

SENATE

Wednesday, March 24, 2021

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

URGENT QUESTION**Purchase/Supply of Pfizer Vaccines****(Details of)**

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. To the Minister of Health: In light of the uncertainty surrounding the purchase/supply of the 351,000 doses of Pfizer vaccines for this country, can the Minister advise whether said order has been cancelled?

Madam President: Minister of Health. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam President. As I said yesterday, we are in talks with Pfizer. As late as March 04, 2021, talks are ongoing, but as the hon. Senator put it, “uncertainty of purchases and supply”, I am happy to announce—well, not announce, I am happy to re-announce because the Prime Minister announced it, that we will be getting 40,000 doses of WHO approved vaccines from the Government of India. And I want to thank the Prime Minister for his work. [*Desk thumping*]

Additionally, pending WHO approval which should be soon, we will be getting 100,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines; again, thank the hon. Prime Minister. And again, by the end of the month, as we said, we expect 33,600 from COVAX. So in total we expect, in the incoming weeks and couple of months, a total of 173,600 doses of vaccines in Trinidad and Tobago. Again, congratulations to the Prime Minister; this is non-political. He has worked very hard behind the

scenes, and he has said thanks to the people of India and China for these gifts. Thank you very much.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Yes. I would like to say congratulations to the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar [*Desk thumping*] for prevailing upon the Indian Government to supply us with 40,000 doses of vaccines.

Madam President: Is that a question—

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I just ask the question directly—

Madam President: Sen. Mark, please ask the question.

Sen. Mark: Yes, Ma'am. Thank you. I could not resist, Ma'am. Yes. Can I direct this question directly to the hon. Minister rather: Minister, given the fact that we are—when I say “we”, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—is in continuous discussions with Pfizer for the supply of the 351,000 doses of vaccines, can you give the Senate the undertaking and assurance that those vaccines that we have ordered will eventually arrive in Trinidad and Tobago fully paid for by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much. As regards Pfizer, I will quote from some of their press releases because this is a situation where demand outstrips supply:

“Pfizer and Moderna, the companies with the only authorized vaccines so far...”

That was back in February 23rd:

“will need to increase their combined deliveries to date of 80 million doses to reach their promised target of 220 million shots by March 31.”

Senator, that is the state of global play; there is uncertainty.

I also want to quote about Pfizer:

“With an upsized production goal of 2 billion COVID-19 vaccines...this year, Pfizer and...BioNTech aren't resting on their laurels...

The time it takes the company to produce a COVID-19 vaccine batch could soon be cut from 110 days to...60...”—days.

They are calling that project, “Project Light Speed”. The point I am trying to make, Madam President, through you, Pfizer, like the rest of vaccine manufacturers, these things are not available on a shelf that we just order and pick up. It is a dynamic situation where supply is constantly trying to catch up with demand. As a result, it will be inappropriate for me to give assurances at this time. But be assured that the Government at all levels, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, the Ministry of Health are working assiduously and to date, we can say with some degree of certainty that in the near future 173,000 doses will be available to the public.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, through you, can I ask the hon. Minister: When the Minister of Health indicated that through discussions with business leaders, including ANSA McAL, there was a deadline set for the purchase of these particular Pfizer doses of vaccines, can the Minister indicate at that material time whether Trinidad and Tobago was being misled by Pfizer when we were told that there was a deadline that we had to meet in order to purchase those 351,000 doses of vaccines? Can you clear the air for us on this?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Pfizer did not mislead us, that was the information at the time, and this is an evolving, fluid situation for all countries and vaccine manufacturers. What we anticipate today is now changing now by the minute. So there was no assurance, there was an indication but things have changed with this, managing this global pandemic because up to now supply has not caught up with

demand.

Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy: Madam President, could I ask—

Madam President: No. I am sorry but only two questions are allowed.

Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy: Okay.

Madam President: Supplemental.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, the Government will be answering all the questioning on the Order Paper, save and except Question No. 108 to the Attorney General. We ask for a deferral of two weeks.

Madam President: Question 108 is deferred for two weeks.

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Charrise Seepersad:

Trinidad and Tobago's Tax Laws (Compliance with EU's Requirements)

108. Could the hon. Attorney General state:

Given that notwithstanding Trinidad and Tobago's enactment of tax laws in compliance with the European Union's (EU) requirements, this country remains on a list of 12 countries considered to be non-compliant, can the Minister advise as to:

- (i) whether the Government is taking steps to implement the additional reforms necessary to comply with the EU's tax governance criteria;
- (ii) whether the Government has set an agenda and timetable to implement the additional reforms referred to at (i) above;

- (iii) how has 'non-compliance' been impacting day-to-day banking transactions between Trinidad and Tobago and European Banks; and
- (iv) what, if any, cost has been incurred by Trinidad and Tobago as a result of being deemed noncompliant?

Question, by leave, deferred.

T&T Fire Service

(Moneys Owing to Telecom Provider(s))

86. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Owing to the non-payment of moneys to the telecommunications provider(s) for the use of mobile devices and landlines by First Division officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, can the Minister advise, as at February 09, 2021, whether:

- (i) said mobile devices and landlines were disconnected; and
- (ii) if the answer to (i) is in the affirmative, when will payments be made to the said provider(s)?

Madam President: The Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, with respect to Question No. 86, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service's landlines were not disconnected. I repeat, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service's landlines were not disconnected and thus continue to be fully operational. Some mobile devices utilized by First Division officers were temporarily affected at the end of January 2021. Service has since been fully restored by the telecommunications provider; of course, this never affected the services provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service nor their response to any member of the public.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can the hon. Minister indicate what were some of the factors which led to the temporary disconnection of these very crucial devices for First Division officers?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: No.

Madam President: Supplemental.

Sen. Mark: I beg your pardon?

Hon. S. Young: No.

Sen. Mark: “What you said?”

Madam President: Sen. Mark—

Sen. Mark: “No”, is that a response?

Madam President: Do you have a—

Sen. Mark: I think that is rude.

Madam President: Sen. Mark—

Sen. Mark: Okay, Ma’am.

Madam President:—do you have a supplemental question?

Sen. Mark: Yeah. Can this—I go to call him “a rude Minister”—

Madam President: No. Sen. Mark—

Sen. Mark:—but I would have to withdraw that.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, please withdraw it. Yes.

Sen. Mark: Yeah. Madam President, can the Minister indicate whether that situation that arose involving the disconnection of telephone devices used by First Division officers, has the Government taken steps to ensure there is no recurrence of this particular development that occurred as the Minister indicated at the end of January 2021, Madam President?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. Madam President, the point is I do not have the information as to why these devices were disconnected. It could have been technical problems with the devices, technical problems on the part of the service provider; it could have been with respect to payment of bills, I simply do not have the information. So the answer to the previous question was, no. With respect to what is being asked of me, there is absolutely no way anyone can give an assurance that the unfortunate circumstances will not reoccur. Firstly, I am not aware of why they occurred; but, secondly, if there are technical issues, that may occur again in the future. So the answer is, no, I cannot give any such assurance.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, as the Minister of National Security, when—can I ask the Minister of National Security whether it is true incompetence on his part that the failure to pay the bills for those devices was in fact the crucial factor that led to the disconnection of these devices?—the non-payment of bills by the Government, is that the reason?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question based on the responses given previously.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, I will release the Minister.

Price Increase of Over-the-counter Medication

(Measures to Protect Consumers)

87. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Given increases in the price of over-the-counter medication at pharmacies across the country by approximately six per cent (6%), can the Minister indicate whether price regulation measures will be implemented to protect consumers from price gouging?

Madam President: The Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, this question is based on an extremely false premise. Contrary to media reports, the Ministry of Health has found no evidence of an increase across the board of 6 per cent in medication at pharmacies across the country as erroneously stated in the question posed. In fact, the Ministry is aware of a price increase of 6 per cent of one, only one over-the-counter drug. The Ministry has been advised that there are many alternatives to this one brand-named drug and that consumers have a variety of choices in selecting their preferred item.

There is no cause for alarm, therefore, as this matter is being blown out of proportion. The Minister of Trade and Industry indicated that approval was sought for 3,300 pharmaceutical items to be suspended from the common external tariff of which 2,800 items were approved, thereby ensuring prices are maintained. This Government remains committed to advancing policies which balance the interest of consumers and support the development of local industry while observing regional trade obligations.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Seeing the Panadol tablet that we have a supply available for Government, can the Minister indicate whether this 6 per cent increase in the price of that particular medication has impacted negatively on consumers who would require that particular brand for purposes of addressing whatever ailment they may be suffering from? Can the Minister indicate?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question.

Sen. Mark: Can the Minister indicate, Madam President, with the recent amalgamation and monopolization of the pharmaceutical industry by one key player, can the Minister indicate whether the Government is examining the whole question of price controls so that, for instance, consumers would not be exploited

by this particular monopolist?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question. It does not arise.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister therefore, Madam President, as the Minister of Health, can the Minister indicate whether, given what is taking place globally as it relates to these pharmaceutical products that we import, whether we can anticipate further price increases as a result of the relaxation of the common external tariff?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, that question does not arise.

Sen. Mark: Well, can I relieve the Minister and move on?

Madam President: Next question, Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Is the Minister of Labour here?

Hon. Senators: Yes.

Sen. Mark: Oh, he is here. First time I am seeing him. Thank you, Minister.

[*Interruption*] No, no, he is a good chap so far. I think he is from La Brea.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, would you ask the question?

Sen. Mark: Sorry. Sorry.

Madam President: Thank you.

T&T Registered Nurses Association

(ILO Convention Ratification)

88. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Labour:

Given the request made by the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association for the Government to ratify the ILO Convention No. 149, can the Minister advise as to if and when said Convention will be ratified?

Madam President: Minister of Labour. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Labour (Hon. Stephen Mc Clashie): Madam President, I wish to thank you for the opportunity afforded to me to respond to the questions raised

by Sen. Mark pertaining to the ratification of the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 149, Nursing Personnel Convention, 1977. Permit me, Madam President, to briefly explain the process of ratification of ILO conventions before answering this specific question. Trinidad and Tobago has been a member state of the ILO since 1963. ILO instruments are adopted at the International Labour Conference and are subject to ratification by member states. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, before ILO conventions are ratified, they are first considered by the ILO 144 Tripartite Consultative Committee which comprises representatives of government and employers' and workers' organizations.

The proposals of the committees are submitted to the Minister of Labour and subsequently to Cabinet where a decision is made to recommend ratification of a particular convention. Once Cabinet agrees that it should be ratified the information is presented to Parliament and then the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs for the necessary instruments to be prepared. It should be noted, Madam President, that once a convention is ratified the Government has a responsibility to ensure the provisions of implementing the law and practice, and reports on it periodically.

With regard to ILO Convention No. 149 specifically, the Ministry of Labour received correspondence from the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association in March of 2019, and formally requesting ratification of this convention. This matter was referred to the committee which undertook in its 2018—2020 term, a gap analysis of the provisions contained in the convention and existing measures in Trinidad and Tobago. In so doing, the committee consulted with the nurses' services division of the Ministry of Health and also reached out to Trinidad and Tobago Association of Midwives for views on the gap analysis. The

term of the committee however ended in February of 2020.

It should be noted, Madam President, that subsequent to my appointment as the Minister of Labour, I met with key stakeholders, including the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association and I would have indicated that the committee was being reconstituted and consideration of ILO Convention No. 149 would be placed on its agenda. The committee was reconstituted in February of 2021, and will be seeking to obtain the outstanding feedback from key stakeholders in order to finalize the recommendations with respect to information regarding the ILO 149. Based on the recommendations of the committee, the necessary and appropriate action will be taken. I thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Thank you, Madam President. Can I ask the hon. Minister of Labour if you can share with us the stakeholders that are being consulted to determine finally the way forward as it relates to Convention 149, the stakeholders involved?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. S. Mc Clashie: Madam President, the stakeholders include all the nursing and medical advisory boards that we have. There is also open consultation in which members of the public can in fact have their views shared. And based on those responses it would be further disseminated and basically looked at in coming up with our policy decisions.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I ask the hon. Minister, given the importance of the nursing fraternity, including midwives, in the field of health, protection and improvement of health and welfare of the population, is the Minister favourably looking towards having an approach made to the Cabinet with a view to having this very important convention as requested by the Trinidad and Tobago Registered

Nurses Association ratified ultimately?

Madam President: Sen. Mark—

Sen. Mark: Can I ask if—

Madam President: No, Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question.

Sen. Mark: All right. May I ask the hon. Minister, is there a time frame that has been established by this committee to look into as it relates to the finalization of this request by the TTRNA from your perspective? Is there a time frame that you are looking at?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. S. Mc Clashie: Thank you, Madam President. Yes, Madam President, I gave the undertaking to the Nurses Association that we would try and finish all the consultations in 2021, with a view to bringing and ratifying it; and 2022, given the agenda that we have for 2021.

1.55 p.m.

Trafficking in Prison Contraband (Prevention of)

106. Sen. Paul Richards asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Given the February 2021 reports of a Prisons Officer being detained for trafficking prison contraband, can the Minister indicate what steps are being taken to prevent such activities in the prison service?

Madam President: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime

Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam President, and to Sen. Richards. The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service has deployed a suite of measures to address the trafficking of contraband, and this has resulted in the detention of a number of persons, including unfortunately active prison officers. The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service continues to monitor and evaluate these

measures to improve upon the level of detection.

For obvious reasons, Sen. Richards, I would not want to broadcast what are the precise measures being employed and deployed. I can assure you they have upped the level of monitoring and the other types of intervention that are taking place. In fact, in the last three years, there have been 33 prison officers who have been held trying to enter with contraband.

Sen. Richards: Thank you, Minister. Can the Minister indicate if in the interest of curtailing contraband further and increased prison security, if the technology is including CCTV cameras, scanners and jammers are operational in the prisons?

