HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, December 09, 1994

The House met at 1.40 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ELECTRICITY COMMISSION (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission Act, Chap. 54:70 (hereinafter referred to as "the Act") in order to facilitate the generation of electrical energy by an approved generator of electricity; brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister of Public Utilities*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Sen. The Hon. B. Barnes*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Audited financial statements of Reinsurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended December 31, 1993. *[The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)]*

   To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts and financial statements of the Primary Education Programme for the year ended December 31, 1992 as required by loan contracts 796/SF-TT and 215/IC-TT between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Inter-American Development Bank. *[Hon. K. Valley]*

   To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

3. The Sixteenth Annual Report of the Ombudsman for the period January 01, 1993 to December 31, 1993. *[Hon. K. Valley]*

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, let me report to the House that of the 12 questions on the Order Paper, the Government is asking for a deferral of three questions and those are Nos. 4, 5 and 11.

Madam Speaker: For what period?

Hon. K. Valley: For a period of one week.

I have also noted that there are some questions on the Supplemental Order Paper. We have to ask for a deferral of questions Nos. 32, 33 and 34.

Question put and agreed to.

Old Age Pension
(Increase in)

1. Mr. Trevor Sudama *(Oropouche)* asked the hon. Minister of Social Development:

> In light of representation made by other Members of this House and myself, could the Minister explain why she will not agree to the income qualification ceiling eligibility for old age pension being raised from the present figure of $5,000 annually to $12,000 annually?

The Minister of Social Development (Dr. The Hon. Linda Baboolal): Madam Speaker, the answer is as follows:

(i) Based on the existing income ceiling (that is, TT $5,000.00 per annum) approximately 60,000 of the 75,000 persons resident in Trinidad and Tobago who are over 65 years of age are now in receipt of an old age pension. In 1994, the expenditure on old age pension inclusive of food subsidy is estimated to total TT $270 million.

(ii) Increases in the annual income ceiling would gradually increase the quantum of the annual expenditure to the point where, should no ceiling exist and all persons over the age of 65 years qualify, total annual payments will amount to approximately TT $322 million.

(iii) Old age pension is considered a welfare payment—the intention being not to provide everything for those who qualify, but rather to complement other income to ensure a better quality of life.

Members should note that notwithstanding the above, the annual income qualification criterion, as well as the quantum of the monthly grant, is constantly kept under scrutiny for review, as and when the overall financial position allows.

Mr. Sudama: Is the Minister aware that the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation has relieved persons earning up to $16,000 per year of the need to pay any income tax whatsoever? This indicates that it is an acknowledgement that the greatest need is at that low level of income. In the light of that admission by the Minister of Finance and that budget concession, would the Minister indicate to this House whether the Government is willing to have this income qualification ceiling raised to $9,000 per year, instead of $12,000?

Hon. L. Baboolal: Madam Speaker, as I said in the last part of my answer, this whole thing is kept under scrutiny all the time. As a matter of fact we are now considering the possibility of raising the ceiling.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Report on Visit
(Recreation Grounds, Victoria)

4. Could the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs state:

(a) Whether a report was submitted to her by officials of her Ministry with respect to a visit to recreation grounds in the Victoria section of the Oropouche constituency on April 21, 1994?

(b) Whether any recommendations were made with respect to the improvement and upgrading of the grounds and facilities?

(c) If the answer to (b) is in the affirmative, whether funding could be made available from the Ministry of Sport for this purpose?

(d) Why no arrangement has thus far been made for a visit to the recreation grounds in the St. Patrick section of the Oropouche constituency as promised on April 21, 1994? *(Mr. T. Sudama)*

Provisions for Repair Work

5. Could the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Women Affairs state:

(a) Whether any provisions have been made in 1994 for repair work on the Debe Community Centre?

(b) If the answer is in the negative, could the Minister state why not? *(Mr. T. Sudama)*

Mohess Road
(Repairs to)

11. Will the Minister of Works and Transport indicate what work his Ministry proposes to undertake on Mohess Road to effect repairs and how soon this work is to be undertaken? *(Mr. S. Hosein)*

Lead Poisoning
(Investigations into)

32. (a) Could the Minister of Planning and Development state whether the Government caused investigations to be done in respect of lead poisoning of residents of Demerara Road, Arima? If it did, could the Minister give particulars of the investigations conducted?

(b) Could the Minister indicate if a report was presented to the Government with respect to (a)? If a report was presented, could the Minister give particulars of the report and its recommendations?

(c) Could the Minister say whether his Government has any objections to the laying of the report in Parliament? If he has, could he give the reasons for his objections?

(d) Could the Minister indicate whether his Government has implemented any of the recommendations of the report and what steps, if any, have been taken or will be taken by Government to minimize the effects of lead poisoning to the residents?

(e) Could the Minister indicate whether his Government has any information or any evidence of lead poisoning to residents in other areas of Trinidad and Tobago? If it does, please state the areas. *(Mr. R. L. Maharaj)*

Companies at Point Lisas
(Protective Measures)

33. (a) Could the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives state what protective measures (if any) have been taken and what safeguards (if any) are in place in the operations of the companies at Point Lisas to prevent injury to life and damage to property of residents of Couva and the surrounding areas, in the event an emergency arises as a result of the escape of poisonous gases or substances or chemicals or any other matter?

(b) Could the Minister say whether there is any risk of the escape of any toxic fumes, gases or chemicals from any of the plants at Point Lisas? *(Mr. R. L. Maharaj)*

Crime Committee
(Duties and Reports)

34. (a) Can the Minister of National Security state the functions and duties of the Crime Committee which was recently appointed by Government?

(b) Can the Minister give particulars of the matters the committee addressed since its appointment, and state whether any report was submitted to Government in respect of such matters?

(c) Can the Minister state whether his Government has any objections to the laying of the Crime Committee Reports in Parliament (if there are any)? If he objects, could the Minister give reasons for his objections?

(d) Can the Minister indicate what criteria were used in selecting the members of the committee? Could he explain why the church, the trade union movement, the police and the non-governmental organizations were not given representation and/or where relevant, a wider representation on the said committee? *(Mr. R. L. Maharaj)*

Questions, by leave, deferred.

1.50 p.m.

Clarke Road Booster and Penal Rock Road Main
(Replacement of)

9. **Mr. Sahid Hosein** *(Siparia)* asked the Minister of Public Utilities:

Is the Minister aware:

(a) that the Clarke Road booster needs replacing?

(b) that the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) main on the Penal Rock Road needs to be replaced?

If the answers to (a) and (b) are in the affirmative, can the Minister indicate how soon remedial action will be undertaken?

The Minister of Energy and Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Barry Barnes): Madam Speaker, the Water and Sewerage Authority has advised that:

(a) The Clarke Road booster was refurbished on August 12, 1994, is now in operation, and there is no need to replace it. It is anticipated that the

booster will be functional for a period of six months before further routine maintenance work will be required and provided. At that time WASA intends to install an additional pump at the booster to provide some stand-by capacity.

(b) There is need to replace eight kilometres of existing cast iron main along the Penal Rock Road. The estimated cost of this replacement is TT $2.2 million, which cannot be accommodated within WASA's short-term rehabilitation programme.

However, the residents of Penal receive a supply of water via the Clarke Road booster, which draws its supply from the Daisy Transmission Main. WASA expects that with the replacement of five kilometres of mains at the Daisy Transmission System, the supply to the Clarke Road booster will be significantly improved and will bring relief to residents of Penal Rock Road. The Daisy Transmission Main's Replacement Project is to be undertaken as part of WASA's short-term rehabilitation programme and should be completed by the end June 1995.

Mr. Hosein: In the light of the information that the hon. Minister has given to the House, can he indicate how and when WASA proposes to deal with this main replacement at Penal Rock Road?

Hon. B. Barnes: WASA has a medium-term rehabilitation programme which will require a much larger source of funds. At present, appropriate loans are being negotiated with the World Bank, but that replacement is part of the medium-term programme.

Mr. Hosein: Can the Minister give an assurance, if and when funds are sourced, that this project will be treated as priority?

Hon. B. Barnes: I can assure the hon. Member that it will be included in the programme. There are a number of priority items as the Member is aware.

Secondary Schools
(Sale of Illicit Drugs)

13. **Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh** *(Caroni Central)* asked the Minister of Education:

(a) Is the Minister aware that illicit drugs are pushed in some of the nation's secondary schools?

(b) If the answer is in the affirmative, would the Minister state what is being done to eliminate this devastating scourge?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh): Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education is aware that attempts are made by unscrupulous persons to involve students in the use and possible trafficking of illegal drugs.

If such a situation develops at any school, the principal, as the person charged with the responsibility for the discipline of the school, under section 27 of the Education Act, has the authority to initiate action against any public officer or student of the school who may be involved in such criminal activity.

The Commissioner of Police also has a direct interest in any such situation as is alleged to exist.

The Ministry of Education works closely with non-government and government agencies engaged in drug prevention programmes. In addition, school assemblies and the first cycle secondary school social studies programmes, which emphasize values and moral education, focus on preventative measures. On the supply side, the schools and the Ministry of Education liaise with the police service.

Parent-Teacher Association
(Role and Government's Policy)

14. **Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh** *(Caroni Central)* asked the Minister of Education:

Would the Minister state:

(a) The status and role of parent-teacher associations in the national school system?

(b) Government's policy on parent-teacher associations?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh): Madam Speaker, the parent-teacher association is an integral part of the national school system. Act No. 18 of 1976, cited as the Trinidad and Tobago National Council of Parent-Teacher Associations Act, gives recognition to and regard for the contribution that a vibrant parent-teacher association can make to an effective school.

The specific roles of the parent-teacher association are:

(a) to promote the welfare of children in the school;

(b) to cooperate with the school personnel to provide amenities and materials that would ensure a stimulating learning environment;

(c) to bring into closer relationship the home and the school so that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the field of training of the child;

(d) to collect and disseminate such information and techniques as may give guidance and direction to members with a view to increasing their capacity for services and to assist them in the use of the best parent-teacher association practices.

The Government's policy is that the parents should be encouraged to participate responsibly in every primary and secondary school through dynamic parent-teacher associations.

Mr. Palackdharrysingh: Is the Minister aware that several schools do not have parent-teacher associations and, in fact, that several principals are very reluctant to have these organizations because they think that they interfere with the running of the schools? What is the method of communication to principals about the desirability of such organizations?

Hon. A. Ramrekersingh: In answering that question, I wish to preface it by saying that the Ministry of Education cannot dictate to any school or any principal that there should be a parent-teacher association. It is a highly desirable agency. We have issued circulars which outline the potential benefits of dynamic parent-teacher associations in the hope of persuading those who are somewhat reluctant to assist in the development of such associations.

