a contract awarded which would be funded in part, to the extent of 75 per cent, by the Government.

Since this is a denominational school, the lead has to be taken by the board which, in accordance with current procedures, selects its contractor and commences the work. The cost of the consultant's design is borne by the Ministry and therefore the board's effort to move the project along is facilitated at every point."

The Hon. Minister of Education:

"My advice is that in July of 1991 the secretary of the board requested that the brief be revised. It should be noted that the Ministry of Education has continuously maintained the Picton Primary Presbyterian School under its repair programme, while it awaits the board's submission of approved designs for the building."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I asked the Minister:

**"Mr. Sudama:** Has the Presbyterian Board ever indicated to the Ministry that they are not in a position to make their 25 per cent contribution to the reconstruction of this school?"

**Mrs. Henry:** I am unable to answer that question with respect to Picton Presbyterian. Debe Presbyterian, which was also part of a package, was requested for support by the Presbyterian Board, but I cannot tell you about Picton Presbyterian right away.

**Mr. Sudama:** My information is that the Picton Presbyterian School was in that same category and my question to you is, whether you are aware that in August, 1989, the Presbyterian Board made a release to the effect that they have agreed to joint management of the Debe and Picton Presbyterian Schools with the objective of bringing these two schools under the financing of IADB funds. Are you aware of this?

**Mrs. Henry:** I am aware of the request in the case of Debe Presbyterian."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my information is that in 1986 the Presbyterian Board gave up the Picton Presbyterian School, as well as Debe Presbyterian School, for joint management, in other words, indicating that they were not in a position to pay their 25 per cent contribution. The Minister of Education comes in 1991 and says that this is not so.

In August 1989, the Presbyterian Board made a public release saying that they do not have the money, Debe and Picton Presbyterian Schools are given up for joint management to the Government and, therefore, would come under the IADB funding.

The Minister is saying it is the board's responsibility and they have undertaken to build with 25 per cent financing. The board says they have no money. The Minister says she is not aware of this. But, lo and behold, along comes my friend, the Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism, to interfere in the affairs of the Oropouche constituency. He held a meeting in the Oropouche constituency last Monday and informed the residents that he has money in the bank—IADB funds in the bank; I do not know if it is in his personal bank account—and therefore the construction of this school will be funded by IADB funds and they will start construction in three weeks' time. But in August, two months ago, the Minister of Education came to this House and said that Picton Presbyterian was not under IADB funding. Now, it has come under IADB funding because the goodly Senator wants to go down there to make political mileage out of the suffering of the children.

Then he went there and told the public that the Member for Oropouche is preventing the construction of the Picton Presbyterian School. Do you see the

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wickedness of the NAR campaign, Mr. Deputy Speaker? He went down there and said that the Member is preventing him, when since 1984 I have been raising the issue, pressing the Government, and finally got a commitment in April of 1987 for the reconstruction of this school. The question of funding was one which the Government kept back and was not giving any priority to, but in order to try to win votes in Oropouche, suddenly IADB funds have been found in an account. Whose account? The Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism—contractor—is now in charge of rebuilding the Picton Primary Presbyterian School. I have always been advocating the rebuilding of the school.

What is happening is, that they are using public funds, in a private way, in order to push forward a political campaign. That is what I am objecting to—not to the rebuilding of the Picton Presbyterian School—the use of public funds for an electoral advantage. That is the only hope this NAR Government has of ever trying to get some votes. It is wrong in principle. It is destroying and undermining the system of parliamentary democracy, when you ignore the elected representative, when you take public funds and use them in a private way.

Each NAR candidate in this country has access to public funds as if they are their own private property, and they can determine projects; they can determine where the money should be spent, who should be employed, which contractor should be employed, and some of them, like my good friend, the Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism, are their own contractors. So you see the corruption and the facilitation of corruption by the NAR Government, merely for the sake of attempting to get some votes in order to try to win an election. That is what I am protesting against.

Furthermore, they use children in their political game. They deprive children five years from the rebuilding of a school so they would have some comfort and safety, then come on the eve of election to push this programme, and then we have a minister of Government coming, and lying, and deceiving this House, with respect to funding and the procedure for rebuilding the school.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be making my case public on Sunday and I will be dealing with this issue. But I raise it here today, first of all, to counter the propaganda of the honourable—I do not know if I should say honourable in his case; perhaps dishonourable might be a better term.

**Hon. Member:** No, honourable.

**Mr. Sudama:** I stand corrected by the Independent Member, Sir. Today I want the temporary occupant of the post in the Ministry of Education to tell this House what is the truth. Is this statement of August 9, 1991 true, or not? What is the position today with respect to the rebuilding of the Picton Presbyterian School, and where is the funding coming from? What role does the Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism—nothing to do with education—have to play in this exercise? Have we thrown over our system of Cabinet responsibility and ministerial accountability, and so on? Is that the case today in a mad rush to try to win an election? Let him make a statement today, and I want the true facts about the status of the rebuilding of the Picton Presbyterian School. Thank you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, we will now take our tea-break. Hon. Members are reminded that Rev. Dorkins will be speaking to us during the tea interval. We shall reconvene at 5.00 p.m.

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.19 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Education (Mr. Oswald Hem Lee):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Oropouche is indeed using the same strategy which he used last week. Last week, he moved a motion on the adjournment which had to do with the Penal Vedic School. We came here and dealt with that, and after we had a conclusion on the matter and it was successfully represented by the good Senator who is a Minister in the Ministry of Industry and Enterprise; after certain representations it was dealt with and settled, he came to debate the matter in order to let the population feel that he is seeking their interest.

