

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, March 12, 2021*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, MP, Member for Siparia, who has requested leave of absence from today's sitting. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Notification of Her Excellency the President, in respect of the nomination of Mr. Mc Donald Jacob for appointment to the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]
2. Notification of Her Excellency the President, in respect of the nomination of Mr. Mark Hernandez for appointment to the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. [*Mr. E. Forde*]

Notification of Her Excellency the President, in respect of the nomination of Mr. Andre Norton for appointment to the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. [*Mr. E. Forde*]

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS**San Fernando Waterfront Redevelopment Project****(Status of)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): To the hon. Prime Minister: Could the Prime Minister provide this House with a status update on the San Fernando Waterfront Redevelopment Project which was launched in June 2020 and was supposed to generate employment as well as economic activity for surrounding communities?

The Prime Minister (**Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley**): Madam Speaker, the San

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Fernando Waterfront project which, as it is said, was launched June 2020, which is approximately nine months ago, is underway. There are a number of components in that project and they are all underway, except one or two which are having some issues with the EMA. As a result of that, we have some further discussions and compliance issues with the EMA. My last information is that that work is being advanced. So if the Member would give the appropriate notice, the relevant Minister would be able to give him the actual detail that he is looking for, but it requires appropriate notice.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister: When the project was launched by your Government in June 2020, the issue that the EMA should have been taken care of—

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am not hearing you very clearly.

Mr. Lee: Sorry, Prime Minister. Follow-up question. When the project was launched, I think by the Member for San Fernando West in June 2020, the country was assuming all the EMA issues would have been cleared up, even the PTSC bus relocation, the terminus, has not been done to date, and then no activity has started. Could you clarify when activity will start?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, my answer remains the same, that there are a number of components to the project, and if the appropriate notice would be given, an appropriate answer could be given to satisfy the Member.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**NiQUAN GTL Plant
(Payment for Products)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Question No. 2 to the Prime Minister. Given that the NiQUAN GTL Plant is now operational and there was an agreement with

the State to purchase all the offtake from the plant, could the Prime Minister state if payments for these products would be made in US dollars (USD) or TT dollars (TTD)?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, just for clarification, the agreements between NiQUAN and the other business operators are still in place. NIQUAN's arrangement is with Petrotrin and Heritage. NiQUAN sells zero sulphur diesel, which fetches a premium of 25 per cent above the market price, and it will be sold in US dollars. So it is a US dollar transaction.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: To the hon. Prime Minister: Given that we have a shortage of foreign exchange in the country, are you saying then that the products purchased from NiQUAN would be paid in US dollars to NiQUAN GTL Limited?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: That is exactly what I am saying, but the arrangement is such that that is only a part of the arrangement. The arrangement between NiQUAN and the seller is that there is an offtake agreement, where NiQUAN supplies its product to Paria. That product is sold on the international market for US dollars, and then the payments are separated when they come back into the country. It is a US dollar transaction.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: To the Prime Minister, follow-up. Prime Minister, when do you feel that the low sulphur diesel that is produced by NiQUAN would be available for local consumption, at the local market?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: As soon as a supply is available, it should be available to the local market because it is meant to satisfy the local and the foreign market. The first products have only just come off the plant. So if the Member would be a little patient, we expect that we would either use the product locally or sell it, or a

combination of both, but it is an addition to our diversification.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Follow-up question to Prime Minister. Seeing that we do not have Petrotrin anymore, and the agreement was with Petrotrin, what state company would be responsible for purchasing the products from NiQUAN GTL Limited?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the same arrangement that existed before with the principal company, Petrotrin, the Petrotrin successor companies would have that arrangement in place. So whether it is Heritage or Paria—if Paria is the company that is dealing with fuel, it may be Paria, it may be Heritage, depending if you are blending but Heritage imports finished diesel. NiQUAN's diesel is not for consumption off the plant, it is for blending and improving other diesel. So that arrangement will remain in place, and the market is there both for export and import, depending on what our needs are. **High Commission in Georgetown**

(Proposed Establishment of)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Prime Minister: Given Guyana's rise as a regional energy hub and the significant trade and other opportunities that will result, could the Prime Minister provide the House with an update on the proposed establishment of a High Commission in Georgetown?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, there is no proposed establishment of any High Commission in Georgetown. The High Commission of Trinidad and Tobago in Georgetown has already been established and has been operational [*Desk thumping*] since 2019.

Madam Speaker, the staff in the Commission has been functioning, and I do not know why a Member of Parliament would continue to mislead the population

in this way.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: In the light of what the Prime Minister has said, could the Prime Minister indicate the staffing, or if not, the High Commissioner designate or High Commissioner to Guyana?

Madam Speaker: Which question is it that you want answered?

Mr. Charles: Could the Prime Minister indicate who is the High Commissioner to Georgetown given that a mission has been established?

Madam Speaker: The question has been asked. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: With all that noise, Madam Speaker, I am not sure I heard the question. Could you repeat the question please?

Mr. Charles: Could the Prime Minister indicate who is the High Commissioner from Trinidad and Tobago to Guyana?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The Commission is functioning without a High Commissioner. There is a Charges D'Affaires and staff in place, and the High Commission is functioning. There is a High Commissioner to be appointed, and that appointment will be made at the appropriate time.

Heritage and Stabilisation Fund

(Productive Application of)

Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*): To the Prime Minister: Given the recent withdrawal of some US \$900 million from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund (HSF) in fiscal year 2020, and a further US \$300 million for fiscal year 2021 thus far, could the Prime Minister inform this House of the productive application of these sums aimed at diversifying the national economy inclusive of structural reform?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, funds from the

Heritage and Stabilisation Fund are deposited into the Consolidated Fund, and are utilized to finance all the fiscal and economic programmes of the Government, as authorized by the Parliament via approval in the annual budget, and that includes the salary of Members of Parliament. There is therefore no specific earmarking of funds for the specific purpose. It is budget support which goes into the Consolidated Fund, and you do not identify the individual dollar bill that came from the HSF, but you identify the general expenditure. So it funds the Development Programme. It funds every aspect of Government's operations during the year. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Can the Prime Minister indicate whether further funds will be withdrawn from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund to pay public servants?

Madam Speaker: I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question based on what was asked and answered.

Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Is the Prime Minister aware that in the report on the first withdrawal to the amount of US \$400 million, it states specifically support to the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Housing Development Corporation and the UDeCOTT, in exact figures from that drawdown?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Well, Madam Speaker, I do not know what is the point of that. The Government's annual budget for service of the country contains a development programme, and some of that money will go to the Development Programme. It is a fungibility involved. If I just told you it funds the annual budget, and in the budget the Development Programme has housing, it has bridges,

it has roads, that is what it is doing. The fund is not withdrawn specifically to be applied to a particular project. It goes into the Consolidated Fund and, therefore, supports the entire uplift of the State. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Could the Prime Minister give this House the assurance that withdrawals from the HSF will be used primarily for investments and not recurrent expenditure?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, everything the Government does in this country is an investment, whether it is a social programme, or health, or education. [*Desk thumping*] Everything we do to service the country is an investment, either in our health, our education, our national security, our construction, our investment in business, that is for the health of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Supplemental please, Madam Speaker. To the Prime Minister: Given the report of the Road Map to Recovery, that report, there were certain strategies identified. Can the Prime Minister indicate when those strategies are to take effect in this country?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Can the Prime Minister indicate whether or not he is aware that based on the two reports laid for the withdrawals from the HSF, those moneys were not, in fact, expended on the Development Programme, but on recurrent expenditure to pay contractors right before a general election? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am not aware of any such thing, Madam Speaker. What I

am aware of is what I will repeat again, that the Consolidated Fund covers all aspects of Government's expenditure in the national budget. Part of the national budget that the Member for Barataria/San Juan approved is a development programme which involves the payment to contractors. So I do not know what this is about, except to misinform, misdirect and mislead the population. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Since the Prime Minister says that everything the Government does is an investment, could he indicate whether the payment of rents on One Alexandra Place is an investment? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I am not going to allow that question.

Non-Lethal Weapons
(Availability for Citizens)

Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister provide a status update of the legislation necessary to make non-lethal weapons, such as pepper spray, available for use by citizens?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the Government has stated publicly of its intention to approve pepper spray for the use by citizens. It also indicated, in this House I think it was, that we have got the advice of OLEP, which is the advice we sought as to whether, in fact, it was safe enough to make it widely available. We indicated the answer was yes we could, and that it would be done with the use of particular permits.

This matter has been brought before the Cabinet. It has found favour, and has been sent to F&GP to finalize the nature of the permitting that is to be done, and very soon that should be out of the Cabinet and available for operationalization.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Prime Minister, given the gravity of this situation, particularly with the increasing reports of violence against women and girls, has the Prime Minister indicated to the F&GP, or any other relevant committee, a deadline by which this matter must be dealt with in Parliament, and permits can be made available to vulnerable citizens?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I wish I did not have to deal with this, because if my colleague from Oropouche East had dealt with it eight years ago, [*Desk thumping*] where the same gravity existed, where women were being attacked and killed in similar fashion, I would not have had to deal with it. But I give the assurance—I give the assurance that in very short order—in very short order, in this Government approval would be granted and the women will have it in their hands. [*Desk thumping*]

IDB and CAF Development Bank Loans

(Details re: WASA)

Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*): To the Prime Minister: Could the Prime Minister inform this House of the terms and conditions of the loan agreements made with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and CAF Development Bank of Latin America as outlined in the Cabinet sub-committee report on the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) recently laid in Parliament?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the Member for—is that Princes Town?—Caroni Central, is hell-bent on misleading the population. This matter was raised in a similar way, and the Minister of Finance came out and told the country that there is no loan arrangement in place with these agencies. It was done by public statement. The Member insists on putting that in

the media. The Ministry of Finance has—and Madam Speaker, what is worse, the document that he refers to was laid in this Parliament. I assure you, Madam Speaker, if you look in that document on WASA, which the Government laid, you would see no reference to any loan being entered into.

What is said in that document, for the benefit of any person who read it, is that there is a future possibility of funding operations at WASA in its reorganization with loans that could be had from the CAF or from IDB. This Member from Caroni Central has gone out telling people that the action at WASA to reorganize and to improve WASA's performance, is as a result of conditionalities that we have made from loans at IDB. Nothing is further from the truth.

There has been no loan-funding arranged. What we have said is that it is a future source. If “future” and “possible” is too confusing for the Member for Caroni Central, I simply ask him to stop misrepresenting the facts in this country.
[Desk thumping]

Mr. Ram: Supplemental please, Madam Speaker. From that report on page 25, these two entities were identified as stakeholders. Can the Prime Minister indicate how did they become stakeholders in a meeting to discuss WASA?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have nothing further to say on this question to the Member misleading people. All that I have said is the fact. There is nothing else to it, nothing else to what I have said. It is a possible source of funding, future possible funding, so there is no loan in place with no conditionality. Therefore, it is quite wrong to be saying that the Government's attempt to deal with the WASA problem is as a result of any conditionality of any loan we have entered into. Madam Speaker, the Member is confusing the public, and I wish he would stop.

Mr. Ram: Madam Speaker, I wish to indicate the question was not answered. Would you give me permission to restate the question?

Madam Speaker: Member, the question was asked and the question was answered. You are entitled to ask another question if you wish.

Mr. Ram: Madam Speaker, supplemental please, I hope I do not get the same answer. Can the Prime Minister indicate whether any arrangement with these possible—for future arrangement, will be made by public procurement or the Government intends to rely—

Madam Speaker: One minute. Just so that we will be guided as we go forward. Sucking of teeth is not permitted inside of here. Anyone who feels frustrated, anyone who is intolerant is free to leave the Chamber, compose themselves and return. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the Prime Minister indicate any possible loans with these two entities, whether it will be done by public procurement or whether it will be done using clause 7 of the recently passed public procurement legislation brought to this House.

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question, having regard to what was asked and what has been answered.

Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, could you inform this House if the IDB and the CAF bank recommended to the Cabinet to conduct a manpower audit into the operations of WASA, to determine if workers should be terminated?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: My colleague from Couva South is another offender. That colleague of ours has taken ownership of a statement which is completely untrue, that some international agency—and he named, I think it was the World Bank, now he is talking about the IDB and the CAF, as giving the Government of Trinidad

and Tobago instructions about workers and reorganization. Madam Speaker, the Government has said publicly that the Member's statement is not true. It is mischief and we are in no such arrangement, and we are following no conditionality made to us by any international agency. As fast as we repeat it, they come out—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, I can say no more.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). The Prime Minister is entitled to his opinion and his views, but he ought not to be accusing Members of the Opposition as making mischief. That is improper. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, could you inform the House then if the Water and Sewerage Authority has commenced a manpower audit into WASA to determine if workers will be terminated?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question based on the principal question asked and answered, and the following questions.

Member for Fyzabad.

COVAX and African Medical Supplies Platform

(Status of Negotiations with)

Dr. Lackram Bodoë (Fyzabad): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister provide this House with an update on the status of negotiations between the Government and providers outside the COVAX and African Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP) facilities for the procurement of COVID-19 vaccines?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, in October 2020, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago through the Ministry of Health started bilateral discussions with producers of vaccines in China, Sinopharm, and later on the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, alongside the Ministry of Health had communication and contact with producers of vaccines in India, who are producing

for western Europe and the Americas, including the Caribbean.

We are also in bilateral discussions with the major producers of approved vaccines, Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca. These discussions are ongoing, and depending on how far those discussions have progressed there are confidentiality agreements in place. We will update the country once we have firm commitments from any of these discussions.

Madam Speaker, as you will know, there are few producers of vaccines in the world, and their supply has largely been contracted out and bought out by large contracts in the major wealthy countries. We are in an arrangement to get vaccines in the COVAX, and even the volumes we expected in the COVAX are not being satisfied because of supplies from the approved manufacturers being cornered by the large countries. However, we anticipate that in the very near future we will get our first shipment of vaccines in COVAX, and there will be a continuous flow after that. The marketplace will improve as more and more vaccines become available, and we expect that by midyear this question of availability of vaccines will recede.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodeo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, thank for that update. Can you indicate, are you in a position to indicate the number of vaccines that the Government intends to procure outside the COVAX, African Medical Supplies Platform, so as to create the herd immunity that is required to allow further opening up of the economy?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: What we are looking at is getting to a level of vaccinating that—in terms of actually having people vaccinated, is about approximately 600,000 or 700,000, because that would mean we are in the order of between 60 and 75 per cent. The biology would tell us that that is where we are in the range of herd immunity. However, having the vaccine is one thing. Getting it in the

people's arms voluntarily is another thing. Because there is one country I know of that has a lot of vaccines, but is having great difficulty in having people vaccinated to get to their state of herd immunity. So I trust that in Trinidad and Tobago, when we get our vaccines, there would be a high acceptability, and that people would get themselves vaccinated, and we will move from a low percentage to upwards of 60 per cent, and then we would be able to do a lot of things, including taking steps to open up our borders and so on.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Prime Minister, as head of Government of this country, do you at this time have a clue as to when this country will receive or have possession of 1.4 million doses for 700,000 persons, to equate to herd immunity? [*Desk thumping*] Do you have a clue of when this country will have mass administration of vaccines?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I just said that we expect in short order to begin receiving our supply from COVAX. That will be the beginning of a flow of vaccines into this country. The COVAX commitments are in place. Madam Speaker, understand that we do not make vaccines, and vaccines cannot be bought on demand in the world. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: We do not make vaccines, and worse, vaccines cannot be bought on order in today's world. That situation will improve in the months ahead. We have commitments. We have discussions in place. We have contracts in place. We have payments in place, and given the world supply, to answer the question from the Member for Oropouche East, as I speak to you now, we are looking at about midyear that the availability and flow by May/June/July/August, that the flow of vaccines into our country will be such that we will be very busy

vaccinating the population. We expect that the marketplace, the availability of vaccines in the marketplace towards the end of the year, would not be a problem because there would be more suppliers and larger volumes which are no longer commandeered but available to small countries like ours.