Hon. S. Young: As I said, I did not want to get into the specifics, for with respect to preventing contraband coming into the prison the scanners and jammers would not prevent them from entering the prison and, yes, the CCTV is part of the measures being currently utilized. Contrary to what I saw recently, yes, the scanners and jammers are also operational.

Madam President: Sen. Richards.

Sen. Richards: Thank you, Madam President, again. Can the Minister indicate if the protocol established years ago of scanning all officers entering the prison have been maintained?

Hon. S. Young: The answer is yes.

Sen. Richards: Finally, Madam President, given the Prisons Commissioner's disclosure a week ago at a JSC, can the Minister indicate, in the interest of again curtailing contraband, if the issue of throwing contraband over the walls has been addressed?

Hon. S. Young: The answer is yes. It is something that is unfortunately part of the prison system worldwide, and it is something that is being addressed and has been addressed in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President: Next question, Sen. Lutchmedial.

**Fraudulent Government Cheque
(Prevention of Recurrence)**

113. Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:
In light of reports that a fraudulent Government cheque for construction works at the Toco Port project was accepted as genuine by a commercial bank in Diego Martin, what measures are being taken by the Government to prevent a recurrence?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam President. No construction work has begun on the Toco Port project as yet, and as a result no cheques would have been issued for such work. In addition, the purported fraudulent cheque did not originate from neither the Ministry of Works and Transport nor any of the agencies under its purview. Also media reports indicate that the cheque was not encashed based on the system in place at the Central Bank.

The Ministry of Works and Transport and its agencies adhere to all Financial Regulations and guidelines instituted by the Ministry of Finance. My understanding is that the matter is engaging the attention of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service at this time and, as such, I cannot comment further on this matter. Thank you.

Madam President: Sen. Lutchmedial.

Sen. Lutchmedial: Can the Minister indicate whether any internal investigation is being done into the issuing of the cheque, as to whether or not there was someone inside of the particular state agency that might have aided and abetted in the commission of this offence?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam President, as indicated, the cheque was not issued by the Ministry of Works and Transport or any of its agencies. The Ministry

of Works and Transport and NIDCO had no part to play in the issuing of any cheque or any cheque generated from any of its offices. Thank you.

Madam President: Sen. Lutchmedial.

Sen. Lutchmedial: That is all for this matter.

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

Order for second reading read.

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

Madam President, 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 consequential amendments to the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 and for related matters, be now read a second time.

Madam President, the Bill that is before this Senate today is intended to give effect to what is known as the CARIFORUM-United Kingdom Economic Partnership Agreement, which is an agreement to govern trade between CARIFORUM, and we know what CARIFORUM is, the 14 Caricom Member States and the Dominican Republic. Of course, this agreement is with the United Kingdom. The House would have recalled that in 2008 Trinidad and Tobago, as part of CARIFORUM, they would have signed on to the CARIFORUM-European Union Economic Partnership Agreement. Why are we here?

We are here because on June 23, 2016, the UK via a referendum voted to leave the EU. It was recognized that once the UK left the EU, the trading

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relationship with the UK and CARIFORUM States could not continue under the CARIFORUM-EU EPA. Rather, there would be a need for CARIFORUM States to secure a new trading arrangement with the UK. This new agreement, which we have come here to debate, would replace the CARIFORUM-EU EPA in respect of the relationship only between CARIFORUM and the United Kingdom. In other words, the CARIFORUM-EU EPA remains in place, and would continue to cover trade between Trinidad and Tobago and, of course, the other CARIFORUM countries, and the EU Member States. And the CARIFORUM-UK EPA, which is before us here today, would cover the trade and economic relations between Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom.

So the reason for the agreement really is the preferential trading relationship. So in order to ensure a smooth and immediate transition, as well as continuity in the preferential trading relationship, which is of prime importance with the UK, what is a rollover agreement, which mirrors as far as possible the CARIFORUM-EU EPA, has been negotiated and signed.

It was quite a lengthy exercise, and CARIFORUM countries and the UK undertook what is called the “technical replication exercise” of the existing CARIFORUM-EU EPA. That took place between January 2018 and March 2019. This exercise was led by the Caricom Secretariat with the UK, with participation, of course, from senior trade officials from the CARIFORUM States, including Trinidad and Tobago. It took about 10 meetings of CARIFORUM and, of course, a number of Cabinet approvals and several high level meetings to arrive at what is now a final rollover agreement. It is important to understand that this is a rollover agreement.

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The replication exercise took place under the guideline that any changes made to the text would not modify the substance of the original CARIFORUM-EU EPA, and should not afford any more or less preferences than granted under that EU EPA. In that regard, the technical amendments were limited to deletion of language or obligations that are clearly not applicable in this CARIFORUM-UK agreement, and there are minor textual modifications to take account of the current realities in the context of the CARIFORUM-UK Agreement. For example, replacements of the term “EC party”. EC, meaning “European Commission”, is used interchangeably sometimes in the agreement with EU. So replacement of the term “EC party” with the term “United Kingdom”, and of course, deletion of references to articles relating to the French outermost region, which are linked to the EU, as they are not now applicable to the UK EPA. Of course, by the end of the exercise, the CARIFORUM States and the UK reach an agreement on the CARIFORUM-UK EPA.

His Excellency Orville London would have signed the CARIFORUM-UK EPA on behalf of our country, on 01 April, 2019 in London. I wish to point out that this was approximately 10 months before the UK officially left the EU, which was on 31 January, 2020. This, of course, shows the efficiency of Government and CARIFORUM to ensure that its manufacturers, its energy producers, its non-energy businesses, service suppliers, are all protected from the impact of Brexit.

So it is to be noted, Madam President, that before the actual departure, which was on January 31, 2020, on December 09, 2020, Trinidad and Tobago entered into what is a non-legally binding memorandum of understanding with the UK, which signaled to the UK Trinidad’s intention to use its best endeavours to

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bring the CARIFORUM-UK EPA into effect, international law through the passage of the Bill before this House today during the duration of the MOU. The MOU ends on April 01, 2021, so we have an obligation really to pass this, get on the way of utilizing this agreement. So the signing of that particular MOU though was very important because it allowed for the continuation of preferential access to the UK market until the assenting of this Bill.

I will go straight to the objectives, and because we have more time in this House I could explain a little more. The main objectives are set out in Article 1 of the Agreement, and they include contributing to the reduction and eventual eradication of poverty. Increased exports are expected to lead to export earnings for goods and also for services, such as in construction, IT, travel and tourism, business and professional services, thereby fostering increased employment, in higher standards of living and increased revenues for Government as well and for businesses.

The second main objective would be the promotion of regional integration, economic cooperation and good governance. Much of the development cooperation, for example, provided by the UK is provided at a regional level and, of course, that supports the development of regional policies, integration of data collections systems, regional standards, and so on.

The third objective would be the promotion of the gradual integration of the CARIFORUM States into the world economy. Madam President, the opportunity that is now afforded to exporters to meet the higher standards of the UK, facilitates the preparation for the wider world markets.

The fourth objective, improving the CARIFORUM States capacity in trade

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policy and trade related issues. This is reflected through the training and capacity building support to various Ministries, not only the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and institutions at the national and sub regional levels, in subject matters such as customs and procurement, intellectual property and trade facilitation.

Also, another objective, supporting the conditions for increasing investment and private sector initiative, and enhancing supply capacity, competitiveness and economic growth. This, of course, would be done through technical cooperation with the private sector. For example, training and certification, export promotion services, institutional strengthening programmes.

Finally, the sixth objective, strengthening the existing relations between CARIFORUM and the UK on the basis of solidarity and mutual interest. Madam President, this would be achieved through joint institutions intended to facilitate enhanced cooperation and dialogue at the international level.

I would delve into the institutional arrangements. Again, I have more time here, and I will go into all of the institutional arrangements later on in my presentation.

With the implementation of any agreement, we will acknowledge that there are potential challenges. The good news is though that we have developed significant experience under the implementation of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA, and that we are better able to address them as they arise. Further, these challenges are not unique to Trinidad and Tobago alone, but they apply to all of the region as well. Therefore, there are regional programmes that are in place that will help us to tackle all of these challenges, but we are well on our way, having the experience with the EU EPA.

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For example, under the CARIFORUM-EU EPA, there was a standby facility set up to support the development of legislation, regional standards, quality infrastructure and things like that. But let me just give an example of what kind of challenges. Increased competition to domestic manufacturers and service suppliers in specific sectors, which have been liberalized. Let us not get worried, let me reassure that as under the EU EPA, many of the sensitive sectors remain protected, and I will speak to those a little later. But further, the liberalization of the tariffs on goods will be phased out, so that it gives manufacturers and service suppliers the time to build capacity.

So with regard to the manufacturing sector, there has been a myriad of actions taken, and incentives offered to boost the competitiveness of the sector, and prepare our manufacturers to face any incoming competition, as well as the ability to compete in international markets like the UK, so that our manufacturers would be well prepared. We are doing similar work with our service providers as well.

But for instance, in the manufacturing, and I have been talking about it quite a bit, we have introduced this TT \$50 million export boosting initiative, which has a focus on certification and implementation of a robust and comprehensive trade policy. The development and implementation of a national quality policy to ensure an effective national quality infrastructure to serve our manufacturers. Of course, there has also been the approach taken again of several grant-funding facilities to support the purchase of equipment, and research and development.

Further, on the services side, the Government has been working very closely with the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Services Industries, and so our creative and maritime sectors, among others, the aim is to boost the competitiveness of our

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domestic service suppliers. So under this Government, it is fair to say that we have developed very clear and targeted strategic plans for the film industry, for the music industry and so on, and we are actively implementing these.

Another potential challenge is the whole question of the rationalization and promotion of the services industry, which I would admit we are behind on, but the work being done at the regional level, because there is what is a regional strategic plan for services, and this is going to help all CARIFORUM States, including Trinidad and Tobago , overcome the challenges with regard to service suppliers.

So I can go on to the benefits, because the benefits far outweigh the challenges of the EPA, let me explain some of them. The main one, of course, being the predictable and permanent trading arrangement. The CARIFORUM-EU EPA has put in place a predictable and permanent trading arrangement, for both the export of primary and manufactured goods and services. It allows as well for the import of much needed goods—we still rely on imported goods—that we rely on. I am talking about pharmaceuticals and so on for our citizens, allowing them to be more affordable. Also for the entry of key inputs into the manufacturing sector, allowing them to be more price competitive.

So 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 exception of things like arms and ammunition. However, UK products entering CARIFORUM States, including Trinidad and Tobago , will be subjected to either immediate duty-free access or a phased reduction of duties over time, and this liberalization will be gradual. It is going to be spread over 11 years, thus minimizing the revenue effect to Government as well. So it is not going to be sudden, it is going to be spread over

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time. Of course, it allows as I said before our businesses in those sectors which were opened up, liberalized, the opportunities to build their competitiveness over the medium to long-term.

I said I would speak to the benefits—I would speak to the sensitive sectors as well. So that, Madam President, it is important to know that in our original EU negotiations there were several sensitive sectors which were protected. For example, frozen animal meats, fish fillets, shrimp, lobster, milk and creams, butter, cheese, honey, cabbage, lettuce, peas, cassava, potatoes, grapefruit, watermelon, papaya which will include paw paw, and rice. What I want to assure you, remembering again this is a clear replication that all of these sectors remain protected under the CARIFORUM-UK EPA.

Relating to trade data, which is another benefit, which speaks to the strong trading relation which we are seeking to maintain and grow, Trinidad and Tobago's—I am speaking a little bit about the trade data. Trinidad and Tobago's exports displayed an upward trend. Of course, your exports and your imports always fluctuate. There was an upward trend from 2015 to 2017—this is our exports sorry—and whilst exports declined in 2018 and 2019, signs of recovery were demonstrated in 2020, with exports having increased 16 per cent over its value in the previous year, 2019. Methanol was consistently Trinidad and Tobago's highest export product to the UK from 2015 to 2019. However, in 2020, the highest export product was liquefied natural gas and, of course, these things fluctuate as I said.

But our other exports include, on the energy side, ammonia, other petroleum oils, diesel oil and so on, but on the non-energy side you would be surprised to know all our aromatic bitters, our paints, lathes, curry, rum, beer, Shandy,

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chocolates, cereals and so on. But I must point out that manufactured goods showed excellent performance, healthy performance, and there is clear room, obvious room, for local producers to capitalize on the benefits from the CARIFORUM-UK EPA.

The trend with regard to imports from the UK, again, showed a slight downward slope between 2015 and 2017 and, thereafter, imports increased in 2018 and further in 2019. What do we import? The main products are whiskey, bank and currency notes, books, machinery, appliances, cheese, cars and other vehicles and medicaments.

These tariff preferences received under the CARIFORUM-UK EPA, through the UK opening up its market, would allow our exporters to establish a market presence for their products in the UK. The healthy competition, as I said, and I said this before, is so important to note, in the UK market will encourage our local manufacturers to produce higher quality goods to be better able to compete in the international arena. Of course, this is going to help us again increase foreign exchange earnings, employment and so on.

There is one thing I want to talk about, it is very important. There is something called the UKGT, which is the United Kingdom Global Tariff. That is very much like what we use in the region, in Caricom, our Common External Tariff, so that is the similar thing with them. So the UK recently announced its global, and it is their right to, their UK Global Tariff, which is the UKGT, and that took place on January 01, 2021. Therefore, if we do not move swiftly to bring this Bill to law, Trinidad's products like its cereals and beverages and rums and so on, all will face duties under the UKGT, if we do not bring this CARIFORUM-UK

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Bill international law.

So let me just speak a little bit about the permanent trading arrangements of services, because attracted so much attention in the press, so obviously it is very important to our services professionals.

