

Leave of Absence

Friday, December 10, 2004

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, December 10, 2004

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House: Mr. Gerald Yetming, Member of Parliament for St. Joseph and Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, Member of Parliament for Arouca South. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PESTICIDES AND TOXIC CHEMICALS (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL

Bill to amend the Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Act, 1979, brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Health*]; read the first time.

FOOD AND DRUGS (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL

Bill to amend the Food and Drugs Act, Chap. 30:01, brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Health*]; read the first time.

DEFINITE URGENT MATTERS

(LEAVE)

**Trinidad and Tobago Nationals in Grenada
(Working Conditions of)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing the following matter as a definite matter of urgent public importance; namely, the horrific working conditions provided to Trinidad and Tobago nationals deployed to Grenada to provide emergency relief and infrastructural assistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan.

The matter is definite, since it refers to the incompetence of state agencies to monitor and manage relief operations in Grenada and their dismal failure to ensure the provision of decent working and living conditions for workers of Trinidad and Tobago.

T & T Nationals in Grenada
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, December 10, 2004

The matter is urgent since Trinidad and Tobago continues its contribution to the relief efforts amid growing evidence of the denial of fundamental human and labour rights resulting from the unsatisfactory conditions in the camps occupied by Trinidad and Tobago nationals.

The matter is of public importance since this revelation suggests that the Government has been a party to the violation of international labour conventions dealing with the absolute necessity to provide decent working conditions, the elimination of forced labour and the provision of health and social services for migrant workers. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the leave which the hon. Member for Oropouche seeks is denied. May I suggest that you refer to Standing Order No. 11(2) and (3).

**Persistent Flooding
(Central Trinidad)**

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Mr. Speaker, I hereby seek your leave under Standing Order No. 12 of the House of Representatives to move the Adjournment of the House today to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance; namely, the persistent flooding in several parts of central Trinidad including Caparo, Mamoral, Todd's Road, Palmiste, Las Lomas and surrounding areas, and the failure of the Government to deal effectively with it.

The matter is definite since it deals with the damage and destruction caused by persistent flooding in Caparo, Todd's Road, Mamoral and surrounding areas. Severe flooding has occurred twice this week alone, and after I wrote this, another flooding has occurred so that makes it three times this week.

The matter is urgent since thousands of residents have lost household appliances, food crops and livestock valued hundreds of thousands of dollars. In addition, there has been substantial damage to several homes. Since the residents have already been affected by five major floods this year, including two this week, another one can have devastating consequences if remedial measures are not put in place immediately.

The matter is of public importance since damage and destruction of homes, household items, livestock and food crops put severe hardships on the residents of the affected areas. In addition, when flooding occurs, residents are unable to get to their homes since the roads are impassable thus putting themselves, their homes and their property at further risk.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the leave which the hon. Member for Caroni Central seeks is denied. May I refer you, hon. Member, to Standing Order No. 11 subsections (2) and (3) and also Standing Order Nos. 23 and 24.

SHIPPING (MARINE POLLUTION) (NO. 2) BILL

Bill to provide for powers and jurisdiction in relation to pollution of the seas from ships, intervention on the high seas in cases of oil pollution, dumping of wastes at sea, prevention of pollution from ships, preparedness and response for oil pollution emergencies, liability and compensation for pollution damage and matters incidental thereto [*The Minister of Works and Transport*]; read the first time.

**ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES
(HEADQUARTERS) BILL**

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Knowlson Gift): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to provide for the implementation by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago of certain of the provisions of the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Association of Caribbean States on the Headquarters of the Association of Caribbean States and its privileges and immunities, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of this Bill is to make legislative provisions for those aspects of the Headquarters Agreement concluded between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Association of Caribbean States on August 27, 1997, hereinafter referred to as the Headquarters Agreement which need to be given the force of law in Trinidad and Tobago in order to be effective.

The purpose of this measure, therefore, is to affirm the conferment of the Association of Caribbean States, hereinafter referred to as the ACS, and its office of certain privileges and immunities which Trinidad and Tobago has traditionally granted to international and regional organizations operating locally.

These privileges and immunities are based on the international law and practices on the subject and on our legislation which gives domestic legal effect to those treaty-based international norms like the Headquarters Agreement, in addition to granting to the ACS certain facilities, for example broadcasting, which are not normally granted to international intergovernmental organizations.

Also in recognition of the fact that the organization and its officers enjoy privileges and immunities which place them in a privileged position in their dealings with natural and legal persons in Trinidad and Tobago, the Headquarters Agreement provides for certain obligations to be assumed by the organization for the benefit of those nationals of Trinidad and Tobago who are either employed with, provide services to, or otherwise come into contact with the organization and its officers.

Why is this Bill necessary? There are several provisions in the ACS Headquarters Agreement which depart from the provisions usually found in Headquarters Agreement concluded between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and not catered for in the Privileges and Immunities (Diplomatic, Consular and International Organizations) Act, Chap. 17:01 of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, hereinafter referred to as the Act.

These provisions are to be found in the following Articles of the Headquarters Agreement:

- (a) Article 3
- (b) Article 5, paragraphs 1 and 2
- (c) Article 10, paragraphs 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7.
- (d) Article 11
- (e) Article 15, paragraph 1
- (f) Article 23, paragraphs 1 to 3
- (g) Article 24
- (h) Article 25
- (i) Article 26
- (j) Article 33
- (k) Article 34, paragraph 2
- (l) Article 38, paragraph 1

The main provision of the Bill can be found in the various definitions. Clause 2 defines the terms “Association”, “Government”, “Headquarters”, “Headquarters Agreement” and “Minister” used in the Bill.

Clause 3 provides that the cost of Trinidad and Tobago’s obligation under the Headquarters Agreement would be a charge on the Consolidated Fund. Subclause

(2) provides that any sums received by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago from the Association shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Clause 4 enumerates the particular provisions in the Headquarters Agreement that will have the force of law in Trinidad and Tobago.

Clause 5 will facilitate the entry into, residence in and departure from Trinidad and Tobago of the diplomatic staff and other personnel mentioned in Article 17 of the Headquarters Agreement.

Clause 6 would permit the Minister with responsibility for foreign affairs, by Order, to amend the Schedule to the enactment so as to incorporate any amendments to the Headquarters Agreement which are set out in the Schedule.

We shall now look at the special status of the ACS in Trinidad and Tobago. It was established on July 24, 1994, at the Cartagena Convention. The convention was in fact signed in Cartagena, Colombia by 25 independent states of the Caribbean and by France on behalf of the French territories of Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana.

In addition to the dependencies of France already mentioned, there are 10 non-independent territories which are eligible for associate membership of the ACS.

The purposes of the Association are:

- To identify and promote the implementation of policies and programmes designed to harness, utilize and develop the collective capabilities of the Caribbean region.
- To achieve sustained cultural, economic, social, scientific and technological advancement.
- To develop the potential of the Caribbean Sea through interaction among member states and with third parties.
- To promote and enhance economic space for trade and investment with opportunities for cooperation in order to increase the benefits which accrue to the people of the Caribbean from their resources and assets including the Caribbean Sea.
- To establish, consolidate and augment as appropriate, institutional structures and cooperative arrangements responsive to the various cultural identities, developmental needs and systems within the region.

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[SEN. THE HON. K. GIFT]

Friday, December 10, 2004

Mr. Speaker, the Bill is a simple one which seeks to confer on the ACS only those privileges and immunities which are already provided for in the Privileges and Immunities (Diplomatic, Consular and International Organizations) Act, Chap. 17:01, and which had been granted in the past to other regional and international organizations.

In addition, in recognition of its unique position as the only inter-governmental organization that is headquartered in Trinidad and Tobago, it provides some additional facilities to permit the ACS to effectively discharge its mandate to the Government and people of the Caribbean region.

The Bill gives the force of law in Trinidad and Tobago to particular provisions such as those contained in Article 33, Article 34, paragraph 2, and Article 38, paragraph 1, which are intended to afford protection to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago who have dealings with the organization as it executes its functions as set out in the Cartagena Convention.

The provisions of the Headquarters Agreement will have the force of law in Trinidad and Tobago. Article 3 of the Headquarters Agreement stipulates that the ACS shall have international, legal personality and such legal capacity as may be necessary for the exercise of its functions and the fulfilment of its purpose. The organization, therefore, has the capacity to contract, acquire and dispose of movable and immovable property and to be a party to legal proceedings.

Article 5, paragraphs 1 and 2, recognizes the viability of the Headquarters of the ACS in conformity with clause 2 of Part 1 of the Fifth Schedule to the Act, which accords to the ACS immunity from suit and legal process. It also recognizes the inviolability of the official archives and premises and grants exemption to and relief from certain rates and taxes.

Article 10, paragraphs 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7, concerns the inviolability of all communications and correspondence directed to the Association or the officials in the headquarters, the right to use codes and diplomatic bags and subject to the applicability communications and regulations, the right to establish and operate at the headquarters, shortwave sending and receiving radio broadcasting facilities.

Article 11 recognizes the right, subject to the laws relating to publication and broadcasting of the Association, freely to publish and broadcast within Trinidad and Tobago.

Article 14 recognizes the immunity from legal process of the Association in conformity with clause 1 of Part 1 of the Fifth Schedule to the Act.

Article 15, paragraph 1, recognizes the exemption from taxation of the Association, its assets and property, its income and its operations and transactions in conformity with clauses 3 and 4 of Part 1 of the Fifth Schedule to the Act.

Article 23, paragraphs 1 to 3, provides for the grant of privileges and immunities including immunity from personal arrest or detention of representatives of member states, associate members and observers of the organization in conformity with clause 1 of Part II of the Fifth Schedule to the Act.

Articles 24, 25 and 26 provide for the grant of privileges and immunities for officials of the Association, additional privileges and immunities to the Secretary General and high level officials designated by the ministerial council of the Association and experts.

The immunities provided to the officials and experts are functional in character and are in conformity with Part III of the Fifth Schedule to the Act.

Article 26, in keeping with Parts II and IV of the Fifth Schedule to the Act, grants to the Secretary General and other specified senior officers of the Association, their staff and families similar immunities from suit and legal process, inviolability of residences and the relief from taxes as are granted to a diplomat accredited to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, significantly, in recognition of the special position of the ACS, and in order to keep the financial contribution of member states within manageable levels, Article 24, 1(d) also exempts nationals employed by the organization from taxation in respect of salaries and emoluments paid on or any other forms of payment made by the Association.

Article 33 exempts the Association from compulsory contributions to the National Insurance Scheme of Trinidad and Tobago and requires it to arrange for the participation in the said National Insurance Scheme of those locally recruited members of staff to whom the Association does not grant social security protection at least equivalent to that offered under the laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

Article 34, paragraph 2, requires the Association without prejudice to its immunities, to carry insurance to cover liability for any injury or damage arising from activities of the Association in Trinidad and Tobago, or from its use of the Headquarters that may be suffered by persons other than the officials of the Association, or by the Government.

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[SEN. THE HON. K. GIFT]

Friday, December 10, 2004

Article 38, paragraph 1, requires the Association to make suitable provisions for the proper settlement of:

- “(a) Disputes arising out of contracts, or disputes of a private law character to which the Association is a party; and
- (b) Disputes involving an official of the Association or any person who by reason of his official position enjoys immunity, if such immunity has not been waived.”

Section 6 of the Order, in conformity with Part III of the Fifth Schedule to the Act, restricts the immunities of those officers and servants not covered in section 5 in the Order to things done or omitted to be done in the course of the performance of official duties, and it limits their privileges to an exemption from income tax in respect of emoluments received as an officer or servant of the ACS.

Mr. Speaker, it also makes it clear that residents of Trinidad and Tobago in consonance with clause 1 of Part III of the Fifth Schedule to the Act only enjoy immunity from suit and legal process in respect of omissions or things done in the course of official duties.

In conclusion, the idea for the creation of the ACS had its genesis in the report of the West Indian Commission which was established at the Caricom Heads of Governments in 1989. The Commission’s report addressed the integration experience in Caricom and sought to project the movement into the 21st Century. I should point out that the Association of Caribbean States represents a market of two hundred million persons and an aggregate gross domestic product in excess of US \$500 billion.

Trinidad and Tobago campaigned vigorously and successfully for selection of the site for the Headquarters of the Association of Caribbean States. As a member possessing one of the most industrialized and diversified economies in the region, this country is in a position to benefit economically, politically and diplomatically from acting as host of the Headquarters of the Association of Caribbean States.

The maximization of those benefits is, of course, dependent on the extent to which members and associate members achieve the goals of cooperation and integration which underpin the formation of this Association. Tangible progress has been achieved in elaborating multilateral agreements on air transport and sustainable tourism development, and attention is now being focused on greater and deeper cooperation in train.