There is one Caricom country that has done something which we are not prepared to do. The health department in one Caricom country has authorized the use of unapproved vaccines into their country because the difficulty exists. There is no WHO approval for—what do they call it, Sputnik and Sinopharm vaccines, and we are not prepared to vaccinate our population with anything other than WHO vaccines, and that is what is going to stand. [*Desk thumping*] So all this carrying on about “we not getting vaccine” and “we late”, it is a product that is not available.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Charles: Can the Prime Minister tell me, as a 72-year-old with comorbidities, when will I be vaccinated? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, I am not going to allow that question. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I ask the Prime Minister—if the Prime Minister has a specific and precise response to a question, is there any update on the request made by this Government for the provision of the World Health Organization approved vaccines from the Republic of India?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The answer is, no. There is no update.

Madam Speaker: Okay. And, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Prime Minister, are you aware that the Moderna vaccine is not WHO certified at this moment?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: But, Madam Speaker, I am aware, but the countries that

produce it provide approval to be used within their borders and therefore, that is why it is not available to people like us because it is only approved to use within the borders of certain countries and the countries that produce the vaccine. We cannot buy it off the shelf, we cannot buy it from the supplier.

**CARIFORUM STATES (THE CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY AND
THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC) AND THE UNITED KINGDOM OF
GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND BILL, 2021**

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

[*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to give effect to the Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM States (the Caribbean Community and the Dominican Republic) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; to effect the consequential amendments to the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 and for related matters, be read a second time.

Madam Speaker, the Bill that is before us today, this honourable House today is intended to give effect to the CARIFORUM United Kingdom Economic Partnership Agreement which is an agreement to govern trade between CARIFORUM States, that is, the 14 members of Caricom and the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom.

This House may recall that in 2008, Trinidad and Tobago as part of the CARIFORUM signed on to the CARIFORUM-European Union Economic Partnership Agreement. And, Madam Speaker, on June 23, 2016 the UK via referendum voted to leave the EU. In it was recognized that once UK left the EU, the trading relationship between the UK and the CARIFORUM States could not continue under the CARIFORUM-EU EPA, rather there was a need for

CARIFORUM States to secure a new trading arrangement with the UK upon its exit from the EU. This new Agreement would replace the CARIFORUM-EU EPA in respect of the relationship between CARIFORUM and the United Kingdom only.

In other words, Madam Speaker, the CARIFORUM-EU EPA remains in place and will continue to cover trade between Trinidad and Tobago and the EU Member States. And the CARIFORUM-UK EPA which is before us today would now cover the trade and economic relations between Trinidad and Tobago and the UK.

Madam Speaker, in order to ensure a smooth and immediate transition and as well to ensure continuity in the preferential trading relationship with the UK, what is called rollover agreement which mirrors as far as possible the CARIFORUM-EU EPA has been negotiated and signed.

CARIFORUM countries and the UK undertook and technical replication exercise of the existing CARIFORUM-EU EPA, and from January 2018 to March 2019, this exercise was led by the Caricom Secretariat and the UK with participation support and input from senior trade officials from the CARIFORUM States including Trinidad and Tobago. The replication exercise took place under the guideline that any changes made to the text should not modify the substance of the original CARIFORUM-EU EPA, and should not afford any party more or less preferences granted under that Agreement.

So it is a true replication, and in that regard the only technical amendments made were limited to the deletion of language or obligations that are clearly not applicable in the context of a CARIFORUM-UK Agreement and minor textual modifications to take account of current realities in the context of the CARIFORUM-UK Agreement. For example, the replacement of the term “EC

party” and it is used interchangeably, EC party/EU party, with the term United Kingdom, and the deletion of references to articles relating to the French outermost region which are linked to the EU as these are not applicable to the UK EPA. And by the end of the exercise, CARIFORUM States and the UK reached an agreement on the CARIFORUM-UK EPA. Trinidad and Tobago signed a CARIFORUM-UK EPA on April 01, 2019, in London, of course, the signing was by our High Commissioner then in London, High Commissioner London.

Madam Speaker, it is to be noted that on December 09, 2020, Trinidad and Tobago entered into a non-legally binding MOU, memorandum of understanding with the UK which signalled to the UK, Trinidad and Tobago’s intention to use its best efforts to bring the CARIFORUM-UK EPA international law into effect through the passage of the Bill before us today.

The MOU ends on April 01, 2021. The signing of the MOU was also as important as it allowed for the continuation of preferential access to the UK market until the assenting of this Bill.

And, Madam Speaker, the Agreement is voluminous and so that there are 1,370 pages and it comprises a preamble of six parts: Part one being the trade partnership for sustainable development; part two, being trade and trade-related matters; part three being dispute avoidance and settlement; part four being general exceptions; part five being institutional provisions; and part six being general and final provisions. fourteen annexes to the Agreement cover, among other things, the commitments that the CARIFORUM States and the UK have made in respect of the trade in goods and the trade in services, and the rules of procedure for the settlement of any disputes that may arise between the parties throughout the course of the Agreement.

Also included are three protocols and they are related and annexes. Protocol

one which defines the concept of originating products. This is important as it is only products that meet the criteria of origin will be afforded preferential treatment under the Agreement.

Protocol two which also—which allows for mutual administrative assistance in customs matters, and protocol three, on cultural cooperation. There are also eight joint declarations, one on each. Development cooperation, business, used goods, a trilateral approach to rules of origin, one on origin fisheries products, one concerning the principality of Andorra and the Republic of San Marino and, of course, one on the signing of the EPA at political dialogue, consultations and appropriate measures. There is also a joint statement on trade between the UK and CARIFORUM States. There is also a declaration of the CARIFORUM States relating to protocol one on the origin of fisheries products, as I mentioned before and, of course, the signatures. And, Madam Speaker, a copy of the actual Agreement was gazetted on November 26, 2020, as No. 200 of 2020 and a copy is laid now on the floor of this honourable House.

Madam Speaker, the CARIFORUM-UK EPA will support Government's initiatives to develop and to grow the manufacturing sector of Trinidad and Tobago, as pointed out in our national trade policy 2019—2023, identifying the UK market as having untapped export potential for Trinidad and Tobago. And this is important given that the UK was one of Trinidad and Tobago's larger trading partners within the EU prior to this departure. And our export earnings are clearly shown in the trade data which states that in 2019 the UK was Trinidad and Tobago's fifth highest export market within the EU, with an exported value of \$602million. Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and France would have been ahead.

In 2020 and that is just between the months of January to November, the UK was Trinidad and Tobago's third highest export market among the other EU

countries with an exported value of \$691.3million. And the passing of this Bill will ensure that the preferences afforded to our existing and future exporters will be maintained.

I also want to take this opportunity to highlight that specific focus is being placed on developing this country's manufacturing sector. And it is only last February that the Government would have approved a national export booster initiative for the manufacturing sector in the value of \$50million aimed at promoting exports in international markets including the UK. The strategic areas therefore covered by the initiative will no doubt tie into the realization of the objectives of the CARIFORUM-UK EPA including increased competitiveness and integration into the world economy.

Madam Speaker, the main objectives as set out in Article 1 of the Agreement include the:

“Contributing to the reduction and eventual eradication of poverty...

Promoting regional integration, economic cooperation and good governance...

Promoting the gradual integration of the CARIFORUM States into the world economy...

Improving the CARIFORUM States' capacity in trade policy and trade-related issues;

Supporting the conditions for increasing investment and private sector initiative and enhancing supply capacity, competitiveness and economic growth...”—and:

“Strengthening the existing relations between”—CARIFORUM and the UK—“on the basis of solidarity and mutual interest.”

So, Madam Speaker, allow me to explain some of the targeted benefits of

this trading regime, and the first one is a predictable and permanent trading arrangement. The CARIFORUM-UK EPA has put in place a predictable and permanent trading arrangement for both the export of primary and manufactured goods and services and the import of much needed goods that we rely on, such as pharmaceuticals for our citizens allowing them to be more affordable and also key inputs into the manufacturing sector allowing them to be price competitive.

Trinidad and Tobago as part of CARIFORUM is now guaranteed duty-free, quota-free access for all of its exports into the UK with the only exception being arms and ammunition. However, UK products entering CARIFORUM States including Trinidad and Tobago will be subject to either immediate duty-free access or phased reduction of duties over time, and this liberalization will be gradual. That is phased reduction and that is spread over 11 years and thus minimizing the revenue effect and allowing our businesses in these particular sectors, which were liberalized, the opportunities to build their competitiveness over the medium to long term.

So that, Madam Speaker, in our original negotiation with the EU also there were several sensitive sectors which were protected and these are, for example, frozen animal meats, fish fillets, shrimp, lobster, milk and creams, butter, cheese, cabbage, lettuce, peas, cassava, potatoes, grapefruit, watermelon, papaya, same as pawpaw, and rice. And I assure you that under the CARIFORUM-UK EPA these sectors remain protected.

And allow me to elaborate a bit on the trade data which speaks to the strong trading relationship which we are seeking to maintain and grow. Trinidad and Tobago's exports displayed an upward trend from 2015 to 2017, and while exports declined in 2018 and 2019, signs of recovery were demonstrated in 2020 with exports having increased some 16 per cent over the value in 2019.

Methanol was consistently Trinidad and Tobago's highest exported product to the UK from 2015 to 2019 while LNG, liquefied natural gas, was the highest exported product in 2020. Other top exports include ammonia, other petroleum oils, diesel oil but also aromatic bitters, paint, lathes, gas oil, curry, rum, beer, Shandy, chocolates and cereals. And despite the fall in energy exports to the UK, manufactured goods showed healthy performance with further room for local producers to capitalize on the benefits of this Agreement.

The trend in Trinidad and Tobago imports from the UK showed a slight downward slope from 2015 to 2017, and thereafter imports increased in 2018 and further in 2019. And the main products imported from the UK would include whiskey, bank and currency notes, books, machinery, appliances, cheese, cars, vehicles, medicaments. Altogether these preferences received under the CARIFORUM-UK EPA, through the UK opening up its market, and will allow Trinidad and Tobago exporters again to establish a market presence for their products in the UK which is made up something like 670 million people.

The healthy competition in the UK market will encourage local manufacturers to produce high-quality products and to be better able to compete in the international arena, and this will no doubt benefit Trinidad and Tobago through increased trade and also foreign exchange earnings.

And, Madam Speaker, I also wish to add that to promote enhanced use of these preferences, several projects have been undertaken nationally and regionally to promote and facilitate increased awareness of this Agreement among the private and the public sectors.

The national project will be undertaken through the delivery of a targeted awareness, a virtual session, several sessions and the administration of a pre and post-evaluation survey to participants. The regional project currently being

implemented is called the UK Trade Partnerships Programme and this project aims to promote trade with the UK under the existing Agreement.

The project is funded by the Government of the UK through the department of international development, and this project runs from 2020 to 2022 and is being implemented by the International Trade Centre in Geneva.

The ITC has launched a survey through its social media platforms which seek to provide feedback on local traders' pre and post-Brexit business experiences and the awareness of market access, penetration and that kind of thing and all of the conditions provided under the EPA. And I can tell you that the response by the Trinidad and Tobago manufacturers, it just has been overwhelming.

It is also very important for me to say this, that the CARIFORUM-UK EPA must be brought into international law to the passage of this Bill to ensure continued duty-free access to our country's exports, and I will tell you why. As the UK recently announced the—what is the UK global tariff, and that took effect on January 01, 2020. It is similar to our CET arrangements. Right? So if we do not move to bring this Bill to law, Trinidad and Tobago's products such as our cereals and our beer and our rum and so on and aerated beverages will face duties under the UKGT.

The second benefit that I want to speak to is the permanent trading arrangements of services, and I will speak more to it in my winding up, as I am not sure how much time I will have.

There is a permanent arrangement for trading services between CARIFORUM and the UK and our previous trading arrangements with the UK under the EU EPA also provided the same, and this UK EPA, CARIFORUM EPA, will continue to provide the favourable opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago's export of services to the UK. And by way of example, this new UK EPA provides

a temporary movement but not exceeding six months of our service providers into the UK market in 29 different sectors. So you are talking about professionals as accountants, tax advisers and bookkeepers, architects, engineers, urban planners, doctors, dentists, vets, midwives and nurses, physiotherapists, paramedical personnel, computer technicians, researchers, chefs, tourist guides, services, fashion models, translators and interpreters, I mean, advertising personnel, but you have to have a contract.

So nationals of Trinidad and Tobago who are contractual service suppliers who wish to supply their services to the UK temporarily, as I said six months, can do so once a contract has been secured with a UK firm. But outside of that, independent professionals or self-employed persons who fall within particular categories, you do not have to have a contract, can also move to the UK temporarily for six months to provide their services such as accountants, tax advisers and bookkeepers, architects, engineers, urban planners, compute technicians, market researchers, management consultants. All right?

There is also another benefit of the support for the growth of the cultural industry. And, of course, we have distinguished ourselves in this region in terms of our cultural industry and we have gained significant international recognition for our artistes and our cultural expressions. And this inclusion of protocol three on cultural cooperation allows for the development of the sector's economic potential and places a renewed focus on culture and creativity which will all foster on social cohesion and create vibrant communities, engage our youth and create jobs and promote the development of both a national and regional identity and create opportunities for collaboration and so on.

There is also another benefit in terms of further development of trade-related areas and integration into the trading arena. But I want go to the actual Bill,

Madam Speaker, to take you through the clauses. It is simple and it is straightforward.

Clause 1 is the standard short-title clause. Clause 2 is the commencement clause. It provides for the Act and Agreement to come into effect on such dates as may be fixed by the President by proclamation.

And, Madam Speaker, this approach is similar to the one taken in the respect of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA Act. And this will allow for the Act to come into effect. For certain provisions of the EPA such as those which relate to development cooperation, agriculture, trademarks, GIs, I mean, geographical indications, copyrights, tourism services, innovation and market access, just to name a few to come into effect as fixed by the President by proclamation.

And for other provisions of the EPA and this is important to know as well, to come into effect on dates in the future by a proclamation of the President. And these would include those articles of the EPA in respect of which the necessary administrative legislative or other work is to be completed before those obligations can take effect. For example, provisions related to services which require legislative amendments to the Immigration Act regarding treatment of graduate trainees and trained professionals from the UK entering Trinidad and Tobago under the EPA. That has to be done.

Intellectual property in which—and I mentioned some aspects which can be done immediately. I talked about the trademarks and copyright and GIs. But intellectual property, in which there have been many developments, but there is still work to be done regarding genetic resources, traditional knowledge and folk law as intellectual property rights and, of course, investment and data protection in which steps are being taken to develop legislation.

And these are the types of articles, Madam Speaker, that will come into

effect at a later date. But, Madam Speaker, it is important to note that the later proclamation of these articles definitely would not preclude Trinidad and Tobago from exporting our goods and services into the UK upon the immediate proclamation by the President.

Clause 3 defines the terms “Agreement”, “Minister”, “Ministry”. It is to be noted that given the size of the CARIFORUM-UK EPA, it will not be attached to the Bill as a schedule. Instead, as was done with the CARIFORUM-EU EPA, the Agreement was gazetted and the relevant reference is made in the definition of “Agreement”.

Clause 4, subclause (1) is intended subject to the commencement clause to give provisions of the Agreement the force of law. This would take effect on the dates of proclamation fixed by the President in accordance with clause 2. Subclauses (2) to (4) allow for any amendment of the Agreement to be given effect by the Minister by order.

And, Madam Speaker, this House may rest assured that this legislation anticipates some parliamentary scrutiny of this process and as such any order by the Minister for an amendment to the EPA would be subject to the affirmative resolution of Parliament.

Subclauses (5) and (6) allow for judicial notice to be taken of the provisions of the EPA and any amendments that are going to be made in the future. It also requires that the Minister makes a copy of the EPA and any orders that are made to amend it are available on the Ministry’s website and to be ensured that a copy of the EPA and any orders made in respect of it are gazetted.

Clause 5 gives the Minister the authority to make regulations as may be required.

And clause 6 sets out the consequential amendments that arise in respect of

the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01, for the removal and reduction of tariffs in respect of goods originating in the UK. And it proposes to amend the Customs Act by inserting a new section 6C by which the term “Agreement” is defined. It is to be noted that this definition accords with the definition of the said term in clause 3 of the Bill.