Public Schools
(Furniture)

15. **Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh** *(Caroni Central)* asked the Minister of Education:

Would the Minister state:

(a) How is furniture provided for public schools?

(b) Who are the suppliers?

(c) The life expectancy of new furniture?

(d) Whether furniture requirements are met on a timely basis?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Augustus Ramrekersingh): Madam Speaker, bonded contracts are awarded on a yearly basis by the Central Tenders Board. For this purpose, the year begins on June 01, and ends on May 31 of the following year. Any item of furniture that is not among the list of those awarded to the bonded contractors is bought on the open market. By this method, three quotations are needed for each item, for which the most suitable submission in terms of cost and quality is accepted. The Permanent Secretary's approval is necessary in this case.

For the period June 01, 1994 to May 31, 1995, the following suppliers have been awarded contracts to supply furniture:

Albert Peters Woodworking Industry

Charran Brothers

National Centre for Persons with Disabilities

Dave Murray

Universal Metal

Alyce Glen Industries

The life expectancy of new furniture depends to a great extent on the following:

(1) handling of furniture by students and manipulative staff;

(2) the extent of the use—continuation classes, YTEPP, evening classes, community improvement programmes;

(3) abuse.

2.00 p.m.

Under normal circumstances, however, furniture in both primary and secondary schools is expected to be durable for a period of some 10 to 15 years, as is evident in some institutions.

It must also be noted that provisions have been made in the contract agreement—that any item found within six months of delivery to be defective because of faulty workmanship and/or the use of unsuitable or unsatisfactory materials, shall within three months be replaced or repaired by the contractor at his expense, inclusive of the cost of transportation and all other costs. Such replacement or repairs shall be subject to the approval of the Project Unit Manager, Educational Facilities Management Unit, Ministry of Education.

Provided that funds are available, furniture requirements are met on a timely basis.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: A supplemental question, Madam Speaker.

Is the Minister aware that there is a furniture shortage in some schools throughout this country? And, what is being done to rectify this problem?

Hon. A. Ramrekersingh: Madam Speaker, earlier in the school year there was, in fact, a problem. That problem has, to a large extent, been sorted out.

Papourie Road
(Repairs)

18. Mr. Sahid Hosein asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister indicate to this House when Papourie Road will be repaired and/or resheeted?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, Papourie Road is one of the district's secondary roads. At present it has a class 4 average daily traffic, an average international roughness index of 10.1, and a positive internal rate of return of 5.03.

The 9.06 miles of Papourie Road at present has a total of 11 landslips and the section of road from the 6.75 mm to the 9.06 mm is the worst section.

Next year, efforts will be made to repair at least three of these landslips under the Road Improvement Fund Programme and also repair around 1.5 miles of roadway. It is expected that as a consequence the roughness index should be reduced from an average of 10.1 to around 7.5, thus improving the condition of the road.

Price Formula for Farmers' Cane
(Tripartite Report)

21. Mr. Subhas Panday *(Naparima)* asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources:

(a) Can the Minister state who is responsible for the appointment of the committee referred to in the Tripartite Report for the reviews of the existing price formula for farmers' cane?

(b) Why has the said committee not been appointed to date?

(c) When will the said committee be appointed?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has responsibility for submission of recommendations to Cabinet for the appointment to review the existing cane payment known as the Seemungal Formula.

Recommendations for the appointment of persons to this committee are currently being finalized.

Water and Sewerage Authority Mains
(Corinth Junction and Iere Village,
Naparima/Mayaro Main Road)

22. Mr. Subhas Panday asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

(a) Is the Minister aware that there exist over 30 leaks on the Water and Sewerage Authority Mains between Corinth Junction and Iere Village, Naparima/Mayaro Main Road?

(b) If the answer is in the affirmative, will the Minister state what immediate steps are being taken to address this problem?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Barry Barnes): Madam Speaker, the Water and Sewerage Authority has advised that there were 47 leaks along the Naparima Mayaro Road between Corinth Junction and Iere Village. As part of its countrywide emergency leak repair programme, the Authority has been deploying six repair crews in the South.

WASA advises that all 47 leaks between Corinth Junction and Iere Village have been repaired as at December 04, 1994.

Mr. S. Panday: As an aside, Madam Speaker, I wish to inform the hon. Minister that he has been misled by WASA.

Madam Speaker: Maybe the Minister might pursue that matter.

Bronté and Borde Narvé Village
(Pipe-borne Water Supply)

23. Mr. Subhas Panday asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

(a) Is the Minister aware that the villages of Bronté and Borde Narvé have not had a pipe-borne water supply since October 1993?

(b) If the Minister is so aware, will he state when the residents of these villages can expect a supply of pipe-borne water?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Barry Barnes): Madam Speaker, the Water and Sewerage Authority has confirmed that the water supply to the villages of Bronté and Norde Narvé has been unsatisfactory, with scheduled supply restricted to one day per week since October 1993.

WASA has advised that the area is supplied through a 6-inch-diameter corroded cast iron main which is inadequate to meet the demand and which must be replaced.

The problem was worsened by the occurrence of several leaks on the Navet Transmission System and along the Cipero Road between the 4½ mm and the 7¼ mm. Most of these leaks have now been repaired and there is an ongoing leak repair exercise for all remaining leaks in this area.

The authority further reports that a recent delay by the South Regional Office confirms that WASA's customers in the area continue to receive water once per week.

The authority expects to complete the leak repair programme on the Navet Transmission System in the Cipero Road area during December 1994. This is expected to bring some measure of improvement to the water supply to Bronté and Borde Narvé villages.

WASA further proposes to replace some sections of the 6-inch-diameter cast iron main as part of the short-term rehabilitation programme by mid-year 1995. The installation of a replacement main is required to substantially improve the water supply to Bronté and Borde Narvé villages and this project is part of WASA's medium-term rehabilitation programme project.

DEFINITE URGENT MATTER

Valesquez Road
(Collapse of Bridge)

Mr. Krish Jurai *(Nariva):* Madam Speaker, I seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance, pursuant to Standing Order 12, at the sitting of the House today December 09, 1994.

The matter relates to the collapse of the bridge on Valesquez Road off the Guaico Tamana Road via Sangre Grande. This bridge is now resting some 10 feet below road level, partly submerged in water. Over 300 residents are affected as a

result of the collapsed bridge. Farmers, housewives, the sick, the disabled and schoolchildren—the villagers in general—are completely cut off from the outside world. There is no other means of access to the village of La Tosca.

I deem that this Motion is definite in that it deals with the collapse of the 30-foot-span bridge over the Valesquez River. It is urgent because the lives of over 300 people are in jeopardy. It is of public importance because it is a matter of grave public concern.

Stemming from the gravity of the situation, I am sure you will allow this matter to be debated so that the Government will act immediately to save the lives of these marooned villagers of La Tosca.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I am not satisfied that this is a matter of definite, urgent public importance.

INDIAN ARRIVAL DAY

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 28, 1994]:

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.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, on the last occasion when this matter was being debated the hon. Prime Minister had moved an amendment to this Motion, but there was no seconder of that amendment. Would someone second it please?

Hon. A. Ramrekersingh: Madam Speaker, without prejudicing my right to speak in the debate I wish to second the amendment moved by the Member for San Fernando East.

2.10 p.m.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, if I recall, I think he did mention it; I am not sure that an amendment was circulated. I recall some mention of it having been made in the debate—I am not sure of any formal letter until now.

Madam Speaker: Can I ask Members to take note and let the Minister's seconding be in effect at this point. We would therefore carry on with the debate; Members can speak on both aspects of the debate, and of course at the end we would take the matters that ought to be taken with respect to the voting.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, according to the Standing Orders my understanding is that one has to signify the amendment but that it must be circulated before the vote is taken.

Madam Speaker: That is why I asked the Member to let the hon. Members secondment be, in fact, in effect at this time. The debate would proceed on those two aspects: The Indian Arrival Day being the public holiday and the question of the rationalization of public holidays in its entirety. So that Members are free to speak on both aspects.

Mr. Gideon Hanoomansingh *(Pointe-a-Pierre)*: Madam Speaker, on October 29, 1994 this honourable House had the benefit of the extensive research and presentation of the Motion by the Member for Oropouche—an argument that looked at the merits for May 30 to be declared a national public holiday to be known as Indian Arrival Day. As I recall, the Member for San Fernando East in his contribution to that debate said that the Government was of the view that the argument has considerable merit. When I heard the statement the thought that came to mind immediately was that finally, as old wine in a bottle, fermentation had taken place. The age of reasoning had come before our eyes, for this Motion by my colleague had reached its zenith after five years on the Order Paper.

I remembered as a broadcast journalist I looked forward with great expectations that this quest to pay homage to the indentured sons and daughters of this land would come to pass. That statement by the Member for San Fernando East that the argument has merit fills my heart with joy and anticipation. I am of the view that an endorsement such as that will lead to the success of this Motion, and by extension people of Indian ancestry will begin to accept Trinidad and Tobago as their own and not be misguided by historical cynics, who by definition and motive have been propelling ethnic divide in this society.

Madam Speaker, given the delicate nature of this subject matter, I should like to seek your permission to make extensive reference to my notes, because I believe that any misinterpretation of what is said will certainly not be in the interest of what we are attempting to do in this honourable House.

In 1838 two major enactments by the British Parliament changed the course of millions of people belonging to two non-white groups—Africans and East Indians. It was the year that witnessed the total emancipation of African slaves in the British colonies, an act that was hailed as humanitarian and benevolent. Ironically, the same year the British Parliament passed legislation that permitted the displacement of Indians from their homeland to labour in a strange and

inhospitable environment. This is the paradox of history which some of the Caribbean countries, notably Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname have inherited from their colonial masters. The rivalry, the conflict and the suspicion which Indians and Africans seemed to mutually share against each other in these lands are rooted in this historical fact.

The Indians felt yoked to and helpless in a system which denied them a sense of belongingness and dignity and seemed uncertain of their status. The harsh and unequal treatment they suffered further exacerbated their alienation from the mainstream Caribbean society. That is exactly what I plan to do in my contribution to this debate, to put the whole question of the Indian presence in this region in a Caribbean context if we have to make the point that May 30 is, in fact, a significant day that should be honoured in this country.

Colonialism remains very much a part of modern-day Trinidad and Tobago. For convenience some of our so-called finest minds forget that the consequences of the middle passage were similar, in a human context, to the traumas of the long and treacherous journey from the Bay of Bengal to the Port of Spain harbour. Though they were not bound in chains, the enslavement of the indentureds by the British is enough for humanity to draw parallels between the Africans and the Indians. Like the sons and daughters of Africa who were captured for a price to be taken to colonies of the British crown, recruitment of the indentureds also carried a price—Indian henchmen, selected by the British, recruited people against their wish, in some instances, only to satisfy the quota system.