Mr. Speaker, the new reality of globalization of the international economy, widening and deepening of integration movements, and the progressive

liberalization of regional and international trade is propelling us in but one direction, closer cooperation and deeper integration.

Mr. Speaker, having promoted actively the establishment of the ACS, having sought the site for the headquarters of this grouping, and being conscious that the dynamics of the international economic environment require us to associate and cooperate with likeminded and similarly situated states and territories, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago intends to do its part to facilitate success by helping to put in place the physical, institutional and legal infrastructure required for the ACS to achieve the goal set for it.

Though a bit delayed, this Bill is part of the process we have already begun. I, therefore, unhesitatingly recommend that honourable Members of this House support this Bill to provide for the implementation by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago of certain of the provisions of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Association of Caribbean States on the Headquarters of the Association of Caribbean States and its privileges and immunities.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche*): Mr. Speaker, the Bill before us is one measure in a small package of foreign policy measures before the House at this time. It is one that deals with issues of regionalism, integration and cooperation, not only in the Caribbean sub-region, but in the hemisphere as well.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to note from the beginning that several of these measures before us now dealing with foreign policy are really not measures that are propelled by urgent internal, social and political needs, but really commitments that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and indeed the people would have to regional and international institutions.

Of the several measures before the House, we are asked to provide support so that Trinidad and Tobago will be consistent with its commitment to international and regional institutions and so on and will sign and pass the relevant legislation in time so that our country will indeed look good at the next meeting when it is reported that the national Parliament would have met, considered and passed legislation.

It is important to state initially that several of these bills before us really will not impact upon the lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago today who are suffering from flood damage, and who are the victims of crime. These measures are not designed to bring relief in the next 48 hours or so, notwithstanding they are neither unimportant nor simple matters at all. By this measure the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will confer upon the staff and other officials at the Association of Caribbean States certain privileges and immunities extended and accorded to diplomats and representatives of member countries in the main.

At first sight, it is interesting to know that in Article 6, the Bill addresses the issue of protection of the Headquarters of the Association of Caribbean States.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Association requires the Government to provide adequate protection to its headquarters, and at first reading you would permit a chuckle, if not a full round of laughter, that the Government is now seeking to get the force of law to protect the headquarters of the ACS, while this Government cannot protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It cannot deal with its own crime problem, whether it is kidnapping, murder, bandits and so on, but we will now bring into law our commitment, by law, to protect the officials and diplomats associated with the Association of the Caribbean States. That is the first paradox, really, that you find.

So that the diplomats will now be entitled to protection by competent authorities; by the police service, the army, the military personnel and so on. So as of this day, assuming this measure is approved, the diplomats at the Association of Caribbean States expect to be safer than us, and this is really the level of governance, the level of responsibility, we have.

This debate also takes place during one of the most depressing weeks in the history of this country. I want to say that it is, indeed, a depressing time to be a Member of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago, for several reasons, but I would focus on one only. It is a time when, on a daily basis, we meet our constituents who are the victims of damage arising from floods, of allegations of discrimination and actions and so on, and it is becoming more and more depressing to seek to represent people and deal with a government that appears to be numb to the plight of citizens of this country.

Hon. Member: And who face a bleak Christmas because of retrenchment.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Of course; the retrenchment, the flooding, and so on, all

within the festive season. It is depressing, but I am reminded of a quotation I read just this week from the President of Nigeria, who is also the head of the African Union, Olusegun Obasanjo. Speaking at the anti-poverty summit in Bukina Faso, the President of Nigeria, reflecting on the grim social and economic development in Africa, reflecting on a continent that is now overrun by malaria, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, where you have had an abuse of aid, and so on, said:

“This is an embarrassing score-card for a continent so richly endowed.”

I thought this quotation would be quite apt, quite relevant, to Trinidad and Tobago. This is a country, after all, where private citizens now donate police cars, where hospitals do not have beds; we have flood waters rising like in Bangladesh; where fire hydrants do not have water amid the floods; citizens begging the Government to bury their loved ones, and if you are in a vehicle in Claxton Bay, you cannot talk on a mobile phone to anybody in San Fernando, and I remembered the President of Nigeria: “This is an embarrassing score-card for a country so richly endowed.”

This is the state we have reached. Today we are here to discuss the matter dealing with the Association of Caribbean States, integration and cooperation. I would quickly connect the crisis of flooding to the Bill, since I may be in fear of being ruled offside and irrelevant. But it will surprise no one that the Association of Caribbean States has, as one of its key mandates, the promotion of programmes in the Caribbean area to deal with natural disasters, to deal with hurricanes, earthquake and flooding. So let me just draw that line quickly. [*Interruption*] The Member for Caroni Central could pass his notes to me.

The Association of Caribbean States is first a cooperation as opposed to an integration movement and for the benefit of my friends on the other side—they may not have a good knowledge of Caricom, the Association of Caribbean States, Free Trade of the Americas, and so on, outside of the Member for Diego Martin Central, who is well versed in this area; a consultant who was selling planes in the early '90s—I do not think other Members may know there are several differences between Caricom and the Association of Caribbean States—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Valley: The Member is misrepresenting me. I have never sold a plane.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Dr. R. Moonilal: So you mean you gave it away?

Mr. Speaker, let us quickly put this matter into perspective. The Association of Caribbean States deals with cooperation along several lines; cooperation as it relates to regional transport, to developing what is referred to as a sustainable tourism sector. The ACS deals, of course, with research and development. Caricom is mainly English-speaking, as we all know, with 15 members with approximately 13 million people, but if you exclude Haiti and Jamaica, you get a smaller number. The ACS represents the greater Caribbean, with 25 members, three associate members and 237 million people, more than the 200 million referred to earlier.

Caricom is about integration; the ACS is about cooperation. Caricom, of course, aims at a single market and economy; the ACS is a zone of cooperation with its current focus on trade, transport, tourism, natural disasters, and so on, in the greater Caribbean. The ACS spends its time liaising with foreign observer organizations, member-states, promoting its budget and work programmes, strategic planning, et cetera. So that is a big difference there between the Association of Caribbean States and the Caricom. The numbers are also interesting, the Caricom with a population of 13 million and the ACS with a population of 237 million. That is a very huge difference.

It may be high time, as well, that the Government consider—given the colossal failure of the Ministry of Works and Transport and, indeed, the failure of the incumbent Minister of Works and Transport—stronger collaboration with the Association of Caribbean States to deal with the crisis of flooding in Trinidad and Tobago. It is amusing and tragic that Trinidad and Tobago would be the headquarters of this organization that deals with disasters and post-disaster management, and so on, in a country where the Government is accused on a daily basis of incompetence in dealing with disasters and, in fact, of facilitating disasters.

The first line of cooperation the Government should establish is to work with the ACS to try and come to terms with this crisis of flooding. I was appalled earlier in the week when on the front page of a national newspaper, I saw young people, school children, up to their waist in water. I thought it was in Bangladesh. I could not believe it was Trinidad and Tobago. The ACS, as the Minister indicated in his presentation, is also concerned with cooperation and integration and seeks to promote education and business facilitation. Just recently the ACS hosted a major business forum in the Dominican Republic, and so on. But what is missing in the region is some type of cooperation between all of these organizations.

It is interesting to know who is the Secretary-General of the ACS. He is, of course, an outstanding scholar from the Dominican Republic. The new Secretary General who replaced Prof. Norman Girvan is from the Dominican Republic, Prof. Valdez. Incidentally, the Dominican Republic rejected the offer of the Member for Diego Martin Central and gave its support to Miami as the headquarters of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. But the Dominican Republic gave its support to Miami only a few days after the Trinidad and Tobago Government led a mission to the Dominican Republic to promote its campaign for the FTAA headquarters. The mission included the Member for San Fernando West, the distinguished Minister in the Ministry of Trade and Industry. I told them before if they stay away from people's country, we may quicker get the headquarters. The problem here is when they know you. If they do not know you, you have a chance.

So they went to the Dominican Republic. I would like to ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs and, indeed, the Member for Diego Martin Central, to outline to us when they make their contribution on this measure, or wind up the debate, whether or not the Government of Trinidad and Tobago made its case to member states of the Association of Caribbean States to promote our campaign to headquarter the secretariat of the FTAA. That, to us, would seem to be a logical approach. We have the Association of Caribbean States in Port of Spain, 25 members; 237 million people. We are now seeking to get the FTAA headquarters—whether or not we used that channel that was available, rather than run helter-skelter up and down the hemisphere, chasing people down to get support and as soon as we take the plane and leave their country, they support somebody else.

Guatemala is a member of the Association of Caribbean States. Just a couple days ago, on December 6—very up-to-date information—the President of Guatemala, His Excellency Oscar Berger, announced his endorsement of Miami as the location of the permanent secretariat of the Free Trade Area of the Americas. So Guatemala gone! I want to quote the President of Guatemala. He says:

“Naturally, Miami is the perfect location for the FTAA Permanent Secretariat’...‘Miami enjoys the infrastructure, workforce and ideal geographic location to host the Secretariat of the FTAA. I am honored to join Governor Bush to announce our support...”

So Guatemala gone! And, of course, Florida Governor is Jeb Bush, the brother of the American President.

The response, in the context of foreign policy of the Trinidad and Tobago Government, has been outrageous, bordering on imbecilic. The Government has taken an approach which we are now picking up, and you need to read through the lines. I want to ask the Members on the other side: Is it our policy in securing the Free Trade Area of the Americas headquarters, that we can bully the American government; that we can threaten the United States of America? Because it is being said, both formally and informally. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, 48 hours ago, spoke in Miami and it is important for us to reflect on what the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago had to say, and I quote:

“...‘whether as the result of the loss of preferential markets or the fallout from natural disasters’...”

Trinidad and Tobago was ideal to host the FTAA.):

“‘The issue of security ranges from the need for affordable, regular and reliable energy supplies to the necessity for support in the battle against narco-trafficking and related organized and violent crimes’...”

The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago tells the United States that the United States would be living in a fool’s paradise if it expected greater security in the region without assisting in the development of smaller Caribbean States. The Prime Minister seems to be suggesting to the United States—and other speakers on the other side—that we have some control over what they refer to as their third border—not Mexico, not Canada, but the Caribbean Sea as a border. “And if you do not give us that FTAA headquarters, we can unleash the criminals and drug barons on you”.

Hon. Member: The Godfather of the Caribbean!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Is this the godfather of the Caribbean becoming the Don of the Caribbean? It appears that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago intends to threaten the Bush family: Governor Bush in Florida, and the American administration. As if to suggest that if they do not support our bid, that we have some control in the Caribbean Sea and we can send—a few centuries ago it may have been pirates, but today we can send the drug barons and the criminal elements, and we can take criminal control of the eastern seaboard of the United States.

This is the approach that you are reading through the lines. We are important for American security, not just in the context of crime, but energy. They are telling the American government that Trinidad and Tobago, I believe, is the

second largest supplier of natural gas to the United States—the first—and we supply energy to the United States, so that “you should give us the FTAA headquarters, otherwise”. This is an important matter that the Government and the people may want to reflect on. Whatever people may think of President George W. Bush, he is a man of enormous resolve, as the world has seen, and it may not be the best policy to be threatening the American administration or the State of Florida.

Another matter related to this Bill, and the issue of cooperation in the region, is to what extent the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will sacrifice bilateral arrangements for their own hare-brained and madcap plans in the southern Caribbean? We noted a few days ago—and it was said in the House—that Trinidad and Tobago must seek a much more dynamic and proactive foreign policy that seeks to interface with the multiplicity of significant alliances that are being developed all over the hemisphere. Whether it is the FTAA, the Association of Caribbean States, the Mercusor, and so on, Trinidad and Tobago must seek to be a party to, particularly arrangements that expose our country to huge markets for our business community and so on.

We noted at another time that while the Government, and particularly the Prime Minister, was obsessed with this southern Caribbean union—and he was the only one obsessed with the southern Caribbean union—other countries were looking at the world. I said in this House that China and India would emerge as major players in the early part of this century, and it is in Trinidad and Tobago's interest, given our level of prosperity and the capacity of our private sector, and so on, to establish relationships in China and deepen our relationship with India, given where those countries are now positioning themselves. Of course, Members on the other side may not have understood that, and some who understood, chose to laugh at that, because they are concerned with deepening that process with Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, whose Prime Minister, we must note, has not visited since the last speech. But he might be here and we do not know.

Just this week we learnt in the *Caribbean Times*, December 08—a couple days ago—“Jamaica to open Embassy in Beijing”. Jamaica is now leading the way by providing a vision and a proactive approach to trade and to promoting their business community, while we—I think we cut a deal on energy to supply gas at a preferred price.

I want to quote:

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, December 10, 2004

“Jamaica plans to open an embassy in Beijing...signaling a deepening of ties between the island and China.”