So the second benefit is the permanent arrangement for trading services between CARIFORUM and the UK. Our previous trading arrangement with the UK, under the CARIFORUM-EU EPA, provided the very same. So the CARIFORUM-UK EPA continues to provide favourable opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago export of services to the UK.

For instance, the CARIFORUM-UK EPA provides for temporary movement, not exceeding six months, of our service providers into the UK market in 29 different sectors. These sectors cover professionals such as accountants, tax advisors, bookkeepers, architects, engineers, urban planners, doctors, dentists, vets, midwives and nurses, physiotherapists, paramedical personnel, computer technicians, researchers, chefs, tourism guide services, fashion models, translation and interpretation services and advertising personnel. But I must point out that this long list is in respect of those professionals that are in a contractual arrangement. They are contractual service suppliers, and they wish to supply their services to the UK temporarily, not exceeding six months. So that once there is a contract that has been secured with a UK firm, all of these 29 different sectors can benefit, and those professionals can stay as long as six months in the UK.

On the other hand, independent professionals or self-employed persons, persons without a contract and so on, who fall within the following categories can also move to the UK temporarily to provide their services. These would be

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accountants, tax advisors and bookkeepers, architects, engineers and urban planners, computer technicians, market researchers, management consultants, so it is a smaller batch of professionals.

As we speak about other advantages, let me speak about the support for the growth of the cultural industry. The region, our beautiful CARIFORUM region, has distinguished itself in the cultural industry and, of course, has gained significant international recognition for artists and all of our cultural expressions, and our Carnival and so on.

An inclusion of Protocol 3 on cultural cooperation in the CARIFORUM-UK EPA, allows for the development of the sector's economic potential, and places renewed focus on culture and creativity which, again, will benefit us through social cohesion, creating vibrant communities, engaging our youth, creating jobs, promoting the development of both a national and regional identity, and create additional opportunities for future collaboration between the region and the UK. Of course, this ties in with the Government's diversification agenda.

The fourth objective will be further development of trade related areas and integration into the trading environment. The agreements treats with some subjects that are relatively new to our trade agreements, but are similar in the EU EPA, so it is nothing different to the EU EPA. But these disciplines, which are for transparency purposes, are intended to enhance the integration of developing regions such as ours into the world trading systems, and strengthen their participation at discussions in the wider international fora. So I will name a couple of the subject areas that are covered in the agreement, that would provide further development of our trade-related areas and, of course, integrating into the whole

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trade arena, and that is one, trade facilitation. By improving communication, reducing red tape and bureaucracy, simplifying customs rules. All of this would make the whole process much easier.

In addition, customs administrations would benefit from cooperation activities geared towards their modernization, and we would welcome this. Competition policy, which would set the rules designed to minimize unfair trade practices, and deal with monopolistic firms and dominant firm behaviour. Public procurement, with emphasis on transparent rules, which can lead to cost reductions and increase competitiveness. Protection of personal data establishes the framework to provide redress in situations where personal data is stolen or compromised. Innovation and intellectual property, fostering innovations and protection of intellectual property being key ingredients to creating an environment for the achievement of sustainable development.

I will now go, Madam President, to the actual contents of the EPA, quite voluminous, 1,370 pages comprising a preamble, six parts, Part I being a trade partnership for sustainable development; Part II being trade and trade-related matters; Part III, dispute avoidance and settlement; Part IV, general exceptions; Part V, institutional provisions; and Part VI, general and final provisions.

Fourteen annexes to the agreement which 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 to the Agreement.

There are three protocols and their related annexes. Protocol I, which defines the concept of originating products. Of course, this is very important as it is only

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products that meet the criteria of origin will be afforded preferential treatment under the Agreement. Protocol II deals with mutual administrative via assistance in customs matters, and Protocol III, as I said before, surrounds cultural cooperation. There are eight joint declarations, and one each on development cooperation: bananas, used goods, a trilateral approach to rules of origin, Protocol I on the origin of fishery products, Protocol I concerning the principality of Andorra and the Republic of San Marino, the signing of the EPA, political dialogue, consultations and appropriate measures.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/cariforum-uk-economic-partnership-agreement>

http://www.sice.oas.org/TPD/CAR_GBR/Texts/CAR_GBR_EPA_index_e.asp

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There is also a joint statement and that really speaks to—I think every one of us should get our hands on the joint statement of trade between the UK and the CARIFORUM States which really gives the expression between the two entities as to the objectives and what they truly want to get out of this, in terms of the benefits to both sets of states.

And of course, there is also attached to the voluminous EPA, a declaration of the CARIFORUM States included, relating to Protocol 1 on the origin of fishery products from the exclusive economic zone and also, of course, there are signatures of the representatives of the CARIFORUM States and the UK. So that a copy was gazetted on November 26, 2020, as No. 200 of 2020 and was laid on the floor of this honourable House. So I go straight to the Bill and then I think I will have a lot of time so I can speak to some other things.

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So today, Madam President, we are committed to making the necessary steps to give effect to this UK EPA at the national level. So I go straight to clause 1 which is a standard short clause—short title clause. Clause 2 is a commencement clause and provides for:

“The Act and the Agreement...to come into effect on such date as...”—may be—“fixed by the President by Proclamation.”

And, Madam President, this approach is similar to the one undertaken in respect of the CARIFORUM EC or EU EPA Act and will allow for the Act to come into effect for certain provisions of the EPA, such as those that relate to development, cooperation, agriculture, trademarks, copyright, GIs, geographical indications and so on, as fixed by the President upon proclamation. And all of this could be done immediately upon assent.

And for other—now, this is different—for other provisions of the EPA to come into effect on dates in the future by proclamation of the President—and these would include those articles of the EPA in respect of which the necessary administrative, legislative and other work is still to be completed before these applications can take effect. It was precisely the same for the EU EPA.

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 into Trinidad and Tobago under the EPA. That would be one example. Also, intellectual property. I spoke about trademarks and so on, which will come in immediately. But intellectual property in which there have been many developments—but there is still some work to be regarding genetic resources, traditional knowledge and folklore as intellectual

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property rights. And also, there is the question of investment and data protection in which there are still steps being taken to develop legislation, and these are the types of articles that will come into effect at a later date.

So it is important to note, however, Madam President, despite the fact of the later proclamation of these articles, this will not preclude Trinidad and Tobago from exporting goods and services to the UK immediately upon proclamation.

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

Clause 4(1) is intended, subject to the commencement clause 2, to give provisions of the agreement the force of law. This will take effect on the dates of proclamation fixed by the President in accordance with the clause 2.

Subclauses (2) to (4) will allow for any amendment of the Agreement to be given effect by the Minister, by Order. And of course, the House must rest assure that this legislation anticipates some parliamentary scrutiny of the process and as such, any order by the Minister for an amendment to the EPA would be subject to the affirmative resolution of Parliament, so there should be no issue there.

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

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

A new Schedule, the Eleventh Schedule is inserted and this Schedule sets out those 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 signature at the EPA, acknowledging that these goods will continue to be duty free.

A new Schedule, which is the Twelfth Schedule, is inserted. This Schedule sets out the reduction of duties; those duties that will be done on a phased basis and those goods are set out in the Schedule of those items which originate in the UK that are being imported, pursuant to the EPA, into Trinidad and Tobago meet the rules of origin requirements, and that is an absolute must, and in respect of which the appropriate documentation is submitted with regard to all the SBS requirements and so on. And the President, of course, is empowered to amend the Twelfth Schedule and provide for the tariff set out in that Schedule to come into effect or to provide for their lapse or expiration.

I want to do a further explanation as I have the time, Madam President, of specific provisions in the Bill, and I just want to ensure that my colleagues have a full appreciation the agreement.

Trade in goods. The EPA covers all types of goods including agricultural goods and includes chapters on custom duties, trade defence instruments, agriculture and fisheries, technical barriers to trade, and that I am talking about all

of the technical regulations, the standards, the inspections, the testing and certification procedures. It also would include the sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures which are measures that are applied to protect human, animal or plant life or health.

With regard to trade in services, the Agreement covers the regulatory framework, governing services such as computer services, courier services, telecommunications, financial services, international maritime transport services, tourism services. And the Agreement also covers cooperation between the UK and CARIFORUM under all of the aforementioned areas.

Another provision is the institutional arrangements, and it is so important that I speak of these. There are four main joint institutions under the CARIFORUM-UK EPA and those types of arrangements would have existed under the CARIFORUM-EU EPA as well. There is what is called the Joint CARIFORUM-UK Council, and that unit is responsible for the operation and the implementation of the agreement, and ensuring that the obligations are fulfilled. And, Madam President, any major issues arising from the Agreement may be addressed at the meetings of this body. And the Joint CARIFORUM-UK Council comprises of ministerial representatives of all of the Government of the UK and of the signatory CARIFORUM States. And this group is expected to meet every two years or whenever the circumstances require.

The second institution is the CARIFORUM-UK Trade and Development Committee, and they meet once a year. And they will assist in the performance of the duties of the Joint CARIFORUM-UK Council and comprises more senior official representatives of all of the parties. And they would meet, as I said, once a

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year for an overall review of the implementation of the Agreement, and this would feed into the ministerial representative meetings at the UK council, at the joint council. So they meet and review the implementation of the agreement. And the CARIFORUM-UK Trade and Development Committee's responsibilities would include things like supervising and being responsible for the implementation of the agreement, resolving disputes of the Agreement, monitoring the development of regional integration and monitoring the impact of the implementation of the Agreement.

And we would all be familiar, those of us who have been here for a while, with the third institution which is the CARIFORUM-UK Parliamentary Committee. And this consists of members of the UK Parliament and members of the CARIFORUM States legislatures, and it therefore provides parliamentarians with an opportunity to dialogue with our counterparts in the UK on pertinent issues. And this parliamentary committee is a forum for our members to meet, exchange views, and they shall meet as often as required. And it is important to note that under the CARIFORUM-EU Agreement, there were three parliamentary meetings, and I remember being a part of that as well and I think my predecessor, Vasant Bharath, would have been a part of a previous meeting as well.

There is also a fourth institution called the CARIFORUM-UK Consultative Committee, and that promotes dialogue and cooperation between organizations of private sector, academia, the civil society, and they meet once a year, and this unit is made up of 25 members. I am talking about the private sector, the academia, regional associations, and so on, from the CARIFORUM side, and 25 representatives from the UK side. And from this committee, the private sector can

forge links with the other UK businesses and also they can discuss challenges that are being experienced by the private sector or any other entity because we are talking about the promotion of culture as well. So the issues and recommendations are presented to the trade and development committee and the joint council for implementation coming out of these meetings.

I did not have the time as well to speak about development cooperation on the last occasion. So that this EPA contains a strong development component with clear links to providing development aid, technical and financial assistance for adjustment and modernization of our CARIFORUM economies. And this development cooperation will provide direct support for the implementation of commitments under the EPA, private sector development, trade—and you would imagine that all members of the CARIFORUM will be at varying levels of competence so—I should say competencies on the various matters. So it allows for support, as I said, for trade promotion, consumer protection, market intelligence, data protection, regional economic cooperation and integration climate change, disaster management, environment and sustainable energy, and also a Caribbean investment facility and a technical cooperation facility. And more specifically, Article 7 of the Agreement speaks to development cooperation. And it is recognized that development cooperation is a crucial element, an essential factor in the realization of the objectives of the Agreement.

And so, Article 8A of the Agreement establishes a CARIFORUM-UK Technical Sub-Committee on Development Cooperation. And some of the highlights, of course, we have benefited from some of the interactions under the EU EPA, and I can tell you—and of course, we would have also had some

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interactions with the UK within that EPA as well. And so I can tell you if I go to the film sector, out of the 36 incoming small and medium and large productions during fiscal 2019 and the first half of 2020, 10 of those films were from the UK. And of course, in the fashion sector, we would have had the Ultra Bespoke Tailoring Programme and so on.

And then, there were also successful—under the EU EPA, there were successful trade missions called Fit for Europe and you would have heard—I think, some Members would be familiar with that, the Fit for Europe one, and we are about to embark on the Fit for Europe two project. And of course, there was meaningful output in terms of the development of partnerships in the creative sector and so on. There were immediate orders from participated companies in fashion. There were immediate orders and of course, all sorts of other successes and so on that were necessary and which came about as a matter of fact. And of course, these successes would demonstrate how real the opportunities are for our manufacturers, our service suppliers and all of those involved in the creatives and so on.

And I want to tell you that the UK was the largest contributor to the European Development Fund under the EU EPA. And in fact, in the 11th European Development Fund which was £346 million for the period 2014 to 2020, the UK, in fact, contributed 15 per cent of the funds. So I am certain that this will continue. Everybody is having a difficult time, all the economies, but I am hoping, I am certain it will continue under the CARIFORUM-UK EPA.

And I can say to you that on March 22, 2020, in a joint statement on trade between the UK and CARIFORUM States, the UK committed to completely

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design a new programme that will directly support CARIFORUM States so that they can fully benefit from the opportunities arising from the agreement. So that commitment has come already. And this programme will complement the suite of wide-ranging UK trade and economic and development programmes that can support all of our CARIFORUM States bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally and so on. So promotion of the Agreement is on the way already, Madam President, and—

Madam President: Minister, you five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah. Thank you. So several projects are being undertaken both nationally and regionally to promote and facilitate increased awareness of this CARIFORUM-UK Agreement among the private and public sectors, and the national project will be undertaken through the delivery of targeted virtual awareness sessions, and the administration of a pre and post-evaluation survey to the participants. The first session will be held on March 29, 2021, and it will cover the interpretation of the Agreement specifically related to trade in goods, information on the processes and requirements involved in exporting to the UK and understanding the logistics of trade with the UK and so on. It has started in a sense because there is the regional project which has started and which is currently being implemented, and that is the UK trade partnerships, UKPT—UKTP Programme. And this aims to promote trade with the UK initially under the existing CARIFORUM-EU EPA and then, of course, moving to the UK EPA.