A new Schedule, the Eleventh Schedule is inserted. And this Schedule sets out the goods which originate in the UK and are being imported into Trinidad and Tobago under the EPA which are duty-free at the time of the signature of the EPA, acknowledging that those goods will continue to be duty-free.

A new Schedule, the Twelfth Schedule is inserted. And this Schedule sets out the reduction of duties on a phased basis of those goods set out in the Schedule which originate in the UK which are being imported pursuant to the EPA into Trinidad and Tobago which meet the rules origin requirements, that is a must, and in respect of which the appropriate documentation is submitted. Some of the items may require SPS and so on. Right?

And, Madam Speaker, the President is empowered to amend the Twelfth Schedule, just as we do always for any amendment of tariffs set out in that Schedule to come into effect or to provide for their lapsing or expiration. And that is the simplicity of the Bill, six straight clauses.

So, Madam Speaker, as I said before, the UK in and of itself, is a significant trading partner, but more than that, a country with whom this country has historical relations, fraternal relations, a very, very important partner in all aspects beyond trade, and therefore we consider the UK a significant partner, and in this case of this Bill before us, a significant trading partner to Trinidad and Tobago. Like the CARIFORUM-EU EPA, the CARIFORUM-UK EPA not only seeks to maintain and preserve the preferential access for our goods and services, but it provides

significant opportunities for our manufacturers and our service suppliers to grow, and I detailed all of the professions, Madam Speaker.

Our Government in its recovery plan has embarked upon a robust development agenda to navigate this country to sustainable growth and diversification. And as a part of that plan, significant attention is being placed on increasing our exports to generate the much-needed revenue and foreign exchange. There is great potential for increased exports, as well as new product exports from the non-energy sector under the signed CARIFORUM-UK EPA.

So this comprehensive EPA, the 1,370 pages of it all, it marks a milestone in our trade and development and economic development, as it covers a wide range of areas which will enhance the integration of our country and region into the world trading system and strengthen our participation at discussions in the wider international fora.

Further, as a development agreement, the development cooperation will improve our institutional procedures and insist with addressing our supply side constraints. I am certain that the healthy development of economic and trading relations between Trinidad and Tobago and the UK will continue to bring solid and tangible benefits to the people of both countries. And, of course, there is our diaspora always at heart. And by bringing this piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago seeks to implement the EPA so that the benefits which are available to our citizens under the Agreement can be realized. Madam Speaker, I therefore commend this Bill to this honourable House, and I beg to move. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam

Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to respond to the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, as the hon. Minister has just laid this very important Bill in this House. Madam Speaker, the Bill paves the way for the implementation of an asymmetric bilateral trade agreement between the 14 member Caricom States and the Dominican Republic and the United Kingdom to ensure that there are continued trade benefits for the region post-BREXIT.

Madam Speaker, this Bill as the Minister said contains six clauses and two schedules. And the document that was laid before us for review is 364 pages, and those two schedules have, in my estimate, about half a million products and services that are going to be within this bilateral trade between Trinidad and Tobago and the Caricom states with the United Kingdom. Madam Speaker, I want to agree with the hon. Minister that the Bill is a straightforward Bill, but in my view it is not a simple Bill. Because when you look at the entire Agreement which was not before the House, but you had to take a read of the entire 1,000-page document which the Minister referred to, this Bill interferes with components of our financial sector, our economy, serious issues of trade, high impact to the manufacturing sector, it impacts the small business sector. Clearly it affects our petroleum sector, our petrochemical sector, our agricultural sector, pharmaceuticals, materials and constructions, motor vehicles.

Madam Speaker, by 2033, from buttons to Bentleys will have duty-free access into this country. Madam Speaker, that, while it is a good thing because it means that Trinidad and Tobago by virtue of a bilateral arrangement—any item that has access into the UK or vice versa is a good thing. But, we must prepare our economy, our manufacturers, our players to make sure that that bilateral trade has some equity in that our partner in the UK does not gain an upper hand while we suffer a consequence later down. Madam Speaker, there could be no reasonable

opposition to an economic agreement with duty-free benefits between this region and the UK. But we must scratch the surface a little deeper, and you would realize that there may be some unsatisfactory trade realities which I am hoping that the Minister will address in her wind up, and perhaps if it is not in the forefront or the view of the Government, that while we do have about 12 or 13 years to full duty-free for all products out of Britain, that some actions can be put in place to deal with this.

Madam Speaker, the region, which is our CARIFORUM region, has had a negative balance of trade with the EU, with a reduction in exports over the years, as the Minister said. But Trinidad and Tobago has underperformed in trade with the EU countries, especially with petroleum products as domestic production and world prices have fallen. As a bloc the EU is the world's largest economy, accounting for around 20 per cent of GDP. The EU's GDP is 14 trillion Euros, yet, Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has only nominal trade ties and a balance of trade deficit with the EU nations. The UK, Madam Speaker, is the fifth largest exporter and the fifth largest importer in the world. Trinidad and Tobago is listed as the UK's 90th largest trading partner, which is only accounting for about 0.1 per cent of total UK trade.

Madam Speaker, a report from the UK Department of International Trade in 2019, identified 1,286 VAT registered UK businesses exported goods to Trinidad and Tobago, but only 96 registered UK companies imported goods back from Trinidad to the UK. So there is a huge imbalance even on the old EU EPA. So, while the EPA itself is good paperwork and a positive trade initiative on its own, it cannot provide a flip in exports that we are looking for, unless we address certain issues, some of them which I will present for this House to consider. To weigh, Madam Speaker, the likely results from the UK EPA, we must examine the current

state with respect to Trinidad and Tobago and the existing CARIFORUM EPA, because it is a similar model agreement. While the Agreement creates preferential market access, CARIFORUM itself has slipped from a trade surplus to a deficit within the EU. Since 2008, Madam Speaker, when the CARIFORUM-EU EPA was launched European exporters have done better than their regional counterparts. In 2019, the most recent year for which statistics are available, the CARIFORUM nations exported €4.6 billion worth of goods and services, but it imported €7.04 billion. What that says, Madam Speaker, is that there was a trade deficit of over €2.44 billion. So, even if the removal of tariff barriers in the region, including Trinidad and Tobago, it could not register a positive balance of trade. The region is currently exporting less petroleum products; sugar, bananas, aluminium, rum and other products to the EU.

So, Madam Speaker, in the Minister's presentation, the hon. Minister identified in the EPA between CARIFORUM and the EU some key objectives. Again, since this EPA is modelled in a similar manner, I am thinking that the objectives would still apply. It is important to examine how these goals, and to see how Trinidad and Tobago has fared. If I would just quickly repeat some of those objectives:

1. Reduction and eventual eradication of poverty.

Madam Speaker, sadly to say under this administration there has been no eradication and in many cases poverty has worsened in several areas in this country.

2. Promotion of regional economic integration and cooperation.

Madam Speaker, Caricom still cannot decide on a way forward with the CSME.

3. Strengthening of the region's integration in the world economy.

I have seen no evidence of that, Madam Speaker.

4. Improvement of the region's capacities in terms of trade policies and trade related issues.

Madam Speaker, respectfully, this has not taken place under this administration.

5. Establishment and implementation of an effective predictable and transparent regulatory framework for investment in the region.

No headway has been made in that either, Madam Speaker.

6. Improvement of the role of the private sector. TTMA and the national and regional chambers have been pleading for more involvement in relevant policy making.

That has not happened, Madam Speaker.

7. Re-enforcement of the relations between parties on the basis of solidarity and mutual respect.

Again, no evidence of more meaningful diplomatic relation between the parties.

So, Madam Speaker, the question that I must ask, what is the Government doing to ensure a reversal of the trade deficit with the EU, and at least to get the best from this CARIFORUM-UK EPA? At a time when Trinidad and Tobago's economy is at its lowest ebb as a result, as you know, of the declining energy production, weak commodity prices and, of course, COVID-19, it is a no-brainer that the Government should seek to leverage out the most out of this duty-free access to the United Kingdom. So to give a boost to this country's exporters and potential exporters, financial stimulus should be provided to niche manufacturers so that they could fully benefit from the duty-free status.

Madam Speaker, SME should be granted incentives in order to enter the export market. The Minister has touted the longstanding trading relations with the UK, but hon. Minister has not announced a pathway to reap significant and sustainable financial benefits from this new EPA. In fact, Madam Speaker, with the

impending increases in water and electricity rates, property tax, et cetera, domestic cost of production is likely to increase, affecting the competitiveness of our products, because as a bilateral trade, while we will have duty-free access into the British market, our products must be competitive as well for a demand to be created. Madam Speaker, when you add the escalating crime situation and businesses having to have higher charges to their books for security, transportation and other services, this too will affect transportation—sorry, production cost for our products to enter the British market.

So, Madam Speaker, the question I will ask the Minister as well: What layer of protection is the Government giving to local exporters and potential exporters? Is the Government cooperating with the manufacturers association to create a more conducive environment for entrepreneurship and innovation? Hopefully in her winding up the Minister will address that. Madam Speaker, I have read on several occasions where the TTMA has been requesting certain trade facilitation measures in order to double exports to TT, seven billion by 2025. What is the status of that arrangement, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, I am asking the hon. Minister to ensure that her Government reviews all applicable trade policies going forward. The Government must also speed up its digitization process, including the effective implementation of the e-commerce windows. Innovation and efficient and trained workforce and the cooperation of the labour sector, modern technology, updated intellectual property matters, marketing thrust, competitive labelling and packaging are all required if Trinidad and Tobago is to gain from this EPA, and the Government must provide purposeful leadership.

In some cases, Madam Speaker, manufacturers and prospective exporters are not fully aware of the benefits of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA. And I am glad to hear the Minister announced that there will be a training programme and a

sensitization programme going forward. So definitely a concise, precise and strong education campaign must be undertaken for both the EU and the UK arrangements to really make sense to our manufacturers. Some exporters, I suspect, because of the lack of knowledge, they have opted for nearby markets, smaller economies, really strangled in their ability to grow their sales as well. Madam Speaker, they may be passing up opportunities for this large European market, as the Minister identified it is about 650 million people, if I heard her correct. In addition, CARIFORUM countries should collaborate with each other in defining common goals. Madam Speaker, I think the Caricom countries that form the CARIFORUM group, and Trinidad and Tobago ought to take a leadership role in having this conversation, they should really pool resources in tackling some of the structural challenges and in improving the business environment of the bloc itself. On that score, Madam Speaker, strengthening the Caribbean CSME would assist regional countries with respect to the EU and the UK EPAs.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister spoke very importantly about the contribution of the energy sector to our trade with Great Britain. But even though our sector remains the mainstay, our energy sector remains the mainstay, the Government, Madam Speaker, respectfully is really dilly-dallying while the production declines and export market dwindles. The slow privatization process, which the Government is currently looking at Petrotrin has really become a scandal, and if we cannot sort that out in the shortest time frame, Madam Speaker, a huge market potential in the British market is going to be affected. I know my colleague who will speak after me may touch on some of that as well.

Madam Speaker, it is clear that a lot of piecemeal policies and incentives have not achieved their intended purposes in that energy sector, when you look at the whole sector. There is another urgent energy export issue which I think will

play a very important role in managing this EPA going forward. The British Prime Minister Mr. Boris Johnson told the 2020 Climate Change Conference that his government would move to end taxpayer support for fossil fuel projects overseas. Madam Speaker, that is a concern to me because this could mean an eventual roll back of investments in Trinidad and Tobago by British energy companies. And as you would know, BP is a British company and they have one of the largest energy investments in Trinidad. How would that decision by the British Prime Minister affect our EPA going forward? Perhaps the Minister can speak on that in her wind up. So, Madam Speaker, if that happens, this is going to hit Trinidad and Tobago where it hurts most, in our pockets, leading to reduced taxes, greater foreign exchange crisis, lower employment and setbacks for the downstream services sector.

Madam Speaker, I do not believe that I have heard the Government respond in any formal way to this issue of the British Prime Minister's decision with regard to that carbon emissions policy. Madam Speaker, the Minister spoke briefly also about trading services which form part of the overall agreement. Trading services to Europe are mainly in the area of tourism which was declining even before the COVID-19 virus. There was a 1.9 per cent decline in arrivals of Europeans to CARIFORUM countries in 2019, compared to the previous year. Madam Speaker, according to the Trinidad and Tobago Immigration Division, the number of European visitors to Trinidad and Tobago fell from 64,877 in 2014, to roughly a little over 50,000 in 2019. So about 30,000 British nationals visit Trinidad each year, and when they come they bring their money, they spend, we earn foreign exchange. But there are two things that have been affecting British travellers and only the Government can address it to fix it. The British authorities have been warning about crime and a health release in this country.

In a recent travel advisory issued on January 08, 2020, just before the COVID-19 outbreak, the advisory painted a very dire picture about the state of security in this country. You know, they spoke about crime in Port of Spain, terrorist attacks and so on, but this is something that the Government must address because if we are going forward with this bilateral trade and we are allowing all these goods duty-free access into Trinidad, our tourism capacity dealing with that issue of the perception and the fear of crime in this country, the Government must address that, because we want to get the most out of the tourism capacity that we can pull from not only Britain but to the entire European community. Added to that, Madam Speaker, there was another travel advisory concerning, there is a risk of mosquito borne illness in Trinidad and Tobago. The UK health authority had classified Trinidad and Tobago as having a risk of the Zika virus transmission. The T&T Government, as far as I am aware, and perhaps the Minister of Health could advise, that they have not advised the British government that Zika is no longer an urgent health matter in this country. If it is, perhaps the Minister can advise. So those two things, Madam Speaker, it really dampens and hampers how we get a flow of people from the UK, from Britain and from the European Union into Trinidad and Tobago as part of that bilateral arrangement to get money for us to earn income in Trinidad. Madam Speaker, it is another example of the Government's sloppiness in dealing with some of these things, and I urge the Minister that, you know, these things must be addressed at Cabinet level, to make sure that this 2033 timeline of access of goods and services into Trinidad and Tobago, that we really deal with these matters.

Madam Speaker, with regard to trade with the European Union countries in cultural services such as musicians, fashion models, designers. I think the Minister spoke briefly of that. There is a reason for the low trade in that area. These are all

potential revenue earners for Trinidad and Tobago. The reason for that is that several providers in my research faced difficulties with respect to issues like visas, language barriers, language certification and other key issues. So, my question to the hon. Minister, if we are going to look at all these areas to bring business to Trinidad or to carry our services to the United Kingdom and earn revenue, is the Government seeking to resolve these problems through services and cultural protocols with the UK and the EU? I read in the—

Madam Speaker: Member, you know, I keep hearing you bringing in the EU, remember this is not—this Bill does not deal with the EU. So, I have allowed it where you sort of tried to show a comparison, but the road you are going down now, I suggest you deal with the UK, this is what this is about.

Mr. R. Paray: So, Madam Speaker, I will just rephrase. I am asking the Government to resolve these problems through services and cultural protocols with the United Kingdom. I read in the agreement documents and in some news reports that our High Commissioner to London did the signing on our behalf of this particular agreement, so, my question through the Minister is: What is the T&T High Commissioner in London doing or putting in place to resolve some of these issues regarding our cultural services, musicians and so on, who are experiencing these problems?

Madam Speaker, the new EPA really offers an opportunity for our cultural ambassadors to pedal their goods and services in Britain, a country which Trinidad and Tobago has a longstanding history. What is the Government going to do to guarantee a level playing field and greater opportunities for all locals? Hopefully the Minister can address that in her wind up. The EPA, Madam Speaker, will create, I think it is supposed to create easier investments for the CARIFORUM States but still as of today, Trinidad and Tobago has not been able to attract any

investments through those arrangements, through those EPAs over the last five years. So my question is: Are we to expect any difference going forward since both agreements are complementary?

The PNM has made Trinidad and Tobago very unattractive in terms of investments because of decisions made in our economic space, and I am hoping that the Minister understands that unless we do not improve our current standing in the ease of doing business, move us from 105, get us out of that space, then we are not going to be assisting our manufacturers and our small businesses to really compete against our British partners in the coming years, especially on the countdown to 2033. Madam Speaker, I must say that between the period of 2010 to 2015, the Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration had made Trinidad and Tobago one of the most competitive and attractive investment destinations, and our country reaped the financial rewards for that good work. This new EPA gives the Government an opportunity—*[Interruption]*

[Mr. Hinds stands]

Madam Speaker: Member, you cannot—no, no, we speak with—

Mr. Hinds: Sorry.