The Caribbean island takes the opportunity to deepen ties and hopefully attract investment from the Far East manufacturing giant.

“The embassy’s main purpose will be to increase trade and investment, Foreign Affairs spokesman...said.”

This is Jamaica on the move. Of course, not to be outdone we have a mission in India that organized a fete and then printed a booklet to show how successful the fete was. While Jamaica is looking at a manufacturing giant, we are looking at a section of “Poison”. That is what the head of the diplomatic mission in India is doing. That is our achievement. That is the news from Jamaica, while Trinidad and Tobago is talking about Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Just this week in the Jamaican Parliament, for those of you who follow regional affairs and debates in other parliaments, and so on—a late night sitting of the House, I think it was; Tuesday night—they were debating a matter involving Caricom and the single market and economy—I think it was a matter we also debated—and the Jamaican government was forced to take a position in the Parliament to announce that while they support the CSME, they will not be part of any political union. They wanted to renew their position and they stated that they are providing for the establishment of the CSME, and so on, but that does not mean political union.

Incidentally, when the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago first announced this madcap plan, the two prime ministers who spoke on that occasion were Prime Ministers Arthur and P.J. Patterson, and both indicated that would have been the plan for the Member for San Fernando East, but in no way reflects their views. But notice what is happening in the region. Jamaica, moving to China, indicating clearly that they are not going to be part of any political union, and so on; Trinidad and Tobago’s Prime Minister preoccupied with Grenada and St. Vincent, while moves are afoot in other parts of the hemisphere.

The Association of Caribbean States, which includes several states in South America—I do not want to read out the full 25 members of the ACS—do you know what happened just a couple days ago again—we have some up-to-date news here—12 South American countries signed a declaration—this was on Wednesday—creating a political and economic bloc they hope would put them on a more equal footing with the United States and Europe, led by the Presidents of Peru and Venezuela. They have embarked upon an initiative to create the largest

economic and political bloc in the hemisphere, larger than the United States. A powerful regional alliance, is how they described it.

They declared their commitment to principles creating a South American community of nations. They advised that over the last 30 years “we have sought a Latin America with the capacity for effective international action and we are creating a Latin America that will be fortified”.

I just want to draw the attention of the House to two countries that participated in those discussions and signed the declaration: Guyana and Suriname, members of Caricom, involved with South American leaders to sign a declaration to create the largest economic and political bloc. They are pursuing their national interest. They see this economic bloc as consistent with the national interest of Suriname and Guyana.

Jamaica gone to China, pursuing its national interest. Who is pursuing the national interest of Trinidad and Tobago, and what is the national interest as they define it? A political union—and we have said time and time again, we are not against political union. In fact, of course we expect to have a lively debate on it. Several of us may or may not be against that, but when you look at the small region of Caricom and the even smaller southern Caribbean region that the Prime Minister intends to look at, you will understand the vision of Suriname, Guyana and Jamaica and the lack of vision of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, South America, on the way; Jamaica on the way; Trinidad and Tobago, still harbouring pleasurable thoughts of hosting the FTAA. As every day goes by, one country would support Miami. But we must ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Trade and Industry, whether or not they are prepared to table in the Parliament, Trinidad and Tobago’s proposals to host the FTAA. We understand that the proposal was all of 12 pages—it should not be too hard to copy that—while other countries made very detailed, comprehensive and professional bids.

Mr. B. Panday: We submitted a brown bag.

Dr. R. Moonilal: That was a brown bag proposal. That is the approach, and we would ask the Minister and the Government at their earliest convenience, to lay in the Parliament the document which is our proposal to secure the headquarters of the Free Trade Areas of the Americas, and when you look at that, it may explain why Dominican Republic, Guatemala and others will support Miami.

The Association of Caribbean States promotes actively, cooperation within the region to deal with several social and employment areas. In fact, the ACS is now funding a project on the promotion of employment in small and medium-sized enterprises. This is an opportune moment for the Government to report to what extent the people of Trinidad and Tobago have benefited by hosting the ACS in Trinidad and Tobago, and the distribution of projects and development assistance to Trinidad and Tobago. This is an opportune moment, established by the treaty in 1994, established in Trinidad and Tobago, I think, in 1996, if I am not mistaken, and there are several reports. But it is important to state the benefits accruing to Trinidad and Tobago by hosting the ACS, in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly as it relates to aid and development assistance, institutional strengthening and capacity building throughout the social sector and, indeed, throughout the Government service as well. It is a moment to report on that.

Another matter occupying the foreign policy agenda is the matter of support to Caricom territories, and so on. The ACS, of course, is committed to a particular cooperative approach. Caricom is committed to an integration approach. Trinidad and Tobago is also committed—and the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago has repeated his commitment in Miami—to supplying aid and development assistance to Caricom. But our supply of development assistance to Caricom is CEPEP. Just a couple days ago, we read in the newspaper of inhumane conditions, of violation of rights of workers in Grenada, and the provision of emergency relief, whether it is in goods or service, is a foreign policy issue.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, had we developed a Ministry of Development Corporation in Trinidad and Tobago, the ministry would have been dealing with the provision of development assistance aid in goods and services and so on. We do not have that. What we have, really, is a head of a state agency running up and down between Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada and setting up camp. The provision of labour, technical support and infrastructure development is a foreign policy issue.

We read in the newspaper of the investigation into the most horrific labour and human rights condition that citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have experienced in Grenada. We are calling for a full-scale investigation into the violation of human and labour rights in Grenada that will include the political opposition. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we do not want an investigation where you pull your partner out of a hat—somebody who is looking for an end somewhere, a little change—you put him to head a committee to investigate.

There must be an independent investigation into the abuse of workers and their human rights in Grenada. Mr. Speaker, there must be no conflict of interest! We cannot have an organization or individual being paid by the Executive, to investigate an arm of the Executive, and to investigate an agency of the State while that person is being paid by the State on other matters, as has happened quite recently. The political opposition should be part of any fact-finding investigation into those abusers in Grenada, where citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are crying at Christmas time; they have made certain commitments and they are living under conditions of forced labour, “slavery-like” was the term used.

Mr. Speaker, this is happening in the contemporary Caribbean. This is not two or three hundred years ago. The pictures were dramatic! It was really like a camp which was the scene in Eastern Europe a decade or so ago. The Government is presiding over this situation. Mr. Speaker, an investigation should include not only the political opposition but the NGO movement and representatives from the trade union movement because it involves workers’ rights. Will they do that? No! But they stand and boast that the gangs are coming home for Christmas. In the United States the President would announce that the troops are coming home, but here they announced with pride that the gangs are coming home for Christmas and will leave again for Grenada. The workers were promised an allowance but now the Government officials say they do not know anything about an allowance. Mr. Speaker, that is the sorry state of foreign affairs in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the state at which they operate.

On the matter of security, another key area is regional security. It is felt that one of the pillars of regional integration must be regional security. In fact, the factor that is driving the process of integration is security. When the Prime Minister announced his plan for a Southern Caribbean Union he did so in the context of security. I remember the Prime Minister saying at the Caricom Heads of Government meeting that Trinidad and Tobago had certain capacity in the area of security; radar and so on. Other islands did not have that and it was important to get them on stream because they would require assistance. The Prime Minister announced that that was fueling his desire to have Southern Caribbean regional integration. He did not announce the economics at that time. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has also backpedalled. I am sure that you would not be surprised to know that the Prime Minister had another flip-flop experience there. On November 08, the Prime Minister said to the Caricom Heads of Government, and I quote:

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, December 10, 2004

“...a clear case seems to emerge for greater and speedier integration of the southern Caribbean. This is the direction and approach the Government of Trinidad and Tobago perceives as necessary, and we shall be working assiduously to achieve what is required in this regard.”

Now that is conclusive. This is the position of the Prime Minister. He has determined and concluded. Mr. Speaker, when he faced public outcry from the newspapers, the press, citizens and the Opposition at the 39th Annual Convention, this is what he said:

“The people of this country must determine if moves to advance deeper political integration with Grenada and St. Vincent should be pursued.”

Mr. Speaker, that was 10 days later after articulating his clear policy approach of his government that, he is moving “assiduously to achieve...” He then said, “Hold on, the people would decide on this thing.” But his government had decided already! Normally a government would decide on a fundamental matter as this after hearing from the people. But according to the Prime Minister—I have read both quotations and I challenge anybody on the other side to correct me, if the quotation is wrong. He indicated first—*[Interruption]* Do you want me to read it again?

Mr. Valley: Yes, read it again.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The quotation from the Caricom Heads of Government Meeting:

“...clear case seems to emerge for greater and speedier integration of the southern Caribbean. This is the direction and approach that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago perceives as necessary, and we shall be working assiduously to achieve what is required in this regard.”

Mr. Valley: *[Inaudible]*

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Trade and Minister in the Ministry of Finance has just clarified this issue. We now understand. The Prime Minister outlined the Government’s position as he regarded it as being important. He meant that although this was our position and we would be working in this regard we need to convince people that that is the right position.

Mr. B. Panday: Why do you not hold a referendum?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to dwell too much on this matter, but that was the flip-flop.

Mr. Speaker, on the matter of regional security, while we are doing our best to provide security to diplomatic missions and the headquarters of the ACS we still have outstanding the matter of the regional security machinery, that is the task force established to look at regional security within Caricom and to ask certain important questions: To what extent have several of the Southern Caribbean territories taken meaningful action to upgrade their security installations both in terms of manpower and information technology? Otherwise, Mr. Speaker, they would say in November 2004 that Caribbean islands do not have the capacity and the next two years they would say the same thing, because no assistance has been provided and there is no programme in place to equip other countries or to assist other countries to upgrade their security installations. Mr. Speaker, that is a burning matter under any attempt at integration or with cooperation within this region.

Mr. Speaker, the point I want to make about business expansion and promoting Trinidad and Tobago is that you must be careful when you promote Trinidad and Tobago. This is not 1960 and 1965, Mr. Speaker, where it took time for a boat to come from London to Trinidad and Tobago, and for a boat to go to New York. This is not the time with a few newspapers around and three months after an issue one would read it in the newspapers. What happens today in Trinidad and Tobago is on the Internet; it is on newspapers; people communicate by e-mail and so on. You cannot hide! When somebody in Miami asks about kidnapping in Trinidad and Tobago the chances are that they are more aware than many of us may be.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot promote your country as a destination for business; to headquarter international trading multilateral institutions and so on if you cannot preside over your own crime situation. You treat your business people in a particular way—Mr. Speaker, it is no secret now and we will not dwell on it; the matter is before the court, that leading business persons and several major players in the region have been harassed by the protective arm of the State and they are taking these matters to the courts, where the courts will determine whether agencies of the State abuse their power and unlawfully detain persons and use their power to harass leading businessmen in the hemisphere. When you do that—as I said before, this is not 1962—do you not think such businessmen would have their connections and networks in Miami, in South America? Who do you think you are fooling by harassing business persons in Trinidad and Tobago and then promoting Port of Spain as the capital for business?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, December 10, 2004

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I would not take 30 minutes at all but I would just like to dwell on the matter relating to the FTAA process. I call upon the Member for Diego Martin Central or the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs to outline to the House what is next in terms of the FTAA. The process has certainly been stalled, if not derailed. There was a deadline for January 2005. It is well accepted that that deadline will come and go. Several countries have already been supporting Miami, as we noted before, what should the Caricom region—[*Interruption*] Do you want to answer the question now?

Mr. Valley: No, I want to ask a question. Mr. Speaker, could the Member inform the House how many countries are supporting Miami and how many countries are supporting Trinidad and Tobago, or how many countries are supporting Atlanta, for that matter? I wonder whether the Member would provide the information.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, it is quite interesting because it is really the Member for Diego Central who should provide that information to the House and, indeed, to the national community. [*Interruption*] You do that! Your job is not to ask a Member of the Opposition for information. You must have the information! [*Interruption*] Well, you should have stood on a point of order. I find that intervention amazing! We are now asking if you have a list of who is supporting Miami and Atlanta. Is Panama still in the race, for example? We do not know. But this also leads to another point, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I allowed you to go on about the FTAA for a while but we are on the ACS.

[*Interruption*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I am really trying to hold back a laugh here.