Historians are of the view that the ugliness of the indentured system was in its genesis, where young men and women were fooled into believing that they were travelling a short journey to a land of sugar called Trinidad. Many of them were detained at holding bays for long days and nights against their wish. Women were tricked by the recruiters in various ways and when the journey began another story emerged.

For about six months, over a distance of 12,000 miles on rough and stormy seas, sometimes motionless for days, over 200 people sat on the *Fatel Razack,* bound for a land where they had never set foot. To the captain of the vessel, their mission was to rescue the ailing sugar plantations when African slaves began fleeing the estates at the sight of emancipation.

The plantocracy had to find quick labour and the answer was not difficult at that time. The secretary for the colonies said in London: “India is a British subject

and there are millions of uneducated coolies there. They are the property of the crown and we should not hesitate to use them in this hour of need."

Mainly Hindus and some Muslims made the first trip and the treatment meted out to them was worse than that given to prisoners in colonial jails. The British had no respect for the religious life of the recruits. Often they would serve beef to the Hindus. Many of them refused to partake of the diet and died during the journey. A few attempted suicide when the oceans to which they were unaccustomed rebelled, tossing them from one side of the vessel to another. The boat was turned into kootiahs and mosques as the indentured labourers recited verses of the Ramayan and the Qur'an, the holy books which formed part of their small "georgie bundles."

Madam Speaker, these sentiments are important in this debate for the simple reason that there is a feeling in this country that our African brothers and sisters who made the middle passage had it difficult beyond any imagination and that the Indian indentured labourers who came were more fortunate.

2.20 p.m.

What I am trying to show in my contribution is that there can be no two descriptions for indignity; there can be no two explanations for inhumanity.

Madam Speaker, when the immigrants arrived in Port of Spain on May 30, 1845, though exhausted as anyone would expect, they were ready to fulfil the mission for which they were brought, to keep their portion of the bargain, to run from the oceans, to forget their traumatic experience of the journey. They were like motherless children. Yet, when the overseers arrived at the holding bay to begin the process of selection to the estates, they made a good showing, leaving the past behind, ready to face the challenges ahead. Though daunted inwardly with the fact that they had left their motherland without even the slightest chance of ever seeing it again, they pinched emotions to avoid the glimpses of the colonial masters.

Having arrived here, they were assigned to planters on the various estates according to the previous request of these rulers of the society at the time. The colonial authorities made efforts to ensure that families or relatives who had migrated together were assigned to the same plantation, but the intention could not always be followed. Some planters even refused to accept what they considered unsuitable members of some families. Such persons would then be reassigned to an accepting planter as part of a concession, sent to the poorhouse on the estates, or repatriated to India on a returning trip. On the estates the Indians

were bound by contract to work for 280 days a year for a period of five years. At the end of the first contract every inducement was offered so that they could be reindentured for a further five years.

Madam Speaker, the story of the emergence of the indentureds from the plantations into the mainstream of Caribbean life is one of remarkable episodes of human progress. Using their inherited attitude of reverence for the land, which had enabled India to become a high civilization based on agriculture, they immediately engaged themselves in agricultural enterprise. At first, they were mainly plantation-centred, concentrating their efforts in completing their indentureship, each wave of immigrants serving its time on the estates.

By the 1860s, the community had started to set down its roots in the society. As successive batches of them became free, they set about shaping the landscape in the manner in which they had learnt in Asia.

There is a view in this country that the indentured labourers were offered land in abundance; hence the reason for such large acreages in the possession of their offspring. I guess the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan and her family might very well be one of the accused in this case.

The point is, Madam Speaker, to save on the return passage to India, the plantocracy palmed off what were considered bad lands on the Indians, in lieu of the return passage. This happened between the 1870s and the 1890s. At the same time, Indians and others could have leased or purchased land from the State. Through these methods of land acquisition, the emerging Indian community came to acquire considerable acreages of property. Using time-honoured methods of land reclamation and irrigation, they fulfilled Governor Mc Leod's dream of joining the north to the south. Before that, history will remind hon. Members that people travelling from either side would have had to go on a boat from Port of Spain on the Gulf to San Fernando, or would have to travel for days on carts using the route of the eastern areas through the east coast and into the southern region.

In Guyana they continued the empoldering works started by the Dutch. They drained salt marshes in Suriname and in the Westmoreland area of Jamaica, converting these areas into rice and vegetable farms. In all these areas they filled up the intervening spaces and drained the saline mangrove areas. They created towns and marketplaces which were closely modelled on the ancestral habitation. The terrains of swamps and forests held no fear for these people who had tamed and conquered vast sketches of the Indo-Gangetic plains or the swamp lands of lower Madras or Kerala.

What appeared to be a hostile environment to the planter class, now seemed a blessing to a people used to agricultural enterprise. In all the reclaimed or restored land areas the Indians, as had been their custom in the Jheels of Bengal and Bihar, practised crop rotation, growing rice in the wet season and vegetables in the dry. In this way, the soil was continuously enriched and year-round enjoyment of food was provided for the local as well as the wider communities.

Madam Speaker, to these settlements which these pioneers created they gave the very names which their ancestors had given to villages and towns which they themselves had created in Hindustan, Fyzabad, Madras, Jangli Tola, Chandernagore and Campoo.

Many of the vegetables sold in these markets were introduced to this region of the world from Bharat. For example, bhagi, a variety of dhals, tamarind, caraili, ochro, guava, mangoes, as well as animals such as the buffalo, Brahma bull and new strains of poultry.

While this settlement and consolidation was continuing apace, free Indians were progressively moving out of the vicinity of the plantations and asserting themselves to the life of the larger society. At first, upward mobility from the estates was determined by the original caste to which the immigrants belonged. We know the story only too well that from different castes they boarded the *Fatel Razack* and the other boats that brought them to Trinidad and Tobago but because of the perilous journey and the experiences on the trips, the caste system disappeared at that time.

In this manner, banias took to shopkeeping and moneylending, telis tool making, kumhars to pottery and ahirs to cattle-rearing. This early period also witnessed the emergence of semi-industrial skills such as straw work (baskets, grass mats, plant hangers), weaving, manufacture of sugar and sweetmeats and jewellery making. In almost every Indian village, there was the goldsmith (sonar) catering to the Indian love for adornment, particularly at ceremonial occasions.

Unfortunately, that does not exist in this country now. Because of the increase in banditry in Trinidad and Tobago, it is obvious to many of the womenfolk in this country that today is a sad day that they cannot do the things that their indentured mothers did in wearing all this jewellery. But that is the state of the nation and the fear is still very much in the minds of people. Not only are these bandits attacking people who are supposed to walk the streets very freely but they go into their homes and when there is no money available there is always the quest that there must be jewellery somewhere—"give us that jewellery"—because

they know that Indians have inherited jewellery. That is the situation at the moment.

In this account of an emerging community seeking to cope with the new environment by blending their transported traditions to those of the new society, the role of Indian Muslims needs to be specifically highlighted. Whilst the majority of those who came were Hindus, about 15 to 20 per cent of the indentureds were Islamic. And this is important, Madam Speaker. European imperialism was no respecter of persons, so that Hindus as well as Muslims, Buddhists and Christians were forced to flee in order to create better lives abroad. Even when they arrived in the colonies the immigrants were not only objects of further exploitation, but were then subjected to the conversion activities of Christian missionaries.

In this regard, the Muslims were the "chosen ones", the special objects of continuous surveillance because they were the last Indian regime to be defeated by the Europeans. Muslims were also among the leaders of the 1857 revolt against British rule. Indeed, hundreds of supporters of that uprising were sent abroad as bound coolies; this was the mildest form of punishment.

2.30 p.m.

The leaders were hanged, shot, or blown out of the mouths of cannons. Hence every effort was made to keep them under control and to convert them to Christianity. Of course, when we talk about the whole question of Christianity as it relates to the conversion of the Indians in the society, whilst we would want to pay homage and commendation to the work of the Canadian missionaries, on the one hand, it is important for us to recognize, on the other, in some way it was a draining of the cultural pursuits and traditions of the Indians who came to these parts.

Efforts were also made to suppress Eastern religious celebrations because they were considered heathen and that is a story that is very vivid in the minds of the Presbyterian community in Trinidad and Tobago. For example, when the Indians sought to celebrate the Muslim Hosea or Moharram festival in San Fernando in 1884, this celebration was brutally terminated by police firing upon the people, which left 16 dead and about 100 wounded.

Despite these difficulties, the children of Allah were able to add significantly to the total Indian contribution in this country. They were competent agriculturalists both in arable farming and in crop husbandry. They possessed highly specialized craftsmen in special areas which had been fostered by the

Mughal rulers: weaving, sewing and upholstery, metal craftwork, furniture-making and ornamental gardening. They were excellent cooks whose presence at Indian weddings and other religious ceremonies was much in demand.

Among the thousands who came were court singers, dancers, poets and a wide range of musicians. While the Mughal Empire was declining as a military power in 1757, its encouragement of the arts remained a powerful force well into the 19th century. Many of them who came to the West brought with them this high art. Most of the pioneers of Oriental song and dance were Indian Muslims, who could blend a haunting sound of Arabian music with doleful melodies of Hindustan; they were as adept at rendering quaseedas as they were at singing bhajans. That tradition of Muslim pre-eminence in Caribbean Oriental music continues strongly into our own time.

These early activities represent the initial efforts of an alien people to place themselves on a firm foundation in the new society. As the 19th century turned into the 20th, the Indians began to make their way further outwards from their own communities and into the larger sphere of education, business, the professions and politics. A major factor in this emergence was the work of the Canadian mission, to which I referred earlier on, among the Indians of the Caribbean.

In 1868 the Presbyterians from Nova Scotia started a mission, the CMI (Caribbean Mission to the Indians), in Trinidad; and using this land as a base, the mission was extended to Grenada in 1884, and to St. Lucia and British Guiana in 1885. From 1894 Indian pastors were sent from Trinidad and Jamaica to assist the Scottish Presbyterian church in reaching the indentured Indians there.

The success of the work done by the missionaries was 10 per cent and therefore, considered unsuccessful. However, educational facilities initiated by the Canadians were very successful. The mission schools offered Western education which was the passport to employment opportunities in all European colonies. The mission schools catered specifically for the Indian population at a time when no one else did; they also taught in Hindi as a gateway to English learning. Mission schools were established among the estate villages, hitherto neglected by the State as well as by other Christian agencies.