Mr. Indarsingh: What is the Standing Order?

Mr. Hinds: 48(4), Madam Speaker, he is imputing improper motives.

Madam Speaker: No, no, no. Please continue.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes—*[Inaudible]*

Madam Speaker: I need no help, thank you so much. Thank you. *[Crosstalk]* Member for St. Augustine, maybe if you look this way you will see I am on my legs. In the light of this week, Couva South, your readily assistance may be taken in the wrong light. Member.

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, I will just repeat this line: This new EPA gives the Government the opportunity to reset the investment climate. The question I have to ask the Minister again: Are there any new and measurable trade advantages for CARIFORUM countries and T&T in particular with respect to this United Kingdom which is now delinked from the European Union?

In 2019, Madam Speaker, CARIFORUM exports to the UK were 11 per cent of all exports and 9 per cent of the total EU imports. CARIFORUM exports to the UK were worth €478 million. Trinidad and Tobago and other CARIFORUM countries must carefully study and report on whether a post-BREXIT UK will offer any peculiar trade opportunities that were not enjoyed under the other agreement? That relevant—

Madam Speaker: So again, I rise to remind Members of the provisions of Standing Order 53, the muffled mask and talking creates a buzz. It affects my ability to hear the Member's contribution. Please do not let me rise on that again. Thank you.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, under this EPA that is before us, CARIFORUM countries are to fully phase out duties, as I mentioned before, by 2033. This means that European goods and services would become more competitive in our region. Madam Speaker, it is my hope and my wish that their products and services do not flood out our markets and squeeze out local production. What is the Government's road map plan to 2023, hon. Minister? What specific measures are being taken by Trinidad and Tobago to give our local products an identifiable edge, and to prepare for an avalanche of goods and services coming out of the UK based on this agreement? Hon. Minister, 2033 is just 12 years away, there should be a working manual with time-bound goals and objectives. While this EPA allows for the removal of tariffs, there is a critical issue

with respect to non-tariff barriers that is not being dealt with by this Government. Inefficiencies at the port and at customs are a major non-tariff humbug. A study by the International Financial Centre has confirmed these obstacles.

Madam Speaker, matters such as onerous documentation, the arbitrary behaviour of certain personnel and the overlap of various administrative organizations and windows, are also impediments to trade. The Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration had made significant gains over the years in reducing these bottlenecks. The Government must build on that through legislative review and reforms and the use of TTBizLink system, new scanners at the port and other effective measures. Madam Speaker, the Government must implement the IFC recommendation of a strengthening of inspection and certification processes at key government agencies. I just want to mention something that one of our CARIFORUM members is doing, Madam Speaker, that is St. Lucia. St. Lucia has taken concrete measures to prepare maritime and other sustainable industries in light of the collapse of their tourism sector and because of COVID-19, in order to attract international investors.

Madam Speaker, that government has taken the decision to upgrade worker skills at no cost to its citizenry. That measure is really an example of small island states evolving its economy because of the current economic imperative. In Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, this administration has still not taken any steps towards the line of diversification of the economy sufficiently to prepare us for 2033. Madam Speaker, the foreign exchange crisis will also cause some problems; my colleagues will speak on that. This crisis that we are facing could make this EPA meaningless in long run. Special emphasis must be placed on cultivating markets for food, paper, beverages, minerals, spirits, for which they are sizable markets in the UK and the rest of Europe.

So, Madam Speaker, in the couple of minutes that I have left, I just want to raise one last item, the issue of the blacklist from the European Union, how is that going to affect this EPA and our ability to trade with certain companies, especially if it is going to be hampering the banking sector because of that blacklist. Now, I note recently that Barbados has come off the black list, and from what I have read, as soon as they objected to that, I mean, the bark of the government there had a reversal, our hon. Attorney General has been liaising with this matter. He too objecting of our position on the black list, but clearly his bite is worse than his bark, because nothing is happening. So I just want the Minister to just address this issue, whether the blacklisting of us in the European Union would hamper this particular issue.

So, Madam Speaker, the Government must utilize this EPA not as an end in itself, but as an opportunity to refocus on exports by assisting both the public and private sectors, and by removing critical lock jams to make sure that we benefit from this EPA. Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Madam Speaker, I have the—I almost say I have the pleasure of speaking after the previous Member. But, Madam Speaker, I am troubled and concerned as to whether or not the Member understands the Agreement that is before us or the business that is before the House today. What we are debating here today and what we are examining today is an arrangement between the CARIFORUM countries and the UK, we are ratifying this Agreement. We would have already signed in December of 2020, and it is very similar, if not identical to the same piece of legislation that was brought in 2013 by his then Minister of Trade, Mr. Vasant Bharath and then taken to the Senate in 2013 by former Member Stephen Cadiz,

and they spoke glowingly about the Agreement.

3.00 p.m.

Now, Madam Speaker, this Agreement that we are discussing today is identical to what we debated and passed in 2013. So I am very clear, based on the previous Member's contribution, he does not understand the material before us and he certainly does not [*Desk thumping*] understand how international trade works.

Madam Speaker, he spoke about being fearful of UK products flooding the Trinidad and Tobago market. There is no one country that makes or produces everything that it needs. If it was so, then we would not need an international multilateral trading system. Many of the products that we are importing from the UK, who is not even our number one trade in partner—the US is—we do not make here; we do not produce here. So we have to engage in an international trading agreement in order to make that happen.

Madam Speaker, the advent of the WTO in 1995, marked the beginning of a new global economic order geared at weaving economies together, opening markets to the world, increasing competition, lowering protection and reshaping international relations like never before. That was 1995. Today, more than half of the world's trade takes place tariff-free; free from trade barriers. Madam Speaker, trade barriers continue to fall, both developed and developing countries of the international multilateral trading system have no choice but to reshape, retool, reposition and get with the programme or get with the times.

The CARIFORUM-UK trade agreement that we are examining today, that was signed in April of 2019, seeks to preserve the region's preferential trading relationship with the UK, or if I should say, more specifically, Trinidad and Tobago's preferential trading relationship with the UK in a post-Brexit situation. You may remember, Madam Speaker, that around 2016, the United Kingdom

would have voted to separate themselves from the European Union, therefore the trading agreements have to be renegotiated and signed so that we could maintain and preserve that relationship with the United Kingdom who has been a major trade partner for us in the past.

Now, Madam Speaker, this is not new to us—trading with the UK, trading with the EU is not new to us based on our colonial history, based on previous trade agreements like the Lomé Convention—and the Lomé Convention which dates as far back as to 1975 and the Cotonou Agreement of 2000.

Madam Speaker, if we did not, as a country, as CARIFORUM countries, as Trinidad and Tobago signed this new agreement with the UK, then we as Caribbean countries would have seen an increase in cost of entry for our products and services entering the UK market, and we have enjoyed tariff-free and quota-free access to their market since the 1970s, Madam Speaker, now with the advent of the WTO, we have to introduce some sort of reciprocity, and those negotiations started in 2002 and ended in 2007, in keeping with WTO guidelines.

Now, Madam Speaker, I think that here we are 13 years later, making similar arrangements with the UK which will redound to the benefit of our economies and strengthen out the relationship between the countries. This Agreement grants us access to a market, 670million people strong, with tremendous purchasing power, and that put us in a position to achieve economies of scale; to improve product quality and quantity; to build partnerships and expand businesses; to reduce unit costs; to access the technologies, resources and expertise of our partners in the UK market.

In addition to the usual market access concessions and benefits, Madam Speaker, this agreement covers poverty reduction—it is geared towards poverty reduction, the strengthening of our institution, the modernization of our economies

and regional integration. It is very similar to what we negotiated or what we debated in June of 2013, as brought to this House by then Minister of Trade, Mr. Vasant Bharath and taken to the Senate by Mr. Stephen Cadiz. I think it would have served the Member well to at least take a read of his colleagues' *Hansard* records.

Madam Speaker, I remember being a student at UWI in 2007. I studied international trade policy and at that point in time, we were negotiating the EPA with the European Union. And member countries—Member States of CARIFORUM, more so of Caricom, were concerned about whether or not we will be able to cope in these new economic arrangement where we have UK goods and services now entering our markets. Of course, even though from day one we are allowed free access—from day one, we are enjoying 25 years of tariff liberalization, giving us some time to build our economies, giving some time to strengthen and nurture and work with our private sector at home so that we could be ready to embark on this journey of taking up new opportunities in the European, or should I say, in the UK market.

Madam Speaker, one thing was sure throughout my time at school and even afterwards when I worked on this same matter at the IADB in Washington DC and at the OAS, amongst all our Caribbean brothers and sisters, Trinidad and Tobago was always seen as the most robust economy, the most resilient economy that would be able to stand up and to perform well and to properly take advantage of this opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact, many of our brothers and sisters in the region were feeling like we were moving ahead too quickly and we had this advantage and Trinidad and Tobago was not considering them, but we had been in this position of having a strong, resilient and robust economy based on the work of

the People's National Movement over the years, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]
When you look at the products that give us the trading advantage and it is bringing in the money in agreements like these, it is based on industries that were developed and invested in over the years by the People's National Movement, and I am very proud and happy about that. [*Desk thumping*]

So our Government is always working on ways to give our private sector, to give our people opportunities and opinions and that is what development is all about, Madam Speaker. So yes, we have access to the EU market, 27 countries; access to the UK market, even though it is not our number trading partner, since the US is our number one trading partner due to logistics and so on, Madam Speaker, at least we have that option and there are private sector entities among us who have already been taking advantage of those options and those opportunities, and that is what we continue to do. So it does not stop with the UK, it does not stop with the EU. Of course, our country negotiating and continuing to engage on trade relations with other countries to give our private sector more opportunities.

The Minister of Trade and Industry would have earlier spoken to trade in methanol and LNG, and these other areas where we are making waves. Madam Speaker, I think one of the most attractive features of the Agreement and the opportunity that it provides for us as a country is that opportunity to grow and expand the non-energy sector. This Agreement allows domestic manufacturers to import raw materials and intermediate products at reduced duties which were previously dutiable from the EU, Madam Speaker. Thus, manufacturers have the assurance that they can obtain their raw materials, without delay and at a competitive cost, without the imposition of high cost.

In 2019, based on the work that this Government had put in with the non-energy sector, we saw trading in the non-energy sector grow by 22 per cent

and an increase of \$1billion in trade. And I want to commend the Minister of Trade and Industry [*Desk thumping*] and her team in the Ministry of Trade and Industry because they have been doing their work. I remember being a student and looking on at what was taking place at home: the different workshops, working with our different industries and our different sectors, helping them to understand, to acknowledge, to embrace the economic partnership and other trade agreements and the workshops to get them ready. So I want to commend her for the work that she has been doing over the years. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, the Member would have mentioned trade in services, because it is not just about trade in goods, we are looking at trade in services, intellectual property, investment, we are even looking aid for trade which I would like to think—which I would like to consider as the jewel in the crown of the agreement because we get the opportunity to build our capacity so that we could be ready for trade, not just for the UK or not just for the EU, but to trade anywhere else in the world. So the improvement in our export of services represent a viable option for Trinidad and Tobago. We often time think about tourism first when we think about trade in services, but we must acknowledge the fact and be mindful about what is taking place right now. Tourism has taken some serious blows due to the whole COVID-19 situation and the sector is still going through tremendous depression.

So, yes, tourism would come back to fore and return to its place of glory later on but right now, this trade agreement allows us the avenues so that we can look at and expand or share in trade in other areas of services like: education, maritime services, transportation, and we would have spoken about the creative industries which I will talk about a little later, Madam Speaker, thus generating income, creating jobs and foreign exchange for business people. Also, ICT could be expanded so that we could bring in some income and provide some jobs through

this medium.

And the work that we are doing at the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation is very critical in trading services, especially in the midst of COVID-19 where we see how important technological or digital infrastructure is. So now we are making sure that even school children, that entrepreneurs, that business people have access to the digital infrastructure that they need, to not just do their trade here at home but you could provide services through the Internet and connect with partners and other resources all across the world. So that digitalization project that we are working on through the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation is critical and that is the work of this Government.

Madam Speaker, the Member did not mention that—I remember in 2013, when the Bill came to the House and we were looking at the EU-CARIFORUM agreement, and Trinidad and Tobago's major problem was because the former government had not done its work in the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Office of the CSO, we had been behind time and we had not been able to provide up-to-date trade statistics to CEDA and to Caricom so that we could properly show or trade, our figures and so on, to CEDA, to CARIFORUM to the EU.

So there were problems in identifying what exactly is the Trinidad and Tobago position. And if you look at the documents coming out of CEDA and coming out of Caribbean Export, you would see Trinidad and Tobago lagging behind during those years because we did not the information. I am pleased that the Ministry of Planning and Development is doing its work in collecting the trade data and the trade statistics. [*Desk thumping*] Because it is one thing to go out there and say you are doing X, you are doing Y, but it must be scientifically driven, it

must be based on data, it must be based on the facts so that we could report to our people and be better positioned to take advantage of these opportunities of this nature, Madam Speaker.

I want to turn to culture and the creative industry because I think, Madam Speaker, this is our gold mine. This is an area—this is our area of strength and I think that we could boast that this is one of our most viable commercial options in this EPA. And this EPA goes as far to have a whole protocol to deal with cultural cooperation, providing access to funding to different opportunities so that all artistes at home could link up with those in the UK, so that they could take full advantage of utilizing the creative industry as a means of creating jobs and as a means of wealth creation.

Over the years, the Ministry of Trade and Industry would have partnered with the EU to hold workshops and to hold seminars, and to prepare Trinidad and Tobago's creative industry to take advantage of these opportunities. I could speak about—there was a programme in fashion—in the fashion industry. I think it was called “Bespoke”, where the Ministry of Trade and Industry [*Desk thumping*] was working to create—help tailors to create the necessary skills so that they could dominate or have proper access to the UK market and be attractive and competitive.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to tell the Member that spoke before me, do not sleep on our creative industry and do not sleep on our fashion icons either, because you have people like Christian Boucaud, like Ted Jones from Tobago, you have Cee Wee designs, you have Shop Shari, you have a host of our—you have Ecliff Elie, you have a host of our fashion icons here in Tobago with their products already on the international market.

So we have been making waves and I am happy that the Ministry of Trade

and Industry has been facilitating that type of activity, preparing our people [*Desk thumping*] to get out there—[*Interruption*] Yes, Ted Arthur, sorry. And Ted Arthur who is from Tobago. I have a couple of his products well, Madam Speaker—for the work that they are doing already dominating the European market, already dominating the UK. When you go out to Nottingham Carnival and you look at the trade shows and the cultural shows along the street, Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago dominates. So it is about trade facilitation and providing opportunities so that our people can make waves in the international stage.

Madam Speaker, we speak about film. The Ministry of Trade and Industry would have contributed—invested over \$18 million to produce over 36 films, Madam Speaker, in 2019. In 2019, 41 per cent of the films created in Trinidad and Tobago were done with the UK. So we already have that trading relationship and this Government is already acting as a facilitator, providing necessary help and assistance to the private sector.

So, Madam Speaker, I think that we are well on our way at it relates to produce—providing these opportunities. I am pleased that over the years, the Government has been working with the EU, working with CEDA, working with the Caribbean Development Bank to continue to train and provide information, technical resources to our tradesmen so that they—we talk even about the booster programme where \$50million have been provided to a private sector in the booster initiative. You have in Tobago—over \$48 million have been provided to build SMEs in Tobago and to train them, to get them ready to not just trade in Tobago, but to trade in Trinidad and therefore go out to the international market. We speak about the grants over the years that have been invested in getting Caribbean countries prepared to take advantage of this initiative.

Madam Speaker, how much time do I have left?

Madam Speaker: You have one minute.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: One minute. So, Madam Speaker, we have over 21 businesses in Trinidad and Tobago benefiting from the development grant, giving them that extra boost to access the European market.