Mr. B. Panday: Do not hold back any laugh; if we have to leave the House we will leave and go!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the Free Trade Area of the Americas deals with cooperation in matters of trade, economics, market access—let me reduce that—not just economic issues, but market issues; trade, alliances and so on. The Association of Caribbean States includes countries that will participate in the FTAA on the same issues of trade cooperation. For example, the ACS promotes a business forum and business in the region and will invite business persons to go to exhibitions to promote that. Mr. Speaker, that must be synchronized with other trading

arrangements in the region such as the FTAA, and other alliances. I do not know how else to explain that. I will try to even make it simpler. If you have a conference in the Dominican Republic where business persons from Colombia would go to advertise their goods, under a programme of the ACS, but the goods could only be sold and exchanged, whether it is goods or services, in the context of trading arrangements, that would include the FTAA, so there is a strong nexus between the FTAA and the ACS. I find it difficult that that cannot be understood easily.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to continue with the Member for Diego Martin Central and to indicate to him that if and when he enlightens the Parliament as to the supporters of Miami, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago and the numbers, he may also want to indicate to the Parliament and the country what is happening in terms of the continuation of the process; not only of the negotiating process but the agenda items that are to be dealt with. Trinidad and Tobago cannot continue to promote a campaign and, particularly to expend taxpayers' money, when we have no end in sight as to whether or not there would ever be a secretariat of the FTAA. In fact, the World Cup for which we got the Brown Package will come and go and we may still not have the FTAA secretariat established.

Mr. Speaker, I will leave it there on this matter. Thank you.

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, the matter before the House is relatively simple. We have come here to ask for diplomatic immunity for the headquarters of the ACS, an organization which was established way back in 1994; an organization which has been resident in Trinidad and Tobago since 1996. We are now in 2004 and we are now seeking the approval of the House for this immunity and to cover the cost. It begs the question what happened in the period 1996 to 2001.

Mr. Speaker, we are becoming accustomed to the flip-flop of those Members on the other side. We have just heard the Member for Oropouche carry on as though he is unaware that this FTAA initiative was started by them when they were in government. Mr. Speaker, I sit here and sometimes there is a hurt in the heart and an anger in the head because this initiative which should really have the support of every Trinidadian—as in the case of Miami, where everyone is supporting the initiative there; where there is a large budget. If you read the *Miami Herald*, they have their main campaigner for the FTAA headquarters writing articles on a weekly basis and they have a system such that when they get one piece of support it could be all over the news in the Caribbean. But we have people here who started

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, December 10, 2004

the initiative and who are now trying to distance themselves; they sound like Americans. It is as though they are campaigning for Miami. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is, Mr. Speaker. There is a lack of patriotism.

Dr. Moonilal: Standing Order 36(5), imputing improper motives to Members of the House.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think so, please. [*Crosstalk*] Order! Order, please!

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, what is the reality? The reality is that Miami, at last count, now has the support of about five countries. Miami is a state, they cannot even vote for themselves.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Miami is not a state.

Hon. K. Valley: It is a city. Worse than that, Mr. Speaker, they cannot even vote for themselves. We do not even know who the US would vote for. I am counting on the US vote because that is the only way to get them out of trouble, should they vote for Atlanta, Galveston or Puerto Rico; they will vote for Trinidad and Tobago as everybody else. I will tell you something: as long as there is an FTAA, Port of Spain is going to be the headquarters! [*Desk thumping*] Put that in your pipe and smoke it; tell them Ken Valley say so today!

Mr. Speaker, while they have five votes, we have 17 votes. Do not talk to me until they have 12 votes. When they have 12 come back to me and tell me something. Do not bother me otherwise; do you understand. We have 17 votes; we are the frontrunners. There are 34 countries in the FTAA and we now command 50 per cent support of the countries that can vote. [*Desk thumping*] Understand that! So do not even talk to me again unless you can tell me Miami has 12 votes. I am tired of it! [*Interruption*] Do you want to know the next step?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Hon. K. Valley: I should be in Brazil next week with the Mercosur countries. Mr. Speaker, the Dominican Republic was never supporting us. The last government, as I have said before, was supposed to be supporting Panama; the new government has come in and they have said that they are supporting Miami. Of course I would have been happy if the new government had said that they were supporting Trinidad and Tobago, but those are the breaks; if you are in a competition you must expect the other side to get one or two votes. But there is no fight until they get to about 12.

Mr. Speaker, we are not sitting down; the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his colleagues have been throughout South and Central America campaigning and that is how we got Peru, Venezuela, Costa Rica and others to support us. [*Desk thumping*] We have no fear; understand that! You continue to work for Miami; I will continue to work for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] There are some things that we must feel passionate about! We must understand what the headquarters of the FTAA would do for us. You come here in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago to campaign for Miami! [*Interruption*] That is what you are doing, man!

Mr. Speaker, we are here this afternoon to provide diplomatic immunity for the ACS. I thought this would have been a simple Motion; we have quite a lot of other work to do today and I hope we can get on with that work quickly.

With respect to the FTAA, the Member wanted to know what the next stage was. As I have said before, we have lost a year; the last time there was any negotiation with respect to the agreement was when an attempt was made in February at what is known as the Trade Committee consisting of vice-ministers, permanent secretaries and so on. That meeting was aborted because Brazil and the United States of America got into a discussion on agricultural subsidies. Brazil's position was that agricultural subsidies must be dealt with at the FTAA level and the USA's position was that it could not be dealt with at the FTAA level because there were other countries, such as the European countries, as well as Japan, also giving subsidies to agriculture and therefore, it ought to be dealt with at the World Trade Organization level. Mr. Speaker, because there was no compromise the negotiations broke down.

A number of mini-ministerials were attempted but that did not work. In July of this year, however, there was some movement at the WTO level and one feels that there can now be movement at the FTAA level. Of course, after July one got into the throes of the US election. I do not think anything is going to happen before the inauguration of the President on January 20. Realistically, I expect them to get back to negotiations around March.

I do not know whether any phase of the FTAA will be completed in 2005 or perhaps even 2006. What I do feel certain about, Mr. Speaker, is that there will be a Free Trade Area of the Americas; it is the natural progression that is coming. The same way I believe that one day we are going to get up in Caricom and realize that political union is the next logical step. When I hear persons say that

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, December 10, 2004

they are not supporting political union, but at the same time they are talking about single economy, I laugh. In my view, anytime you talk about single economy you had better also talk about political union.

Mr. Speaker, there are some things that I see as being natural. People argue about them but I do not waste my time, I prefer to play some dominoes or something. It makes no sense arguing about it. The ACS is important for us. I have seen it as the second stage in our movement with respect to market access agreement. I am convinced that as a small country we need market access agreement. I believe in the ACS as I believe in Caricom, as I believe in the movement towards the FTAA. I believe a country such as Trinidad and Tobago can benefit most if there is open trade, if we can use that fact to attract investors to Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member mentioned initiatives with respect to China and I do not know who he said laughed at him. On the last occasion that point was raised and I told the Member for St. Augustine, clearly, while I do not see an export initiative towards China, I see, clearly, attracting inward investment. As a fact, I think our businessmen would benefit by seeking alliances with Chinese businessmen. We know that China is now known for competitive production. If some of our manufacturers were to seek alliances with Chinese businesses to locate in Trinidad and Tobago so that they could access the Americas, to me that would be excellent strategy.

Last Saturday at the dinner of the Greater Chaguanas Chamber, the president mentioned to me that that Chamber took 45 business persons to China earlier this year. I thought that was fantastic. *[Interruption]* That is right, because government must simply be a facilitator. I remember in the early 1990s when I was Minister of Trade and Industry we had to organize the trade missions and to ask members of the private sector to come with us. That is long gone; no longer is that happening! They are now organizing their missions and asking us to come with them.

My colleague, the Minister in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, had been invited and went to Suriname. My other colleague, Ambassador Narace, was in Martinique at the invitation of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association. They are organizing their missions because of that facilitative environment that we have.

Mr. Speaker, we have the Caricom Trade Support Programme and from time to time I hear Members on the other side arguing: Why do you have a Caricom Trade Programme and you have done nothing for our local businessmen? And I

marvel because I ask: “Who they think the Caricom Trade Programme is for, if it is not for businessmen?” When we take care of—they do not understand the facilitative role of the Government—the main markets of our manufacturers and we ensure in our main markets that they are building capacity so that they can import from us, who are we protecting but our main manufacturers that can now sell more to them? They enlighten self-interest, that is the critical part of what we call the Trade Assistance Programme. Or when in the summer we hire some young students to look at our markets and to look for opportunities and so on, who are we helping, if not our manufacturers? Mr. Speaker, our manufacturers know it and that is what is important to me.

Mr. Speaker, we can finish this piece of legislation because we really have some critical work to do this afternoon.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Winston Dookeran (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Speaker, I think I should put the record straight given what the Member for Diego Martin Central has said.

Mr. Speaker, he seemed to have implied that the Member for Oropouche, in his contribution, which attempted to look at world development, suggested that Trinidad and Tobago should have a much wider frame in its foreign trade policy. But, he interpreted that to mean that the bid that Trinidad and Tobago has made for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is not supported by the Opposition. He has admitted that it was the United National Congress Government that, in fact, started this entire process and for him to deliberately twist the facts of the Member for Oropouche is a bit unfortunate. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is also interesting that the Member for Diego Martin Central spent his entire contribution on the FTAA and you did not bring him to task for that. But I will let that pass just for the sake of consistency with which this House should be ruled.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Diego Martin Central started to speak at 2.45 p.m. and he concluded at 2.59 p.m., so he could have spoken for 75 more minutes. I did not tell him to finish; he could have gone on. [*Interruption*]

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in piloting this Bill before us, has the responsibility, in my view, to establish whether the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) has, in fact, been functioning as it was first

planned to give us some idea whether the mandate of the ACS was, in fact, being honoured by the work of the ACS.

I would start with a quotation from Ambassador Richard Burner in which he said the following:

“The growing gap in the Caribbean between expectations and performance, and the rising tension between intention and reality, has widened the space between the art of politics and the discharge of governance. Political rhetoric tends to base new promises on old premises. In this politics of illusion, yesterday’s hopes remain unfulfilled and new hopes emerge with little expectation that they will lead to Action.”

Is this the case of the ACS? It was in the early 1990s that two separate events took place that led to the formation of the Association of Caribbean States. The first was the Commission that was established by the then government under the prime ministership of Mr. ANR Robinson to look at the future of the Caribbean and, in 1992, they produced the report, which was referred to as, “Time for action”. At that time the Caribbean was searching for some way out of its dilemma where it had allowed itself to look inwards, both in terms of its domestic policies and in terms of its external policies, and I say that against the background of the quote which I just read.

The Commission was established to look into the future of the Caribbean and suggested in the 600-page report that it should now look on a much wider basis at the wider Caribbean in order to find appropriate political space in which to operate. The Caribbean was too isolated. It was, in fact, reduced to a small voice in world affairs and there was need for such movement to expand. It was against that kind of background that the Association for Caribbean States was eventually established as a vehicle that will be able to provide more political space for the region. It included countries of the mainland in South America, including Mexico as well, and the wider Caribbean.

At the same time, a second development was taking place internationally and that was the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement which was the first such arrangement between the developed world and the developing country in which a new trade arrangement was taking place. It was felt then that if the Caribbean did not put its house in order it would have been left out of the new dimension that was taking place in world trade.

The North American Free Trade Agreement between the USA, Canada and Mexico created a new beginning and was somewhat responsible for the reaction

of Caribbean countries for the establishment of the ACS. What was at stake was a search for more political space and the question I ask the Minister is: Has this really happened?

At that time, I argued that without an explicit agenda or clearly identified targets, the precise functions of the ACS were unclear and it was in danger of becoming an expansion of outdated and ineffective structures and could not deal with the then crisis. Ten years later, have we, in fact, seen any benefit emerging from the ACS in terms of creating economic political space for the region?

The preamble to the Convention establishing the ACS was high in its expectations. It talked about the ACS initiating a new era; it talked about transcending the separateness of the past; it talked about the timely response to the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization; it talked about enhancing economic space, coordinated participation by the region in multi-lateral forum, making the Caribbean Sea a unifying element in the region's development, facilitating the adoption of common positions of our Caribbean states and promoting economic integration in the wider Caribbean; high sounding intentions. Is the work programme of the ACS consistent with its mandate?

What has turned out to be the work programme of the ACS—and I had hoped that the Minister would have given us the benefit of his own Ministry's thinking on the issue of the ACS performance against its expectations. Has it lived up to these expectations? This is an opportunity for this Parliament to ask that question. What has the ACS done? It has established four specialized committees; one in the field of trade; one in the field of transportation; one in the field of sustainable tourism and one in the field of disaster preparedness. And it has organized a number of contracting parties on which it can piggyback and create the impression that it is, in fact, moving in the direction of the mandate that has been given.

The social partners that it has identified are the Caribbean Medical Association, the Regional Economic and Social Research Coordination, the Caribbean Shipping Association, the Caribbean Association of Industry and Commerce, the Association of Caribbean University Research and Institutional Libraries, Caribbean Conservation Association, the Antilles French Guiana Regional Centre of the National Institute of Agro Research. And it has gone further. It has now invited a number of observer countries to become observers; the list is impressive.