This project is actually funded by the Government of the UK through the Department of International Development. And the project runs from 2020 to '22, and is being implemented by the International Trade Centre in Geneva. They have

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already launched a survey through its social media platforms which seeks to provide benefits on local traders, pre and post-Brexit, business experiences, the awareness of market access and so on and. Of course, the response has been really very, very good—great by our manufacturers. Maybe in my wrap up I will speak a little bit to monitoring because that must be a feature of any exercise like this. Monitoring is critical, that we are continually reviewing so that we will ensure that we are receiving the benefits and the opportunities expected from the Agreement, and I can speak a little bit more later.

And it is important to note that there is quite some UK investment in Trinidad and Tobago, and that has started. There are, I think, more than 50 companies that have invested in Trinidad and Tobago, as recently in 2019, with the Rex Turtle Beach hotel in Tobago; that is a UK investment. And of course, as was required along those years, we have signed onto a Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments Agreement that was entered into force in 1993, and of course, there is the double taxation agreement as well.

So that the relationship is excellent and it really would serve to benefit a number of businesses, and there is the wide benefit to the country, individuals, professionals, businesses as well. Government has embarked on a very robust development agenda to navigate this country to sustainable development and diversification, particularly out of the COVID area, and this is going to put us in a right direction along with the multitude of agreements that are in existence both bilaterally and of course, also with Caricom.

So 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

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tangible benefits to the people of both countries. And therefore, I commend this Bill to this honourable House, Madam President, and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Sen. Jearlean John: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. Thank you for the opportunity for contributing to this Bill which seeks to provide for the implementation of the UK EPA, Economic Partnership Agreement. Well, the Minister would have given a detailed oversight of what the Bill is suppose to—in what got us here in terms of the signing—well, the Brexit and then the signing, et cetera, by the honourable His Excellency in England, et cetera.

Madam President, the hon. Minister has indicated that in order to ensure a smooth and immediate transition, and as well as continuity in the preferential trading relationship in the UK, they had what is called a rollover agreement. So by and large, what is in the Agreement of 1,370 pages is by and large what was there with the EC, the one with the European Community, EPA—or the EU, sorry, EPA that had been negotiated and signed earlier.

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago is a dualist state and that means that by international law or for international legal Acts to be incorporated, there is need for this legislation, and I do not think anyone who is interested in the progress of the country can be against an opportunity for our citizens and our business people in particular.

The purpose of the Agreement and I know the Minister spoke about six steps or six benefits that was supposed to accrue or arrive from this, but there is a purpose of the agreement which is to strengthen the structure for economic

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relations between CARIFORUM and the United Kingdom; enhance the economic relationship between CARIFORUM and the United Kingdom, in particular trade and investment flows; three, to build on and improve the current level of preferential market access, and four, to create new and more favourable conditions for relations between CARIFORUM and the United Kingdom.

Madam President, we have had a long history with trade and relations with the UK, so this is perhaps nothing new and really this was an agreement had picked up with respect to the UK EPA. So I think what we have to look at is whether we are really going maximize this very specific agreement now with the UK and particularly as the virus—well, it is brought under global control because a lot of countries are moving towards bringing that under control with the wider—and hoping that a vaccine will be widely available and life should return towards normalcy, but it is likely to be a new normal.

Madam President, you know, the specifics at this time will be hard to predict, but there will likely be some permanent changes in the structure of demand. And as much as we have been making do with Zoom, Zoom cannot help a potential importer or exporter from going to physically examine or inspect a plant, you know. So there is really need for us to get going to—so when the rest of the world gets to that point of being ready to move on, we are also right there. I want to divide the potential of what I see as the long-run effects on this agreement or any agreement or any potential to maximize the Agreement. It will be driven by, one, changes in the structure of demand. The demand will change maybe in the short term, in the long term—we are not sure as yet. Some industries—well, there will be some acceleration, and there will be some protectionism dressed up as

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maybe national security as the geopolitics change. So people in advanced economies may decide to continue to do work at home which will reduce the demand on, well, cars and gasoline. Well, for us it will gasoline, as we used to be an exporter of that, that is no longer so.

So, Madam President, I think in looking at what we were exporting before or what we intend to export, we have to look and see if there is any downward pressure on these demands. In terms of services, what we do is more than likely international tourism. It may not recover. It does not look as if it will recover to its previous level very quickly and this has been a very important export for many of these CARIFORUM countries and for us.

On the other hand, there has been a demand for health care, child care and elderly care. This is likely to rise. So we have to look to see where really is the demand. You know, it is not what we want to produce. It is, what it is—business is about supply and demand. It is what is in demand and it is good to see—and I will talk about that a little later. There is a demand for our human resource. So the child care, health care, elderly care, these are all migrant to immigrant-intensive industries. And, Madam President, I think the hon. Minister, will have to review some of her objectives because maybe there might be a little dampening if they are to go in the route that has already been established, you know, and have not really scrutinized what is now emerging.

So the general business environment has been inhospitable towards fostering domestic enterprise for export. The Minister spoke about the \$50million boost fund, and I am not sure I heard about training there in terms of some of the non-tariff barriers. I am hoping that there will be a little expansion of what is

happening. I did not get the sense that a lot is happening, you know, with respect to preparing us for when the markets open up.

So, Madam President, an importer looking at TT, at Trinidad and Tobago as a likely source for products, there are certain matrices they are going to look at, and one of them is ease of doing business. And I do not think I heard the Minister speak about that and that is critical. Because when you are trying to—you are in the UK and you want to import, you want to know that you are going into an environment that is business-like. You are not going to be tied up in endless red tape because it is all about your margins, whether you are importing or exporting.

And this ease of doing business really is a ranking that is managed by the World Bank and they have, I think, 190 countries which they have rank based on several matrices. And the country that is ranked—I just want to very quickly call the first—the top line so we know what we are dealing with. New Zealand is number one, Singapore is number two, Hong Kong and China is number three and the UK is number eight, but Trinidad and Tobago is at 105, so do not have apples with apples. When an importer in UK looks at Trinidad and Tobago, and says, but they are ranked 105 on this ease of doing business. You know, why am I going there for, when in the US, in Singapore which is literally right next door for them, you know—you are probably paying the same amount of money for shipping, you know, or courier, or what have you, or the USA or Sweden or Norway which is right in Europe there. You know, the fact that we had Brexit does not mean the UK is no longer Europe. It is part of Europe, you know.

So, Madam President, if it is we are settling at 105, we are trending in the wrong direction, because there was a time we, in 2014, we were at 85; 2016, we

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were at 96, because this is what new people—people coming to forge new relationships, these are the things they look at because they do not know us. Right? So these are the things we have—we also have to look at now that the country is a little slow, you know, we have to look at these things. How do we cut through the red tape and make it easier for people to come here and feel that they comfortably can do business with us, that we are really moving from this Third World country into some kind of developing country. We have to set objectives. So I am saying, let us use the time wisely.

There are some non-tariff barriers also, and my colleague who will be coming after to me, I think he is going to deal with that with some level of expansion. But notwithstanding the reduction of tariffs to zero on imports from CARIFORUM to the UK, there are several non-tariff barriers that would prevent Trinidad and Tobago companies from exporting to the UK. And, you know, a part of it is that the first chart that current exports are dominated by petroleum and petrochemicals in excess 90 per cent on average.

So, Madam President, you see, we have to look at the non-energy sector. We keep talking about it but we are not doing anything about it, you know, because the Government's policy and business strategies must be in sync, because we have to kind of depend on the private sector to go out there, show them some opportunities, treat with what can be incentives, whether it is tax breaks or cheaper real estates, subsidized real estates, et cetera, to assist them, to ensure that they can go out and manufacture things or produce things which will benefit the country because forex is a key issue now with us.

So whilst UK imports into Trinidad and Tobago are wide and varied across

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commodities and sectors, you know, we have a very narrow list of products that go into these, into the UK. So therefore, domestic companies are not currently participating in the UK market widely—as widely as they could, so we can find ourselves with a negative—which we are—a negative balance to trade. You know, and these are the objectives we have to set, and this is what I expected the Minister to be talking about. You understand that, okay, we are in a negative balance of trade because these things are there, you could read it anywhere, and what are we going to do to close to the gap?

2.55 p.m.

Yes, we are small, but with efficiencies, you know. We have a lot of people who are out of work. Now the Government has, I think they are managing GATE to some extent where the Government, their policy now is really we are going to give GATE for products and services that the country can use, that are needed in the country. That is probably about policy but then, how are you going to use it for the value added? I did not hear these things, because we have to be competitive. If we have to be number one and we keep flagging Singapore as small country but not a small economy, there are things that they have done and they are really serious about trade. We just stumble into anything, if somebody is doing something down there we will visit it and say, well, okay, they are doing something. But it must be in alignment with the Government's policy, what Government is trying to achieve.

So, Madam President, well, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and you know, you have to look at these international bodies to look to see in terms of the statistics and so, because try as you might, you

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get nothing on any website in Trinidad and Tobago, but:

“Non-tariff measures...are policy measures,”—these are—“other than ordinary customs tariffs, that can potentially have an economic effect on international trade in goods, changing quantities traded, or prices or both.”

This measure identified in the main non-tariff measures:

“...flagged by exporters as...barriers to trade...”

They are:

1. “Technical regulations”—namely on sanitary products.
2. Pre-shipment inspection—“and formalities”
3. “Licences and quantitative restrictions”
4. “Charges, taxes & para-tariff measures”—and—
5. “Finance measures”

You know, sometimes these are not things that show up in an agreement, but these are things that we have to be aware of that we can guide our manufacturers, and if it is, again as I said, if we are to succeed in this new Agreement which is really not a new agreement, we have to say how we are going to broaden our scope.

In Chapter 5 of the, I think it is the Agreement, they talk about procurement procedure and in this article, it is Article 168, procurement done of the EC, which spells out a warning as pertains to treatment of public procurement. These are things that the Minister has to flag:

“The Parties and Signatory CARIFORUM States shall ensure that their procuring entities provide for effective dissemination of the tendering opportunities generated by the relevant government processes, providing eligible suppliers with all the information required to take part in such

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procurement.”

So, I do not know if this is why they took government-to-government agreements out of the scrutiny of the procurement legislation, but these things are important. These things are part of international treaties. You understand? So by gutting that out of the legislation, it is not helping our companies to become more robust, because they have to now go and compete with companies that have to face the most stringent measures across the world. The world is not going to wait for us to amend our laws however we see it fit to make it an easy pass for whatever we are doing here. But if we are serious about having the expansion of the non-energy sector, these are the things we have to contend with, and it is like with like.

So, Madam President, we have to prepare our economy, our manufacturers to make sure that the bilateral trade has some equity in that our partners in the UK do not continuously gain that upper hand while we suffer the consequences later on. Madam President, the hon. Minister has indicated that the replication exercise took place under the guidelines, and that any changes made to the text, well, it did not really modify so, I think I made that point that it is basically a mirror image, so it means we have had a test run. So, what we should have—I coming here would have said, this is what we have achieved, we have some very broad—there was a dip in terms of what we exported between, I think I heard the Minister say 2017 to 2018 or '19, but there are no real figures, and then there is an uptick in 2019. But then how does that compare? What is the baseline? Is the baseline 2017 or is it 2015? Were we doing better in 2015, because then we have to pick up from what was a more progressive baseline and move from that. You know, we are always at the lowest common denominator.

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So, Madam President, you know, this is really not a straightforward Bill with 1,370 pages of detail. It will impact our economy because the UK manufacturers, they are very aggressive and the reason they came out of Brexit, they did not come out of Brexit to “make joke”, they came out of Brexit because they want to manage their own business. They want to maximize, and they see economies such as Trinidad and Tobago as soft targets, easy to roll over. Good. So we really have to get busy with what we have to do because this is going to really impact whether the financial sector, manufacturing sector, petroleum, petrochemical sector, they do not have to wait anymore for their capital in Europe to tell them anything. We have 13 years, and, you know, the glowing story was painted of the 7.3 million people, but they were there from 2008, and we really have not made the aggressive progress that the opportunity had provided.

So, Madam President, the debate on this CARIFORUM-UK Economic Partnership Agreement, well, it really seeks to ensure that we enjoy terms and conditions, and that we enjoy low tariffs on specific exports to the UK. Again, as I said, it presents an opportunity to ask questions as to the work done locally to monitor. The Minister spoke about monitoring, I do not know if it is monitoring the business—the performance of the local manufacturers or if it is the business of the Government in preparing the part of the—the official part, getting the documentation right, the environment right to ensure that our manufacturers can really compete in the global market. Well, in the UK, as it were.

Madam President, and I am not going to take too long because with this lil part here, as a block, the EU is the world’s largest economy accounting for about 20 per cent of GDP. That is just a comparison. Because we were part of that EU

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EPA. So, the value of their trade was €14 trillion, yet we only had nominal trade ties and, of course, a balance of trade deficit with EU nations. So, I do not want to say well, the same thing will happen with the UK, and that is why I am saying we have to get busy because, Madam President, the UK is the world's fifth largest exporter, and I think the fifth largest importer in the world, and really and truly, our trade just accounts for .1 per cent of the UK's trade, and I got that on some international site, so I stand corrected. It is—the United Kingdom imported US in 2020, \$631.9 billion US worth of goods from around the world. And it is very clear what they import of that, from the Caribbean, and the Caribbean including, that is Latin America and the Caribbean, it was 1.2 per cent.

So it is really very, very small and they are very clear in terms of what they import, and within what they really import, what does Trinidad have to export? So they import:

“Gems, precious metals: US \$108.4 billion...”—Billion!

“Machinery”—we do not make that—“including computers: \$70.2 billion...”

—we do not make that.