So, at the end of the day, the UK, being the number one contributor to the EDF over the years, we know that they are going to continue to make that investment in capacity building. At the end of the day, our commitment as a Government is to increase the markets to which our manufactures or traders or our people have access to in the UK, throughout the European Union, throughout the US, Madam Speaker, and this would ensure predictable and permanent trading arrangement for export of our primary and manufactured goods. It is about assertiveness, it is about willingness, it is about readiness. As a Government, our business is to create opportunities and to prepare you to the best of your ability. We can control only what we can control, but our people and our private sector—

Madam Speaker: Member—

Hon. S. Cudjoe:—have to rise to the occasion and take advantage of this opportunity and this Government has done—

Madam Speaker: Member for—

Hon. S. Cudjoe:—its part in creating this opportunity.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to join this debate on the Bill, the CARIFORUM States:

“The Bill seeks to provide for the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreement (‘Agreement’) between CARIFORUM States and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland...”

Madam Speaker, before I start to get into my substantive contribution, I

would just like to welcome my colleague, the Member for Arouca/Maloney back into the House. We missed you. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you. It is a pleasure seeing you back safe and sound. And I am glad you are here because you had to prompt the Member for Tobago West, actually to give her the information of—she called the wrong creative individual from Tobago. So she does not even know her own colleagues in Tobago as far as the creative industry. So I thank you, the Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Madam Speaker, I listened to the Member for Tobago West and she went back to 2013 when the CARIFORUM Bill was debated in July 02, 2013, in the Senate. She was a Senator at that point in time, Madam Speaker, and she referred to that debate of going back to that debate because I think it was piloted, according to her words, by the hon. Cadiz at the time who was the Minister of Tourism. When I referred to that debate, the hon. Senator, the Member for Tobago West at the time was an hon. Senator in that House and I want to quote her remarks on that same Bill. And I quote, the Minister is saying—at the time, a Senator:

“...is a very unique and ambitious trade agreement...it is far-reaching, and it calls for a significant amount of adjustment and rapid reform for our economies and our countries...”

Now, that was her statement back then. What has changed? Because she mentioned that our Member for Mayaro actually did not read the Bill. So she, the Minister, the Member for Tobago West, agrees that this Bill today has far-reaching consequences on the country. And I agree with her. She is shaking her head and I agree with her, because it is not—today is not about politics, it is about our local manufacturers, it is about export and import, that this Bill has a far-reaching effect on our country, Madam Speaker. And I will get into that.

When I looked at her debate, the only other substantive part the Minister

talked about in that debate—about going down to the Indian Expo and getting married and somebody wants to marry her, and so forth. The Member could go into that debate she presented.

So, Madam Speaker, the Opposition understands the potential benefits of this deal—the Bill that is before use today. As the Minister of Trade and Industry and also the Member for Tobago West agreed that back in 2013, this Bill that is before us today, which relates to the UK and Northern Ireland, was part of that European Union holistic Bill in 2013. And no one would have envisaged that the UK and Northern Ireland would have pulled out from the European Union at that point in time, Madam Speaker. So it is where you are now pulling out the UK/Northern Ireland Agreement from the European Union 2013 and isolating it with their own separate Bill.

So the Opposition understands the potential benefit. The Opposition understands based on the number of potential individuals, the people in UK and Northern Ireland—I think the Minister of Trade and Industry had said 671million individuals. So we understand it is a very large market and it has potential for our local manufacturers who export. So we have no problem with that. The problem that we have, Madam Speaker, is really asking the Minister of Trade and Industry, for the last five years and especially when this Bill was signed on April 01, 2019, by our High Commissioner in England, what has her Ministry of Trade and Industry done to get our local manufacturers ready for the implementation of this Bill that would affect our country? [*Desk thumping*] And doing research on this Bill, I listened to the Minister of Trade and Industry and she mentioned that the TTMA is very positive about this Bill.

But doing my research and talking to some of the local manufacturers—and there are some local manufacturers especially in the paper industry that has a

concern with this Bill at this point in time. They understand our international duties, our responsibilities but they have a concern given the tariffs, especially in certain manufacturing areas, that will go down. And the duties already started to come down in 2021—very minimal duties—and in the next five to six years, it will literally be zero duties. And they have a concern coming out of the COVID pandemic that we are still in and what has happened to the economy over the last 12 months, as local manufacturers, that they are saying that they have a grave concern of this Bill coming into play at this point in time.

So we are asking the Minister of Trade and Industry: What systems, what help is her Ministry putting in place to assist those local manufacturers? So it is all well and good to say that you have access to a very large market in UK and Northern Ireland, but the concern they also have, Madam Speaker, is market access versus access to market. Now, there is a big difference between market access and access to market. So on paper, you have market access to UK and Northern Ireland, but do our local manufacturers really have access to those markets? Because when you really get down to the research and listening and talking to the local manufacturers, there are a lot of non-tariff barrier issues that affect our local manufacturers breaking into those markets of UK and Northern Ireland. And I am asking the Minister of Trade and Industry, through her Ministry: What systems and assistance and help have they put in place, under her watch, to assist our local manufacturers getting in and breaking into to those markets, Madam Speaker? Because the non-tariff barriers, for example, like labelling products tracing is a serious—it might sound very simple, but it is a serious concern—an issue for our local manufacturers entering into the UK markets. There is something called “technical barriers labelling”, such as the regulations require specific labelling that has the contents and manner in which the products were produced, et cetera. And

that is an issue for our local manufacturers.

Another area that is sort of a hindrance is something called “sanitary and phytosanitary tracing”. And what that really is about—if our local manufacturers are exporting a product, given the non-technical barriers that is in place to access the UK market, something as simple as a pepper—if you are exporting a pepper, you have to actually be able to trace that pepper back to its origin, on the farm, Madam Speaker. And if certain systems are not put in place, education, the assistance of the Ministry of Trade and Industry ensuring these things happen, guidance, it is an exercise in futility for our local manufacturers to export their product to the UK and Northern Ireland. So I ask the Minister of Trade and Industry, in her wind up, if there are things in place to assist our local manufacturers in that respect?

Madam Speaker, there is an issue from both sides, export and imports from the UK and Northern Ireland or any other country. There are two agencies that all our products, whether you export it or import it, must go through, that is, the Chemistry, Food and Drugs Department— I think that falls under the Minister of Health. And then you have the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards— I think that falls under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. And they are dealing and listening and talking to the manufacturers locally. They have grave concerns with those two agencies because without their input, their products, export would not happen because they have a part to play and even imports from UK and Northern Ireland, those two agencies have a part to play. And they have been consistently been underfunded. The staff, from all reports, are very knowledgeable and experienced, but the functioning of those two agencies leaves much to be desired. I am asking and I am hoping, through the Minister of Trade and Industry, which the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards falls under, and the Minister of Health,

that the Chemistry Food and Drug Department—that without the efficiencies of those two departments, our export of our products will go nowhere, especially for our small or medium manufacturers who are seeking to export. Because our large 20 top export manufacturers—our large exporters already have gone through and they understand that process.

3.30 p.m.

So it is really about helping our small and medium manufacturers to come up to speed, hold their hands to ensure that they understand the actual workings on how to export their products because we have actual excellent products that we can export, Madam Speaker. Again, I think the Minister of Trade and Industry understands that. So I ask her to really look at those two agencies with the Minister of Health.

The other area, Madam Speaker, I want to ask: Are we producing competitively priced goods for our international market? And I direct that question to the Minister of Trade and Industry, through you, Madam Speaker. Because sometimes the question is asked, we have this access to this large marketing, UK and Northern Ireland, 671 million, but our pricing of our products might not be competitive to be able to break into those markets, especially when you are talking about China's market, and you are talking about other European Union countries, India and so forth, given how we, as local manufacturers, produce our goods. There is a cost for the foreign exchange. We import a lot of our raw materials, we make our products and then we export it, and transportation cost, et cetera. So it is all well and good to say we have a large market to access, but really and truly our pricing competitive to be able to break through into that market. So again, Madam Speaker, on paper, we have no problem with the Bill. It looks good on paper but in reality, we do not know if this would really assist our country, Madam Speaker.

The flip side to it, Madam Speaker, is the imports from the UK and Northern Ireland. Because when you look at the tariff reduction based on this Bill, Madam Speaker, it is a concern for our manufacturers. Because given—well, we are coming out—we are in COVID pandemic, the economies in the world have gone down, and what you will find happening is that based on the small amount of duties in this Bill, you will find importers in Trinidad looking to see where they can import goods and pay less duties. So that, you will find what would be happening is that if your traditional countries of import might be USA and you look at this Bill and you see the same product can be imported from the UK paying 3 per cent duties, 5 per cent duties presently, as opposed to 20 per cent, you will definitely move over and look and see if you can import these goods from UK at a lesser tariff to be able to survive as a business in Trinidad and Tobago. So that is a concern that we have as a country, which will directly impact on our manufacturing sector. And I made the point using a large paper manufacturer in Trinidad and Tobago who has a grave concern with this Bill, Madam Speaker.

The other aspect I would like to ask the Minister of Trade and Industry is research and development. Research and development is very critical for our manufacturing sector, especially our small and medium, and I am asking her, through her Ministry, if there is any thought given in research and development for our small and medium manufacturers? Because this would benefit and assist in the long run our local manufacturers in R&D, because it is a high cost in R&D and I am hoping that the Minister of Trade and Industry can assist in that aspect.

The other aspect, Madam Speaker, is our e TecK parks. Our e TecK parks really and truly—because I understand there are some local manufacturers who are looking to expand. But because of the cost of real estate, the cost of rental, and the commercial rates that are being asked by the e TecK parks, it is forbidden that they

can expand, Madam Speaker. So I am asking the Minister of Trade and Industry to look at a model, like China, where they develop the e TecK parks for their manufacturing sector; give them a peppercorn rate, not a commercial rate, and then they can utilize those facilities for manufacturing. And so, then what will rebound to the country would be increased revenues, exports, revenues from taxes, et cetera, Madam Speaker, as opposed to the model that is used right now, as being a commercial landlord and charging commercial rates that really and truly it is a deterrent for local manufacturers to expand. So I ask the Minister of Trade and Industry to look at that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, and that has a direct impact on revenue and jobs. Because in the same Senate debate on July 02, 2013, the Senator at the time, Sen. Al-Rawi, who is now the Member for San Fernando West, spoke in that debate on the same CARIFORUM Bill, and I want to quote him and he is correct:

“...the fact is...”—that—“you know in an agreement”—he is talking about that CARIFORUM Bill—“like this that revenue”—foregone by the lower tariffs—“is going to be sacrificed, however small, however large, revenue is revenue, particularly when you are relying on energy alone.”

And the Member for San Fernando West at that time is correct. Because based on these tariffs we are going to forego revenue as far as duties as concerned, especially in the economic times that the country is going through, Madam Speaker. And I ask the Minister of Trade and Industry: What is the buffer for that? So we understand our international obligations, but as the Minister of Trade and Industry, that should play a part.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn to a company that was closed down by this Government called Caroni Green. Caroni Green was set up for export, especially in the pepper industry. And if they had an issue with Caroni Green, they did not have

to shut it down. It could have been re-tweaked, they could have restructured it, and today it could have been a company that could have—

Madam Speaker: Member?

Mr. D. Lee:—played a role—

Madam Speaker: Member, I am going to give you one minute to tie that in to what is before us. Okay? Because I do not want to curb you too much, but I am not sure that you are going down the right way. So I will give you one minute.

Mr. D. Lee: Sure. Thank you, Madam Speaker. What I am trying to say is that Caroni Green was a company set up for export of agricultural products and if that company had been restructured properly, instead of closing down, it could have been a company that could be assisting our farmers in breaking through into UK and the Northern Ireland markets as far as agriculture is—and that is the only point I want to make on that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker—how much more minutes I have, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: You end at 2.39—

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, all I would like to ask the Minister of Trade and Industry: Given that we are in the COVID pandemic era, has consideration been given on this Bill in respect of the COVID pandemic that we are going through right now? Maybe either—if you cannot negotiate—maybe a delay or a postponement before certain duties start to kick in which can affect our local manufacturing sector? So that is all I would like to ask about that. Madam Speaker, I also, through you—the ease of doing business has been steadily declining under this Minister of Trade and Industry. I hope in her wind up she would be able to say what positive steps she is doing to increase that number back to positivity.

Madam Speaker, as I close, I just want to say that we understand the reason

for this Bill. We support it in its content. We are hoping that there are more negotiations that take place and education with the private sector and the TTMA as far as the implementation—

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, your time is now spent. Member for San Fernando West. [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I will attempt to be charitable for the contribution coming from my colleague for Pointe-a-Pierre. I honestly recommend that hon. Members take the time to read the legislation that they are about to get into. [*Desk thumping*] For the hon. Member to close and say that the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, who piloted this Bill, should have a view of whether this agreement could be delayed, or suspended, et cetera, Madam Speaker, where on earth has the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre been living? Madam Speaker, put quite simply, the Bill before us is intended to ensure that our Caricom market, the group of 15 countries that comprised this union, can continue to have competitive advantage into the United States of America. That is the first—I mean, into the United Kingdom. That is the first principle, and I would like to remind the hon. Member, Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. So there is no need to call it separately. The United Kingdom includes Northern Ireland. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, apart from a lack of geography and understanding, the fact is if we do not put this law into effect, our United Kingdom entry on a duty free basis in accordance with the annexes and schedules to the reception of law principle are going to fall flat. What is equally distressing by the hon. Member's contribution is the fact that the hon. Member has no conscious reflection that the EPA for the UK that we are dealing with now, the Economic Partnership

Agreement, has a dispute resolution formula, has a technical advisory and dispute advisory structure, and that therefore, the issue of paper companies access and preferential management to ensure the preservation of our company will be put forward into that matrix. It is no different from the Caricom COTED structure, the fact that there is dispute resolution, there are protection measures, Madam Speaker. So please, hon. Member, read the legislation before you come here. I mean that in all sincerity, Madam Speaker. It is dangerous to tell the business community of Trinidad and Tobago in today's world, that there is an issue about protecting the market. There are mechanisms in the law to take care of that.

Madam Speaker, what is equally distressing is that both Members, the Member for Mayaro and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, have not reflected upon the fact, first of all, the EPA with the European Union's structure, the 2013 law, is in effect via operational measures prior to full operation. In other words then, there are mechanisms contemplated in the EPA 2013 Bill which allow, prior to full proclamation and operability of that law, for that law to come into effect, and it is in effect now. Secondly, clearly both Mayaro and Pointe-a-Pierre are blissfully ignorant of the fact that we have had three memoranda of understanding with United Kingdom—three. We have had March 28, 2019, we have had October 09, 2019, we have had December 09, 2020, Cabinet involvement with post-execution by Trinidad and Tobago. So that whilst the United Kingdom was looking at the issue of Brexit and whether they would actually have a deal, and whether that Brexit deal would result in an almost immediate crystallization of issues, Trinidad and Tobago, like all of the other States in the CARIFORUM structure, entered into memorandum of understanding with the United Kingdom so that we can apply exactly what is in the 2013 EPA law into effect.

Madam Speaker, it is important just as a matter of record that I support the

structure of the Bill. Obviously, Trinidad and Tobago being a subscriber of the dualist theory of law, we are obliged to bring into national law, treaties, in the fashion that we do—have that brought into national law and therefore, a treaty, into which we have entered, becomes local law. Madam Speaker, this particular Bill borrows the structure of the 2013 legislation where we import, by way of reference, the provisions of the treaty. The treaty itself is a must read. The treaty itself is over 1,000 pages long. That treaty has set out in it answers to every single one of the questions posed by Pointe-a-Pierre, including the issue of research and development, including the issue of commerce. But what is critical inside of the treaty is that we have to make sure that the treaty has balance in it, and I would like to point out something that hon. Members have not seen. They have not focused upon the Cotonou arrangements.

The Cotonou concessions are important to this because Cotonou concessions—by the way, entered into by then Prime Minister Basdeo Panday—the Cotonou concessions ensured the closure of Caroni. In other words, let me put it simply, the UNC shut down Caroni because the trade issues and preferential treatment, having been removed by Cotonou arrangements, ensured that Trinidad lost its preference in terms of market access to the European community. When the United Kingdom stepped out of the European Union and that community, it became the situation that they are no longer participants in Cotonou. And what the Minister of Trade and Industry has done, very commendably, is to ensure that the post-Cotonou arrangements apply to the UK perspective. In other words then, the hon. Minister has taken care to ensure that we are protected from the exit out of Cotonou arrangements, and that is a very important issue.