In 1996, the Kingdom of Spain, Republic of Italy, the Republic of India, the Federal Republic of Brazil, the Republic of Ecuador, the Republic of Argentina, and the Russian Federation became observer countries and in years following a

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, December 10, 2004

number of other countries joined. So what really has emerged is a very narrow work programme focusing on four technical matters and a broadening of the institutional links of the ACS. It is in that context that we may ask: What has, in fact, been the performance? It has established a miniscule programme of financial cooperation in areas that are, in fact, dealt with by other technical agencies in the field. No wonder one commentator described the ACS as a “medicine in search of disease”.

Mr. Speaker, it is in that context that the Bill before us, which is now providing the necessary immunities for the function of the ACS, must be seen. I believe it is in reference to this that the budget statement made reference to the financial sector in Trinidad and Tobago. It said Trinidad and Tobago has now emerged as the financial centre of the region.

“In 2003, bond issues for regional governments and corporations amounted to over US \$500 million while investment in the region by Trinidad and Tobago financial institutions amounted to some US \$250 million. The financial sector in Trinidad and Tobago now accounts for 12.5 per cent of the GDP and employ 7.5 per cent of the labour force.

We are convinced...”

said the Minister of Finance,

“that we have an excellent base to become the Pan Caribbean Financial Centre. We have the advantages of an ideal geographical location, good air links and well-developed legal code.”

These are the expectations. But the financial centre has not been established in Trinidad and Tobago. What is required to establish such a centre is much more than increased trade in foreign exchange. It requires a full regulatory system; a set of incentives for trade in financial products and the emergence of corporate and government bonds. I say this if only to argue the case that the environment the ACS has created has done little to enhance the financial centre in Trinidad and Tobago. So the ACS, in terms of its actual function, has much for which it must answer.

It is true that it is only 10 years in existence and, perhaps, we will see in the years to come an expansion of its role but, clearly, in terms of the mandate that it has set itself, in terms of the aspirations of the people of the region when it was formed, it has not lived up to its expectations. Emerging out of this—and the Member for Oropouche and the Member for Diego Martin Central talked about

political integration. The Member for Diego Martin Central said it was inevitable that there will be political integration in the region once there is a single market and economy.

This is mis-reading of the politics that is taking place in integration movements today. The reason countries are looking globally is because they have seen the futility of a small space influencing the world and putting their eggs in that basket. Economic forces are working at variance with political forces and the financial and economical geography of the region are now working at variance with a process of narrow integration. What, perhaps, we should be looking at in terms of regional diplomacy, is not so much an integration movement as a non-sovereign regional state.

A non-sovereign regional state has been the basis for collaboration on foreign policy as we have seen in the Scandinavian countries that have been able to pursue such common policy in world councils. It has been used as a basis to bring about greater political voice in world affairs and, perhaps, it might be useful for the ACS to establish a process by which they can work toward the establishment of a non-sovereign regional state.

I believe the Member for Oropouche was the one who talked about what is happening in South America. It is in today's newspaper in which it was pointed out: "South American Leaders discuss new bloc".

"PRESIDENTS and high-ranking officials from 12 South American countries gathered in this ancient Inca capital to create a political and economic bloc they hope will put them on a more equal footing with the United States and Europe."

The leaders of the meeting will decide on a court establishing the South American Community of Nations. This is but an example of a non-sovereign regional state that is being promoted, coming together to create more political space rather than simply talking loosely about integration. The world politics of today will require the region to have a much deeper voice and the events as happened in South America on one hand, and North America on the other hand, and Europe on the other hand is likely to leave the Caribbean without such a voice and it is in that context I believe the ACS ought to really play a much more important role. The notion of political integration is really of the old order. What is now required is to embrace the challenging world of regionalism and globalization.

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, December 10, 2004

The 12 nations that agreed to sign an accord on the South American Community of Nations are: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela and, as the Member for Oropouche pointed out, along with Guyana and Suriname. So countries are looking in different areas; countries are looking globally now and, therefore, this is not the time for us to be bugged down by inward-looking policies even in the region.

“In a preliminary step in October, South America’s two major trade blocs signed pacts to gradually create the free-trade zone across the continent.

‘If things turn out reasonably well, in 15 years we will have a new map in the region’, Allan Wagner, secretary general of the Andean Community, said during a meeting of the smaller trade group on Tuesday.”

So there is a whole new map that is emerging in the world, but we have now begun to embrace, some narrow visions of political integration.

Mr. Speaker, the West Indian Commission report attempted to look at the future region. Some believe that there is a loss of sovereignty once you move in this new direction. Some believe that sovereignty is put at risk, but this can be further from the truth. Sovereignty today is both formal and operational and one has to cede operational sovereignty at times in order to get greater formal sovereignty. So the notion of a non-sovereign regional state is, perhaps, the best option to follow in the region today—and here I take issue with the Member for Diego Martin Central when he said that the logical option of a single market and economy is political integration.

What we need to talk about is the creation of a non-sovereign regional state. Already Jamaica has stated its position. Already other countries have stated their position with respect to political union. This is an idea that has lost its times, but we need to replace it with the concept of the regional state that the South American leaders are doing or indeed, as is happening in Europe and to a lesser extent it is happening in Asia.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs would be well advised to explain to this House what is the global politics in which he sees Trinidad and Tobago operating; and within what global political arena are we to operate? Or are we to confine ourselves into a small place when the world map is changing on us?

I will not be concerned about the sovereignty issue. Nations sacrifice some operational sovereignty or legal freedom of action when they enter into international agreements. If entered wisely such agreements increase economic

well being at home and enhances government's option and its ability to govern. So the Minister of Foreign Affairs owes it to this House, if he has to be accountable to this Parliament, for accountability is an important part of his responsibility.

Many things have happened in the Ministry of foreign Affairs for which there has been little accountability, many of which have been raised in this Parliament before but there has been no compulsion on the part of the Minister to explain or to give an account.

Some mundane issues have been raised with respect to the fishermen, with respect to the diplomatic bags, with respect to the High Commissioner's offices and residences in London and South Africa, to name a few, but, to date, it appears as if the Minister does not feel the compulsion to account for the performance of his portfolio. It is in that context, in piloting this Bill before us, the Minister failed in his endeavour to argue what the Government's foreign policy perspective in the world global situation is.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the time has come for us to change direction; perhaps the time has come for Trinidad and Tobago to review its foreign policy posture *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world. To rely on the policy of free trade arrangements is not enough.

On the last occasion, I had the opportunity to talk about the multi-track foreign trade policy of the Government—whether or not reliance on that multi-track policy is sufficient. There are certain questions that must be asked. Where are we heading? Are we heading to make our economy competitive to be able to deal with the challenges ahead? The evidence points to the contrary. The *Business Guardian* of December 2, 2004 posted an article on how competitive Trinidad and Tobago was. They went on to argue about the growing lack of competitiveness taking place in the country. While we are talking about these free trade arrangements, we are being subjected to a growing lack of productivity.

“The annual Global Competitiveness Report, first launched in 2001 and with the most recent version released in October, is an excellent resource highlighting some of the factors that we must address if we are to become truly globally competitive. The report attempts to evaluate the potential for the world's economies to realize sustained economic growth in short- to medium-term. Given the personalities behind the report (Profs. Jeffrey Sachs and Michael Porter) it commands a high degree of creditability. The cornerstone

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, December 10, 2004

of the report is the Global Competitive Index (GCI) and the Business Competitiveness Index (BCI).

In 2001, when the first report was published, T&T was ranked at 38th on the GCI. With each subsequent report T&T has fallen in the rankings, falling to 42nd in 2002, 49th in 2003 and to 51st (out of 104) in 2004.”

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, will the Member give way? I wonder whether the Member would also give the total number of countries in the report in 2001 as against 2002 and so on.

Mr. W. Dookeran: The ranking has changed. The number of countries was 80 in the beginning and 104 in 2004.

It makes no difference. The ranking has changed. This is only one piece of evidence, Mr. Speaker.

“The GCI is based on three ‘pillars’: macroeconomic environment, public institutions and technological readiness. For each of these three pillars, an index is calculated, which is based on relevant sub-indices. The GCI is calculated by finding the average of these three indices...

In the macroeconomic environment index, T&T ranked 44th out of 104 countries...in the area of Government waste, T&T performs poorly (69) despite the fact that we have tended to ensure small fiscal surpluses over recent years. There is clearly a perception that much of the Government expenditure is inefficient and that the expenditure has not resulted in improved infrastructure or the other things needed to ensure an environment conducive to business.

In the public institutions index, T&T ranked 64th. The public institutions index is based on the contracts and law sub-index (60) and the corruption sub-index (68).”

It was interesting to see the comments of the Auditor General in today's newspaper, confirming that there are high levels of corruption in Trinidad and Tobago.

“This index essentially looks at issues such as judicial independence (35), the impact of crime on business (89), property rights (60) and favouritism in the decisions of government officials (66).”

This report was October 2004.

“In the technology index, T&T ranked 54th. The technology index is based on an innovation sub-index (81)...

On the innovation sub-index, T&T ranked a lowly 81st. The low ranking in the innovation sub-index is an obvious area of concern and must be addressed, not least through improved linkages between business and UWI and the new UTT.

Technology transfer is an issue of particular significance to the energy sector where there is a need for local content and participation that involves a transfer of knowledge to local firms.”

We go further into this report and we look at the Business Competitiveness Index.

“The BCI evaluates the underlying microeconomic conditions and their impact on levels of productivity. The GCI report notes that macroeconomic and institutional factors are necessary conditions for growth, but that wealth creation actually takes place at the microeconomic level of companies.”

Trinidad and Tobago’s rank is 59th, which places us at the bottom half of the index.

“This low ranking is due mainly to the fact that we place 62nd on business environment ranking—lower than Colombia, Mexico and Ghana. T&T scores particularly poor ranking in areas of centralized economic policymaking (87) reliability of the police service (85) and co-operation in labour/employer relations (82).”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for St. Augustine has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, thank you and thanks to Members.

“The GCI report points to a number of priority areas that need to be addressed in order to secure the sustainable development of T&T. Policy-makers would do well to examine the findings of the report in greater detail.”

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, December 10, 2004

Mr. Speaker, the point I am trying to establish is that creating these markets under free trade requires an even more aggressive policy of creating competitiveness and productivity in the local economy. The evidence suggests that rather than becoming more competitive and highly productive in the local economy, in spite of the fact that we have substantial public revenues in the country, our ability to exploit these markets will be weakened.

So when I hear that the manufacturers are happy and we use as an indicator that they are now making their own arrangements to do trade missions whereas before they relied on the Government to support them, there is nothing wrong with that, but I would not use that as an indicator of productivity and competitiveness.

The evidence is very clear, Mr. Speaker, that some of the goals of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), as I said earlier, have been limited to four main areas and that of technical studies and holding business conferences. An entire organization that has been set up with high-sounding goals, but we have not been able to see the benefits of that.

Mr. Speaker, I come back to the issue of accountability. I believe it was the hon. Member for Siparia who brought to the attention of this honourable House the fact that in the Standing Orders of this Parliament, there is the provision for the establishment of a Joint Select Committee on External Relations, which will perhaps be the first step in ensuring the accountability of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been able to conduct itself in a foreign manner in Trinidad and Tobago. It has not been able to hold itself accountable to the people of this nation and the institutions that are to be in place to hold it accountable are not being put forward in this Parliament. The least that can happen is the establishment of the Joint Select Committee on External Relations, so that the foreign affairs policies and programmes could be scrutinized at parliamentary level and so expose themselves to the full scrutiny of the population at large.

For too long foreign policy has remained a secret area of public policy in Trinidad and Tobago. It has simply been discharged by statements and these foreign interest Bills before us have given us the opportunity to make the plea once more that there should be greater accountability.

The Government and the Minister owe it to the people to ensure that they account for the affairs on foreign matters. To date, it is not clear what the exact position of the Government is on a number of foreign policy matters.

Mr. Speaker, a recent report that looked at foreign policy matters made the point that the very fundamental function of foreign affairs is to protect the vital interests of Trinidad and Tobago. Sometimes we hear the argument that the Caricom interest must supersede the Trinidad and Tobago interest. At all times we must bear in mind that the foreign interest in Trinidad and Tobago must be protected. On the last occasion when we discussed the Caricom bill before us, we made mention of a number of foreign policy issues on which we needed clarification, but the Minister in his reply did not do us the courtesy of responding to some of these concerns.

We talked at that time about the missions that are being opened; whether one was being established in Mexico or whether it would be better to establish it in Central America. What are the Government's plans on this? We talked about bilateral relationships with the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the plans of the Government in this regard. We talked about the mission in Guyana and Barbados; about the joint commissions that were established between Trinidad and Tobago and the OECS countries and the results of that work.