From the 1870s the missionaries started the primary school system. In 1894 a teachers training college was built, and in 1900 the first boys' secondary school was opened—one of the prides of the South to which you belong—Naparima College. Twelve years later, Naparima Girls came on stream to educate East Indian girls at the secondary level, and by the late fifties three more secondary

schools were built. In contrast, Madam Speaker, secondary education started in British Guiana in 1916 for boys and in 1920 for girls.

The major contribution of the Canadian Mission lay in the fact that it provided the essential lever, which was then Western education, by which these people could enter the New World on equal terms. In fact, at one time in our history, thousands of our nationals were coming out as graduates from Canadian universities; and now that we have a regional university, the figures will show less. But one would ask a question about the purpose of the University of the West Indies and its graduates, and all the traumas gone through and sacrifices that these students make. When they come out it seems as though, from the trend that is emerging in Trinidad and Tobago today, it is difficult to get managerial positions in some state enterprises.

Madam Speaker, it was not surprising that the first group of Indian leaders in the region came from the mission schools. The sense of discipline, punctuality and hard work which characterized these pioneers were qualities passed on by the Canadian missionaries themselves, most of whom were men and women of profound dedication and commitment.

Madam Speaker, the argument will continue forever in Trinidad and Tobago for the merit of Indian Arrival Day, May 30, being a national public holiday, but if we are to look at the traumas that these people experienced; if we are to look at the contributions they have made to the economy, to social development in Trinidad and Tobago—like the Member for San Fernando East said in his contribution, "there is merit in the argument", and considerable merit at that.

Because, Madam Speaker, what is the present role of the Indian in the Caribbean? In Suriname at the southern end of the region they constitute 35 per cent of a population of some 400,000. In Guyana out of a population of 940,000 they form 51 per cent and in Trinidad and Tobago they are almost equally balanced with the Afro-Trinidadian population. In Jamaica, Madam Speaker, with a population of 2.3 million, Indians make up about 2 per cent of that number, and in the French departments of Martinique and Guadeloupe, out of a population of some 660,000, the Indian segment is some 16 per cent of that total. They form about 3.2 per cent of the population of Grenada, 2.6 per cent of St. Lucia and about .2 per cent in Barbados.

Although the larger international community records the Caribbean as predominantly Afro-influenced, the Indian presence has certainly altered the culture of the place. To their larger settlements in the region they brought a way

of life that was markedly different from the predominating Western, Christian norm. This is a cosmic view of the world, informed by a value system that has significant relevance to the region. For example, Madam Speaker, to a region in which the relentless pursuit of profit has destroyed so much of our flora and fauna, the Indians came with a profound reverence for the land, to which they referred, Madam Speaker, as Mother Earth, or as you will know, *Dharti Mata*.

In this view the earth is revered as divine, and plants and animals are seen as elements in an eternal, cyclical cosmic order. To destroy and not replace any one link in this chain was to upset the whole cosmic order according to the philosophy and traditions of the Indians. Therefore, they set about reclaiming swamps, introducing a wide variety of crops and new animals, using grasses and herbs as food, medicine and shelter, thereby making full use of the environment and not seeing commercial gain as the end of life.

In the areas of larger settlement they were able to resist Christianity because they brought to the region their own religions, of greater antiquity. These possessed time-tested values, which fixed the devotee securely in time and in space, giving a necessary stability which makes for ordered society. To a region in which the dehumanizing effect of slavery had rendered the family unit irrelevant, the Indian brought a ritualistic, clearly defined family structure in which the institution of family was of major importance as the basis of society, where each member had a secure and useful place and would be looked after from birth to death.

2.40 p.m.

In Caribbean society we have much to be thankful for and grateful about, because if the Caribbean society is to move forward on to the next century as a coherent whole and not as a Balkanized group of states, then the question of cultural pluralism must be squarely faced and addressed by our peoples. Part of the solution must surely be an acceptance of difference, in the first instance, followed by an effort to appreciate the richness of our diversified tradition. In the longer term, we must seek to build a civilization in the Caribbean which would draw from the wealth of the East and would merge this richness with that of Africa, the Middle East and Europe. That must be the larger vision of Caribbean peoples.

History will also recall that when the Indians brought their religious traditions with them, every effort was made to destabilize the practice. Divali is a festival that came from India and when the Indians came, they brought with them the

Ramayans, harmonium, the Qur'an and the Majeera, and so many other small pieces of important instruments that would have reminded them of Mother India, because they felt that this was, in fact, what was going to keep them in touch with the past. As I said earlier on, they never had the slightest inclination to, and in some cases, never did, set foot on the motherland again.

But what they have done for this society and, indeed, the Caribbean as a whole, is brought together this new world, this new society, into the multi-religious, multi-ethnic grouping that it is today, where people in other societies see Trinidad and Tobago with its diversity as a mini United Nations. We know for a fact that the cultural inheritance of our peoples from India and from Africa have led Europeans, who once controlled this land, to return to find out the secret of the unity of the peoples of our country.

That is tremendous testimony to the vision of these pioneers who came here and struggled and made sacrifices. When we consider the history itself and go back to the land of plantations when intemperance was, at one stage, a vehicle by which people left the plantations and fled Trinidad and Tobago—that is why in Venezuela today there are Indians and when they say they have come from India, people ask: But how and why? It was to Trinidad and Tobago they came, and because of the inhumane conditions, they left here and fled to the nearest port, which was to Venezuela.

When you listen to the stories of the inhumanity which the womenfolk faced, it must bring tears to your heart, to consider that these were women, who, like the women of Trinidad and Tobago, have had to endure these indignities. Yet we have people in the society who spread the view that the slave period in this country was nothing compared to what the immigrants from India endured. That is so far from the truth; it is simply for personal reasons that some historians in this society propel that view. If we continue to accept those views, then how do we expect to bring this into a coherent, united society?

We must understand within ourselves that it is important for us, as responsible men and women sitting in this Parliament and by extension, Trinidad and Tobago, to determine where we want to take the society, whether politically or otherwise.

Indentured Indians experienced tremendous difficulty at the hands of the colonial masters on the estates. Apart from the inhumane conditions under which they lived, life on the plantations was a hellhole. Men worked for long hours for less than meagre wages. The womenfolk assisted for even less than what they were getting. There is a story about the ignorance of an Indian indentured

labourer—ignorance of the language, English, as a matter of fact, but not in cultural traditions—who got a pay packet. At that time she never knew anything about notes, but coins; and it was her practice to discard the notes because she thought it was just paper. One day she was seen throwing away the notes and retaining only the coins, and one of her male friends on the estate asked her: "Why are you doing this?" She said, "that means nothing to me; this is only paper." Then he had to explain to her—this is after one year of throwing away the money that she thought was not important. It was only then she understood the value of the paper that she was receiving. That was because devotion to the land and the mission to which they came had to be fulfilled, apart from the other chores that they considered to be less important.

There were stories of white men on the estates, when they wanted some form of personal entertainment, often chose a beautiful Indian woman. The story is also true of African women; they also suffered the indignities. The overseers would often send husbands to other estates for long periods in order to coerce their innocent wives to bed. I guess, to some extent, that is responsible for the kind of cross-fertilization we see in Trinidad and Tobago today. Of course, when the word got around that that kind of practice had taken place, the consequences were very severe for the women, because the men could not take revenge on the plantocracy. In most cases these incidents created murders. The men, obviously, took to alcohol, and domestic violence was very much a part of the agenda, when they felt hurt that their wives had succumbed to the whims and fancies of the white men.

It was this type of humiliation that the indentureds experienced. When we hear historians say that they had it easier than the African slaves, I say that is nothing short of educated nonsense. Because of that same convenience of wanting to convey a message that distorts the truth in so many ways and create the divisions in the society, we, today, as a more intelligent grouping, suffer the consequences, because we are not prepared to face the facts head-on and deal with them. That is why I asked permission at the beginning of this presentation to make extensive reference to my notes, because I did not want to be misinterpreted that what I was saying bore a bias to Indianism in Trinidad and Tobago. That is far from the truth, because we all live in this society and we must be our brother's keeper. If we cannot work in that kind of unity, then as a society we will not evolve as people who are supposedly intelligent. We have, continuously, in Trinidad and Tobago, a situation where we recognize the difficulties, the faults. We blame the colonial masters, we have the solutions, but when it comes to the practicality of these solutions, we are far removed from the truth and the truism.

2.50 p.m.

Madam Speaker, there could be no two descriptions for indignity, no two meanings for humiliation. What the African slaves suffered was just as brutal as the Indian indentured immigrants. If we in this country pay respect to the emancipation of the slaves, then it is natural that we pay homage to the courage and fortitude of the children of our ancestral home and the sacrifices they made, like others, to create a society that we are all proud of, or should be proud of. That pride is shared in the achievements of the offspring of some of these indentured labourers and African slaves who have brought recognition internationally to us, and who have all made us proud. One name that comes to my mind almost vividly is that of the Afro-Trinidadian southerner Trevor Mc Donald, who now resides in London and who is, today, considered England's most prominent television news presenter and reporter.

Of course, not only is Trevor Mc Donald doing us proud in England, but we will remember the name of Indarjit Bahadoorsingh, the son of indentured parents in Trinidad and Tobago, who worked for the BBC in London and then migrated to India, was accepted as one of the sons of that country and he represented the Indian Government at one of its missions abroad.

Geoffrey Holder, a well-respected cultural activist and stage actor in the United States. Vidia Naipaul is another name that comes to my mind. And, quite recently, another southerner who has brought fame and glory to every Trinidadian and Tobagonian resident wherever in the world—Dr. Eddi Frye, who is now a minister in the government of Canada.

We have much to be proud of in these sons and daughters of our land. The torch-bearers of those whose vision for a better life did not anticipate a historical perspective as we are, indeed, witnessing almost 150 years after they came. For them, it was work. For us, it is a way of life better than even most parts of the motherland, whether Africa or India.

If it is that this House will have accepted this Motion as giving in to the wishes or the whims and fancies of a people on the threshold of history, then we would have wasted time and energy in this debate. If, however, the granting of Indian Arrival Day as a public holiday represents the vision and sacrifices of the indentured labourers and their enormous contributions to the socio-economic development of the peoples of this twin-island republic, then history will one day applaud this decision.

If we went on to take a closer look at some of the other aspects of why we feel it is important for Indian Arrival Day to become a national holiday, it is in recognition of the sacrifices and contributions that were made. Apart from the fact that they came, they made sacrifices, they endured and they conquered. It is also important to recognize some of the other aspects of the presence of Indians in Trinidad and Tobago as a part of the total society.