He did the same thing today; he came to deal with the Picton Presbyterian School, when the Member for Oropouche is in receipt of information and he is fully aware that the school is going to be built. Construction work commences some time later this year. He was told by the Minister not too long ago when she replied to a question that, “yes, we are in the final stages of preparation and we are expecting to start some time at the end of the year.”

The Member for Oropouche circulates a false document as well, all over the place, where he mentions schools outside the constituency of Oropouche. The La Romain RC School which is outside the constituency of Oropouche, he is taking credit for it.

**Mr. Sudama:** On a point of order. Many children who attend the La Romain RC live in the constituency of Oropouche and that is why representation was made for the school's reconstruction.

**Mr. Hem Lee:** So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if people from Oropouche go to university abroad, and he talks about a university abroad, would you say he is representing them at that level? The school is in another constituency and he has here: Picton Presbyterian School pending construction. So he is in receipt of the information that, "Yes, we are about to start something at Picton Presbyterian School", but he comes here to debate the motion.

Let me state that he made mention of the fact that the board had approached the Ministry of Education to have the school built under the IDB programme. I want to state that, yes, the board could desire that. But it depends on the number of schools that we need to repair and build. Of course, we already had a school placed in the constituency of Oropouche, which is the Debe Presbyterian School. Already, we were doing other works with respect to other schools, such as Mohess Road and even the Penal Vedic and there were several schools in the Debe constituency that were being built by the Ministry of Education. Therefore, priority was not given to the Debe Presbyterian School at that time. However, the school has since deteriorated to a great extent over the few months and we, in the Ministry of Education, decided that we are going to address the situation in a more creative way. Of course, we happened to receive a certain amount of money under what is called the "Tesoro Fund Programme". Based on that allocation of money, \$6 million was allocated for the rebuilding and repairing of schools.

**Mr. Sudama:** When was that decision made to allocate funds from the Tesoro Fund Programme for the rebuilding of the Picton Presbyterian School?

**Mr. Hem Lee:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me indicate that the intention was only to repair schools such as upgrading toilets, electricity, roofs, floors and so forth. But because of the situation with this particular school, the topography of the land, the shifting of the land and what not, it was decided that we will not repair this particular school but rebuild it. Therefore, in deciding to address the matter head-on, taking into consideration the welfare of the children, and the teachers, to ensure they can work in comfortable surroundings, we decided that we are going to allocate some funds to rebuild the school.

Indeed, I have the prospective sketch before me today. I wish to indicate that it is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Prime Minister's Community Upgrade Programme, School Repair Project, Phase I—Picton Presbyterian School—to be monitored by NIPDEC and so forth.

The fact is, the Member for Oropouche is concerned about the school and we are addressing that. We are going to ensure that the students who attend the Picton Presbyterian School get a new school. Right now, we are in the process of having the students placed in the church, in the community centre to ensure that their education continues. Also, a meeting is to be held on Sunday to make the final preparation for having the children placed in the church. The Presbyterian Education Board has absolutely no objection to the students being housed in the church for a period of time. But certain persons in the community who are playing politics are trying to get the parish board to undermine the education board in order that the students would not be housed in the church.

But we, as a responsible Government, are concerned about the students' welfare and we want to ensure that work continues with respect to the education of the students as we move along to ensure that the building is constructed in a reasonable time so that the students would be able to move in at the end of the second quarter of next year to continue their education.

**Mr. Sudama:** You said that this school is being rebuilt under the School Repair Programme of the Prime Minister's Community Outreach and Upgrade Programme. Will it be the repair of the school, if it is coming under the Repair Programme or will it be the complete rebuilding of the school?

**Mr. Hem Lee:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact is, because of the condition of the school, we did not repair it but decided to rebuild the school. There is an annex which houses the nutrition centre and certain classes—the fifth standard classes—that area is in a habitable condition and may very well remain as is. So what we are doing is not rebuilding everything, but we are addressing the major part of the school.

What is worrying the Member for Oropouche is that the Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Enterprise and Tourism is the chairman of this committee and, therefore, he is addressing the situation with respect to that school head-on. He is going in there, meeting with the people and the parents are relating to him. That is upsetting the Member for Oropouche. I would have thought that the main concern of the Member for Oropouche would have been to ensure that the

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students of Oropouche get a decent school. But it seems that is not his main concern.

**5.30 p.m.**

In the meantime, under the same programme, just to mention a few other schools we have touched in that immediate area: the Woodland Hindu School; Toolsa Trace Hindu School; Suchit Trace Hindu School; the Bien Venue Presbyterian School is expected to begin shortly; and as I have said, the Picton Presbyterian School is to begin sometime in the month of November. As we are all fully aware, the Debe Presbyterian School is being built under the IDB; the Penal Vedic School is being constructed by its board and the Government; and, of course, we have just opened the La Romain Government School.

In my view, many schools have been built and repaired in the constituency of the Member for Oropouche and we, in the Ministry of Education, are trying to ensure that, based on the limited resources which are placed at our disposal, the people, not only of Oropouche, but all over operate in a more decent learning and teaching environment.

Therefore, I would hope that when the Member for Oropouche knows that something is going to take place in his constituency, he does not rush to this House to move a motion on the adjournment with the view of going back to his constituency and reading the *Hansard* on the platform to say he made representation for this and for that, when he is fully aware that, in a matter of time, these things will be done.

Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 5.35 p.m.*