It is not clear what the Government's policy on Venezuela is. This is another area in which there have been one-line statements from time to time. Venezuela remains a high priority area in terms of foreign policy. There is a partial scope agreement. Are we going beyond that? We asked on the last occasion whether Trinidad and Tobago was to pursue a technical and scientific cooperation agreement in the field of agriculture with Costa Rica because of the reported significant advances made in this area by Costa Rica.

We talked about the Caricom/Central American process and where we stand on that issue. We have very little opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to have the Minister of Foreign Affairs here; that is why we have taken the opportunity to raise a number of these issues for clarification and debate; so that there can be a full debate on foreign policy. At that time in his reply, he did not do us the courtesy of responding to these issues.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the point that the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) should be given a mandate to put the modalities in place for the development of a non-sovereign regional state—there is a lot of literature on that subject—and that it should move in order to create more political space for the region in global discussions. It should not confine itself only to the narrow technical issues of holding conferences, seminars and workshops on trade, transport, sustainable development and national disasters; many of which have been done by other specialist groups in the Caribbean.

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Friday, December 10, 2004

What is the cost, Mr. Speaker, of maintaining the ACS headquarters in Trinidad and Tobago? We have absolutely no idea of what that cost is. It is not that we measure the benefits against monetary cost, but at least we should be aware of what is happening.

I am arguing that the ACS does not provide us with the leverage in regional diplomacy that we once wanted and that there is need for Trinidad and Tobago to make its position known on these matters rather than simply be waiting for something to happen.

What has been our own public policy position on the ACS? What have we asked them to do or not to do? I am suggesting that we not allow ourselves to be restricted to the debate on political integration; the world map is changing dramatically around us as we see in South America and elsewhere. Perhaps we should take a leaf out of the book of the Jamaicans, who are looking at the global reach and pursuing a public policy to achieve that. We should not simply say that we have a financial centre when we do not have the infrastructure for such. In fact, this was mentioned previously, Mr. Speaker. What we need is not so much ideas that will imprison us in the past, but ideas that will free us for the future.

The Member for Diego Martin Central has consistently given us the mechanics of what he is doing without seeing the total vision in which he is placing himself. They are moving the country, not only in this area, but in many areas through old ideas. As I said in my quotation earlier about “new promises on old premises”:

“The growing gap in the Caribbean between expectations and performance, and the rising tension between intention and reality, has widened the space between the art of politics and the discharge of governance. Political rhetoric tends to base new promises on old premises.”

That is the point I am making—old premises continue to influence the public policy postures in the area of public policy. In this politics of illusion, yesterday’s hopes remain unfulfilled and new hopes emerge with little expectation that will lead to action. The new integration paradigm for the Caribbean must go beyond matters of trade and respond to the international situation. The paradigm should link productive structures, promote interaction among the private sectors of different countries and create technological advances that will reduce the cost of doing business, increase institutional flexibility and promote social capital among the peoples of the region.

We are looking, therefore, for a total approach: a consistency in approach between the opening up of markets and the creation of productive capacity. We

are looking for a situation in which protest diplomacy will no longer be part of our vocabulary. The Caribbean for too long has been involved in protest diplomacy; special and differential treatment; matters that put us in perpetual bargaining for a better place when what we need is to establish the wherewithal to exploit the international market.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bill before us is a simple one putting into place the immunities required for the functioning of the ACS. We look forward to an ACS that is more dynamic; an ACS that will have a wider mission and one that will link its activities to the future benefit of the country. Merely to have an institution located in our country, without a clear expectation as to the benefits, will be short change to our society.

I hope that this debate would bring some life to the ACS and that the Minister of Foreign Affairs would tell us his mandate for the ACS. What does he intend the ACS to do? I have taken the liberty of suggesting areas they could be involved in. I raised a contentious but important issue of a non-sovereign regional state to be placed on the agenda so that we can become part of the new global map, which is now being redrafted in Trinidad and Tobago, which will have collaboration on many issues, particularly with respect to the multilateral institutions and with respect to the United Nations and other world bodies. It has been 10 years since we have established the ACS with such goals in mind. Let us hope that the next 10 years would be far more productive ones.

4.00 p.m.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Diane Seukeran): Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you too Minister of Foreign Affairs, thank you for allowing me to speak since I could not resist the opportunity to rise, particularly in light of the comments from the Member for St. Augustine—much of which is in agreement with what is before us. On the one hand, one hears him talking about the ACS and the creation of a single regional space, and yet listening with some trepidation, in this House of Representatives, as one hears from the Opposition, what seems to be a degree of contention even among their Members.

One listened to the Member for Oropouche who is very much against the creation of anything that has to do with regionalism, complaining—for instance going so far off course saying, complaining that Trinidad and Tobago was sending people in CEPEP to be abused; that their human rights were being fundamentally abused by the conditions of labour. [*Interruption*] That is what he was saying. I listened to him.

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Friday, December 10, 2004

Here we are talking about the ACS; talking exactly about what the Member for St. Augustine is talking about.

[MR. SPEAKER, *in the Chair*]

That debate must happen that of foreign policy of Trinidad and Tobago, where it is going, what is strategically in the interest of the Trinidad and Tobago; in the understanding, very clearly, that foreign affairs and trade today are one and the same; that same regional space that the Member speaks about is a single, economic space, whether it is in the EU, or in the ACS, or in the FTAA, or in the South American movement towards the Bolivarian Republic of South America, the Southeast Asian Tigers, whether it is happening in Russia, or in China, wherever states come together. It is the creation of a single economic space that passes for foreign policy in today's day and age.

But I want to touch on what the learned Member for Oropouche said—given his degree in labour relations and his familiarity in terms of the ILO and its convention—and ask whether they apply: whether he is saying we in Trinidad and Tobago must supply, send our people cushioned in comfort or build them houses first? They are going off to perform a humanitarian task where all the people of Grenada are without houses, living without lights, water or electricity: We Trinidadians are going to help them but we must build our houses for our workers first. What arrant nonsense!

Does the Member for Oropouche—for whom I had a great deal of respect, given his knowledge of the ILO and its conventions—feel that we should behave so arrogantly because we are big brother and we are richer than the Grenadians? We are going there to help them but we must look after our own first. That is total nonsense! We are going to help them and no worker of CEPEP ever accepted any other conditions. They were told in advance of the conditions. Everybody knew the conditions in Grenada. When they went there, they knew that they were volunteering to perform a humanitarian function to help “your Grenadian brothers, not to help yourself”. I want to dismiss the entire contribution of the Member for Oropouche as being nonsense. It has nothing to do with what the Member for St. Augustine began to speak about, although he, too, seemed to be completely mixed up as to what is actually happening in the global environment.

Mr. Singh: Tell us, tell us.

Hon. D. Seukeran: I am going to do that, or attempt for some moment of time to enlighten you. There is a road map that we in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago have designed. You asked about the foreign policy of Trinidad and

Tobago, and I say to you that the trade policy and the foreign policy of Trinidad and Tobago are virtually one and the same.

Let me just touch for a moment, in fact I want to deal with the comments of the Member for St. Augustine, because we seem to hear so much uncertainty as to what is going on. He said, quite rightly, that one must question the work programme of the ACS. He pointed out that nothing seems to have happened. Let me point out that he belongs to the team that was in power in 1994, when the ACS was formed. In 1996, it becomes an entity, its location and headquarters are in Trinidad and Tobago. In 1997, who comes into power in Trinidad and Tobago? It is that side. We go through the whole motion. [*Interruption*] I am not bad talking anybody. We are going through a period of time; in 1997 the ACS had been formed. Exactly as the Member for St. Augustine asks, I begin to paint the picture of certain global events were happening at that time.

The ACS was formed as a result of what was going on in the world. We have on the one hand the EU and that has taken more than 20 years to happen. On the other hand we have the coming together of NAFTA as a result of what is happening in the EU. And all of these are sequential. Alongside that are the countries of Mercosur and the Andean Pact countries as South America moves to exactly what they are quoting is happening today in South America: the coming together of the South American continent to find an economic space; to find space in a global environment.

And, very importantly, again in the 1990s, is the fall of the Berlin Wall and as the wall falls, a further space is created, another economic space that leads to the expansion of Europe. So that today we have an expanded Europe. That comes about even as we see what is happening in Russia today. We see that within Russia—as we look at Croatia and all the old Russian territories we see that what is happening—the contractions, the political uncertainties—is a movement to become again an integrated Russia—perhaps, not a communist Russia, but an integrated, economic space that will be Russia tomorrow.

In that period of the formation of the ACS, we saw the formation of the Asian Tigers. Very importantly, today we see, moving from the 1990s into 2005, the coming together through the Cotonou Agreement, signed in 2000, as Europe began to focus on Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. That is the global environment in which we are operating yesterday and today. Again, the Member for St. Augustine knows that extremely well. He is asking for a foreign policy to be determined in Trinidad and Tobago, and that has to be a trade and foreign policy together. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Industry are actively involved in every single forum that there is, whether it is in the FTAA,

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Friday, December 10, 2004

which will come to pass—as the Minister of Trade and Industry said, it is a logical reaction to global events. Every one of these steps that I have outlined here has been a reaction from one thing to the other. As the world order changed, the political discussion changed—the philosophy of which the Member for St. Augustine is so fond of speaking changed—from being democracy versus straight communism. As the focus of foreign affairs changes from the language of diplomacy to that of trade, so, too, the entire focus of where we in the Caribbean are has to change.

And so since 1994, as a first step, the ACS was formed. Yet here we are, having a wonderful conversation mind you, but discussing simply why we should give the status and the diplomatic things that the ACS requires. I am trying to respond to the Member for St. Augustine. If you have the understanding that we are here in the islands of the Caribbean, that no one island can stand in the might of what I have just described, except as a regional space, exactly what the Member for St. Augustine has been asking for—let me use his words: the non-sovereign regional space. He gave the example of the European Union. That can be the FTAA, Russia or Asia. Each one of them is a non-sovereign regional economic space. If you look at that you understand where all the islands of the Caribbean must go, including Trinidad and Tobago which cannot stand on its own.

Long ago, the Treaty of Chaguaramas was envisaged as the farmers watched global events they knew, because history teaches you that economic and political philosophy changes over time, that we must come together as a region. The regionalism of the Caribbean began with Caricom and it has expanded under the Ministers of Trade and Industry and Foreign Affairs to include Cariforum although the ACS was there. But global events transpired—and here we are, talking not of the events in the region of Caricom—we are talking about a global environment, because we operate in a global environment. All of these things are happening around us. In the centre is an island called “Trinidad and Tobago.” Enlarge that centre to become Caricom, because one island, with or without oil, cannot withstand the onslaught of liberalized trade and globalization such as I have described. You know well that it exists in the world today. Because we have to find the regional space as Caricom, designed so many years ago, becomes even more vital. Out of this comes the CSME; the economic tool empowering regionalization to happen faster—and it has to happen because we will all be wiped out otherwise. Enlarge that to Cariforum, including the Dominican Republic, Belize, Venezuela and all other countries; very importantly exploring linkages with the countries of South America; operating in the Cotonou Agreement so that you talk to Africa, developing south trade even as you deal with your Northern European counterparts and in the FTAA talking to North American and South American neighbours. The Caribbean has to find a place, a space, in both of them.

After Cariforum, the ACS becomes extraordinarily important because it is the widest territory of the Caribbean. That would include the French territories, the Spanish territories and all the countries that lie within the gulf. We are engaged in all the trade negotiations, whether it is the FTAA that the Member scoffs at, or the EPAs, as we call them in Europe. In all of them, the political dimension is driven by an economic consideration of size or space, so that we can be sure that our businesses can thrive and our people can be employed in a global, liberalized world. That is what we seek to do in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, whether we are in trade or foreign affairs.

I want to assure the Member for St. Augustine that when we say Vision 2020 and developed nation status, it is not done envisioning an island with concrete buildings; we see a country, fortified by a region that can survive in a global, liberalized world, developed and capable of withstanding the onslaught of liberalization—because we are one region; unafraid to mix the political into the economic because economics and politics are one and the same today.

When Europe gets together, the Commissioners are elected, so that you do not have a European Commission without politicians inside of there to use the example of Europe. It is the political dimension that discusses the measures of trade. When NAFTA was born—it is the political union of Canada, Mexico and America that drives the region's trade, the economic space! When South America gets together and is forming the Bolivarian Republic and I am sure that gentleman, so many years later, is very happy with what is happening in South America today, as all of us who know history understand that this was the dream of Simon Bolivar so many years ago. And it was a political union that he spoke of, today driven by the economic need of Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay all of them to survive in a global trade environment. The world of politics is driven by trade. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, perhaps in his understanding of global events and the political and economic ramifications of global trade and global space, understands very well that we must not be afraid to speak of politics.

