

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SESSION OF THE FOURTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON
JANUARY 13, 1992

Session 1992-93

Volume 36

SENATE

Friday, August 21, 1992

10.00 a.m.

The Senate having assembled, and it being the First meeting of the Second Session of the Fourth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Clerk of the Senate read the following Proclamation:

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

No. 24 of 1992

[L.S.]

By His Excellency Noor Mohamed
Hassanali, President and Commander-in-Chief
of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

NOOR M. HASSANALI

President

A PROCLAMATION

Whereas it is provided by subsection (1) of section 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that each session of Parliament shall be held at such place within Trinidad and Tobago and shall commence at such time as the President may by Proclamation appoint:

Now, therefore, I, NOOR MOHAMED HASSANALI, President as aforesaid, do hereby appoint the Red House, Port of Spain, as the place at which the Second Session of the Fourth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held, and 10.00 a.m. on Friday August 21, 1992, as the time at which the said session shall commence.

Given under my Hand and Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad
and Tobago, at the Office the
President, St. Ann's, this 18th day of
August, 1992.

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PRAYERS

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Daniel Teelucksingh from today's sitting because he is out of the country. I have also granted leave of absence to Sen. Ainsley Mark (Vice-President) for the period August 21 to August 25, 1992. He is out of the country. Also, to Sen. Everard Dean on his continued illness for the period August 21 to August 31, 1992.

Hon. Senators, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago desires to address both Houses of Parliament. The sitting of the Senate will now be suspended to allow the presiding officer to meet His Excellency on arriving at the Red House and to allow the Senators to proceed to the Parliament Chamber to listen to His Excellency's Address.

10.06 a.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

10.08 a.m.: *The Senate joined Members of the House of Representatives in the other place.*

10.31 a.m.: *His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, arrived in the Chamber.*

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Mr. President of the Senate, Madam Speaker, hon. Members of Parliament, on this the first day of the Second Session of the Fourth Parliament and, incidentally, the eve of the 30th Anniversary of our blessed Republic, I am pleased to bring you greetings, with my prayer that God's peace be with us all now and always. I trust that hon. Members have enjoyed their recent holidays—after all, you had eight days of them and that you are accordingly fully refreshed. Incidentally, if hon. Members are under the impression that the hon. Prime Minister, or his Cabinet is to blame for the text of my address this morning, I should like to correct that impression. All the blame is mine and I accept all of it.

I should like, this morning, to share with you some reflections on the term, "Freedom," as it appears in our Constitution, and along with it, its implications for us in the Preamble. I note two phrases whereby the people of Trinidad and Tobago have in effect:

- (a) affirmed their faith in a society of free men and free women and free institutions;*

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(b) declared their recognition that men and women and institutions remain free when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law.

Such values reside in the enlightened conscience of the human being cultivated by exercise of the human virtues which are based, in my perception, on self-respect and due consideration for all other persons. Implicit in "respect" of those values is the commitment to the pursuit of truth. Needless to say, a commitment to the pursuit of truth, implies a commitment also to integrity.

I refer to the constitutional guarantee of certain freedoms with which we are all well acquainted; freedom of thought and expression; of movement; of association and assembly; of religious belief and observance; of the press; of the holy scriptures. Of the holy scriptures including of course, the Gita, the Bible and the Koran, they all enlighten us on the implications of the term, "freedom". These implications, I suggest, are not inconsistent with those indicated in our Constitution. The scriptures affirm that obedience to God's words is the prerequisite to discovering truth and that it is the truth that shall make us free. We are to obey lawfully constituted authority and live as free men and women, not using our freedom as a pretext for committing evil, but to live as the servants of God. Those of us who perpetrate evil are not really free, but we are, indeed, the servants of evil.

One perceives the influence of the scriptures in the Constitution and particularly in the Preamble. One is aware that Ministers of religion did contribute to the debates and discussions which preceded the drafting of our Constitution many years ago. I note, with pride, that hon. Members commence their sittings with expressions of thoughts and prayers for divine protection and guidance in your deliberations and related activities.

Further, one cannot ignore what seems, happily, an increasing tendency in our citizens all over the country to recognize divine presence and to acknowledge their dependence on divine protection and guidance in their activities.

Hon. Members, our country today is experiencing national problems, financial problems, unemployment, poverty and related ills, problems relating to housing. We are also experiencing an incidence of crimes, of violence, involving the use of firearms and other lethal weapons, of crime involving dishonesty. We are experiencing an incidence of crime against children and women, and one of crime relating to the illicit use of drugs. There is a problem of crime perpetrated by young and very young persons. The list is not meant to be exhaustive, of course.

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At the vantage point of the highest forum in the land, hon. Members may be said to have a panoramic view of society at large and of the happenings in it. A closer view may reveal accusations of misconduct of several kinds, some perhaps not redressable by the law of the land. The list may include yet such evil as indiscipline, inefficiency, neglect, extravagance and waste, indecency and the mischievous or unfair action contributing to frustration. Together with others, they constitute an assault upon the moral fabric of our society.