“Vehicles: \$58 billion...”

Electric machinery, equipment: \$55.8 billion...

Mineral fuels including oil:...”

Well, all right, so we were in that market, but that now is a whole other story, and that is:

“\$34 billion...”

Pharmaceuticals:”—we do not have that, that is—“\$25.9 billion...”

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Optical, technical, medical apparatus: \$18.9...

Plastics, plastic articles: \$18.1 billion...

Clothing, accessories (not knit or crochet): \$11.8 billion...

Knit or crochet clothing, accessories: \$11.1 billion..."

So the United Kingdom, that is the top 10 imports which accounts for 65.2 per cent of the overall value of the product purchases from all the countries.

So, Madam President, I think it is said in my notes here, we had only 96 registered companies, UK companies importing goods back from Trinidad and Tobago, when about 1,286—there are 1,286 VAT registered UK businesses exporting goods into Trinidad and Tobago. So right away there, you know, that is an overwhelming, there is a huge imbalance, and that was even in the old EU EPA. So while the EPA represents a good opportunity for our manufacturers and for bilateral trade, how is it going to work for Trinidad and Tobago now, when as a group we barely scratch the surface of the available opportunities? The region is currently exporting less petroleum products; sugar, bananas, aluminium. Again, since it is modelled—that this particular UK EPA is modelled in a similar manner, I am thinking that the objectives will still apply. It is important to examine how these goals and to see how Trinidad and Tobago will benefit, particularly, as I said, in this new world order.

I went on the Ministry of Trade and Industry's website to see what the \$50 million, the Booster will do, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry in collaboration with exporTT, they are saying the Booster is to increase the export value of manufactured goods from Trinidad and Tobago, 2.7 billion in 2019, by 10 per cent at the end of the fiscal 2020/2021, if they double that. But, you know, it

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was very vague, again, it is a big goal, and that is nice to set big bad goals, but, you know, how are we going to achieve this goal? And \$50 million Booster will not take the Ministry very far. The Ministry has said gone are the days of working in silos and that too is correct. So it appears as if everybody there is ensuring that they are bringing everybody to the table. And they have said, Madam President, that this Export Booster Initiative is made up of 16 initiatives under three broad strategic areas, namely; export promotion. Export promotion, you are paying for promotion in US dollars, you know, and that is very expensive. You know, marketing is a very expensive product to purchase as it were, capacity building. That is training and institutional strengthening.

So these are a lot to do with this \$50 million, and I do not know how long it has to go, if it is within one fiscal year, or—so if the Minister is going to get a little more in the upcoming budget. So, Madam President, for it to make an impact the Government will have to find other ways of incentivizing the private sector. They will have to work very closely with them. There has to be an encouragement to align business strategies with government policy. And, I mean, I saw, I think I saw a lil video of the hon. Minister visiting a particular plant and, you know, the Minister was well received, but all of the charm, initiative, Madam President, will go to naught if the hon. Prime Minister in his conversations finds himself in public spats with manufacturers who you depend on to work with the Government to get, to ensure that we get our balance of trade right, to earn much needed forex and to create jobs. Because I think the Government should be looking to creating jobs, particularly after this pandemic. So, the key features of the Bill, Madam President—well, clause 3 of the Bill proposes to define the key terms of the

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purpose of this legislation, and you have clause 4. So really and truly, it is really just the technical part of it of what has to be done, and I think the Minister went through that in terms of it being gazetted, et cetera, Madam President, so I will not go through that.

Madam President, another issue is in terms of when goods are being exported. Very recently I am seeing where shippers are calling for—they are requesting that exporters should pay them in US dollars in advance, and when you look at the rate of exchange it is far above, significantly above what is published as the Central Bank weighted average buying and selling rate. All these things one has to look into if it is we are to make a dent or really take advantage of any new EPA. Madam President, in terms of using this as a lever for earning forex, and I had seen where the UK imports petroleum and petroleum products, and I think one of it was the imported LNG, but that market is depressed, I believe. The market that is where there is an uptick in the price, I think it is ammonia and methanol, yet the Government—you see, it is about government policy, how does government policy fit into this UK-EPA? What is the UK importing? Yes they import LNG, but the Government now, when you have less resources there is something called the opportunity cost of your resources. So the Government can say, where am I putting my money? So the Government now, in terms of, “what am I exporting”?—because you really want to export more than you import, that is the equation. You do not want a negative balance to trade. So basically, when the Government is taking this limited resources that they say, okay, we are good at doing this petrochemical industry, we have no real interest in diversifying the economy. But, the commodity that you love so much, the price is depressed on the marketplace,

planes are not flying, factories are idle everywhere, et cetera.

But this Government insists that they are going to—the gas that they have, whatever little they have at NGC, they are going to give it to this Train 1, and I do not know if they have any up-takers, and I hope that the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries might contribute to this debate and we may learn something. This year for the first time, in its 45 years of existence, NGC will declare a loss. The first loss they declared in half the year is not the real thing, we are going to get it at the end of next month. So, we are in real problems. So it means the Minister of Trade and Industry needs a bigger budget so she can go out there and really stir up the non-energy sector because this Government is just insisting that they are going to put this money into—what you call it? In Train 1 of Atlantic LNG which will probably not do anything for us, and all of this time the price of methanol and ammonia, they are the prices that are a little bit robust today, Madam President.

So again, Government policy is very important in ensuring that this particular EPA works and works for us. We do not have time. Whilst we are here not doing too much, everybody is getting ready for when people can travel. They are waiting for the markets to return, Madam President. There is a permanent—so again, the hon. Minister would have referred to that the Bill will provide opportunities for professionals, as accountants, tax advisers and bookkeepers, architects and so on. But, these folks must have a job before they can leave Trinidad and Tobago. Now, if it is one can get this right, a lot of economies work on having these transfers of moneys, it is not transfer payments. Transmittals they call it or, there is a term that it is called, it is more—you find of the Philippines and so on, they work on that, where people go abroad, Pakistan, et cetera, and they

work—India to some extent, and they send back money. A lot of countries depend on that for generating foreign exchange. Maybe that is something we can do. If people are to get the jobs on their own, most likely they may not come back.

But as it stands now, when you turn up at the border in England, you get six months. You get six months. So, what is different here it seems is okay, you have to get a contract. Is it that—I do not know if the Minister knows, it sounds good on paper, but in practice this will deter the UK small and medium enterprises because they need to have an employer's licence from the Home Office to employ people from abroad. It is not as nice as it sounds. It is better they just turn up at the border and slip in and see if they could get something, you know, because if they have to wait here to get a contract, it puts a lot of company—there is a lot of cost attached to that. So, all of this really just benefits the UK as far as I am concerned.

So the EPA CARIFORUM countries, at least, should be reinstated now, this is another thing. There was a list, there was a time when folks who were 18 to 30 years old could enter the UK, and now it is a good time because we have a lot of idle people all over the country, and they could have entered the UK for two years on a Youth Mobility Visa, formerly called the Youth Commonwealth Visa. This visa will allow them to work in most jobs, and if the Government manages that, it means after they will come back and they will come back with skills, and they will come back with skills that the UK would have paid for, not we have to pay for because we do not have money for GATE anymore. So work on these things. And you can set up your own company as a self-employed person for up to two years. CARIFORUM countries were removed from the list as at that time the EU Freedom of Movement Policies gained popularity. So if they now are into Brexit

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and they have been “Brexitied”, it is a good time to ask them within this context to reinstate that, because they still have youths from the other former Caricom nations, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Hong Kong. They are still on the list and recognized.

So, this visa issue has been damned good, but that is nothing special because we already can go up there and get that. We also have to ask, if someone gets a job and they get that six months, will it be, if the employer wants to hire them for another six months, is it that they will have to come back to Trinidad? Is there a cooling off period? And these things are the things, because we are here to get, to approve or affirm this Bill today, we should have been hearing about this. It should have been advertised already so that folks could have been ready to take advantage of it. So, one has to find out, is there a cooling off period between the two visas? If so, how long? What will it cost? How long would it be granted? If it can be renewed, can this be done whilst the TT national is still in the UK or would they have to come back? So, these things require resolution. Can a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago arrive in the UK on a visitor’s visa and then maybe they catch on to a lil job and they can transfer to this new visa? The other thing is, it should be noted that Trinidad and Tobago students are no longer receiving preferential treatment when it comes to receiving the financial criteria for a UK Tier 4 student visa. Long ago, you could have just rolled up and you have the money to check into school and so on, you could have done that. But now they have to meet very onerous financial terms which were never placed on them prior to 2019. So that happened very recently, you know, and we know we have all of this relationship with the UK going way back. We really appreciate and honour the UK university places of

learning. Our own system is modelled on the UK.

So, the citizens of this country, if given a chance, they really appreciate having that opportunity. So we have to find out why were Trinidad and Tobago students removed from the preferential list? And, I think that is a discussion the hon. Minister has to get into. On the list of professionals they are looking for, or they are seeking; doctors, but the doctors to get into the UK to work, you cannot just say well, I have this qualification and I am registered by the Trinidad and Tobago—that particular registering—that agency that registers the doctors to work in Trinidad and Tobago. They have to go and they have to take a test called the British Medical Association exam, and those exams are not now held in Trinidad and Tobago. Those exams, they have to go to Canada. The nurses are different. I think the nurses can do their own—there is a regional centre in Trinidad and Tobago, but no regional centre in Trinidad and Tobago for the doctors. So, Madam President, I think that is something the Minister would want to look at, because if they are saying these folks can move between the countries, it is not just people see that, they feel happy. The doctors need to pass this particular exam. And I think just this morning I saw where on CNC3, in treating with nurses, there was a headline where they said they were leaving because they were no longer happy. “Unappreciated nurses leaving T&T”. What that means is that if they leave on their own, if they privately make their arrangements, the remittances are not—the Government will not be able to look at the remittances, that is the term.

So very briefly, Madam President, in Chapter 4, the CARIFORUM-UK Economic Partnership Agreement, Chapter 4, where is it called, “Temporary presence of natural persons for business purpose.” What is an offer? Article 81

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says:

“...intra-corporate transfers...”

“...for...up to three years...”

For—“...key personnel and graduate trainees...”

This does not provide any details of whether there is a minimum salary requirement. And my notes were, when I looked at it, is the visa being offered under the existing UK Immigration Rules is more favourable to Caricom nationals as it offers a longer time in the UK, and neither leads to a settlement visa at the end of the five-year term if that is what people want. Article 81, 90 days for businesses visitors. It is already possible for people to go to the UK on a standard visitor visa and engage in limited business activities for up to six months. Because we have to ask, what are we getting with this? Yes, the hon. Minister has said it is a replication, or it is really a continuation. But still we can seek to have some of these elements enhanced and let them know that we are not being fooled by what they are offering. So, this Article 81, 90 days for business visitors, both opportunities offer almost the same outcome, except that a standard visa is available for a longer period, so one cannot see what is preferential benefit conferred by Article 81. Article 81, again, “...one year for graduate trainees”. Graduate trainees can stay for up to 12 months and can then transfer to key personnel visa after. That is what is currently happening.

Madam President: Sen. John—

Sen. J. John: Yes.

Madam President:—you have five more minutes.

Sen. J. John: I thank you, Madam President, for reminding me. So it is not certain

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whether Article 81 allows graduate trainees to switch their visas to another category while in the UK. Article 82:

“Business service sellers
...90 days in any 12-month period.”

It is already possible to go to the UK on a standard visitor visa. So, existing immigration rules offer similar opportunities and are more favourable to business service sellers than the CARIFORUM Agreement, especially in terms of time periods.

Article 83, “Contractual services suppliers and independent professionals” as those listed. Six months maximum in any 12-year period. This opportunity for independent Caricom professionals, that is useful, but we should really look to engage in maybe negotiate a longer period. Right? So in contrary to another visa, i.e. work visa, without the need to first leave the UK. And Article 84, “Short-term visitors for business purposes”, 90 days in any 12-month period. Existing immigration rules are more generous.

So, the UK does not appear to be offering anything substantial by way of some of these placements of personnel, and, Madam President, we really have to look at it, because, as I said, the Bill is not as straightforward as presented, the devil is in the details. I think we will love to have the opportunity, or some people would love to have the opportunity to go and work if they have no jobs now, because the unemployment situation is really very troubling. And very briefly, the creative and cultural sector, again, that earns significant foreign exchange, and this again was some sector to be on the front burner during this sort of downtime to ensure that we build them up and they are ready to go when the economy opens up.

You know, the previous government, there was an alignment with fashion via UTT and so on. We did not do very well in staging a virtual carnival, and then it appears that 2022, that window will close on us, and we have a significant number of people who work in this sector. They look forward to the sector, they earn a living. And it is not only the practitioners, the calypsonians, and the mas folks. We are talking about single mothers who stand at the side of the road and they sell on carnival days. And you would not believe, Madam President the amount of room the sales, the proceeds of those sales would have gone into. The lil foreign used car, sending a child to school, doing a surgery that is well needed. These things are very important, it is not just about government policy, it trickles down. The government policy is about trickling down to the man in the street. So, it is very, very important that we look.

And, Madam President, I probably have a second, but as a Tobagonian if I did not talk a little bit quickly about Tobago and visitors arrival. I saw where in 2019 there was, I think, an uptick of 8 per cent in terms of arrivals, by now that has probably disappeared. But, right now IATA, the agency that looks after—well, travel that is, they are working with the airlines from Qatar and Dubai and those places, to roll out a travel pass. So that when people actually have their vaccine, it is uploaded right away. Because we really need to bring back that travel market, and not only domestic travel but international travel. So, all of these things, you know, CAL is now forlorn, they are there waiting. All of these are the things we have to be working on and looking at all of the new developments in the various industries.