And again, the Member for St. Augustine is confused. He is saying that we should be talking of this non-sovereign regional space, which he knows to be both political and economic while yet here were the Members for Oropouche and very much the member for St. Augustine, hitting the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago for talking about regional integration, political union. Whether Jamaica is afraid of espousing it as we do or not, is not the business of Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is concerned with the future of our country and our region in the

year 2020. [*Desk thumping*] We understand that we operate in a global environment. We understand that foreign affairs and trade are one, and that politics and economics are inextricably linked today.

And the Member for St. Augustine, having been Governor of the Central Bank, knows it even better than I do. Let me go through the points. He asked us what happened to the ACS. I have been trying to tell him—even I am getting somewhat carried away in arguing the many different ways. In 1994 to 1996 we had the ACS formation. While we were going through that process the world was changing. But the Opposition came into power in 1997. During the period 1997/2002 nothing happened. Remember that nobody over there would come to the Parliament in 2002 so nothing happened to the ACS. Yet here is the Member for St. Augustine asking the question why, when the people in the seat to drive the ACS, to bring this country a step further into that single economic space, are sitting across there with him. Is he at cross purposes with his Members on his side? One has to ask that question.

He asked what our policy on the ACS is. I have already espoused that. If he is asking what the work programme is, their side did nothing about it. Now we are back in action. This Government is now in power and is doing everything to make sure that we have a future in Trinidad and Tobago. The Member said that the ACS had only come to medical, environmental and agro-research as being three of the four heads he mentioned. Let me tell him that in the trade agenda, agriculture is fundamental and so are environmental concerns particularly as non-technical barriers.

If you looked at the flooding in Trinidad and Tobago, and that in the world today, you would understand the importance of the environment. As to medical research, look at HIV/AIDS. I am really shocked at the Member for St. Augustine. I expected a lot better. He talked about observer countries and that the ACS had asked Brazil, Russia, et cetera. Surely, the Members of the ACS understand this very well. Ask the Minister of Trade and Industry; he sits on the ACS. He will make sure that you understand the global ramifications of who are the emerging giants. Brazil is an emerging giant. India is an emerging giant. Russia contains some of the largest reserves in the world today, in terms of energy. If the Member understands the global discussions of what is happening—of whether currency should be vested in euros or US dollars, in terms of oil—then the importance of that conversation, perhaps, we in Trinidad and Tobago ought to be having—I know the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is already having those conversations.

We talked about the creation of a financial centre. I want to remind the Member for St. Augustine that he sat as Governor of the Central Bank, very much in charge of driving the financial processes that we have to create, outside the

politics of Trinidad and Tobago. He wondered that people were looking elsewhere, referring to Jamaica, to the fact that the Dominican Republic, as the Member for Oropouche said, has not supported us in terms of our FTAA bid. He said that they had recognized the futility of the small space that is Caricom, and the Caribbean, competing in a global environment. I heard the negativity, the defeatist attitude of throwing your hands up in the air and saying: “we are too small to compete”. No matter how small this island is, we are going to survive in the 21st Century and beyond. [*Desk thumping*] We have a Government in power that is thinking strategically, acting strategically, engaged in the geopolitical economic space the Member talks about. It is a global space, not a regional space, that we are creating. The centre is this island, then we have Caricom, the Cariforum, the ACS: concentric circles, the FTAA, the Cotonou Agreement and the globe. [*Interruption*] I will not be diverted.

Again, the Member for St. Augustine accused the Government of Trinidad and Tobago of being bogged down, looking inward. What I have described to you is not inward-looking. I am a mere Minister of State. I am not the Minister of Trade, nor am I the Minister of Foreign Affairs and yet my understanding of what we do seems to be so totally different from what is happening across there. [*Desk thumping*] The gentlemen who are actively involved would better describe what needs to be said.

We kept hearing about what is, happening in South America today, as if it is something new. This has been in formation since the time of the formation of the ACS. Regionalism was the objective of forming the ACS—and Simon Molina Duarte, with whom I had the pleasure of working, just as you had at the time, was very much a part of that thinking, of making sure—as you said, the global lending agencies—look at Trinidad and Tobago and all the islands of the Caribbean, as being part of Latin America. They say Latin America and the Caribbean. We are inextricably linked in the lending portfolio. The ACS was to join us into the South American continent. So, too, the Venezuela initiative is to also join us into the South American continent.

The fact that the Minister of Trade and Industry sits at the ACS today is to bring us into the trade environment that is South America, recognizing that Brazil is and will be a world power tomorrow, understanding that our future is tied to deepening south trade. Even as that Minister deals on this side of the globe, I deal across in Europe, Asia, the Pacific and Africa, so that we cover the globe; understanding that China is a world power and we are unafraid of talking to and treating with her, just as Jamaica is.

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Friday, December 10, 2004

While we speak to them and do business and encourage investments, we understand that we cannot really compete with China. No one can compete with China. America cannot compete with China. Nobody can compete with China. China is the mass producer of the world. *[Interruption]* We export asphalt which has titanium so we do have something to export. But can we produce goods to compete with China? Can America or Europe compete, in terms of cost of production of goods? We cannot, so we have to find other strategic ways to compete. But let us recognize what is happening globally. And so we strive to form the political/economic union that is Caricom, Cariforum, the ACS that is the region of the Caribbean. We enter into negotiations in South America, with the members of the Cotonou Agreement, and very much in the FTAA, which, as the Minister said, is a logical conclusion. It has to happen in reaction to what is happening in China. America needs that economic space.

Yes, for a moment, during the politics of the US elections, time was suspended. But as China emerges into the giant that she is; as Africa, that sleeping giant, wakes up; as Brazil having gone through the G90s and G20s, comes into its own as a force in the WTO, America itself will wake up and the Free Trade Area of the Americas will come to fruition. It is a logical conclusion, as the Minister of Trade and Industry said. I am speaking to the Member for St. Augustine because of all the Members on that side, perhaps, he has the finest mind, if one can put it across like that, and yet he still seems to be talking about regional spaces, but he says at the same time it is not enough to talk about the FTAA or EPAs.

He made a point that really shocked me. He wanted to know our foreign affairs policy. He said sometimes we seem to hear things. He was saying it in such a tongue-in-cheek way. He said sometimes one seems to hear that Caricom interest must bear greater weight than that of Trinidad and Tobago. That was really the question he asked. Yet he, of all people, and many of the Members on that side, understand only too well that it is only as one region that we can survive. And sometimes, in order to create that region, you have to give way on certain issues. You have to bend and compromise; never putting yourself at risk, but not taking full advantage, sometimes, in order to find the compromise that binds the region together, to come in a bloc that can be an economic space. As the Member said, Jamaica—they might have been talking to China or US, looking to their own self-interest. Trinidad and Tobago looks to its self-interest, let me assure you of that; understanding that it must survive in 2020 and beyond.

He talked about a new map, that in 15 years this region and indeed the world will look different. What we seek to do is to use that 15-year time span to create the new map, to ensure that the country of Trinidad and Tobago will be buttressed

by a strong Caricom, a strong Caribbean, a strong Cariforum, a strong ACS, a strong southern partner, a strong northern partner, a strong African partner, a strong Chinese partner, that we will survive, and will be marked clearly on that map. That is what the Ministries of Trade and Industry and Foreign Affairs are doing. On the one hand the Member is stressing the point—his major point has been that we must create the non-sovereign regional space. Yet he asked, tongue-in-cheek, that sometimes we seem to sound as if Caricom interest must be greater than that of Trinidad and Tobago. One wonders what his agenda is. He is questioning the partial scope with Venezuela, understanding the enormity of the benefit to Caricom of the energy pipeline: the benefit to Trinidad and Tobago.

There are mixed signals. On the one hand, you hear one thing and on the other hand you hear another thing. It is very important that I come back to what the Member said. I listened to the past Governor of the Central Bank in dismay. He quoted from the Global Competitive Index. He said that in 2001, we ranked 38; in 2002, 42; 2003, 49; 2004, 51. He said it did not matter what the reasoning was that we fell. What arrant nonsense! This from a man who sat as Governor of the Central Bank, substantially in charge of the finances of Trinidad and Tobago. That is no politician speaking, that is a technocrat of substance speaking. When GCR began they had 80 countries. And it is a very subjective report. There were 80 countries. Today, four years later, 28 new countries have been added and Trinidad and Tobago has fallen 13 points behind. We went from 38 to 51, but 28 countries have been added and most of them are developed countries. [*Desk thumping*] Yet we are ahead of 15 new countries, plus all the others. When you are doing a comparison, be honest and not mislead the country of Trinidad and Tobago. Yes we have to do a great deal more. That is absolutely guaranteed. We cannot rest upon our laurels. We have to aggressively move forward. But it is as the Minister of Trade and Industry said when he accused the Member for Oropouche of being non-patriotic. I have to emphasize what he said. I am surprised at you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea and will be resumed at 5.00p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, I was attempting to point out and to reassure the Member for St. Augustine and the country that the Government of Trinidad

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Friday, December 10, 2004

and Tobago is very well aware of the Global Competitive Report, that we are doing everything in our power to work with our manufacturing and productive sector to ensure that we do attain that competitive edge; understanding, as I was trying to point out, that we are not competing against the other regions of the Caribbean, or against the ACS states, or Caricom, that we operate in a global environment and we are aware of it. We want to assure the Member for St. Augustine, that man of statistics, that technician that he is, that whereas—I am sure he can count—when we ranked at 38 in 2001, if you count, there were 80 members internationally and we ranked 38. Since the 28 members were added, mainly developed nations, we now have 108. In that competitive environment we dropped 13 points. Yet we are still beating—*[Interruption]* I will not give way since I want to hurry up and finish as the Member for Caroni East reminded me, we want to go home. We are still ahead of 15 other new countries.

Yet given that satisfaction, we are very well cognizant of the fact that we have to build the competitive edge, hence the Caricom support measure, the technical cooperation and all the different other things we are doing to ensure that both in the public sector and the private sector, we develop that competitive skill. Let me reassure the Members opposite and the national community of that.

The Member mentioned the Auditor General's article in the *Guardian*. Like me, the Member for St. Augustine is a member of the PAC. It says that we need to tighten the financial regulations very much. That is exactly what we are working towards in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We are quite aware that there is a slippage that can occur. Degrees of what is termed corruption, but it is actually slippage. We need to tighten it and we are actively working on that.

Mr. Speaker, just to wrap up, I want to remind the Members opposite and the national community that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago intends us to be a developed nation. It is the competitive edge that will make Trinidad and Tobago in 2020, in the new map of the world. This country and this region shall stand tall and strong in a united Caricom, in a united ACS and in a united Cariforum; part of the global environment, north and south, south-south, and across the board, standing, not just surviving, with a competitive edge that allows us to be termed a developed nation. That is what a developed nation means: when your people are working and their quality of life has improved. It is not a concrete jungle. It is a quality of life. That is what we seek.

The Member for St. Augustine very much pointed out, as did the Ministers of Trade, that we cannot rely on that clause in the WTO, the FTAA and the Cotonou Agreement, which says “special and differential treatment”. We have—whether it

is as the Ministers of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, Trade and Industry or Foreign Affairs—all embarked upon developing the skills set and human resource base, that is able to compete in a global environment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to assure Members opposite that whereas they seem to be at odds with each other, on the one hand, the Member for St. Augustine saying, one must become the non-sovereign regional space, and on the other hand, the Member for Oropouche said: “Hello, Caricom first? What happen to us?” We in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago are extremely sure that where we have to go is as a united region, well aware that gas and oil are finite reserves. Therefore we are planning, as good strategic thinkers, for the day when that is finished and for 2020, in the 15-year new road map, to be very much in place—alive, kicking and well; a country that is sustainably employed. Thank you.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Knowlson Gift): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to preface my remarks by two gentle reminders. When I took the floor to introduce this Bill I said the following in part:

“Mr. Speaker, this Bill is a simple one. It seeks to confer on the ACS only those privileges and immunities which are already provided for in the Privileges and Immunities (Diplomatic Consular and International Organization) Act, Chap. 17:01 and which have been granted in the past to other regional and international organizations.”

I further reminded that though a bit delayed, the Bill is part of a process we have already begun. I continued by saying:

“I therefore, unhesitatingly recommend that honourable Members of this House support this Bill.”

I thought I would begin with this gentle reminder because during the course of the debate I noticed that we were taken very far off course. I am very glad that, on this side, what we have are strategic thinkers and not pseudo-intellectuals. [*Desk thumping*]

We were taken on a merry-go-round, a ride around the park, by first the Member for Oropouche, who apparently was not quite au courant with the nature of the meeting which recently ended in Cuzco regarding the creation of more economic and political space by the participants. That meeting was circumscribed in terms of its membership of participation by continental Latin American states. Therefore, Suriname and Guyana were part of that continental Latin American geography. I thought I need to set that straight.