The hon. Member for Mayaro raised the issue of the Global Forum and permit me to address in response to the enquiry made. Madam Speaker, the Global

Forum requirement was a painful exercise for Trinidad and Tobago. We were not in the position of the entry into the multilateral arrangements for Global Forum. When the UNC gave the commitment under the Larry Howai, Minister of Finance, in Berlin in 2014, to say that we will comply with Global Forum, they failed to negotiate any of the bilateral treaties that were required, as a result of which, we had to bring legislation to allow us to deal with the multilateral convention approach, and therefore, take that step to exceptions in the Income Tax Act, the taxation exchange legislation.

So we are only now in the position of taking the next steps for Global Forum which includes SEZs, the economic zones that will replace free zones, and to deal with the base erosion points or BEP system that we must deal with. But the hon. Members opposite keep confusing Global Forum with European Commission listing, with Financial Action Task Force. They just are almost reticent, if not resistant, to an intellectual exercise of research. And it is important that the population understands one very simple prospect, do not listen to the UNC. Simple! [*Desk thumping*] Do not listen to the UNC when it comes to any matter that involves turning a page, and I will say why I say that most respectfully. International observers pay attention to what we do. Transparency International listens to anecdotal information. People assume that Members opposite bothered to research the law, but, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1), please. Relevance.

Madam Speaker: Please continue, Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you. Madam Speaker, but when we get to law such as this and you hear a Member for Mayaro stands up with aplomb and reads from a prepared script and ask about Global Forum in the context of this legislation, pay no attention. You are going down the wrong road. [*Desk thumping*] You will end

up in danger of a cliff because there is no research attached to that. Let me make it clear as I end on the point of Global Forum in response, we are well on our way to the management of exit out of Global Forum tragedy and that is because of the hard work of this Government, Madam Speaker, and we need to be careful about that. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to raise a very important point. Both Pointe-a-Pierre and Mayaro have said that they understand why we need to pass this law. They support the law. Let me unearth another desperate misunderstanding, born about of a lack of research from failing to consult the law. Madam Speaker, do you know that at page 1,784 of the *Gazette* of November 26, 2020, in black and white, Chapter 3, there is a whole section on public procurement, and the public procurement provisions set out a general objective, definitions, scope, and here is what is said at “Scope” in Article 167:

“2. The Parties and the Signatory CARIFORUM States shall ensure that the procurement of their procuring entities covered this Chapter takes place in the transparent manner according to the provisions of this Chapter and the Annexes pertaining thereto...”

Madam Speaker, if the hon. Members support this law, they said so in plain fashion, how could the Member for Mayaro and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre explain the criticisms that they have in this debate about the public procurement amendments in 2020?

Madam Speaker, for the record, the amendment to section 7 of Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act to say that where you have a treaty that the treaty procurement shall prevail, which is what we put into law, it is exactly in the context of this EPA. It is in the same context of the EPA for the European Union. So hon. Members opposite make a song and a dance, a theatre

and a false narrative, not daring to crack the pages of the law that they are debating. And this law before us today because the annex to the law, the treaty born by way of reference in the law, by judicial notice being applied, by the *Gazette* being incorporated into the parent law, this law says that the procurement procedures have to be complied with in priority to local law. Effectively that is what it says. But, Madam Speaker, I am hearing some grumbling from Pointe-a-Pierre.

Madam Speaker, I can understand the need to grumble. Grumble is usually an expression of relief when you have been caught out and you are usually just swearing at yourself for not having done your research, like when you leave an exam and you realized you failed, and you realized, “Oh gosh, I should ah done better”, I understand Pointe-a-Pierre’s torture. I would understand him in this. But I would like to point out for the record and for the national conversation that the reason that we are managing these issues of procurement, as we have, and the amendment to section 7 asked by the hon. Members opposite, and in question time earlier today, is that treaties such as this that contemplate a wider parameter of operation, the CARIFORUM, 15 countries in operation, there is no way our public procurement law could have trumped this. Because it means Trinidad and Tobago would find itself outside the CARIFORUM, and outside the EPA that we are doing today, to protect the market access entry that we are engaged in.

So, Madam Speaker, it might sound very thick and complicated and other persons may not want to hear what I am saying, but I am honestly encouraging Members opposite to do a little homework research. No shame in asking for assistance. Madam Speaker, the simple positions in relation to this law are that there are protection measures set out in the body of the laws. We had dispute resolution issues. We come back to concepts of trade in most favoured nation’s

status, et cetera. We have the position of the preservation of duty free access. But, Madam Speaker, there is one last point as we get into the second aspect, and that is the gradual elimination of tariffs on the Trinidad and Tobago end of the equation, or the CARIFORUM end of the equation, as we get down to the 2030s, et cetera. What I would to say is that as the market situation changes, the resolution techniques, the body set up in the body of this law to deal with complaints as to variations that ought to be had, those allow us to ask for a change in circumstance and that is very important.

To the paper manufacturers, I say that that is exactly where the issue of paper manufacturing will be dealt with, and I would like to say that I raised that issue in the Senate in 2013, the issue of paper protection. I raised that issue squarely to the Minister who piloted at that point. The issue of paper protection, amongst others, is critical. There is another issue, the market free entry, duty free entry of motor vehicles coming out of the UK is a matter that the Minister of Finance has already treated with. As that scale climbs down, we have to look at the competition in the global context for cars from Japan, or from the Far East, or from India. And therefore, there are alternate techniques that the Ministry of Finance is engaged in and will be engaged in to ensure that our country survives within the parameters of law and in the bona fides of treaty obligations that we hold ourselves to, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, on the point of the e Teck arrangements and the landlord model, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre clearly has been asleep on the public announcements. I would like the hon. Member, in reflecting upon the Chinese recommendation, to please just Google at this point now on the free iPad that the Parliament gave him and look for the name "Phoenix Park", and look for the Chinese model that has been put into operation, and then to understand that the

model is not only peppercorn rental, that the model approved by the Cabinet and the operationalization of that, and the building of that park by the Chinese, involves them arriving with anchor tenants. So that if we buy a bus from the People's Republic of China, that we have a company from the People's Republic of China arriving in Trinidad and Tobago to deal with maintenance and supply, et cetera.

So, Madam Speaker, I will tell the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, please do a little bit more research on the issues. Understand that these have been the subject of public announcement. [*Desk thumping*] There is a marvellous tool called "Google". You could kind all sorts of things on it, and if you put the little label "Trinidad and Tobago", you could narrow your research a little bit. So I would ask the hon. Member to please regale himself and this Parliament with the research that is available to us all.

Madam Speaker, I believe that the hon. Member made some—he gave an attempt at saying that the hon. Member for Tobago West was inconsistent in her contribution in 2013 versus now. I have had a chance to reflect upon the contribution, there is no inconsistency in the statement. [*Desk thumping*] Then Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe, and now Minister in this Government, the Member for Tobago West, has been perfectly consistent on the issues. This is not a Government of vacillation, or of approbating and reprobating on a point of law. In other words then, saying it is black then saying it is white, or saying from two different sides, two different stories. That is not the position, and I want to correct the record on behalf of my colleague, the Member for Tobago West.

Madam Speaker, I think that that, in effect, answers the vast majority of positions offered. I am grateful for a test case to have proved the prudence of the Minister of Finance in amending section 7 of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Property

Act because this law could not get off the starting blocks as we got to Chapter 3 on public procurement in this law. It could not get off the blocks. We would be outside because countries like Jamaica have the law as we have amended, and therefore, I ask for that message to be carried forward, and I thank you for this opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this very important debate, an Act to give effect to the Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM States and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; to effect consequential amendments to the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01, and for related matters.

Madam Speaker, before I go into the meat of my contribution, I would like to address some of the issues raised by my colleagues opposite in the debate thus far. The hon. Minister raised an issue in her presentation in which she indicated that when she piloted this Bill, when she reviewed the presentations of colleagues, of herself, when she consulted, the response by the TTMA was overwhelming. She suggested then that there was significant confidence expressed by the manufacturing associations and by Trinidad and Tobago manufacturers. There was tremendous confidence in the benefits that could be derived from this CARIFORUM EPA.

In the presentation by my colleague from Mayaro, I think what we saw was something slightly different. There are concerns that are being raised and have been raised and will continue to be raised as to whether or not our manufacturers are ready and have sufficient access to the resources required and whether the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been able to put in place the requisite

measures to ensure that our manufacturers are not placed at a disadvantage but in fact are placed on equal footing with manufacturers in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland.

Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate a comment that was made previously that we on this side have tremendous confidence in the manufacturing sector and in the capacity of our producers to compete efficiently and effectively but Government's inaction has tied the hands of this sector. We have spoken about the lack of equal access to foreign exchange, difficulties at the ports, et cetera. Those things create difficulties, Madam Speaker, for manufacturers who are seeking to break into the United Kingdom market.

The hon. Member for Tobago West seems to not have paid significant attention to the contribution of the Member of Parliament for Mayaro when he spoke of these very same concerns: the failure of the Government to establish the environment within which growth, development and investment can take form. In fact, she stressed that this EPA will create the benefit of economies of scale. It is a wonderful concept. It is a wonderful concept but that same economies of scale is why our manufacturers have been put at a disadvantage. Our manufacturers are competing with producers elsewhere in the world who are catering for markets significantly more than ours. She indicated as well that when she was in school and when she was working at the IADB, et cetera, Trinidad and Tobago was the most robust country in the Caribbean. Even if that were true then—

Ms. Cudjoe: Member, would you like to give way?

Mr. D. Tancoo: No, Ma'am.

Ms. Cudjoe: No. Well it was Vasant Bharath that said it is economies of scale.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Even if Trinidad and Tobago was the most robust country in the Caribbean when she was working at the IADB, even if it were true then, it is

certainly not true now and the evidence is there for all to see. She referred to the ease now that we would have where domestic manufacturers would be able to import raw materials duty-free, et cetera, from the United Kingdom into Trinidad and Tobago. That fails to take account of the fact that those very same manufacturers are having challenges today to access foreign exchange. That is a fact. I am glad too that she raised the issue of COVID.

Madam Speaker: Member, you are going to have to find a way to include either the hon. Member or the Minister or the Member for Tobago West. Okay?

Mr. D. Tancoo: The hon. Member for Tobago West indicated that tourism was a critical factor under this EPA as well and that tourism has suffered the vagaries associated with COVID. I am in agreement with that, Madam Speaker, and I will treat with that a little later in my contribution.

I turn to the Member for San Fernando West who was his normal verbose and loquacious self and still did not deal with any of the issues raised by Members on this side. The fact that paper manufacturers are now expressing concerns highlights that the Government has failed in its responsibility to educate and inform manufacturers about the benefits, processes and procedures that fall under this EPA.

The hon. Member for San Fernando West also cleanly and clearly stated and I want to quote him because it is important for reference. The Member said the UNC shut down Caroni. That is absolutely not true, Madam Speaker. Caroni was shut down by the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] Petrotrin was shut down by the People's National Movement [*Desk thumping*] and so many other entities.

I was enthused to learn as well about the Member's definition of grumbling when he cited—the hon. Member for San Fernando West, his reference was when

you leave an exam and you have failed, effectively that is when you grumble. This is a man who is speaking from experience, Madam Speaker. He is speaking from experience in having failed case after case after case and dare I say class after class after class. In seeking to complicate and obfuscate a simple issue of procurement, what the hon. Member ended up doing was raising the entire issue of the amendments that the United National Congress have concerns with but not tying it in with the point that he was trying to make.

Madam Speaker, to date, having heard three Members of the Government speak, I remain even more concerned now about the state of our manufacturing sector and the conditions and the environment that they are expected to operate under because this Government has failed to create the enabling environment for investment, development, for the creation of foreign exchange streams, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, in an article published in the *Stabroek News* from Guyana dated June 26, 2020, entitled:

“CARIFORUM countries set to test ‘specialty foods’ in UK, EU markets”

I want to quote directly from this article, Madam Speaker. The article says:

“Building resilience in the short term and generating growth in the long term, taking account of the prevailing COVID-19 restrictions in Caribbean economies is, the ITC says, the primary objective of the initiative, while the United Kingdom Minister of International Development...is quoted as saying that the UK is delighted to work with the ITC ‘to launch a UK Trade Partnership Programme in the Caribbean, supporting the region’s Caribbean Forum States to increase exports, create jobs and make the most of their economic ties.’”

This resembles the requirements, the proposals, the intentions of the CARIFORUM Agreement as well.

Following on that article, I decided to take a look at the Ministry of Trade and Industry's website which I visited in preparation for this debate. I visited it again a short while ago today to see if any mention was made of the CARIFORUM-UK EPA, this same matter that we are debating today, to my surprise, Madam Speaker, nothing. No data, no resource information, nothing. In light of this, Madam Speaker, I want to ask the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry if she is prepared to answer the following questions which I hope you respond to in your wind up, Madam Speaker. Does the Northern Ireland trade protocol apply to this CARIFORUM-UK EPA or is there an exemption from the specific requirements for moving goods into, out of or through Northern Ireland? Has the Government of Trinidad and Tobago through the Ministry of Trade and Industry conducted any review of its trade remedies regime given that the United Kingdom will be operating under its own regime outside of the EU? And in addition, Madam Speaker, has the Ministry taken cognizance of what bilateral safeguards we may wish to implement on the onset of the coming into force of this EPA? Madam Speaker, I could find no information on the website on those issues.

But let me share with you, Madam Speaker, some information that I can find. We are going to be negotiating, we are going to be trading and in trading, we must know our trade partners, what their positions are, what their levels of capabilities are, what their strengths are. In terms of the ease of doing business which was mentioned before, Trinidad and Tobago is at 105. Do you know where the UK is? While Trinidad and Tobago is at 105, the UK's rank is eight. In terms of the Economic Freedom Index, Trinidad and Tobago, in 2020, our rank was 109, the UK's rank was seven. In terms of the Corruption Perception Index, Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago ranked in 2015, 72; today we are on 86.

And one of my colleagues opposite, a Member of Government, expressed

grave concern. The hon. Member for San Fernando West expressed grave concerns that people are looking on, they are listening to what we are saying and we are misrepresenting, those are facts, those are international agencies that have concerns about the way we are doing business in Trinidad and Tobago and that is not acceptable. Those are agencies that determine whether they want to invest in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, in her wind up, I would like the hon. Minister to tell us exactly who benefited from this trade facilitation. We have had a lot of talk but the Minister has provided no evidence of the number of companies, which companies and how much benefit they have derived from the inception of this, of the EPAs, the former EPA with the European Union and this EPA, which is according to my colleague opposite, an almost exact replication of the terms and conditions therein.

Hon. Member: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: So Member, I allow you a little leeway but please, remember what we are dealing with here. All right?

Mr. D. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Duly guided. Article 17 of the EPA gives to the assigning country the right to adjust its customs duties and tariffs, et cetera, to specific products based on their negotiation. I want to ask today, Madam Speaker, whether the Government has engaged in any specific negotiation within the framework of this EPA for protection either via specifically introducing a tariff or other protective measures for any product or company manufacturing in Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the concerns I have, Madam Speaker, is that while we may have duty free access to UK under the EPA, I am not sure—and we have raised this issue. We are not sure that what we are doing now is not in fact putting our manufacturers at significant disadvantage into creating what is in effect a one-sided

preferential arrangement.

Madam Speaker, if I may, I want to refer to an “Ex-post evaluation of the EPA between the EU and its Member States and the CARIFORUM Member States, Final Report, Executive Summary”. And I am referring to this although it is EU EPA because as Members opposite have indicated, the terms and conditions are almost identical. The reason I am referring to this, Madam Speaker, is because there were some concerns that were raised and the same concerns raised with that EPA will also be relevant to this EPA.

In the Executive Summary from which I reference, under the heading “Overall economic impact”, the report states and I quote:

“In the stakeholder consultations, the limited changes in trade and investment observed in the data were confirmed and considered as a sign of a lack of clear overall economic impact of the EPA.”

They also highlighted the:

“...lack of awareness of the EPA...”