When I say that, I make the case for the language of the majority of Indians who came to Trinidad and Tobago to be included in the curriculum of schools in the country; that is, for the teaching of Hindi. It is important for us to understand this cultural link. We must be in a position to understand the background. Many times we meet people in the society who have had the benefit of being educated at schools where Hindi was taught at the primary level in small scales. Those of our African brothers and sisters who lived in Indian communities, and who enjoyed the language, and who, today, speak—though brokenly—the language of our forebears. They are the ones who, today, say they regret that Hindi was not taught at a higher level during their time.

We feel it is important, if we have to recognize Indian Arrival Day as a national public holiday, that all the endorsements must be made. For instance, the introduction of Hindi on a larger scale. I know to some extent it is being taught, but we feel it is important for us to understand our own ancestry and our African brothers and sisters to appreciate and understand what we experienced and our quest to know each other. We feel that it is important for us to have Hindi, as well as Swahili—

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh]*

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. G. Hanoomansingh: Madam Speaker, I thank hon. Members for their graciousness.

I was making the point that it is important for us to understand that the languages that our forebears brought to this land are important for us to evolve as a society. Swahili was brought by the African and Hindustani—

Dr. Rowley: The Africans did not bring Swahili here.

Mr. G. Hanoomansingh: The East Africans. *[Interruption]* Well, I do not think that we will want to make that point of argument, hon. Member, but thank you very much for your guidance. It is important.

The point I am making is that in order for us to appreciate each other, culturally and otherwise, inwardly, it is important for us to understand from whence we have come. These are the traditions that will allow us to really appreciate these aspects of our lives.

When we consider that there is this tremendous quest for us to accelerate the learning of Spanish as a language important for the survival of trade and industry in Trinidad and Tobago because of the extension of the Latin American region, the market facilities and the interaction between the English-speaking and the Spanish-speaking areas of the Caribbean, we must also remember that it is important for us in terms of accessing information from Africa and India to learn these languages. Indeed, if we fail to do that, then we would have failed as a people to recognize the cultural traditions of our peoples. The argument was made on many occasions, by supposedly intelligent people, that if the pursuit of the teaching of Hindi in the schools of Trinidad and Tobago becomes a big issue, then further alienation is going to take place. That is so far from the truth. So very far from the truth because every attempt is being made at all levels in modern-day society to accept and appreciate one's culture.

We see Hindi films on the television sets, and what do we see? We see English subtitles. There is a lack of appreciation of these films because it is difficult to follow the English subtitles simply because of the rate at which the subtitles appear on the screen.

3.00 p.m.

If we knew something about the language, perhaps, even a passing knowledge of the language, then we could begin to understand the lifestyles and the cultures of these people.

When you hear stories of an Indian film-maker and actor by the name of Raj Kapoor going to Russia and being swamped by thousands of Russians calling his name Mukesh—even with the same subtitles perhaps, because, of the close proximity of the subcontinent, the Russians have become closely associated with Hindi films. That is simply because of the trade that takes place between India and Russia and they feel it is inherent for them to be a part of that cultural mosaic, that cultural society and that cultural oneness.

This is the approach that I feel we should honour in this country. So, yes, when I support the Motion by the hon. Member for Oropouche—and we recognize that the hon. Prime Minister has said his Government is of the view that the argument has considerable merit—then we feel it is important for us to put in these asides that will be a vital and integral part of the Motion that is before this House at the moment in pursuit of making Indian Arrival Day, May 30, a national public holiday.

Of course, this goes back to 1845 when they first came here and if I might make a personal intervention in this issue, I probably would be one of the persons who will be more than eager to want to see that from a 1994 perspective as that is the day when I was elected by the constituents of Pointe-a-Pierre to this honourable House.

In 1838, these two enactments of the British Parliament changed the course of millions of people belonging to the two non-white races. One hundred and fifty-five years after the first arrivals to the Caribbean, the scenario is rapidly changing. Indians are asserting themselves as a Caribbean people. They are no longer content to be passive and be treated as the butt of society, which is what happened in earlier times. The Caribbean is as much theirs as they are the Caribbean. Calypso and steelband are part of their psyche as the tassa drums and curry have become part of the colourful tapestry of West Indian life. The Indians have endured their hardships and the hostilities waged against them for more than a century and a half without grudges. They have proven through their sacrifices that the coolie trait is the stuff of nation-building and it forms an essential core of commercial activity and cultural continuity. They have, in short, like their African counterparts, gained strength and spiritual sustenance from their colonial experiences. The Indians are now at the crossroads of political power, which seems somehow to elude them despite the fact that they form the majority population in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Suriname. But political power has never been the ultimate aim of Indians, as equality and power-sharing have been their political philosophy. For this ideal, the new generation of Indians will strive relentlessly in the hope of ushering in the 21st century with a brighter and better future for all.

Madam Speaker, I thank you very much.

The Minister of Works and Transport and Minister of Local Government (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I rise to enter this debate and I would like to return to the Motion itself. Let us look at the Private Members' Motion

from the Member for Oropouche because, in the contribution of the last speaker, other issues were touched on. Let us read the Motion:

> *Whereas* the first group of indentured workers from India arrived in this country on May 30, 1845;
>
> *And whereas* the above date heralded the commencement of a long period of emigration from India involving thousands of indentured workers who came to these shores;
>
> *And whereas* the vast majority of these indentured workers settled in this country and their descendants today comprise a very large and substantial portion of the population;
>
> *And whereas* the above date is of outstanding significance in the historical evolution of this country as a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society;
>
> *And whereas* the above date is today widely commemorated as a day of great national historical importance;
>
> *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.

Madam Speaker, prior to the contribution of the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, there was the contribution from the Member for Oropouche on this subject and the hon. Prime Minister also made an intervention. When the Prime Minister intervened he proposed an amendment which essentially would refer the matter to a committee, and he also indicated at that time that the proposal had merit.

Although the Member for Oropouche has done quite a bit of work on this in his contribution, before I go into my brief analysis of this Motion, I would like to take a look again at the origins of public holidays in Trinidad and Tobago. When we look at the Public Holidays and Festivals Act Chap. 19:05, the definition of a public holiday is as follows:

> The expression 'public holiday' means the closed holiday in banks and public offices in Trinidad and Tobago.

Additionally the Act decrees,

> That where a public holiday falls on a Sunday or where two public holidays fall on the same day, the next following day that is not a public holiday shall be a public holiday.

The Act also indicates that the President may, by Order, appoint any day to be a public holiday and may also amend the schedule for public holidays.

Madam Speaker, it is important to understand that where a public holiday falls on a Sunday, the next following day that is not a public holiday shall be a holiday, because that would give us an understanding of some of the holidays in Trinidad and Tobago at this point in time.

Public holidays in Trinidad and Tobago at present are New Year's Day, which is celebrated on January 01. In 1995 we have Good Friday on April 14; Easter Monday on April 17; Whit Monday on June 05; Corpus Christi on June 15: it is a Thursday; Labour Day on June 19, Monday; Emancipation Day on August 01, also a Monday; Independence Day on August 31, a Thursday; Republic Day, September 24; Christmas Day, December 25; Boxing Day, December 26; and Eid-ul-Fitr and Divali at dates to be appointed. We also have Carnival on the appropriate Monday and Tuesday, but these are not official public holidays.

Let us look at the holidays themselves. New Year's Day. My research into New Year's Day tells me this is a holiday we have imported from Europe. It is one of the oldest festivals known to European man, that is. If one is a Christian it is termed a pagan festival. It is celebrated as the coming into being of a new passage of time, a new year.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, if I recall I think he did mention it, I am not sure that we were circulated with an amendment. I recall some mention of it having been made in the debate—I am not sure of any formal letter until now.

3.10 p.m.

My understanding is that it was originally celebrated in March to coincide with certain astronomical and astrological events, but at some point in time it was changed to January 01. We see that New Year's Day is the oldest public holiday in European history. As we were a former British colony, we celebrate New Year's Day as a transition from our colonial European heritage.

Let us look now at Good Friday. This is celebrated as the day of the death of Christ and has always been a day of compassion and mourning, and at the same time joyful, in knowing that Christ died to redeem mankind. It is a Christian holiday.

Easter Sunday celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is the most important religious festival in the Christian calendar. In the year 325 the Church fixed the date of Easter determining it to be the first Sunday after the first full moon in Spring. That is the origin of Easter Sunday.

Pentecost Sunday or Whit Sunday is celebrated 50 days after Easter; it is the official end of the Easter season. It also calls to mind the coming of the Spirit on the Christian church. Like Easter Sunday, Pentecost Sunday or Whit Sunday is a holiday that falls on a Sunday. As a result of our laws and the European tradition, the Monday is given as a holiday. That is why I indicated that when the public holiday falls on a Sunday, the Monday is given as a holiday. That is the origin of Whit Monday. It is really the celebration of Pentecost Sunday.

Let us go to Corpus Christi. This holiday relates back to Easter and Pentecost. It falls two Thursdays after Pentecost on the Thursday immediately after Trinity Sunday. Those of us who have some knowledge of Christianity would know what is Trinity Sunday. I do not think I need to go into that. It is connected with the worship of the sacrament, and Catholics express their faith in the presence of Jesus in the sacrament or the bread of life. My understanding is that this holiday has been celebrated in Europe since 1264, so that is over 700 years of celebration of Corpus Christi.

Let us go on to Christmas Day, which is celebrated on December 25. My understanding is that it was celebrated on the 25th from the fourth century after Christ. It replaced the pagan festival. Many of these Christian festivals have replaced pagan festivals in the evolution of European life and history. The pagan festival was a festival of the unconquered sun god and it was established in the year 274 by the Emperor Aurelian of Rome. I think it is necessary to give this information so people would understand why these holidays are celebrated. After the birth of Jesus and the growth of the Christian church, the pagan holiday of the unconquered sun god was replaced by the celebration of Christmas Day, the birth of Christ, to give significance to the view that light came into the world with the birth of Christ, and that the redeemer Christ is now the real “Sun”. They took the celebration of the sun god, the pagan festival, and equated Jesus with light and replaced a sun festival with Christmas Day, the birth of Christ.