So, it very, very important that we look at this, whether it is a travel vaccine,

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that all of these folks—whether it is Qatar, or BA. The UK is also looking at that. Britain is reviewing the idea of vaccine certificates to allow access to travel, and that is critical in terms of—because we know in travel you have to deal with the airlift sometimes, the Government will make a contribution to airlift and fuel, just to ensure that travellers, visitors can get here. You know, sometimes they twin with another Caribbean government, maybe Grenada, et cetera, just to get the flights in, because airlift is the greatest impediment to people getting to Tobago which is the best place on earth but it is very far away. It is a good distance from all of these places that we look at as markets. So we really have to be looking at what is happening with travel becoming a thing again in the very near future.

So, Madam President, I really want to thank you for this opportunity, and I am hoping the Minister will go a lil deeper in terms of what, with a little more information, what the plans are relative to maximizing this UK EPA. Thank you so much, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

3.25 p.m.

Sen. Anthony Vieira: Thank you, Madam President. The purpose of the CARIFORUM Agreement is to strengthen the framework for economic and trade relations between the CARIFORUM group of Caribbean nations and the European Union. As the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry pointed out, following the end of the Brexit transitions period, the UK is no longer an EU member state and the partnership agreement between the European Union and CARIFORUM is no longer applicable. So we now need to regularize the relationship between the UK and CARIFORUM, vis-à-vis the partnership agreement. And this legislation establishes the framework for the UK to remain part of the CARIFORUM

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arrangements on a general equivalence basis, as you have heard the roll out agreement which is basically a replication of what exists in parallel.

The European Union is the Caribbean's second largest trading partner after the United States. As a region, we export products like sugar, rum, fruit, oil and gas. And from Europe we import cars, machinery, appliances, wine, textiles, pharmaceuticals. As you have heard, the Caribbean enjoys a happy relationship with the European Union and there is a fair amount of trade and investment between the two regions. However, because we tend to export primary commodities while the Europeans export high-end manufactured goods, there is a large income gap between the two regions—and Sen. John touched on this—but the end result being that the Europeans get a greater share of the profit margin.

Now, the Economic Partnership Agreement is intended to provide, as we have heard, predictable market access between the two regions and to gradually open the European marketing services, in particular, the creative and the entertainment industries. I agree with the Minister that there is great potential and I think that if the partnership agreement is adroitly implemented by us in the Caribbean, it should allow our countries to have a commercial presence throughout the European Union and the UK. The Agreement also includes a free trade component which theoretically should deepen trade in goods between the two regions. In other words, it should make it easier for us to export goods and services to Europe and to the United Kingdom. But while this looks promising on paper, the sad reality is that in practice, we have not taken full advantage of the provisions in the Agreement. In fact, since the Agreement was signed, instead of Caribbean exports to the European Union increasing, as the Minister has confirmed, exports

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are actually decreasing. She indicated that they declined in 2018 and 2019.

Now, this is not necessarily as a result of bad faith on the part of the Europeans, rather it has to do with limited supply capacities on our end; it has to do with the fact that we have an inability to keep pace with or to meet the very tough European regulatory requirements and standards, for example, when it comes to things like labelling and intellectual property, and in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, our tardiness in putting in place the measures under the ease of doing business to benefit from investment under the Economic Partnership Agreement. So simply stated, the systems and policies in our region may be constraining our ability to export and to better capitalize on our primary commodities. And this inability may in fact be stifling trade.

Now, as a result of this disparity in the value of goods in trade and the gap in manufacturing, distribution and administrative capabilities, two very different views on the impact and usefulness of the partnership agreement have emerged. One view is that the Agreement is a major breakthrough in trade relations which will greatly benefit the Caribbean. The other view is that the Agreement is detrimental to our interest and that it is really of greater benefit to the European Union than it is to us. Either way, it cannot be denied that the comprehensive changes to trade, investment and related policies produced profound and wide ranging economic impacts. When handled properly, trade can act as a motor for growth and development and it can contribute to poverty eradication. But handled poorly, trade can increase inequality.

It may not be good for the less fortunate in society when the benefits of growth are not shared or they are not equally distributed. So as a consequence, it

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behooves our regional leaders, not just in government, in both the public and the private sectors to ensure that we do not commit to these international pacts, these international agreements, we do not commit to these obligations unless we are able to work them to advantage. Our leaders and captains of industry and trade must liaise and work with the Caribbean Export Development Agency in identifying and addressing the shortcomings and blockages which meditate against our being able to improve export performance or which are holding us back from being able to secure and develop markets for our goods and services.

Now, the hon. Minister did not mention this in her presentation. It was not included as one of the main joint institutions, but the Caribbean Export Development Agency was established as the regional trade and investment promotion agency and its mandate is to enhance the competitiveness of CARIFORUM States and to promote trade regionally and internationally.

So while I support this legislation—because on balance I think the CARIFORUM arrangement affords the Caribbean some valuable opportunities and it has the potential to increase economic growth, and as the Minister said, the benefits far outweigh the challenges and in any event it is a done deal because we have already signed the main agreement— I do so with cautious optimism and I would like to offer some gratuitous advice. And I say this because I think we need to flag, we need to make a careful note that the provisions of these Agreements are now law. They can be legally enforced in the courts. Right? They have the force of law. So we need to be very attentive to these commitments and so I suggest, first, we must do our best towards ensuring that results live to expectations. And this includes, as Sen. John has suggested, greater diversification of our economies. It

means overcoming the high dependence on just a few commodities. It means having support systems in place to guide and assist our exporters, to guide and assist our artistes and entertainers in meeting the European compliance requirements. And it means reinforcing and deepening our Caribbean Single Market and Economy.

Now, we love to speak about regional integration, but my impression is that more often than not we just like to pay that lip service. The CARIFORUM Partnership Agreement should be used as a stepping stone towards Caribbean countries, deepening integration thereby better positioning ourselves into the world economy. Again, we love to talk about the ease of doing business. Well, the partnership agreement affords us an opportunity to make it easier to do business in the Caribbean. If we were hesitant about doing this before, then we should no longer be hesitant about removing the red tape on bureaucracy, because this Agreement requires us to do so, the same way it requires us to improve capacity, improve capacity building and the disciplines needed to support trade.

And last but not least, if we hope to narrow the disparity gap, it may also mean negotiating or renegotiating some revisions to the Agreement. International agreement, such as this, should not be seen as an end in themselves. They are a means to promoting sustainable development and they should be used as tools for development. These agreements are living documents, if you have them, you should use them. We also should not be crossing the river feeling for stones, instead we should know exactly where we are going and how we expect to get there. Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

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The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, it is an honour again to join this debate on the CARIFORUM-UK Economic Partnership Agreement, the EPA. This legislation, as was articulated by the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, is a parallel successor legislation as it were to the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement, EPA. Based on that fact, it is almost identical, if not identical, to the conditions that were established under the CARIFORUM-EU, now rolled over to the CARIFORUM-UK. Having said that, the debate finished but there is a lot of things we can discuss in a legislation like this. Let me deal with some basic fundamentals in the world to put and contextualize this Agreement.

The modern world is changing very rapidly. Two decades ago, the World Trade Organization made its stamp on the world on the free trade. Free trade, as defined by WTO, was free trade that was not so free trade, you know. Because free trade in its absolute theoretical sense caters for countries to trade freely without tariffs and imposition of duties. Now, in an environment like that, the weak will—the strong will massacre the weak. So a small island like Trinidad or Caricom cannot compete against United States; cannot compete against China; cannot compete against Japan and South Korea; cannot even compete against the European Union.

So in the framing of some of these legislation, as the Minister of Trade and Industry articulated, we have free access, tariff-free access into UK and into the EU, but we still have tariffs—Trinidad—to progressively decrease with time until you level the playing field. Because it is understood that small countries cannot

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compete in a completely global environment. So in that context only, this CARIFORUM-EU EPA and CARIFORUM-UK EPA is quite supportable.

Now, another point to note is the changing dynamics of the global economy. The mighty United States, Uncle Sam, is the biggest economy in the world, still is and will be for a while. You have China running close second now—the list I have here, which is the countries with the highest GDP for 2019 and 2020—followed by Japan, Germany and the ever, ever, increasing Indian presence—now, one, two, three, four, five, in terms of GDP—followed by the UK, followed by France, Italy and Brazil.

Since the days of the British Raj who would have believed that India would, in 2021 and in 2020, have a larger GDP than the colonial master. The United Kingdom—India has now surpassed the United Kingdom in terms of its gross domestic product. You know, Madam President, what crowned off this to me years ago was when the Tata Group of Companies acquired Land Rover. That was a total inverse reaction of what the British Raj did to India. So that today, you have an Indian conglomerate owning the British flagship product, the Land Rover, and that is how the world is changing. Do not underestimate your ability to succeed. And small islands could succeed. Small nations have succeeded with strong leadership. Singapore is an example; Hong Kong is an example; New Zealand, fairly small, good example; Iceland coming up. So we must have confidence in ourselves. We must have confidence that we could compete, we could produce goods and services that the nations of the world could want, could want to buy, where we could export and earn foreign exchange.

But, Madam President, let me deal with Brexit; June 23, 2016, the British

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referendum on Brexit. Nobody, very few people in the world expected this outcome. I personally did not. But it happened and in a democracy you honour the will of the people. So via referendum, the British people voted to get out of the European Union. Of all the European countries, probably the weakest link was always the British, because they were never historically part of Europe in the context of continental Europe. They were an island state, they had a totally different system. A classic example is imperial versus metric measurements. These things may sound simple but it is fundamental to the culture.

For those of you who are old enough, remember pounds, shillings and pence; 12 pence, one shilling; 20 shillings, one pound. The British did not take the European currency, the euro. However they converted to metric to make 100 pence, one pound. So in a way, they sort to adapt to it. And what England did has fundamentally change the character of Europe. You all will recall how traumatic the transition was when you had to extend the discussion between Brussels and London. And even in the end, when it was finally agreed to, there were still inconsistencies, the most important of which is the Northern Ireland/Irish Republic border and that still remains a contentious issue in the UK.

So what happened post-Brexit—and I want to congratulate the CARIFORUM Trade Ministers for being able, in spite of all the upheaval during the transition over the Brexit negotiation, to have this legislation in place in a timely manner so that today we can pass it in the Parliament hopefully and proclaim it hopefully by tomorrow so that we will meet the deadline of the 31st of March, so that this legislation could become effective. I want to go on record as congratulating the Minister of Trade and Industry here, in particular, and by

extension the Ministers of Trade in all of the CARIFORUM countries.

So let me now deal with some figures. A lot has been said by Sen. John and it was mentioned, en passant, by Sen. Vieira about the balance of payment. Now, a country the size of England; a country with the manufacturing capacity of England; a country that had traditional links with Trinidad and Tobago; a country that has been our former colonial masters, there was time here, prior to independence, where virtually every single product that was foreign in Trinidad came from the United Kingdom. That has changed dramatically over the decades. So it is a very difficult position at this point in time to have a favourable balance of trade with a country like the United Kingdom. However, what we want to see is that the optic of our trading and especially our export into the United Kingdom.

Now, Trinidad and Tobago suffers from this dilemma. When you have a gross figure or a total figure and when you disaggregate it into its component, you get various outcomes. The export of energy commodities is as high as 75 to 80 per cent. So if you take that out and you deal with non-energy exports, you get a different picture. But with energy exports, the trade balance in the context of the size of the British economy is extremely small. In 2015, the trade balance was negative \$313 million; in 2016, \$586 million; in 2017, \$254 million; 2018, \$386 million; 2019, \$763 million and in 2020, January to November figures, just a mere \$127.7 million. That is good performance, you know. That is extremely, extremely good performance.

And let us deal with the energy exports. As indicated, I think the Minister of Trade and Industry did in fact give some figures, but I will give some more details. All these figures were provided to me by the hon. Minister through the Ministry of

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Trade and Industry. Our largest export to the UK is methanol. This is followed by LNG; some years LNG is higher, some years methanol is higher. And for the last five or six years, methanol usually is on top of the pack. The methanol market—and that is why you see the individual fluctuations every year.

Now, we do not sell methanol per se as the State. It is the petrochemical companies in Point Lisas who trade their methanol and what we need to realize here, as a Senate and as a country, is that we cannot see the trade of energy products in the context of the balance of trade of a specific country. For example, we have to try to fetch the highest market. So I will give you some methanol prices here. For January 2021, United States Gulf in the Barge spot, FOB, US \$367 per metric tonne; Rotterdam FOB, \$400 per metric tonne; Western Europe, C&F, \$305. Western Europe is where the British price is quoted. So if I am an exporter of methanol, I would not want to sell in the Western European market. I would prefer to go on the US Gulf Coast or on Rotterdam and market my products because I am getting \$50 to \$100 more per metric tonne.

So by the same token, there are times when the Western Europe market may be higher than the Gulf Coast market or the Rotterdam market. And then when you come to deal with LNG, it is even worse. Because while we export LNG to the United Kingdom, that is based on what is called NBP price, which is National Balancing Point; that is the European market. But the premium market for LNG is JKM, which is China, Japan, Korea market. That is where we want our LNG to go. So you may find a particular year where the trade with Europe, the EU and by extension United Kingdom, falls but it does not fall to our disadvantage. It falls to our advantage because we migrated our cargoes out of Europe into Japan and

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Korea and China where you get a higher price. So these are some of the fluctuations that you see on the annual figures with regard to the prices of petrochemical products.

The same thing happens for ammonia. On the ammonia market, we have the Caribbean spot, and I am giving you January figures, \$237 per metric tonne; US Gulf Coast NOLA Barge which I quoted for methanol, \$282; Tampa, 282; Black Sea, 239, and hear what now, Western Europe, C&F, \$294. So the highest price you are getting for ammonia is in Europe. The highest price you are getting for methanol is in the Gulf Coast.