They also suggested that there were existing challenges in the business environment which put businesses in that area in those states at a disadvantage in the open trade with the United Kingdom. Importantly as well, Madam Speaker, they referenced the need for increased transparency. They referenced the need for increased transparency and they cited barriers, non-tariff barriers to trade which affect the ability of the signatory countries from effectively maximizing the benefits that should have been derived from an EPA such as this.

Madam Speaker, if I may, can I find out how much time I have left?

Madam Speaker: Your time expires at 4:19:36.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What CARIFORUM has done, and Caricom by extension, is demonstrate the need for small-island states like Trinidad

and Tobago to join with other similar countries in negotiations with larger economies and larger countries in pursuing preferential access.

According to a recent newspaper article, our hon. Prime Minister bemoaned the fact that small countries are being ignored, they were being put on the backburner, overlooked in the pursuit of vaccines. That is a fact because when you are small, nobody takes you seriously, but it was absolutely predictable and it is not just in vaccines, Ma'am, it is also in trade and in any facet and every other facet of business engagement and for many, vaccines is one of those trades.

It is no secret that our manufacturing sector has been adversely affected by COVID, Madam Speaker. We have witnessed the closure of hundreds of commercial activities and the loss of jobs of tens of thousands of persons before COVID and after COVID-19. Already reeling from the difficulties identified by my colleagues from Mayaro, manufacturers are now experiencing severe challenges just to stay afloat. How can they then take advantage of this EPA? Everywhere else in the world, we would have heard about million- and billion-dollar stimulus and multitrillion-dollar stimulus packages designed to keep businesses afloat and in operation.

The hon. Minister in her presentation identified that the Government had a robust recovery package. I see my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, I am hoping that he will be able to provide some clarification as to what exactly this robust package that would trade and save this country's manufacturing sector from going under on the basis of COVID and other facts. Where is our package? Where is our stimulus package? Seriously. The Government has not even thought about a united approach, a CARIFORUM-type approach, maybe even using CARIFORUM to pursue the sourcing of vaccinations. Since CARIFORUM was designed to do amongst many things, treat with specific issues confronting

Caribbean countries, what is the difficulty in using CARIFORUM or using CARIFORUM agencies or even going through Caricom to procure vaccines for this country? Here we have a significantly large number of persons in Caricom. We have 11 out of 15 CARIFORUM Members who have already received vaccines. We have not. Allow me please, if I may—

Ms. Cudjoe: Standing Order 48(1). That is stretching.

Madam Speaker: Okay, so Member, while Members have stood up on 48(1), I have stood up to let you know that your time is spent. Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): I was waiting for you to recognize me, Madam Speaker. [*Laughter*] Being very respectful.

Madam Speaker: Maybe there is such a hearing challenge in this room and therefore I will forgive you because we speak through all these muffled things, I did recognize you.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, when I listened to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and the last speaker, I am afraid my memory fails me as to which constituency the last speaker is from but it does not matter. When I listened to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and the other speaker, I cringed because both of them fell into error and I am always worried that little children watching the Parliament channel might listen to the Members opposite and also fall into error. The Attorney General corrected the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and it falls to me now to correct the previous speaker.

Madam Speaker, it is a matter of fact and it is known that the United Kingdom is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and

therefore to make a statement about the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland is really not very helpful for the schoolchildren who are looking on and may fail their geography exam. [*Desk thumping*] And because Members opposite looked continuously—

Mr. Tancoo: Have you looked at the Bill? It is in the name of the Bill.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West, if it is you want to make an intervention, we do it in particular way. You do not sit at your desk and turn on your mike and speak. Okay? Would you like to make an intervention? Is it a point of Standing Order or are you going to ask your friend to give way?

Mr. Tancoo: I want to ask the Minister if he could give way—

Hon. Members: Nooooo!

Madam Speaker: Okay, there is one Minister in the box who I am sure could answer for himself. All right? Remember what guides us in here is courtesy.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And even the Bill itself indicates that it is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, so—

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. C. Imbert: And that is why the previous speaker fell into error in wondering whether there would be different applications with respect to this Economic Partnership Agreement as it relates to Northern Ireland not being aware that that part of the world is covered by this Agreement and therefore it is applicable to Northern Ireland, as it is applicable to Scotland, as it is applicable to Wales, as it is applicable to England.

Now, Madam Speaker, what Members opposite have also failed to recognize is that when the CARIFORUM EC EPA came into effect which is now being replaced with respect to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the duties and tariffs—and I am reading from a document here, Madam

Speaker, and let me just read it as it is, verbatim:

“The EPA removes all tariffs and quotas on Caricom exports to the EU”—
immediately. “The only exception is sugar and rice which will be liberalized,
over short periods.”

The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that the Caribbean, Caricom, CARIFORUM was confronted with a decision several years ago because this particular EPA was adopted in 2007 and then evolved with various Member States accepting it, ratifying it and so on and then as is required with all treaties, it is a matter of law, that treaties have no effect unless they are incorporated into your domestic law. So that even though Trinidad and Tobago would have signed on to this EPA, would have ratified it, it was necessary for Trinidad and Tobago to incorporate the CARIFORUM EPA into its domestic law and this was done in 2013 by the UNC Government at the time.

And the reason why that Government would have done that, supported by Members on this side, we were in Opposition then and the reason why we would have supported the Bill to incorporate the CARIFORUM EC EPA into law was because of what I have just read out that the EPA immediately removed all tariffs and quotas on Caribbean exports to the EU and that is the whole point of all of this. This is not a one-way Agreement. This particular Agreement that is before us is bilateral. The Agreement with CARIFORUM was multilateral. But what it does is it allows both sides, both trading partners to export goods and services—goods in particular, services came a little later—into their respective territories. So it gives us in Trinidad and Tobago, our manufacturers, the privilege to export in this Bill into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland our goods duty free and this is following the CARIFORUM EPA which allowed our manufacturers to export our goods into Europe duty free.

As other speakers have said and I would not belabour the point, the reason why we are doing what we are doing today is because of Brexit. If Brexit had not happened, we would not be here. What we would be doing is building on the work done by successive Governments starting in 2007, then into 2008, 2009 and then 2013 when this Parliament adopted the CARIFORUM EC EPA.

Madam Speaker, I have some statistics here. I know Members opposite are accused of not reading so let me put into the record what the facts are. Trinidad and Tobago exports to the United Kingdom in 2015, our exports, 67 million. This started to grow in 2016 to 496 million, peaking in 2017 at 698 million and for 2020 understandably because of COVID, we at 561. But 2020 is still an improvement on 2019.

So what we have seen, Madam Speaker, over the period is that the trade balance with the United Kingdom under the UNC was negative \$1.5 billion with just \$67 million of exports from Trinidad and Tobago going into the UK in 2015 under the previous administration but 1.6 billion in imports coming from the UK into Trinidad and Tobago in 2015 under the previous Government, causing a trade imbalance of negative \$1.5 billion. This has systemically been reduced so that our exports into the UK have grown from 67 million in 2015 under the previous Government to 561 million in 2020 under this Government, Madam Speaker, and imports have declined from 1.6 billion in 2015—imports from the UK into Trinidad and Tobago were 1.6 billion in 2015, they have now declined to 1 billion. So under this Government, exports have been going in the right direction, increasing by almost 1,000 per cent from 67 million to 561 million—well 698 was the peak, over 900 per cent increase in exports under this Government and imports have declined from 1.6 billion to 1 billion, Madam Speaker, a decline of some over 30 per cent, 40 per cent, in fact.

4.30 p.m.

So everything has been going in the right direction. Imports from the UK going down, exports from Trinidad and Tobago going up. And the fact of the matter is that we have some very significant exports into the UK. We export natural gas—liquefied natural gas. We export methanol. We export aromatic bitters. And for those opposite who fail to read, aromatic bitters is the third largest export from Trinidad and Tobago to the United Kingdom. Let me repeat. Our aromatic bitters from Angostura is the third largest export from Trinidad and Tobago into the United Kingdom after methanol and natural gas.

And what Members opposite do not want those who listen to them to understand is that if we did not do what we are doing today, and if the Parliament did not do what it had done in 2013, following on the signature and ratification of the agreements prior to that, our natural gas and our methanol and our bitters, and other spirits that are exported from Trinidad and Tobago into the United Kingdom would be subject to substantial tariffs and duties. Is that what Members opposite want? You want Trinidad and Tobago's natural gas and Trinidad and Tobago's methanol and Trinidad and Tobago's aromatic bitters to be subject to duty and tariffs going into the United Kingdom? You want to kill our petrochemical industry, Madam Speaker? Is that what they want? You see, they never explained—when they make all the noise that they make—they never explained the consequences of the irresponsible prescriptions that they put before us. Trinidad and Tobago has been in this arrangement, this economic partnership arrangement, with the EU now for over 10 years.

You want us come now and tell them that we want to renegotiate? We have been negotiating all the time, Madam Speaker. And things like motor cars, for example, the Attorney General mentioned it, we have been able to get a delay in

the removal of tariffs for cars imported into Trinidad and Tobago from the UK. So we do not have to have full implementation of the removal of tariffs on British cars until the year 2033. This is what this Government has been doing, Madam Speaker. So I am just shocked that Members opposite are not aware that this Government has systematically reduced the trade imbalance with the United Kingdom over the period that we have been in Government. I am shocked that they do not know that and I am shocked that they do not know that if we decide to play the fool with this Agreement, our LNG, our methanol, our aromatic bitters could be subject to significant tariffs and become completely uncompetitive. Is that what you want for Trinidad and Tobago?

And therefore, Madam Speaker, I totally support this Bill. It is a no-brainer and I support the Minister of Trade and Industry in her efforts. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, as I make a very brief intervention as it relates to this particular debate this afternoon, which seeks to focus on the CARIFORUM Agreement and the United Kingdom of Great Britain Economic Partnership Agreement Act, 2021, Madam Speaker.

As I stand to contribute to the business of this honourable House, as usual, the Government of the day is forced with an opportunity for which they cannot rise and take advantage of. This Bill seeks to establish trading preferences between CARIFORUM nations of which Trinidad and Tobago is part, and the United Kingdom. And, Madam Speaker, it is my firm belief that while the deepening of the trade with the United Kingdom can theoretically benefit CARIFORUM and Trinidad and Tobago, the benefits of such an agreement can only materialize once states signatory to this trade treaty can provide each other with the goods and services that form the content of this Bill.

[MR.DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and to do so in a manner that is based on the sustainable growth of each state as individual members and particularly as a regional block within the United Kingdom as one partner and CARIFORUM as the other.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the challenge therefore before us is not to simply entrench the principles of preferential trade with the United Kingdom but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ensure that Caricom or CARIFORUM, and in our case Trinidad and Tobago, can develop the economic and industrial positioning so as to take advantage of the preferential treatment therein and to provide increasing value to our trading partners and increasing opportunities for us.

It is against this background, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we must consider the following circumstances: the ability of CARIFORUM Member States to capitalize on the benefits of this Agreement, and the ability of Trinidad and Tobago, as a member of CARIFORUM, to capitalize from our association with CARIFORUM and therefore capitalize from the benefits of this Agreement.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the Minister of Trade and Industry, I hope that in her wind up here this afternoon that she may be able to be in a position to point us in a direction where we can critically evaluate the efforts by CARIFORUM, as a trading body, to position the body and its Member States to effectively maximize what I would call the accruable benefits of this Economic Partnership Agreement.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important for us that—and it is instructive to note that at this point in time, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago holds the chairmanship of Caricom, and therefore, the performance of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago as Caricom's Chairman is a key to the success of Caricom within CARIFORUM and CARIFORUM within the Economic Partnership

Agreement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, it is important and I hope that the Minister of Trade and Industry will focus on it in her wind up and can point us in the direction, as I said, of whether Caricom was able, as a trading bloc, to maximize the potential benefits within the last Economic Partnership Agreement. And how have Caricom and CARIFORUM countries boosted local production for export to the European Union through the Economic Partnership Agreement? Mr. Deputy Speaker, have the potential benefits, enshrined in the Economic Partnership Agreements stimulated any innovation of new value-added products with such products being included as new exports?

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, given the prevailing international circumstances, we must also be concerned about the impact that COVID-19 may have in the foreseeable future as it pertains to what we produce and how we produce it. And we must also be mindful of the global spending trends and the implications of such trends on the development of the regional export capacity and our ability to produce, in terms of the quality and the quantity required.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Minister of Finance and the Member for Diego Martin North/East intervened, he spoke and referred to that he was concerned about the issue of geography and children looking on and what they would be learning from this particular debate, especially from the point of view of the Opposition. And I want to make it very clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a narrative that has emerged from those on the opposite side where they feel that the Opposition—or attempts to create this narrative that the Opposition is creating mischief and is attempting to go in the direction of misinformation and so on. [*Desk thumping*] But it is not mischief and misinformation. It is exercising our rights within the parliamentary framework of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk*

thumping] And that was done in a very exemplary manner by my colleagues this afternoon: the Member for Mayaro, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and the Member for Oropouche West, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact is the Minister of Finance claimed that the MP for Oropouche West was misleading children when he referred to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The fact is that is what it is and I am forced to conclude that the Minister of Finance needs a lesson in geography [*Desk thumping*] and probably he needs to collaborate with his Minister of Trade and Industry and his Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, as it relates to his role and his understanding of the global community and what is the United Kingdom, in the context of what we are dealing with here this afternoon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he indicated that exports have been going in the right direction, increasing by approximately by 1,000 per cent to the United Kingdom. And in terms of aromatic bitters, it is the third largest export into the United Kingdom after methanol and natural gas. And we on this side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are very proud of Angostura and what this bitters mean, in terms of being a brand ambassador for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. And at no point in time, those of us in the Opposition will be involved in any kind of activities to jeopardize Angostura or any business entity in Trinidad and Tobago that seeks to realize economic growth for the well-being of the economy of this county. I want to put that on the record here this evening, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while he boasted and presented a number of statistics, in terms of how trade is increasing towards the United Kingdom, I think the Minister of Finance should be very concerned about the very fact that the Government which he belongs to has failed to grow the economy of this country

for the last five and a half years. We have suffered negative economic growth for five-plus years and the economic indicators are—

Ms. Cudjoe: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And as I said, the economic indicators are that we will experience negative economic growth for a sixth year. The first quarter for fiscal 2021, the statistics are there to show that we have suffered a \$1.9billion deficit and it will worsen in the second quarter, the third quarter and the fourth quarter of 2021. There is a foreign exchange crisis. There is no diversification of the economy of this country, and we do not know which direction we are headed under the Government of Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley and the Minister of Finance, and to a lesser extent the Minister of Trade and Industry. Because the manufacturing sector, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has not benefited in any tangible way from the “tenureship” of the Minister of Trade and Industry, Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon. What has been the track record of this Minister in creating a sense of hope for the manufacturing sector in terms of expansion and growth, and even for the people who work within this sector, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important that we, from an Opposition point of view, are very concerned about the prevailing economic conditions in this country. And we have that role to ask: How does this Government, in the context of what is unfolding in this particular debate, tell our local manufacturers, our local businessmen and local exporters there is renewed opportunity for trade and there is preferential foreign markets, when the Government has placed local exporters under duress and has made foreign exchange a priced scarcity in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker? How can this Government tell exporters there is

opportunity in production, when the import cost into export production has increased? The rising cost of doing business is a slap in the face of exporters and manufacturers, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And trade is indeed linked to foreign affairs and I hope that the Minister of Trade and Industry, in the context of this particular trading arrangement, is prepared to do the legwork and work with the diplomatic missions or embassies in the context of not only from a UK arrangement point of view, but also in the context, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the point of view of taking into consideration that Trinidad and Tobago has several diplomatic missions across Europe, for example, in Brussels, Belgium a permanent mission to the United—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). This is not about the European Union, please, and 55(1)(b) and 48(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member—hon. Member?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, I have given you certain leeway and I would like you to get back on track now and tie it in quickly, please. Again, stick with regard—close to the Bill as possible.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided and all I want to ask is: What are the new initiatives to boost exports to the new market in the context of what is or will emerge as a result of the Parliament giving teeth to this particular treaty that has been negotiated, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important that I respond, I think, to the Attorney General during his contribution here this evening before I end. Because the Attorney General stated that the United National Congress Government was responsible for the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And while my colleague from Oropouche West touched on this particular issue very

briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a known—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, as you said, your colleague has already mentioned it briefly. I am not going to give you any major leeway with regard to this. So quickly—couple seconds and move on, please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Okay, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided as it relates to this particular issue. Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the point of view of this particular arrangement also, I hope that from the point of view of the trading arrangement, the Minister may be able to point in the direction or take into consideration that we are mindful that trade is often informed by standards and values of countries and companies involved in trading arrangements. And from the point of view of that, takes us in the direction of the question of labour standards, and whether the standards of occupational health and safety observed by local exporters are up to international standards, as may be observed by companies in the United Kingdom.