Emancipation Day became effective from the year 1984. It was declared a public holiday by Cabinet on July 26, 1984. There are many interpretations as to why Emancipation Day was declared a public holiday. I do not wish to get into any contentious aspects of that, but one of the reasons is the celebration of emancipation of the slaves. There is some debate about the actual year in which slavery was completely abolished. Some say it was 1834 while others say it was 1838. That is not for this debate. The year of reference used for the celebration of Emancipation Day is August 01, 1834. It goes back to a day when there was a march in Trinidad and Tobago, when several emancipated slaves marched into

Port of Spain to speak to the Governor to indicate their intention to strike, because they regarded the apprenticeship period after the initial abolition of the slave trade as being unsatisfactory. It actually goes back to August 01, 1834 where there was a march by half-emancipated slaves because they still had a period of apprenticeship for some years. If one goes back it was 150 years from the date 1834 which most historians agree was the time when there was abolition of slavery as it was known at the time. As I said, there was an apprenticeship period afterwards.

My understanding is that the idea for initiating this day, August 01 as a public holiday came from a group of academics who discussed the matter. It was also discussed at the Caribbean Conference of Churches and eventually it was agreed, in 1984, that August 01 would be Emancipation Day to celebrate emancipation. I do not want to get into any contentious issues about emancipation of whom and for what. There is no doubt that a significant aspect of this holiday is celebration of emancipation of African slaves, but there are other interpretations that this holiday should be viewed as emancipation of all peoples in Trinidad and Tobago, who were under some form of slavery or other conditions.

Let me go on to Divali, an East Indian religious festival. This was first declared a public holiday on November 10, 1969. [*Interruption*] I am going on. It is a Hindu festival of lights celebrating the victory of light over darkness and the victory of good over evil. I think I have that correct.

Eid ul Fitr was first declared a public holiday on December 11, 1969. It is a special day for all Muslims and people generally. It is a day of giving thanks after the fast of Ramadan.

Here we have a synopsis of most of the holidays. The holiday that has given me the most difficulty is Boxing Day. When one tries to determine the origin of Boxing Day, the point made by the Member for Oropouche comes up in literature that postmen were given special significance in Great Britain and that Boxing Day, the day after Christmas Day, was set aside as a day to give gifts in boxes to postmen. That comes up in literature.

I have also determined another interpretation of Boxing Day. It is a day for giving gifts after one stays at home with one's family on Christmas Day. In addition, in some parts of the world, Boxing Day is interpreted as a day to give boxes of gifts and food to the poor; to give alms to the poor. Boxing Day has given me the most difficulty in terms of its origins.

3.20 p.m.

There were other holidays celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago which have been removed, for example, Empire Day, a British celebration. This was removed in 1960 and May Day was substituted. Empire Day is also called Commonwealth Day. May Day was the first day of May, and if it fell on a Sunday, it was celebrated the following Monday. The replacement of Empire Day was passed by the Legislative Council on May 08, 1960. May Day was considered a day of public celebration by trade unions and labour organizations in Canada and North America. It was also considered a public holiday in all territories of the region, with the exception of St. Vincent and Jamaica. May Day eventually fell by the wayside since its major significance was a trade union/labour movement celebration.

In 1972, the schedule of public holidays was amended and May Day was substituted with Labour Day. This holiday was set at June 19, or, if it fell on a Sunday, the next working day, a Monday, if that was a working day. It has assumed significance now because it relates to the Butler issue and the labour riots of June 1937.

Discovery Day was removed in 1984 and replaced with Emancipation Day. Discovery Day celebrated the landing of European voyagers—Christopher Columbus and others—on our shores. It is still celebrated unofficially in the constituency of Ortoire/Mayaro, where they enact the landing of Columbus every year.

I hope I have given an overview of the public holidays that we celebrate in Trinidad and Tobago. Some of them have religious significance; some of them are pagan festivals—when I say pagan, I am speaking as a Christian. I mean they are considered within Christian Europe as a pagan festival. Of course, if one is a Christian European, then one is not a pagan. I am just using the terminology; it is not that I have any convictions about who is pagan and who is not.

New Year's Day was not initially a Christian holiday and still is not necessarily one. It was a pagan festival which was changed to the beginning of the year.

Independence Day and Republic Day. One does not need to belabour the point about why we celebrate Independence; that is a joyous occasion: that is true emancipation. One also would not need to ask why we celebrate Republic Day, although there is some discussion about that in the academic community, that

having already celebrated Independence Day, whether it is also necessary to celebrate Republic Day.

The changing of Trinidad and Tobago from a monarchy initially to a colony—if Members on the other side would allow me to finish—to a system of internal self-government where we still had the head of state being the Queen, whose representative was the Governor of the Republic, was a significant event. That is something for the academics to look at to see how significant Republic Day is in the context of Independence Day. I will not get into that.

Clearly, at the time, in 1976, when we changed and we made our head of state a Trinidadian or Tobagonian, rather than a governor who reported to the Queen, it was considered significant.

Let us go now to our current scenario. The Member for Oropouche made some compelling arguments for the celebration of a day, not necessarily May 30, as a day to celebrate the arrival in this country—

Madam Speaker: The Motion said May 30.

Hon. C. Imbert: I know that, Madam Speaker, but I am just saying that the Member made compelling arguments for the celebration of a particular day, and he used May 30, and I was going on to explain why he used May 30 for the celebration of the arrival of indentured workers from India. He used May 30 because in his Motion he indicated that the first group of indentured workers arrived in this country on May 30, 1845.

He has two prongs in his argument—he believes that there should be the celebration of the arrival of indentured workers from India and that this day should be May 30 because this was the day the first group arrived here. I also saw merit in many of the arguments of the Member for Oropouche, but I was a bit confused by the presentation of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

The Member for Oropouche made the point that for the descendants of these indentured workers from India what was important was their arrival in the country. They considered that to be important, not freedom from indentureship. If I can paraphrase his arguments, he said that the release from indentureship—the expiry of the contract—was not as important as the arrival of the indentured workers from India, therefore what should be celebrated is the event of arrival and, of course, the subsequent events.

I got a bit lost in the contribution of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre because he seemed to be going into other issues. If one sticks to the arguments of the

Member for Oropouche, one can understand the argument that Emancipation Day can be viewed as emancipation of all peoples in Trinidad and Tobago from oppression and slavery, and even from indentureship, but from his perspective, what was more important for descendants of indentured workers from India, was arrival in Trinidad and Tobago. I can identify with that argument, Madam Speaker. I am very sorry, I could not identify with many of the arguments of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, who seemed to be carrying us into other areas which really are not, in my respectful view, too relevant to the question of celebrating May 30 as Indian Arrival Day. I identified with the arguments of the Member for Oropouche. I understood what he was saying about the concept of people having left their homeland, come to Trinidad and Tobago, started a new life, and the East Indian community evolving from that historic first day, May 30, 1845. I can identify with that argument.

Mr. Hanoomansingh: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. On a point of clarification, I did say at the beginning of my contribution in support of the Motion by the Member for Oropouche, I would have been giving a historical perspective of the contributions of those immigrants who arrived on May 30, 1845. It is my humble view that not just the arrival day is important in this context because of the contribution of the immigrants to the evolution of the society. This is what I was making reference to.

Hon. C. Imbert: Let me get back to the mover of the Motion, the Member for Oropouche. I am sorry, I got completely sidetracked by that intervention of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I do not want to get into that.

The hon. Prime Minister made the point that the argument has merit. He has moved an amendment that this matter be sent to a select committee. I would have thought that the Members on the other side would have got some kind of gut feeling about the feeling on this side. The Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister, said there is merit in many of the arguments and indicated that it should go to a select committee.

3.30 p.m.

I dispute any interpretation on the intervention of the hon. Prime Minister that that act was not done in good faith. The Prime Minister has spoken on behalf of the Government; he has indicated that the matter has merit and he has indicated that it would go to a select committee.

I do not wish to go any further on this issue. The point I have made is that our holidays in Trinidad and Tobago have come about for many different reasons.

Some of them are good reasons, some of them are very obscure. Some of them may no longer have any relevance in Trinidad and Tobago in the 1990s.

The Member for Oropouche made the point that some of the major Christian leaders in Trinidad and Tobago had looked at some of the Christian festivals and had indicated that they may not have a difficulty with these festivals being replaced or modified and so forth. I would ask Members on the other side to trust the process. The Government has indicated that there is considerable merit in many of the arguments. This matter is to be referred to a joint select committee and I suspect that that committee would look at all the public holidays we have, the reasons why we celebrate them, weigh the arguments for and against, look at the fact that the Christian churches have come out and said that some of these holidays are not as relevant as they used to be, and would arrive at a very reasonable and worthwhile conclusion.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh *(Caroni Central)*: Madam Speaker, I too, like the Member for Point-a-Pierre, crave your indulgence this afternoon to refer extensively to notes because of the nature of this debate. One cannot be too cautious in making sure that every word said in a debate like this sends the correct signal and meaning, otherwise it is very easy for wrong interpretations to be concluded.

I heard the Member for Diego Martin East making a passionate plea for trusting the process of sending this matter to a joint select committee. This is not the first time that this Motion is being debated in the House, neither is it the first time that this matter will be referred to some committee. It would seem that in spite of the importance of the issues raised and the urgency and expectations of a large sector of the population, the matter seemed to have died a natural death when sent to committee.

If only for the calls of keeping this Motion alive, it is quite appropriate to keep the issues open to the Parliament, to the Government and the national community. Today, the clause: 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—I consider my participation in this matter as a continuation of a contribution I made on August 26, 1991 in this House. The Member for Oropouche moved the Motion then, and again, he has done so. Again the proposal is to send this matter before a committee. We know in parliamentary gymnastics when one wants to kill a matter, send it to a committee and leave it there. *[Interruption]* Madam

Speaker, I have no intention of being derailed by the Attorney General or the Member for Diego Martin Central. I simply want to make the point that no matter what the perception of others is about the Member for Oropouche, history would give him a place in this country for his courage to bring—what is considered by many of us—a contentious matter for scrutiny in this Parliament.

I am sure that his contribution in this debate would have dispelled any doubts in the minds of Members of Parliament, as indicated by the Member for Diego Martin East. Of course the Prime Minister was constrained to rise on two counts to recognize, firstly, the persuasive case made by the Member for Oropouche and to admit there were compelling justifications to recognize May 30 as the date to be considered for a public holiday.

I want to let the Member for Oropouche know that I pay special tribute to him for his profound work in this matter in his courageous advocacy of making Indian Arrival Day a national holiday. I have no doubt in my mind that the Prime Minister's pretentious posturing on this profound physical and metaphysical occurrence is pseudo-empathizing.

3.40 p.m.

The nature of this debate is not an attempt to relegate any of the cherished practices, values, traditions and conventions of our society. It is simply to enhance them. No other society in the world, perhaps, could be more thankful to the Supreme Being for gracing us with the opportunity to enhance our endowments by strengthening our community of communities. That is what I want Members to get clear. The perception of a community of communities.