The cynic—maybe, along with others—has commented that civilized man has landed on the moon but has not yet rid society, on earth, even of bad manners. He may wonder whether citizens may claim that our society does not enjoy two basic freedoms, which it would like to enjoy, “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”, and he may ask: Are we a society of free men, free women and free institutions? How free is our society? How free are we?

Society may wish to ponder whether any one of those questions does arise for its consideration. Society, like the citizen, can only do its best, but, like the citizen, it must consult its conscience to decide and to know whether it has done, or is doing, its best.

Responsibilities facing hon. Members, both in the legislative and in other areas of their endeavour, are onerous, and are fraught with difficulty.

Society is concerned about the incidence of problems; it is seeking solutions for them; and it looks upon, and to hon. Members and other leaders, for solutions or for help. In its concern, I trust that society be specially mindful of the problems of youth, including children.

The youth comprise a substantial percentage of our population. Their problems manifest themselves in the home, in the school and thereafter. We must be, and we must satisfy the youth that we are, interested, anxious to understand, considerate to, loving and caring for them. Our actions must reflect accordingly.

Whatever the problem being considered, hon. Members must distinguish between individual interest or sectoral interest, on the one hand, and national interest, on the other.

Hon. Members expect, and are entitled to expect, citizens to help themselves to the extent that they may legitimately do so before seeking help elsewhere. Our society must accept, I suggest, self-help as a creed, and not merely adopt it as an occasional policy.

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Citizens look upon hon. Members as, and expect them to be, men and women of integrity, among our first leaders and exemplars of conduct, above reproach, both in and out of Parliament. The society is accordingly pleased when debates focus on issues, and not on personalities; when language is measured, and not loose, and when emotions are controlled and not left at large.

Hon. Members, like all other citizens, and particularly other leaders, are constitutionally committed to the pursuit of truth, and must remain so committed. Accordingly, hon. Members do not allow their intellectual, albeit professional judgment, to ignore or to cloud their humanity or morality. One hopes that our society will rid itself—if indeed it has not already done so—of any perception that “in politics anything goes!” One hopes, too, that society will question, and question closely, any suggestion that truth and what is sometimes called “political expediency” are interchangeable.

Every citizen, in the premises I have adumbrated, is constitutionally committed to the pursuit of truth; and all of us should consider ourselves leaders who are concerned with influencing others, or who are vested with authority, power or privilege, and who make decisions affecting other persons, and who, of course, bear corresponding responsibilities.

Thus, the term “leaders” may include parents or guardians, teachers, employers, employees, seniors in companies, organizations or other groups, among others. For obvious reasons these must all discharge their responsibilities conscientiously, and to the best of their respective abilities.

In the faithful discharge of their onerous responsibilities, hon. Members need the support and co-operation of the rest of the society. Hon. Members must strive legitimately, however, to earn, not to demand, the respect, trust or goodwill of the society. Mutual trust and goodwill admittedly, are elements essential to our welfare and our progress.

Society's conviction, that leaders are committed to truth, enhances the promotion of mutual trust and goodwill. Whatever the complaints being agitated, and however difficult of solutions they may appear, I perceive that prevailing conditions of mutual trust and goodwill, will contribute some measure of relief or hope, and may consequentially improve prospects of satisfactory resolution of problems.

Hon. Members, we are quite—all of us—rightly anxious to rebuild the national economy. I suggest, with respect, that if we are to remain a society of

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free men, free women and free institutions, we must, at the same time, build or rebuild, as the case may be, a national conscience that would ensure that our freedom, is—in the words of our Constitution—"founded on respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law."

I make this plea urgently, and I make this plea to hon. Members, and through you, hopefully, I make it to all other leaders, and, indeed, I plead with the rest of the national community, for its intelligent, adequate and reasonable support and co-operation.

If you forgive me, I would suggest, our Constitution may be likened unto our own voice, designed to speak back to us. If speak, it does, let us listen, let us obey.

Mr. President, Madam Speaker, Members of Parliament, I extend my best wishes to you for an enjoyable and successful second session. I pray divine guidance and protection for you, in all your endeavours.

I extend my best wishes to you and to members of your respective families, for health and for happiness.

May God bless us all, and may God bless our nation.

11.03 a.m.: *Senators return to the Senate Chamber.*

11.10 a.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

PAPER LAID

Address by His Excellency the President of both Houses of Parliament at the opening of the 1992/93 Session on Friday, August 21, 1992. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Sen. Dr. The Hon. Lenny Saith)*]

To be printed as a Senate Paper.

Motion made and question proposed, That the Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday, September 1, 1992 at 1.30 p.m. [Hon. L. Saith]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourn accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.12 a.m.