So, from that point of view, all I want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we move towards the ratification of this Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM, to which Trinidad and Tobago belongs, and the United Kingdom, we must do so in a spirit of preparedness and an intention to use the arms of the State and the economic policies of the Government in a manner that helps us to maximize such benefits and to boost economic activity in this country.

It is a trading arrangement and the customs officers of Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The customs officers of Trinidad and Tobago will have a very critical role in terms of policing this particular arrangement. I hope that the Minister of Trade and Industry will collaborate with her colleague to ensure that there is the adequate manpower

within the Customs of Trinidad and Tobago, and also to ensure that there is the adequate training of customs officers, as it relates to their sensitization and awareness of the details of this particularly hefty agreement.

And we on this side will continue to ensure that we hold the Government accountable, not only on matters of trade, but in every aspect, so that we will put our position very clearly in terms of the issues affecting the people and stakeholders of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Trade and Industry. [*Interruption*] Member for St. Augustine, you have a comment?

Ms. Ameen: I was trying to bring to your attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there was someone on our bench who wanted to speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, there is a certain procedure how this House operates. Minister, would you like to give way to the colleague on the other side?

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): No, no, no, he did not indicate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Kindly proceed.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And I would like to take the opportunity to thank my colleagues who presented. Obviously, they were well prepared. Member for Tobago West, Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Member for San Fernando West, I thank you all for our contributions. I also thank my colleagues on the other side: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, Members for Oropouche West, Couva South and Member for Mayaro.

This is indeed a most important Bill, and I think you all had due notice and

my main point of contention is that people did not prepare. And if you call yourself an alternative government, the one thing you must do is to understand all facets of government. Trade—

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 48(6), imputing improper motives that the Opposition did not prepare.

Hon. Member: But they were not prepared.

Mr. Ratiram: We are fully prepared. It is they who are not prepared. [*Crosstalk*] They are not prepared because they had no one else to speak. I was well prepared to come and deliver [*Desk thumping*] and I think that is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Thank you [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: That is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Member.

Mr. Ratiram: That is in poor taste.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Could you retract the last statement you made, please?

Mr. Ratiram: I retract.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Overruled.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I was just on the point of preparedness and certainly you would have find yourselves in a better position to make more meaningful contributions. Right? For instance, Member for Couva South really did not listen and he kept asking questions for which I had given answers in my presentation. I had a very detailed presentation. And again, this goes back to the question of preparedness.

The Member for Oropouche West went fishing, because he was all over the place and he really came up with nothing. He came up with—I mean, with nothing, you know, you would call that but worthy of being bait and it was really a very lost

and confused contribution, talking about vaccines and that kind of thing and the manufacturing—bad-mouthing the manufacturing sector, the manufacturing sector is going under, when in fact you know that the manufacturing sector has performed admirably, especially during this COVID pandemic; rose to the occasion, came up with products that they could have provided, not only to Trinidad and Tobago but to the rest of the region as well. They continue to employ more than 52,000 people. That is something, that you are asking a question like that.

Pointe-a-Pierre—I mean, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, what has the Ministry done et cetera, et cetera. Again, the information is online. It is on the website, if you just take a look. Google on the Internet. Just go Google and you are going to find all the information that you want to get. Our National Trade Policy from 2019 to '23 is available. You could have looked at it. Again, the Government's "Roadmap for Trinidad and Tobago: Transforming to a New Economy and a New Society", available on the Internet, so that you could pat yourselves—so that you could come across more experience and of course understanding more about the subject matters.

You brought up the issue about the paper. And even though Member for San Fernando West responded, I want to let you know, Member for Pointe- a-Pierre, that one of the very early things I did when we first started talking about the CARIFORUM-UK EPA is I wrote to my colleague, my counterpart in the UK about the very said matter because it is something that was not dealt with at the point of negotiation. And I can understand the impact on one—just probably one or two manufacturers, but still it is important to us. And the records will show that I wrote to my counterpart and he has said to me, let us go the way of at least doing the replication exercise, and the actual Agreement provides for joint institutions where these matters can be raised again. And I can give the public and those

particular manufacturers the reassurance that we will revisit the matter on paper. There is no question about it.

Again, you know, you brought up, Pointe-a-Pierre, the question about pricing. The Ministry cannot be engaged in pricing, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you ought to know that, because that is a matter for the manufacturers and the exporters and the distributors, and so on. Pricing is not a matter for the Government at all. Right?

And again, you talked about the expansion of e TecK, and so on. Now e TecK is—no, I think you were probably raising some concerns about e TecK, and so on. I can tell you whatever concerns you were raising, all of our parks are filled chockablock, except for the very new ones, which I am talking about Point Fortin and Debe, which I am going to take a special interest in. Those are very small parks and they may—and I am happy to note that in Point Fortin there is now one established—one of the nine tenants is in fact established. All of the lots have gone, eh. But what I am saying to you is all of our major parks are filled chockablock and it is the reason why we are establishing the new Phoenix Park Industrial Estate at Phoenix Park, close to the Port of Point Lisas, and I can tell you it is going to be a major success and we already have great interest in that park.

5.00 p.m.

But let me go on to Mr. Paray—and there is something I want to do which is to apologize, because I spoke to the population size and I did give the wrong figure. The population of the UK and Northern Ireland is in fact 67 million and I wish to correct the records, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

But again, as the person responding, Mr. Paray, I would have liked to think that with 20 minutes and the availability to your good self of this 1,370-page Agreement, I would have thought you would have been very focused on the

Agreement and would have questioned matters within the agreement because it had been laid before. But what came out of you, you stretched yourself very wide and it really told me that you have not again, you are not showing your knowledge of trade. You are not showing—and this is what I would have expected from you. You are not showing your strength in trade at all. So again, and one—the biggest negative in your contribution is your bad-talking of Caricom. You cannot bad-mouth Caricom—

Mr. Paray: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did not bad-talk Caricom.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, you were bad-mouthing Caricom and that is the fashion of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, one second, one second, one second. Please use a different term, please.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah, he did not speak well of the regional mechanism which is Caricom. And they have a habit of doing that. We all know about the ATM experience and it will not serve us well. But what I am saying is be positive about Caricom. Trinidad and Tobago is but a speck within the world and it is only as a region that we can come together and really have the rest of the world respect us. And of course, it is the only way of building economic strength among ourselves. So we have to be a little bit more united. It is only if we are united, we will in fact be stronger together as a region.

All of our goods go in to the region and therefore we should always remain grateful to the rest of the region. Without them—they were our primary exports, eh, our first exports, that is where they went. We are now building out the other markets, but that is why we have to be grateful and that is why we work so well together, and for other reasons as well in security and so on.

So, you know, hearing you all speak, not understanding the efforts that we

are making to make the CSME work. You can revisit the St. Ann's Declaration which was the end policy which came out of the Heads of Government meeting which was held here in Trinidad at the Hilton to focus on the development of the CSME. So great focus we must, must have on the region and the CSME and all of the benefits which all of us as countries can certainly—the community can benefit on their path to economic prosperity.

So “all this thing” about travel advisory and mosquito borne disease and so on, in a 20-minute contribution absolutely should not be there. Listen, and again, many of you talked about our engagement with the TTMA, and there are issues with the TTMA, and I can tell you we have a resounding relationship, an excellent relationship and we work very, very, very, closely with the TTMA. I can tell you even when I visit factories and new businesses and large ones and small or medium ones, I always do it together with the TTMA, never alone. I cannot do it, I am not a manufacturer, but never alone. And when we are constructing let us say our—and putting together our trade policy and so on, they are an integral part of our research mechanism and our discussions. We do not do anything without them. Very, very, important the TTMA is to this Government, and we continue to work well with them. [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

And—Madam Speaker, I see you have joined us again. Again, the Member for Mayaro stated that the two schedules which form part of the Bill in the House today contain half a million products, and I must correct because the Eleventh Schedule which is the “Duty-Free Schedule” contains 3,500 lines. You must get your facts right. So this half a million is not there, it is the 3,500 lines in terms of Duty-Free products and the goods in the—

Mr. Paray: Would the Minister give way for some clarity. Can the Minister give

us a point of clarity?

Madam Speaker: Could you put on your mike, please?

Mr. Paray: Madam Speaker, I just wanted to find out if the Minister will give way for one minute for a point of clarity?

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thirty seconds.

Mr. Paray: Thank you. Minister, you said “3,500 lines”, but I did some quick count. Some of the lines have 10 items, 12 items. I was referring to the items not the line. Thank you, Ma’am.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Okay. But I mean again, you have to be very careful when you are putting it over, maybe you should have said explicitly what you mean to say. But it is 3,500 lines in terms of duty-free products and in terms of the Twelfth Schedule which is the “Liberalisation Schedule”, the goods originating from the UK and which are going to be phased out over a period of time, I think I told you 13 years, that is about 1,700 lines. So together you are talking about 5,200 lines.

And then another point raised by the Member for Mayaro is the impact on the inflow of goods and the impact on our manufacturers myself. And I myself had raised that question when I was on the other side and your Member was debating the CARIFORUM-EU EPA, so I had raised that myself. And therefore, it is one of the first things I would have looked at as Minister with the responsibility for Trade and Industry.

And the answer is simply that the CARIFORUM-UK agreement providing access to a market size of \$67 million—67 million, sorry—persons, and therefore, the significant revenue that can be earned and the benefits far outweigh any revenue forgone in any negatives at all. So, impact on manufacturers, very, very little. As a matter of fact, as I said the phasing out gives the manufacturers a

chance to be able to build their competitiveness. But the impact is very low when you consider the gains in terms of foreign exchange earnings, et cetera, and expanded exports, employment generation, et cetera. So that is a moot point.

Now, then I heard repeatedly, “What are we doing”? “What are we doing for the manufacturing sector?” We are doing so much. I have to thank again the Minister of Finance. Despite our very strained circumstances, we were allocated in the last budget \$50 million for this fiscal year, \$50 million towards manufacturing and called an Export Booster Initiative. And I have gone to the population and I have spoken on this only recently. So I do not know if you all are not reading or as I said you did not do your research, but \$50 million at this time—given our circumstances at this time is no small cry at all. This is a significant injection.

And I want say to you that this Export Booster Initiative not only focuses on the large but primarily on the small and medium-sized enterprises which you have talked about as well. And some of the initiatives, let me elaborate on it because you did not seem to know, that is made up of about 16 initiatives and there are three broad strategies, export promotion which we call accelerating internationalization, capacity building, and institutional strengthening. And there are a number of initiatives including the establishment of trade facilitation offices. Of course, the trade facilitation office in Cuba has worked well, so that we are considering, I have been deliberating with the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, and we are going to Cabinet just to tighten and to present the particular market in which we expect to place this new trade facilitation office.

I can almost say that I can see it being in the Central American market because that is a most important market for us having—I mean, owing to the fact that we already have a bilateral trade agreement, a partial scope agreement with Panama, and then also existing is a Caricom Trade Agreement with Costa Rica,

and then not too far by, in Latin America, South America, is of course Colombia with whom we also have a trading agreement. This is through Caricom.

So very important, we are going to increase our—we are going to put out some new trade attachés there in significant markets, there are markets even within the region that are so very important. We are thinking of Jamaica so that they can attend to Jamaica and to Dominican Republic, and to Haiti. We are thinking about Guyana, so that we can attend to Suriname as well. And I will tell you, having people on the ground is so very important so that when you have any barriers to trade or any problems which have been created, you have somebody there on the ground to be able to attend to that.

So all of these SMEs, of course, we are going to assist them with market intelligence, we are doing virtual trade missions, every month we are doing a virtual trade mission. Translating services would be provided so you do not have to hire somebody to interpret a document or so for you, or produce a document in another language, so all of that because they do in-market promotions. Especially for the small ones, we can put their products—we have people placing their products on the shelves in those markets at no cost to them, cost to us. And of course doing what is called a virtual expo platform. And building all of their markets, all of their sector profiles for them.

We are doing this now. In fact, we are building sector profiles for even Tobago so that, you know, the preparation of those profiles would require expertise, and the small businesses are not able to produce those themselves unless of course they contract out that kind of service. So, in-house we are doing—building out those sector profiles at exporTT.

And there is another big programme in there which is the Certification Programme. And I will tell you, that businesses exporting under TT \$20 million

and of course those that are going to be involved, or are involved in import substitution have access to this Certification Programme. You would have seen it advertised in the paper just last week and already businesses, manufacturers are knocking on our doors.

And so I can tell you that those manufacturers can accept up to \$500,000 per business, right, and this is going to help you to enter new markets because I can tell you if you want, if you feel that you are exporting well and you are satisfying all the ASPS measures et cetera, everything within the region, once you are thinking of going out extra regionally into the Central American market, into Europe, into the UK and so on, you would find that there are going to be certification and requirements, standards requirements, and we are assisting small and medium-sized businesses in particular in ensuring that they can get their certification done. All under this particular programme.

Someone talked about R&D, research and development. Apart from the Research and Development Programme which is at exporTT, we are going to be doing what is called Innovation Vouchers to encourage product development where we would—and you will see the details of that soon in the newspaper. That is going to allow the potential recipient \$200,000 towards their research exercise which they can do through established institutions. Like for instance, UWI and UTT and the other universities that are in Trinidad and Tobago.

Someone talked about labelling. All of that labelling and product testing support, all of that is going to be provided under the \$50 million Booster Initiative as well. Export accelerator programmes to transform companies to new exporters and so on. Green packaging, encouraging green packaging and supporting financially those in thinking of manufacturing green packaging, both for import substitution and for exports as well. So we are not only arming our businesses to

withstand the competition, but we are also making sure they are top competitors in the international market. And we have put our money where our mouth is, right?

So, as I have said to you, somebody—of course, you talked about SMEs, I told you this booster programme is for the SMEs. There are other things in the last budget. We talked about the incentive to encourage small and medium-sized businesses to list on the junior stock exchange. This is going to assist them with getting equity capital to push their businesses forward as well.

And even within the Ministry especially for the small businesses you can find our Grant Fund Facility which is actively sought after. The RDF I talked about as well, and even the Steelpan Manufacturing Grant Fund Facility which is doing also very, very, very well. And many of the beneficiaries of these funds are engaged in agro processing, and food and beverage, and manufacturing, and ICT, and the creative industries, and so on.

Additionally, NEDCO which now falls under the new Ministry under the Member for Laventille West, I think? Yes, NEDCO also has a grant facility that they are now providing to the very small entrepreneurs as well, those with less than a million in annual sales. And of course, we have provided immense support during the last year, immense support to all of our SMEs in particular, through the banks, through the credit unions, Eximbank provides a support to manufacturers, and yes, for importers to the extent of 200 million, but also to the manufacturers to the extent of US \$200 million, so—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, your time is now spent.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Madam Speaker: So if you can wind up.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: So, Madam Speaker, I want thank you. I wish I could have said more about our National Quality Policy and of course that the

agreement provides for investments on either side, but I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, and I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Madam Chairman: Okay, Minister, the Whip has agreed that we can do all six clauses en bloc unless you have amendments.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: No.

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

Preamble approved.

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

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 19th day of March, 2021, at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, at that time we will do a Bill to amend the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act, Chap. 11:24, and on the Supplemental Order Paper, the Notification of Her Excellency, The President in respect of the Nomination of Mr. Mc Donald Jacob for appointment to the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Madam Speaker: And before I put the question, I too would like to join with the sentiments expressed by the Whip and on behalf of us all to welcome back the Leader of the House, [*Desk thumping*] and to wish you continued good health.

Adjournment

2021.03.12

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.23 p.m.