Since 1971, at the ecumenical consultation for development held in Chaguaramas, there has been the breaking of new ground, whereby several denominations came together on common ground, negating bigoted and parochial views. They have found common ground for serving with people here and everywhere in the Caribbean. The ecumenical movement has added an inter-religious dimension to its witness and stewardship by coming together with other faiths such as the Hindus and the Muslims of the country. The inter-religious dimension has strengthened the work and witness of religious stewardship nullifying the possibility of religious and credal conflicts.

Madam Speaker, when we go into the realms of talking about the authentic existence of members of the community, one has to understand that there is a role for the theological movement. That theological movement has not merely been a forerunner for creating consensus for community but has become a prototype. The

State and Government have been woefully backward in this regard. The recognition of Indian Arrival Day as a national holiday would, indeed, strengthen the fabric of our society as we seek to recognize the contributions of those who struggled and laboured alongside all others who built this community.

Madam Speaker, our contemporary historic context demands that we strive to decrease and eliminate conflicts, tensions and alienation. Have we not learned anything from the lessons of Eastern Europe over the past two years? Have we not learnt anything from the disasters of ethnic intolerance during the Second World War? We need fresh criteria for our national community relationships that go beyond the economic, political and legal structures—values that sustain personal and group life within the community, giving a sense of freedom and participation in our national community. We should allow the belonging and authentic demands of our people to flourish side by side, in spite of any resistance by the status quo for change.

Madam Speaker, in our existence here in the nation we cannot ignore the transcendental dimension and at the same time we must embrace the positive resources and responsibilities for living together. There seem to be some difficulties with the notion of our national community. Our national unity must not be equated with a homogeneous unity or a totalitarian uniformity such as the "melting pot" concept. When people of different parts of the world meet, that meeting could only enhance the experiences of others without the loss of one's distinctive traditions.

When Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa described the harmonious relationship as likened to a rainbow, he was absolutely correct in his perception of what community relationship should be. The community is together, the communities are distinct, in the community of communities. The rainbow is that community, the colours of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet are those communities. The recognition of Indian Arrival Day must be symbolic and meaningful as one of the colours of that rainbow. To deny it is to emasculate the beauty of our rainbow, the rainbow of ourselves. When people of different transcendental experiences meet, it must not be regarded as an act of syncretism. Syncretism is an act of shallow friendliness, not of mature understanding and distinctive commitment. It leads to spiritual poverty, theological confusion and ethical impotence. It is not right to project Indian Arrival Day as meaningless and to suggest that January 01 be a day to be observed as Liberation Day.

Arriving here had more awe-inspiring significance to the psyche of the East Indian immigrants, for they believed it would transform their lives for the better,

even if there was the notion of returning to India. The fact that so many of us remained, in spite of the option to return, gives testimony to the significance of our arrival here. Do you know it is recorded that some immigrants returned to India and willingly came back to Trinidad? It was their arrival here that transplanted them on a new soil in a new field for nurturing, blossoming, bearing, harvesting and propagation. January 01, 1917 could not be the crowning moment of the East Indian existence in the Caribbean, for the indignities of indentureship were not eradicated on that day.

3.50 p.m.

The Member for Couva North, hon. Basdeo Panday, has testified, on several occasions, of his struggle to end child labour among Indian workers on the sugar plantations within the last 15 years. The struggles of colonialism, indentureship and exploitation did not crumble on January 01, 1917, and liberation was not realized. The process of liberation and unity is still taking place. Much has been said about the irrelevance of Indian Arrival Day. The fact that there is a concerted and spontaneous response to May 30 tells how important and meaningful that arrival is to East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago

There are religious and transcendental dimensions which point to the element of mystery in human relationships and this must be recognized whether it is in interpersonal relationships or in relationships between communities of faith. There are elements of our existence which may be ignored but cannot be interpreted purely through sociological terms. Unless the human is grasped by the divine and the human responds in obedience, renewal of the centre of personal existence would be impossible. These are theological arguments. This House has been devoid of theological arguments for a long time, and I think it is necessary to introduce it so that people would begin to understand that there is an element with which we have not grappled. To go beyond the “we” and “they” to more united, more meaningful, more responsible relationships defying the bitterness of past history and accepting the other in trust and confidence is an act of faith. Madam Speaker, it is not always possible for us to achieve that objective, but it must still be possible for us to be open and to manifest concrete signs of community, especially in times that are challenging.

The arrival of East Indians in this country saw the introduction of the religious heritage of Hinduism, and Islam to a lesser extent, and each religion has had its heritage of worship, prayer and meditation developed through long centuries. Without this reservoir of deep spiritual heritage, no community of faith can be sustained with power, meaning and direction. It sustains personal values in the

community and helps man to link the provisional with the ultimate. Therefore, when we talk of the national community or the community of communities, the spiritual has to be recognized not as one element beside the others but as the basic underlying and pervading factor.

Indian Arrival Day is intimately linked with the spirituality of the community of faith of the membership's experience. This is his focus; this is his yearning: satisfy his psyche drive; recognize his arrival to the shores. None of us can hope and expect to squeeze all others into his or her particular way of looking at the world and its problems. But we can glimpse in all religious heritages and experiences some transcendent understanding of human existence, some divine initiative regarding our world which can provide a uniting context for cultural pluralism.

It is recorded that on Friday, May 30, 1845, cum Wednesday, a tall-mast vessel of the clipper type sailed into Port of Spain harbour and anchored just off the lighthouse jetty. The *Port of Spain Gazette* appearing in the afternoon that day made mention of the vessel and I quote:

> "We have pleasure in announcing the arrival of the long looked for vessel, the Fatel Razack, 96 days from Calcutta and 41 days from the Cape of Good Hope, with 217 on board, all in good order and condition as the bills of lading usually have it. There were five deaths on board during the passage but the general appearance of the people is very healthy. She was immediately boarded by the Harbour Master, Health Officer and the Agent General for Immigration."

Can anyone not imagine the intense nostalgia kindled in the conscious being of the East Indian and their ancestors as they reflect upon their experiences? They were making history without fully knowing it and becoming foundation stones for posterity, but they continue their historic and predetermined mission as they undertook their assignment in a hostile and cynical environment.

Madam Speaker, listen to Ravi-Ji, a well-known thinker, teacher, activist who wrote:

> "We culture still in quarantine"

I quote from page 15 of the *Sunday Guardian* of April 21, 1991:

> "Mr. Immigration this is an application for a visa for landing permission eh? Well true not for me for mih inheritance dat mih aja and ajee lef behind."

It goes on:

> "Nelson Island jam up with hundreds of ghost ships. Fatel Razack with ragged sails waiting to unload their precious cargo."

One is beginning to see even the modern-day activist reflecting upon that experience and bringing to bear what is important to his own existence.

The recognition of Indian Arrival Day would be, in large measure, part of that release from quarantine that hinders the legitimate ordering of our cultural heritage and the enhancement of our national landscape. Many contributions have been made by distinguished people on the subject of Indian Arrival Day.

4.00 p.m.

I begin by reporting on an article in the *Sunday Guardian* Indian Arrival Day Supplement Sunday, May 26, 1991 by Fitzroy Baptiste, Head of the Department of History, UWI "Why the argument for Indian Arrival Day holiday is justified". Madam Speaker, in that article, Mr. Baptiste has indicated that:

> "There is a clear need to examine the proposition for the declaration of a national holiday to commemorate Indian Arrival Day, the first officially recorded landing of indentured forbears of our Indian-descended Community...."

He also indicated that given the sensitivity of this matter, he was likely to stir up other arguments on this subject, but in spite of that, he went on to say, and I continue to quote from the article:

> "Given the sensitivity of race in the national psyche and politics, my views on the subject are likely to displease some segments of the national community. The time is long past for an open discussion on the race question in this country, not just the African-Indian dimension, but the 'pigmentocracy question'."

Madam Speaker, he goes on:

> "The Private Sector. The latter still determines, subtly and not so subtly, employment practices in the private sector and in banking. The selection of ethnic and somatic images by advertisers, is by no means free of this bias and prejudice. The reported conventional wisdom in the boardrooms of advertising firms is reported to be 'Too black, stay back'."

Madam Speaker, that was part of the article. But he has made some equally important statements in the same article as he says:

> "The case for declaring Indian Arrival Day to be a new public holiday is a self-evident one, and proponents will be doing themselves an injustice if claims are based on an argument to have 'our thing' like Emancipation Day (August 1) which is for the African-Trinbagonian.
>
> Equally, opponents of the proposition must desist from perceiving the request by East Indian organisations, as another index of 'rising Indian power'.
>
> Either way, the approaches are irrational though somewhat understandable in a historical context.
>
> The argument for a public holiday is justified firstly on its historical rightness: a commemoration of the coming of East Indians who have played, are playing and will continue to play a significant role in nation-development."

He continues, Madam Speaker, and I am still quoting:

> "New World. Personally, I find it interesting in noting the preference by Indo-Trinidadians for Arrival Day, that is, the start of the indenture experience as against the end of indenture.
>
> Is it that Indian descendents in the Trinidad and Tobago Diaspora see something celebratory in their coming here from the Indian subcontinent? Is it because they have come to a New World of opportunities, and of new expressions away from the Old World with a relative lack of opportunities, and of custom-bound traditions?
>
> If so, the contrast with the Afro-Trinbagonian's sense of Diasporic experience is sharp. For Africans in the New World, there is nothing to celebrate about their arrival. Rather, the celebration—the commemoration—is over the Emancipation, the end of slavery.
>
> Secondly, the Indian Arrival Day proposition is justified in that it will serve to give greater meaning to the national motto: 'Here every creed and race finds an equal place.' As things stand, the calendar of public holidays in our Republic adheres disproportionately to that of the Christian Church community. This is a legacy from the colonial era.
>
> The recognition of Divali, Eid and even Emancipation Day as national holidays since Independence, has gone a little way to redress the legacy and imbalance. Obviously, more needs to be done."

Madam Speaker, he has continued by making the points that other areas of life and our existence need re-examination. Areas such as education—the sort of curricula offered in our schools—which need to be re-visited to correct some of the prejudices instilled in our education system.

For some reason old newspaper clippings seem to be useful and I was also able to put my hands on another *Sunday Guardian* Indian Arrival Day Supplement of Sunday May 26, 1991, on page 9. Here we have C.L.R. James saying very clearly: "We Were All Totally Wrong!" We were wrong to stereotype East Indians; we were wrong to denigrate them; we were wrong to evaluate them by the criteria of others and that, Madam Speaker, says a lot.

Madam Speaker, I think those of us here would know that C.L.R. James has been an outstanding citizen of this country. He is the author of several books; he has been in the forefront of people's liberation; he has championed—

Mr. Eckstein: He was a PNM, what do you expect?