So these are the market dynamics that affect your trading of your commodity, and that will be reflected in the actual balance of payment for the specific country for any particular point in time.

3.50 p.m.

So, Madam President, I have outlined some of these issues to bring further clarity to the issue of trade with the UK and the European Union. But the real potential—and I will spend some time on that although I am not the Minister of Trade and Industry—for expansion has to come from the non-energy sector because that is where the diversification of the economy lies, because we cannot put all our eggs in one basket. We cannot bank on a balance of trade that is so skewed towards two commodities, methanol and LNG, and to an extent ammonia. So what we have to have now is a basket of commodities and services that we can export competitively to the international market. That is where the capacity building has to now focus, and that is what our whole new drive in the Trinidad and Tobago economy will now be focusing on, championed by the Ministry of

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Trade and Industry—okay?—because this is where we will take it in small steps. Whether we export chocolates, whether we export wines, whether we export condiments, whether we export mas, whether we export culture, whatever we export, “one one cocoa fills the basket”.

Every sector of this economy now has to start to go export driven [*Desk thumping*] and you do not have to export \$10 million in your first year. Okay? But if every industry, whether it is pepper sauce, whether it is jams, whether it is furniture, whether it is craft, these are some of the skills now that this country needs because for the far too long we have depended as a mono-economy, on a single product economy. And single product economies are very vulnerable to economic shocks. The economists will tell you that. And we have gone through cycles of boom and bust for so many decades, and for some strange reason we have not learnt as a country. This is a time now that necessity is the mother of invention. We have to come to the game. We have to start to play ball, and I want to compliment the Ministry of Trade and Industry, exportTT, e Teck, and some of the agencies of the Ministry of Trade and Industry that are working feverishly to build the capacity.

The Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association is doing yeoman service to this country. Obviously, they cannot compete in some commodities with China, with the United States, with even some of the European Union, but they are making inroads, and what you have to try to do now is create niche markets; see where your product has some strategic advantage over the other; capitalize on the Caribbean diaspora in Western Europe, in North America, in Canada, United Kingdom and see if you can build markets in these countries, and be in a position

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that one day—check Angostura Bitters. In any bar—and I have travelled a lot and when I travel, when I finish work I go to the bar for a drink, and in every bar, in every part of this world that I have been to, you see a bottle of Angostura Bitters. Since I became Minister of Energy and Energy Industries I have been to Qatar, I have been to Russia, I have been to Bolivia. I have travelled a lot based on my job.

Even before this I was an extensive traveller and every bar you go to in the night—I do not want to sound as if I am big drinker, but every bar you go to, to have a beverage in the night, you see an Angostura bottle there and that is the power of a product, and that is the power that when you build a brand and it has international outreach, that is the capacity of trade. And what we have to do now, we have to start to build brands. And to build brands in a modern world, you know what you have to do? Have a good product and have a good marketing strategy because it is all about marketing. And the good thing about the modern world is that through the Internet now marketing has become very cheap you know.

You do not have to go to no international agency and no big marketing firm to market a product you know. You just go on Facebook, on YouTube, or whatever the social medias are and you can build a brand, and Trinidad and Tobago has to wake up from its slumber. COVID has taught us a lot. COVID has given us a time for introspection but there will be a post-COVID world, a post-COVID world that brings a new dawn for mankind and we can be part of that new dawn. And Trinidad and Tobago, if we pull ourselves together, we have the human resource capacity in this country, we have brilliant young people. I see them every day. I work with them every day, both in any energy, both in the creative industry, both in manufacturing, both in IT, both in communication, both in animation. There is a

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whole blooming industry in amination. All these areas we can capitalize on. We would not become like a Sony overnight, but one day several of the products of Trinidad and Tobago will emerge and I hope to live to see that day.

Madam President, before I close, let me just give a little anecdote of a book I read many, many years ago. It is called *Made in Japan* by Akio Morita. Akio Morita was the founder of the Sony Corporation. The Sony Corporation started off as a business in Tokyo after World War II in the shell of a bombed out building. They started making transistor radios in the '50s and they built themselves after a little while, and then they started to export. And Akio Morita went to the United States and there was a chain, a department store called Montgomery Ward at the time, and they ordered 100,000 transistor radios from Sony. And just when he about to sign the agreement, the guy from Montgomery Ward told him, "You know there is just one small matter. When the transistor radios come, we will take off the Sony sign and put a Montgomery Ward sign on the radio."

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: He said, "No deal." When he went back to Tokyo his partners almost crucified him. He say, "You are a crazy man." He say, "You give up a 100,000 order?" And he told them, he said, "One day the Sony brand will be bigger than Montgomery Ward." Today, Sony Studios have taken over Hollywood and that is the vision when you want to build a brand, and I implore our creative artistes here in Trinidad, our entrepreneurs here in Trinidad, to learn from that, take pattern, and let us build Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Madam President.

[Desk thumping]

Madam President: Sen. Lyder.

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Sen. Damian Lyder: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, we are called to Parliament today to debate a Bill that aims to ensure the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM and the United Kingdom, and we, of course, understand that it has already been signed and I will not go into all the details, except to say that, Madam President, this is not a Bill that we are against in any way. So you know at the end of the day I can assure my friends on the other side that they can relax today, but it was interesting listening to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and from the contribution I took one main thing, well two main things from his contribution. One was that the Minister finally recognized, the hon. Minister finally recognized that after six years it is time to diversify the economy outside of petrochemicals. So after six years of this PNM Government, it is time to diversify, it is time to, I think the words he used was, wake up from the slumber, time for the country to wake up from the slumber. The other thing I got from him was that well glad to hear that there are drinkers on that side as well, Madam President, enjoy the bar.

So, Madam President, you know—but even though we are not necessarily against the Bill, there are certainly some concerns that we have today and I will be speaking mainly towards the non-energy manufacturing sector, having my friend, the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries speak towards us going in that direction.

And, Madam President, the challenges that we face, as a nation, at this time, is essentially how do we position our productive sectors to participate fully in the UK market, a UK market that benefits from sheer size and the economics of scale, a market that has its own reserve currency as well as a significantly larger fiscal

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budget and capital wealth in the United Kingdom. So this requires first and foremost for us to take stock of where we are as an economy and a nation.

The ability to compete with United Kingdom companies can only be obtained with deliberate Government action to support the growth and development of companies and industry. But, Madam President, I will demonstrate how this Government has by its actions, and in some cases inactions, weakened our competitive position. Notwithstanding this, Madam President, there was a quote, Dr. Roger Hosein, trade economist, is recorded as saying that to prevail we must and I quote:

Organise and pool our talents and resources so as to be better prepared to deal with the threats and opportunities that the EPA may pose.

Madam President, it is important to have preparation of business for UK market entry and it must be comprehensive.

Madam President, the ability of domestic companies to break into the UK market is dependent largely upon several factors: enabling an environment where the ease of doing business propels companies to success, that the training and education supports industry growth; and most importantly, Government works with the industry to provide an enabling environment where they can boost output and overcome some serious hurdles such as non-tariff barriers which act as impediments to trade, especially in small nations and especially for small and micro and medium-sized companies that exist in these small nations. So, Madam President, when we look at the impact of non-tariff barriers which can limit the success of Trinidad and Tobago products getting into the UK market it is very imperative here now to record for the *Hansard* the various ways that these barriers

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can render impotent any market access obtained by the way of this CARIFORUM-UK Agreement. And one of the key ones I want to look at in terms of the non-trade barriers is that of sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures.

Whilst there are many categories of non-trade barriers that exist, sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures weigh heavily on exports of manufactured agro processing goods. You see, Madam President, this forms a significant part of the manufacturing sector output of Trinidad and Tobago targeting the United Kingdom, and as a result we must place some emphasis on the measures here. Some of the measures that are applied and if I may quote them, Madam President, is that you are:

- “(b) to protect human or animal life...from risks arising from additives, contaminant, toxins or disease-causing organisms in their food...;
- (c) to protect human life...”—from plant or animal carried diseases; to protect animal or plant life from pest diseases or disease-causing organisms;
- “(d) and to prevent or limit other damage...”—to a country—“from the entry, establishment or spread of pests;”—and to protect biodiversity.

All of these sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures serve as non-tariff barriers for many products manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago that would otherwise be destined to attempt to get into the United Kingdom. Now, you have to ask yourself: Do the United Kingdom manufacturers have any challenges surmounting these barriers? And, of course, I will say not. These big companies in the United Kingdom have decades of experience exporting to all over the world, and so they are accustomed to these sorts of challenges. And, madam President, in my

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experience in Trinidad they may experience a delay in getting approvals, but inevitably that is about the worst case scenario. There are no blockades to the entry. And for full disclosure, Madam President, let me say to you that I myself am a distributor and an importer, and whereas I distribute a phenomenal amount of locally produced products both here and in the region, I also import products from outside of the Caribbean region, many international companies, and you know it is necessary in many cases to get approvals for products coming into Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, I would not say that it is overly burdensome to get these products approved. We have a Chief Veterinary Officer who works very diligently to approve things once you fall in line with all the specs and requirements, Madam President. But this is a central issue to the debate because the failure of the Government to ready our manufacturers with necessary supports, renders this entire process worthless to our manufacturers. Madam President, I am sorry but the Government is characterized by inaction in this sphere.

The Minister of Trade and Industry would have outlined with the best of intentions of her administration, and I know the Minister of Trade and Industry is a very hard-working Minister, but, Madam President, as I said in previous times, a lot of the times her hands are tied as a result of maybe some other senior Ministers who do not give her the level the freedom, sorry the hon. Minister, the level of freedom that she needs to be successful in these areas.

Madam President, so with all the good intentions, you know how that saying goes, the road to a certain place is paved with good intentions. I would not say where that place is, but it is certainly not the Promised Land, and it is not our

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domestic industry. But by virtue of illustration, I wish to record on the *Hansard* some examples of sanitary and phyto-sanitary measures that the domestic manufactures would have to be prepared to surmount to enter the United Kingdom notwithstanding the removal of the import tariffs, and if I may list them, Madam President: prohibitions, restrictions of imports for sanitary and phyto-sanitary reasons, registration requirements and special authorizations, conformity assessment related to the SPS, and testing certification and inspection.

Madam President, another key area, and I know this is very relevant for the United Kingdom, is the traceability requirements. So, in the United Kingdom disclosure is required of information that allows following a product through its stage of production, processing and distribution, and this results in and I will cite some examples. For example, vegetables, disclosure of information of the location of the farm, the name of the farmer and the fertilizers used; for meat products, disclosure of information of their slaughterhouse as well as the food processing factory; for rice, disclosure of information of the location of its temporary storage facilities. These are all important factors that can be barriers if we cannot translate this to the UK authorities effectively.

Madam President, another non-trade tariff barrier we look at is a local content measure. So in other words, the requirement to purchase or use certain minimum levels of types of domestically produced products sourced locally. So there was always the issue of, like an example is in the automobile industry where they may require locally produced components. It must account for 50 per cent of the value of the components used. In the Caricom region, we see in the alcohol industry, for instance, to qualify for Caricom certification, we see that more than

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50 per cent of the contents of the product must be of local, of the value sorry, must be of content local and, most importantly, if you are going to get duty free on alcohol, the base spirit must also be produced in a Caricom region. So these are examples of tariff barriers that could become a hindrance for us that the Minister would have to look at and ensure that we are prepared for such non-tariff barriers.

I will just mention a couple more, Madam President. For example, pre-shipment inspection and other formalities, licensing quotas, prohibition and quality control. And, Madam President, you have to ask yourself the question: Who are the companies in Trinidad that are ready for this type of export at this time into the United Kingdom? And you know, undoubtedly, Madam President, there are some, but they are mainly the very large manufacturers. So right now at this point in time it could be only the large manufacturers that are able to quickly overcome these non-tariff barriers that can exist between the trade between Trinidad and that of the United Kingdom. Because, Madam President, the one factor that is missing here is the small and micro and medium enterprise industry, because we have seen the Government forsakes small, micro and medium enterprise.

Madam President, to be able to take advantage of the terms and conditions of the trade liberalization on offer with the United Kingdom, we need a robust domestic SME sector, an SME sector that can not only overcome the challenges of the entry into United Kingdom, but at the same the time, can protect themselves against the onslaught of British products that can come into our local market space and compete against our small manufacturers. And, Madam President, one only has to look, it is clear through the amendments that were recently proposed in the Finance Bill, 2020—which I will not re-debate—that this Government had no

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intention of assisting small, micro and medium-sized businesses in this country who happen to be the very backbone of this economy.

Madam President, I debated that Bill and I remember they merely sought to cherry-pick promises from the budget statement that will benefit the big business friends and financiers. That is what I remember and I do not have the time to go into the aspects, and I know you do not want me to go back into the Bill. But when we talk about the financial support for the Government to SMEs, we have to hear on the other side they say that, you know, “We are not First World nations and do not have the levels of budgets the First World nations have to put money behind all these SMEs in the country.” But, Madam President, the UK is a First World nation and they have found the money to support the SMEs, especially during this COVID pandemic, and that is what we are up against. We can find the money for paintings and palaces, but we cannot find the money to invest in the future, the expansion, and the security of our SMEs.

Madam President, instead of giving meaningful support, in that Bill they gave some increase in depreciation allowance to the wear and tear of plant and machinery. Madam President, some of these SMEs are barely making profit today. They can barely pay their workers, their taxes, let alone buy machinery. Now, I heard the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry speak about the Government assisting in the purchase of machinery, and, Madam President, if that is so, great, but we wait to see. We wait to see that actually happens. Many people are still waiting for their grants, Madam President, for various grants that were promised. What they should have done—

Madam President: Sen. Lyder—

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Sen. D. Lyder: Yes, Madam President.