Another question raised by the Member for Oropouche was the question of Trinidad and Tobago, by passing of this Bill, will be granting better protection to people enjoying diplomatic status, than it does to its own citizens. This is the tradition that obtains in diplomatic intercourse between states. Trinidad and Tobago too has its diplomats abroad and, quite naturally, it would be normal on the part of the Government or any other State to expect the protection of the host country or receiving State. As I said earlier, we are not creating anything new but we are simply conforming to a tradition which obtains in the diplomatic representation, accreditation and receipt of foreign diplomats in any given city.

The Member for Oropouche raised as well the question of the non-support of the Dominican Republic to Trinidad and Tobago's interest in the FTAA bid. As I said earlier, when we first discussed this matter, the ACS, FTAA and CCJ efforts were all very laudable efforts. Indeed, in the conduct of foreign policy, one would find if there are worthy issues to be pursued in defence of the interest of the State, whether government or opposition, the policy of seeing to the best interest of one's country is always carried across from one administration to another. This is a very laudable effort initiated by the UNC when they were in office. We cannot but propel these initiatives forward. This is what we are doing here today.

As far as the Dominican Republic is concerned, at no time did that country pledge its support for Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, a very curious situation developed there. Based on the personal relationship between the former President of the Dominican Republic, President Mejias and the President of Panama, Mireya Moscoso, the support of that government was given to Panama. It made not much of a difference because Panama started with one vote and ended with zero, for the time being, because both governments saw themselves defeated. Therefore, the promise that was given by the Dominican President, who was himself defeated by the current President, Leonel Fernandez, fell to naught. It is not a case that we lost the Dominican Republic's support.

As the incumbent President said, having visited with Jeb Bush in Miami, he was literally forced, after accepting an invitation—I supposed he might have been wining and dining somewhere because the announcement seemed to have come immediately thereafter—he found himself with no other alternative but to support the city of Miami for the FTAA bid.

Hon. K. Valley made a very interesting point, that up to now the United States Government has not declared the preferred city. Indeed, when I went to Miami earlier this year and sat in a one-on-one exchange with Governor Bush on the

question of the FTAA secretariat, after 15 minutes, we came to the conclusion—I think it ended in a draw—that as far as we are concerned in Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago Government—along with the rest of Caricom, starting with 14 countries—we are still waiting on the United States to tell us which city the United States, as a government, is planning to propose as the headquarters for the FTAA.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the process by which this is being considered by the United States of America is that they felt that consensus should be the mechanism by which this is to be decided. I agree with them on the grounds that the consensus should first be established as to which one of the 10 cities within the United States of America is going to compete with Caricom, which is Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. They are yet to get back to us on that matter. Guatemala was never in our corner.

With respect to the initiative that we mounted on the Central American mainland and the Latin American mainland on the basis of an agreement arrived at between Caricom Heads in Montego Bay in Jamaica last year is that we decided that Caricom governments would contribute to the bid effort and would themselves—at the level of foreign ministers—lead a number of missions penetrating Latin America. I must say that the foreign minister of Barbados, Dame Billie Miller, the foreign minister of the Bahamas, Fred Mitchell, and the foreign minister of Guyana went out into the field and they have done extremely well. [*Desk thumping*] In the line is the foreign minister of Jamaica, K. D. Knight, to be followed by the Prime Minister—I hope my colleague on the other side does not throw a tantrum on this matter—of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is also due to lead one such mission as part of the conclusion of a grand Caricom effort to locate the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) headquarters. It is a good initiative. We saw it this way as the successor Government to the UNC, and we applauded and endorsed this initiative. We have always said that this should be a national effort.

Mr. Singh: That is why we want a joint select committee.

Sen. The Hon. K. Gift: I would like to see the media, the Opposition, private sector and everyone else latch on to this initiative like what is being done in Miami. The Miami budget is about US \$30million. What we are hoping to do is to be able to match that if not in quantity, at least, in quality.

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[SEN. THE HON. K. GIFT]

Friday, December 10, 2004

I would not subscribe to the view that the Prime Minister's factual statement in Miami was a veiled threat of bullying the United States of America. I think what the Prime Minister was doing was simply reciting the fact of security from a Caricom perspective. Each country had to establish a security priority. The priority of the United States of America may be from the standpoint of terrorism. Certainly, from our standpoint, it is survival. We are talking here about economic survival, and the peoples of our region benefiting from the natural assets and the natural resources. Indeed, if it took a graphic representation to bring home to the United States of America administration that we need to be looked at as a major participant, if not, a contributor to the economic and security well-being of the people, I think that was really the message that the Prime Minister was articulating in Miami.

Now, a lot of mileage was given to Jamaica establishing an embassy in China. I would like to see equal recognition being given to the initiative of Trinidad and Tobago establishing a mission in South Africa. Let me add that two other Caricom governments, namely Jamaica and the Bahamas, are pleased that Trinidad and Tobago has located and identified South Africa as a preferred country to locate an embassy. They are now standing in a queue asking us to piggyback on the facilities that we have there so that they could share in part of the bonanza that can flow from establishing a mission in South Africa. So, it goes both ways.

Now, let me return to the question with respect to Guyana and Suriname. Guyana and Suriname are attending the Continental Latin American Summit that is presently taking place. Significantly, there are three major concerns with Latin America whose President chose not to attend that meeting. This should not be viewed as a panacea for some new big economic space. There are all sorts of arrangements within the south of the Andean group and the Mercusor countries. Indeed, as far as Trinidad and Tobago is concerned, we have found ourselves as a preferred location within the context of the Ibe American Summit. Trinidad and Tobago was the only country in Caricom invited to all summits of Latin America for what we have to offer.

In addition to Latin America, we have Spain and Portugal conforming to the Ibe American Summit. Spain has a lot of investments there and everyone is looking at their interests. When we are challenged as to Trinidad and Tobago's national interests and the defence of those interests by the present administration, I want to urge colleagues on the opposite side to just stop and reflect.

With respect to the question of larger and wider economic space, while other Caricom countries are thinking of physically going out and establishing missions overseas, we find ourselves benefiting from things like the conclusion of economic partnership agreements, and investment, promotion and protection agreements as we have done in the case of China, Japan and other countries. We believe that having taken that inescapable step, we would see Chinese and Japanese investments coming to Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, the highest-ranking Chinese official, the Vice-Premier of China, is due to be visiting Trinidad and Tobago in early February 2005. In addition, two other Latin American presidents will be visiting Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the preparation for those visits. We are indeed opening up our economic space. There is no doubt about that matter. We have a lot to offer the rest of Caricom with respect to that initiative.

I think the Member for St. Augustine raised the question with respect to regional security. In a Caricom context, the question of security is one of those areas assigned to Caricom prime ministers who are dealing with governance and subjects of that nature. The security portfolio has been assigned to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. If the programme that was worked in collaboration with the United Kingdom and Canada were to be implemented, I believe that the security of the region would be very much improved. [*Desk thumping*] We are waiting to see what is going to happen in the next couple of months.

Mr. Speaker, I was surprised by what seemed to be a notion on the other side that the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) should be engaged in analysing the concept of non-sovereign regional states. To be frank, while that may be a good project for academia, I do not think that it has anything to offer to the real condition of living of Caricom countries. It seems to be something that a classroom could be engaged in—the pros and cons of it. This matter has very little practicality or applicability to countries of the regions. Perhaps, that is one area that should be given some attention within academia as far as the aspirations of that proposition go.

Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat here that in any international organization, the expectation regarding the performance of that international organization has a very close connection with the participation and the involvement of the membership of the organization. The organization does not propel itself on its own since the direction must come from the membership, the intellectual input.

Association of Caribbean States Bill
[SEN. THE HON. K. GIFT]

Friday, December 10, 2004

There is no need to blame the organization as a physical entity. We have people who are intelligent and they should be giving the direction to these organizations. I say that having spent many years with major international organizations in the region, including eight years as an executive director of the Inter American Development Bank in Washington DC. They are paying the bill so governments should set the course and give the direction intended for these institutions.

The Member for St. Augustine also raised the question as to where we are heading as a country in terms of our economic aspirations. The speaker before me on this side explained in great detail the number of associations and connections that are being made through visits by senior Government Ministers—many missions to destinations like Costa Rica, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Canada, Atlanta, and Santo Domingo, et cetera. When we are talking about Caricom's interests it is not at all unrelated to Trinidad and Tobago's interests. We are saying that with the health of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, so too will the health of the economies of other Caricom countries be improved. There is really nothing wrong about that. We are not saying that we would subordinate Trinidad and Tobago's interests to Caricom. This case has been made over again, and we are just not doing that.

The Member for St. Augustine also raised the question with respect to the establishment of embassies in Mexico, Costa Rica, Barbados, et cetera. I wish to alert Members that for the time being, this is not a priority of the Government. It may come later on but, certainly, it is not the priority of the Government.

Mr. Speaker, the relationship with Venezuela is a very unique one. Indeed, as I have said before, and also my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, there is everything to gain from the Trinidad and Tobago/Venezuela Agreement. I think there is nothing to fear from that. If there is anything it should redound to the good and the benefit, not only for Trinidad and Tobago, but for the rest of the Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, with these remarks, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

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

CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)

COSTA RICA FREE TRADE BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): I beg to move,

That a Bill to give effect to the Free Trade Agreement between the Caribbean Community and the Government of Costa Rica, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill is to give effect to the Free Trade Agreement entered into between the Caribbean Community (Caricom) and Costa Rica. Trinidad and Tobago, being a member of Caricom, is required to enact appropriate legislation to give effect to the provisions of that agreement.

This initiative dates back to 2001 and, again, this was an initiative started by the last government, but they started it in the wrong way. Even though we are part of Caricom, they attempted to do it alone. When we came into office in 2002, negotiations for a Trinidad and Tobago/Costa Rica Agreement were far advanced. In fact, negotiations were completed in May of that year. Being aware of the sensitivities within Caricom, when I went to a Caricom meeting in June/July of that year, before facing the wrath of my colleagues, I informed the more important ones of the Government's intention to convert the Trinidad and Tobago/Costa Rica Agreement into a Caricom/Costa Rica Agreement, and so obverted what would have been a real opportunity for market access. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Just to enlighten us a bit, are you saying that no member of Caricom can enter into an arrangement with any other country without it being under the umbrella of Caricom and, if so, is it a treaty requirement? Could you just explain when you say that Trinidad and Tobago could not have entered into a relationship with Costa Rica? What law is this under?

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I did not say that Trinidad and Tobago could not enter into any arrangement. I am saying that if we do, we will

Caricom Costa Rica Free Trade Bill
[HON. K. VALLEY]

Friday, December 10, 2004

face the wrath of our colleagues in Caricom. There is Article 80 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. The Member would remember that last week we passed the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. Article 80 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas says that if one does that then one has to ensure that bilateral trade agreements negotiated by an individual member state do not prejudice the state's obligation to the community. That condition is difficult to fulfil because we negotiated on a trade agreement and, therefore, we will be putting a third country on par with a Caricom country and, obviously, we will be going very close to the line.

Now, I am aware of that matter. The last time around when we were looking at that matter, I know the problems that we were faced with. When I saw the problems, I knew we had to do something otherwise those who would otherwise be our friends would suddenly become very antagonist.

We have gone past that matter and we have gotten around the obstacles. We converted the agreement into a Caricom/Costa Rica Agreement. We even had difficulty with these negotiations, but we were able to complete the negotiations within a year by using some creativity. For example, we have come up with what we called the differentiated list of products for individual Caricom states, meaning that goods which may be traded duty free between Trinidad and Tobago and Caricom may not be so traded between Jamaica and Caricom, or between Guyana and Caricom. We had to recognize the sensitivities of the different countries. In effect, when one looks at this matter one would see a series of bi-laterals that we have put under the umbrella of the Caricom/Costa Rica Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, this agreement also allows for the opting in of other Central American countries. For example, if another Central American country wants to come into that agreement they simply have to say so. As a matter of fact, El Salvador has already stated its intention and, hopefully, in the New Year, we are going to take them on rather seriously.

What is the objective of the agreement? The objective of the agreement is basically for market access. We also expect, via the agreement, to stimulate trade expansion and diversification to promotion conditions of fair competition. I think that during the budget debate the Member for St. Joseph was speaking about the issue of pasta. Obviously, a particular manufacturer of pasta got to the Opposition. These are some of the issues that we are faced with in respect to these

agreements. In effect, what the agreement does is provide increased market access or manufacturers' extra-Caricom. As you know, they have already been monopolizing the Caricom train and they need further markets.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I want to recommend this agreement for the approval of my colleagues in the House. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Clauses 1 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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

House resumed.

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday, December 13, 2004 at 1.30 p.m. On that day we will be doing the resolutions standing in my name as well as the committee stage of Bill No. 1 on the Order Paper.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.47 p.m.