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: The Member for Arouca South says he was a PNM. [*Laughter*] I tell you, the first time I met him was when he was a WFP candidate. Probably he started off like a PNM.

Dr. Rowley: That was when Panday lost his deposit.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Nevertheless, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Maharaj: He started off as a PNM and then he went to OWTU.

Mr. Haniff: PNM never wanted him.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Yes, I think he was too bright for the PNM. I knew of the conflicts that Dr. Williams used to have with him.

Mr. Eckstein: I did not mean to distract you, go ahead.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Yes, Madam Speaker, in this article, "We Were All Totally Wrong!" by C.L.R. James from 'Party Politics in the West Indies' recorded in the Indian Arrival Day Supplement, Sunday, May 26, 1991, page 9, he says:

> "The Indians have introduced deeper currents of developments in our society. Over 30 years ago, I noticed, along with other people, the primitive housing and the low level of domestic life of many Indians in the island.
>
> Participating in the prevailing ignorance, I believed that they were a primitive people and that was the way they lived. We all were totally wrong.

They lived that way because they were long a civilised people who, for thousands of years in India, had lived a certain type of life under circumstances which had taught them the social value of money.

The primitive type of life the Indians lived in Trinidad was aimed at enabling them to accumulate money by slow degrees. But more. Now after 40 years we all can see that they had social aims...with this patiently accumulated money, they have built and furnished fine houses and they have expanded their connections with businesses and above all they have sent their children abroad to be educated."

4.10 p.m.

"They don't propose to make money here and spend it elsewhere. They are West Indian and have helped to make the West Indies more West Indian in countless ways…

Let us for a moment take a glimpse of the future, necessary, because section by section people change…they develop. Recently I have noticed that young Indians of 30 and under have thought through the local political situation and have come to a new stage of political understanding."

Madam Speaker, I still want to continue to quote at the end. It states:

"But I am convinced it is not weakness; for us it is a form of strength. If the Indians were looking elsewhere, had their eyes fixed, for example, on return to India, that would be a serious matter.

But with their own qualities they are completely West Indian. For one thing they have produced Vidia Naipaul, and in time to come I hope to show that Naipaul, the novelist is an Indian with a special quality and attitude in his writing that are the results of his historical origin.

I wouldn't give up that for the world; it symbolises an extension of vision, of concept, character and attitude for all of us, which means added power and range to the West Indian nation."

So we have seen yet another notable citizen of Trinidad and Tobago dispelling the myth of some of the previous stereotypes of the East Indian. Do you not wonder why, today, sometimes there seems to be so much suspicion that the East Indians are here to dominate? That is not what we are here for.

Madam Speaker: With respect to the Motion on hand that May 30 be declared a public holiday—if you could just probably return to it. Proceed, please.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Yes, Madam Speaker. This was a comment made on the occasion of Indian Arrival Day. On that day, several people link what is happening in the Indian community to their coming into this country. I think that a very real case has been made out. I do not understand why the delay. I said in my last contribution, no matter what the difficulties are, the recognition of East Indian Arrival Day as a national holiday is inevitable. It is a reality that is confronting us. Of course, it is challenging some of the old status symbols which have become irrelevant.

If you notice the contribution from the Member for Diego Martin East, it is extremely clear that he has not moved forward with current social thinking, with a theological understanding of anything; he has merely sought to give the impression that the order, as it is, is sacrosanct, and therefore, we must be extremely cautious not to take a look at them.

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Mr. K. Jurai]*

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: I can see the protest in your voice with that "aye."

Mr. Sobion: Madam Speaker, I supported the extension for the Member; I do not understand.

Mr. Imbert: Just on a point of clarification, Madam Speaker. I am sure I recall I indicated in my presentation that the reasons for the public holidays were as I indicated, and times have changed. I do not think I gave any impression about it being sacrosanct. I am very surprised.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Madam Speaker, I am willing to retract that statement and to say I recognize that gradually he has been shifting towards change and dynamism. I know with a little more impetus on this side he would do well—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Proceed, please.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Madam Speaker, I always have some difficulty with my friend from Diego Martin West. He seems to believe that he is the PNM Rottweiler.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker, for the last seven minutes the Member has said nothing about the Motion. Clearly he has nothing else to say. Why is he blaming me? *[Laughter]*

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Madam Speaker, I am not blaming him; I am merely recognizing that he is simply a little common "pot-hound."

Madam Speaker: Is that really called for?

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Again, Madam Speaker, I wish to withdraw.

Madam Speaker: You were going on very well, except for some irrelevant matters. Please, proceed.

Hon. Member: You have nothing more to say!

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: I have a lot to say. I am coming to some of the juicier matters in this presentation. As he reminds me, let me read from a very interesting clipping that I have here. Maybe you could recognize the picture also. *[Clipping displayed]* I have here a clipping from the *Express* supplement on Sunday May 27, l990, page 23—the headline: "Indian Arrival Day Opportunity for Reflection." This is so important that I must quote it. There is a photograph here of Mr. Patrick Manning, and he says:

> "The observance of Indian Arrival Day in Trinidad and Tobago next Wednesday marks the passage of 145 years since the first East Indian immigrants came to this country from Calcutta.
>
> The 237 East Indians who first graced these shores sparked off an entirely new era in the cultural, sociological and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago.
>
> In the years that followed, 143,000 East Indians would bring to this land, a wealth of cultural knowledge and a rich religious tradition that has helped to make this country the truly multi-cultural nation that it is.
>
> The People's National Movement believes that the difficulties of the early immigrants have not been given the attention and focus that is due and we do not believe they should be glossed over as has been done in the past."

4.20 p.m.

> "It is part of our history and we strive to forge an understanding of all cultural forms in Trinidad and Tobago. It is incumbent on all our peoples to learn the experiences of each other.

> Records show that the passage to the West Indies was fraught with hardships including widespread disease which resulted in a high mortality rate. On one occasion, in June, 1859, the vessel 'Shah Jehan' caught on fire and 300 persons were killed. On their arrival they were faced with a strange environment and with a language and customs that were alien to their culture."

He continued:

> "The lack of understanding at the time caused them to be shunned and removed from their own system of education with no understanding of their ways, they were branded 'strange people with a low literacy rate'. That the East Indian survived the trials and hardships of the early days in Trinidad and Tobago, while holding fast to their traditions and culture, tells much about the resilience that is the Indian personality."

Madam Speaker, he goes on:

> "Much of this resilience is due to the strong influence of religion which is at the core of Indian cultural life. The religious traditions have withstood the passage of time and has resulted in a strong, vibrant community whose ideals and mores have penetrated the community as a whole. Indian festivals, Indian food and Indian music are very much a part of the entire culture in Trinidad and Tobago.
>
> The contribution of the East Indian to Trinidad and Tobago goes beyond the cultural infusions. The economic development of Trinidad and Tobago owes a great deal to the Indian population and cannot be understood.
>
> It began with their arrival as part of an indentureship plan to give a new lease on life to the dying sugar industry. In the years that followed, sugar production quadrupled, thus saving the industry and today the Indian is still the backbone of the sugar industry."

The Member continued:

> "The observation of May 30..."

Mr. Sobion: Madam Speaker, I wonder if the hon. Member can repeat the last paragraph he just quoted, please? I think I missed something there.

Madam Speaker: The last paragraph of what?

Mr. Sobion: The last paragraph of the article from which the Member is quoting.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Madam Speaker:

> "The contribution of the East Indian to Trinidad and Tobago goes beyond the cultural infusions. The economic development of Trinidad and Tobago owes a great deal to the Indian population and cannot be understated."

Hon. Members: That is better.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Madam Speaker, I am sorry for that mistake.

> "It began with their arrival as part of an indentureship plan to give a new lease on life to the dying sugar industry. In the years that followed, sugar production quadrupled, thus saving the industry and today the Indian is still the backbone of the sugar industry."

Madam Speaker, I would continue at the point where the Member closed in this article by stating that:

> "The observation of May 30th must be viewed as one of the most important days in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. It is the day on which we celebrate the arrival of East Indians to this country, but it is also a day on which we reflect on the multi-cultural nature of our beloved country and the diverse elements that have strived together to make this land the unique and wonderful country that it is."

I wonder if the Attorney General would like me to repeat this paragraph? *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Sobion: Who said that?

Dr. Rowley: Who said all of that?

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Madam Speaker, if the Government is so convinced why is there the need for a committee? Why can we not now take the vote and approve it! *[Desk thumping]* Does the Government want to do that? *[Desk thumping]* Let us put it to a vote and the matter will be settled. The Government seems to be so convinced and if that is so, and this seems to be the banner headline of the deepest conviction portrayed by its leader, why, for heaven's sake, does it not get along with its recognition and stop the procrastination or the process of procedures?

Mr. Sobion: Madam Speaker, I wonder whether the Member for Caroni Central—*[Interruption]* The Minister of Religion—would tell the House whether

the appointment of committees is an attempt to procrastinate in the work of the Parliament?

Mr. Maharaj: In this case.

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Madam Speaker, let me deal with the Attorney General even-handedly. If the Attorney General has any knowledge of committee work he would know that committees, especially when they are over-staffed—I can call it that—with people of a particular thinking, they can stultify whatever needs to be done.

Committees have two functions. Basically, one of the functions is to do the work that the plenary body does not want to do. Secondly, the committee can also bring reports that are inconclusive. The Attorney General knows that! If he does not know that, he has not studied May's, neither Roberts' Rules of Order!

Mr. Sobion: Madam Speaker, I would like the hon. Member for Caroni Central to answer the question specifically. Is he saying that committees of Parliament, as they are now, cannot work?

Mr. Maharaj: Generally, no, but yes in this case!

Mr. R. Palackdharrysingh: Madam Speaker, I wonder if the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro believes that I am a greenhorn in this Parliament? *[Laughter]*

Madam Speaker: I do not think the Member would dare to think so, hon. Member. *[Laughter]*

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, if you are going to take the tea break, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, December 14, 1994 at 1.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker: There is a Motion on the Adjournment. The Member has 15 minutes to finish his contribution, then do the adjournment of the House followed by the Motion on the Adjournment.

Hon. K. Valley: Madam Speaker, in consultation with the Chief Whip, we agreed that we would adjourn at 4.30 p.m. I am sure the Member wants to

continue in the vein that he is going on the next Private Members' Day. I understand that the Motion on the Adjournment is in the name of the Member for Nariva, so I would ask him, very kindly, that we defer it to next Wednesday.

Mr. Jurai: No problem, Madam Speaker.

Hon. K. Valley: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.30 p.m.