Madam President:—some of your comments are really not relevant to the matter at hand.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you, Madam President. What they should have done is assist businesses through the low interest loans, subsidies. This is what should have been done with small businesses and this is to prepare—

Madam President: Sen. Lyder—

Sen. D. Lyder:—them for this Bill.

Madam President: Sen. Lyder. Sen. Lyder, I am going to let you finish that point, but I will ask you to be a little more specific to the Bill eh.

Sen. D. Lyder: Yes, I was going to tie it in, Madam President, but thank you for your guidance. So what they should have done to prepare them and get them ready for this duty free trade between the United Kingdom is to get the SMEs ready. We know that there is a company called NEDCO, but they are limited in capacity and support for that.

But, Madam President, I will tell you the one thing that speaks directly to this Bill here and we heard a few Members mentioned it here earlier broadly, but I am going to be very detailed here so I would not be repetitious, and that is the matter of the ease of doing business. This will be directly towards the non-energy manufacturing sector, Madam President. The question is: Why has this Government failed over the last five years going on six in the ease of doing business, moving us from 63 in the world to 105 in the world? How do we expect our economy to compete with the United Kingdom when they themselves, Madam President, the United Kingdom, is ranked at number eight in the world in 2020?

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Madam President, we have neighbours, Jamaica at 71st place, St. Lucia at 91st place and we are at 105, the so-called manufacturing capital of the region. But, Madam President, to be fair to the Minister of Trade and Industry who I respect, and as I said I know she, sorry the hon. Minister is a very hard-working Minister and so forth, but the ease of doing business is not on her alone. It is on many Ministries in this Government who really is—they are letting down the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, and it is that heavy cross that the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry has to bear now with this ease of doing business. Every time manufacturers speak to the hon. Minister, they speak about the ease of doing business and I know her pain. I know the hon. Minister's pain.

And, Madam President, the World Bank does not even take into account the levels of corruption and inadequate access to foreign exchange when they are doing their measure of ease of doing business. So I would figure that if they did cover that, we would be in a much worse position in this sense. And, Madam President, this is the number one factor in speaking with people at the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association, the various Chambers of Commerce, and—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Madam President, point of order.

Sen. D. Lyder:—the general business community—

Madam President: Sen. Lyder, a point of order is being invoked.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: 46(1).

Madam President: Sen. Lyder, I have cautioned you before and you said you did not want to be repetitious and you are actually raising issues that had been raised before in the debate.

Sen. D. Lyder: Right.

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Madam President: So I will ask you to just be a little more succinct, tie in everything.

Sen. D. Lyder: Madam President, thank you and I appreciate the opportunity to bring the relevance here in this very tight area, because— Madam President, thank you for letting me finish. The general business community, Madam President, complained about the ease of doing business, and this is the fundamental issue facing the private sector, partly causing this economy to decline by 18 per cent between 2015 and 2020. So now I am going to tie it, Madam President, to this.

Madam President, since the budget debate I have updated the statistics, and when you look at us having to expand our production to compete with the English or be successful in the UK market, many of these factories now have to expand their factories. They have to increase the size of their factories. So when we look at construction permits, the ease of doing business in this respect, it has fallen from 125 to 126 since the budget, an overall decrease since this PNM Government came to office from 77 to 126. So if I want to improve my manufacturing plant as a manufacturer, I now have double the challenge in construction permits. A manufacturer cannot even respond to the market threats from the United Kingdom by increasing its productive capacity in a timely manner due to this change to doing business. Let me state for the record the United Kingdom is ranked No. 23 in this respect, eh. That is what we are going up against.

4.25 p.m.

Getting electricity for the new manufacturing plant fell. In the ease of doing business for electricity fell and the ease of doing business from 10 to 41 since 2019.

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Sen. Gopee-Scoon: I am sorry. Point of order again, 46(1).

Sen. D. Lyder: I am bringing it to the EPA.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: You are going really long on the ease of doing business and you should bring it into the Bill.

Madam President: Okay, Minister, you have invoked the point of order. Sen. Lyder, I will ask you to move on please to another point. Okay?

Sen. D. Lyder: Madam President, with the greatest of respect, this is very pertinent to the manufacturing sector that deals with the ease of doing business to compete against the United Kingdom.

Madam President: And Sen. Lyder, with the greatest of respect, I have allowed you to talk about the ease of doing business despite the fact that it has been raised by other speakers. So I will ask you now to tie it in and to move on to the other points.

Sen. D. Lyder: Right, thank you, Madam President. Well, I will end with one part of ease of doing business then—thank you—and that is trading across borders which I do not think was spoken about. In the ease of doing business, trade across borders went from 73 to 130 and further to 134 in 2020. This is a decline in 2020 across all the matrix cannot be blamed on COVID because the entire world experienced COVID including the United Kingdom, yet we are declining against our counterparts. Yet we are hearing the Government touting their achievements of readying this industry to engage in the type of liberalized cross-border trade. The United Kingdom is ranked at 33 in trading across borders.

Madam President, what compounds this matter even worse is our nation is not attracting investment under this regime which is needed to improve our

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competitive position with the United Kingdom. At the beginning of the fiscal year, we had the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry boasting about a paltry \$300 million in local investment when in excess of \$6.3 billion has left the country from 2017 to 2019, Madam President. Madam President, one only has to look at Lever Brothers shutting down their manufacturing operations and there are other examples in different sectors such as the Point Lisas Estate, a staggering US \$929 million has left in net foreign direct investment outflows between 2017 and 2019. Investors are bypassing us as an investment destination. So how are we going to compete against the mighty United Kingdom?

Madam President, another challenge is forex shortage. Madam President, this country is in the throes of a forex crisis. The Minister of Trade and Industry would have spoken time and time again about Eximbank providing forex for manufacturers. But this is clearly maybe for only a select few, the larger companies, because I hear daily stories of SMEs. You hear that many suppliers are not in a position to purchase inputs in a ready manner which has contributed to several companies being excluded from the global supply chain necessary to support our manufacturing sector. Madam President, the United Kingdom prints a reserve currency. They do not have that worry like us. Therefore already, the playing field is not balanced and by the inaction of the Government in forex, our domestic companies are placed at a further disadvantage.

What is worse, Madam President, is there is an impending storm regarding the forex and it is being spoken about around the business circles. This Government has borrowed to buy foreign exchange and draining the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. This attrition of our foreign reserves cannot benefit our

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manufacturing sector in the long run, it is simply not sustainable if we are going up against the United Kingdom.

Madam President: Sen. Lyder, you have five more minutes.

Sen. D. Lyder: Thank you, Madam President. What did this Government expect would happen after shutting down one of our major forex earners Petrotrin? Did they expect that US dollars would fall like manna from heaven? Meanwhile we are facing a UK firm and a Bank of England that sits on a reserve currency and can literally print as the situation requires.

Then, Madam President, we look at our tax situation in Trinidad. The draconian taxes placed on manufacturers. These put them in an uncompetitive position. The increased taxes go into the value chain and it takes up the cost of our goods versus the UK. Corporation tax for firms locally range from 25 per cent and then there was an increase under this administration to 30 per cent for larger firms. The larger firms with the capacity to export would no doubt fall into this higher tax bracket based on their net income.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

We also have to face the increases by this Government in the business levy and Green Fund levy which collectively represents 0.9 per cent of top-line revenue, further taxes. And this, however, compares unfavourably with the United Kingdom firms that face a 90 per cent corporation tax. They will be expected to raise it to 25 per cent by 2023 but still, Mr. Vice-President, the Government's policies are not encouraging the manufacturers. Who will this Bill benefit at that point, Mr. Vice-President?

Mr. Vice-President, there is a market in the UK for fast-moving Caribbean

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consumer goods. There indeed is. And as someone involved in the distribution business for fast-moving consumer goods, I can state that there are possibilities for our domestically manufactured products to be exported. We however would need to ensure that local manufacturers get support along specific lines to ensure that they can work this magic that we are hearing will happen in the UK economy. Some of these, Mr. Vice-President, include capital support to broaden the manufacturing base and excess capacity. We would need to boost our production capacity. Factory sizes and warehouses for instance would need serious cash injections, injections of capital to make the increase possible. Prompt working capital support to ensure the increase in operations do not dry up cash and this speaks directly, Mr. Vice-President, to the access of VAT refunds in a timely manner. This was a major concern by the TTMA and it took a COVID pandemic for them to get some. And then, of course, favourable access to foreign exchange to purchase imported inputs into manufacturing.

So, Mr. Vice-President, as I close, the Government has simply brought this Bill to Parliament seeking to smooth passage. What they fail to do is make a case for themselves as to their record in supporting the domestic industry to enter into the UK market. This is despite being there for six years, you know, Mr. Vice-President. What they are asking us and the manufacturing and the agricultural sector and the service industry is to ignore the last six years of neglect. Trust in the Government, we will support you. There is a local saying, Mr. Vice-President, that says and I quote:

What you see in broad daylight, do not shine flambeaux to find it in the night.

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The business community has seen this Government's abysmal record on us getting ready for export. They have already seen the poor performance. They have endured through the failure to support industries, unless of course it was a family, friend or financier of the PNM. They have seen the Government's failure to transform our economy and they will not go forward expecting any change. They gave this Government a chance after the budget debate. They said that the Government spoke the right language and now they are completely disappointed. The people simply do not trust the Government.

So as I close, as we embark on this journey with the United Kingdom and as the wheels of this administration are grinding to a screeching halt, we encourage the PNM drivers of this struggling economy to step aside, Mr. Vice-President, and let the UNC led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar take over the wheel and steer us to a path of economic transformation. So I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal): Mr. Vice-President, it is with great honour that I stand before this Chamber today to present on the CARIFORUM Bill, 2021. I thank you very much for the opportunity to do so. Mr. Vice-President, I relish the opportunity to present on a Bill that touches and concerns trade. Now, I had the opportunity of serving our great nation from 2016 to July 2020 on the board of directors at exporTT Limited. I must say this was one of the most valuable experiences of my entire life.

Now whilst I am no trade expert, I do believe that I do have institutional knowledge of trade and commerce based on my prior portfolio which I held. Now

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it is because of this experience and knowledge I will say to Trinidad and Tobago that I am excited, that I am invigorated by the opportunities that this Bill will bring to the manufacturing sector and service sector of our country. Now, Mr. Vice-President, I respectfully submit that to truly understand the benefits that this Bill can bring and the opportunities it presents for the penetration into the UK market, you have to sit and you have to speak with manufacturers as I would have done during my tenure as a director on the board of directors of exporTT.

Now during my time at exporTT, I met so many manufacturers, especially the newly invented ones. I met people who invested lifelong savings and all of their time in following a dream. I saw personally mom-and-pop shops which evolved into money-making enterprises. I saw a woman from Tobago for example who made ready-to-bake cassava pone which was a hit and which was ready to take on the export industry by storm. And all the time in which I served on exporTT, it was this PNM Government that was in power and I can speak sitting on the board of directors as a previous director of exporTT to all of the initiatives that our Government did do because Sen. Lyder spoke about the past five years.

I could speak from personal experience as a director on that board, the initiatives and the things that we would have done in order to assist the manufacturing sector of Trinidad and Tobago. So yes, Mr. Vice-President, I will say I am overly excited by the great opportunities that this Bill will bring to our manufacturing sector. Mr. Vice-President, that being said, I will undertake to discuss this Bill both from the lens of an attorney-at-law and also from the lens of a previous director sitting on the board of exporTT.

Now, I know Sen. Vieira made a very substantial point in his contribution.

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The hon. Senator said I believe the systems and policies in our region may be constraining our ability to export. Now, Mr. Vice-President, during the hon. Senator's contribution, I had an opportunity to pull the Government's Trade Policy 2019—2023 and if I may respectfully put on the record, in that particular policy, that policy outlines many of the steps that the Government is taking to have a proper handle on trade. So in answer to the hon. Senator's queries or questions, in this policy document, the Ministry of Trade and Industry did identify constraints which need to be addressed and furthermore highlighted policy measures to be taken. For instance, one policy measure which personally stuck out to me was that policy relevant to reducing bureaucracy and red tape in trade as illustrated in part 4.7.3 of that said trade policy document.

So certainly, Mr. Vice-President, we as a government, we acknowledge that there are hindrances to trade but what we further recognize is that these hindrances are not static, that they are fluid in nature and it requires us to tailor our policy position as we move along. And certainly I can say that the Minister of Trade and Industry is doing a perfect job at that.

Now, as I indicated to this honourable Chamber, I will address this Bill both from the lens of an attorney-at-law and then later on, I will speak from my experience as a director on the board of exportTT.

Now, Sen. John in her contribution, she alluded to the fact that Trinidad and Tobago is a dualist State and the hon. Senator is indeed correct. Now, in order to look at the issue of dualism from a legalistic point of view, Mr. Vice-President, I would want to examine the Bill—so I am scrubbing the legislation from a legal perspective. We would have to look at the Preamble of this particular Bill. Now

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when one looks at the Preamble of the Bill which appears before us, for the listening public, the Preamble of a Bill, it really attests or it goes to what the Bill intends to do. It gives the information on that particular Bill. Now the last line of the Preamble is what I particularly want to discuss. The last line says:

“And whereas it is necessary in order to give effect to the Agreement, to enact national legislation:”

Now this particular part of the Preamble is where the issue of dualism comes into being.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago, as we all know, is a dualist State and for example, there was a case of Joseph and Boyce versus the Attorney General. It is a CCJ Appeal case, CV No. 2 of 2005 and this particular piece of legislation actually dealt with the concept of dualism and in this particular case, it is stated *inter alia* that:

“The classic view is that, even if ratified by the Executive, international treaties form no part of domestic law unless they have been specifically incorporated by the legislature.”

So this is just simply for the benefit of the viewing and listening public.

As a Government, we are here. Yes, there is an existing trade treaty but we are here asking that this international treaty be incorporated into domestic law and the reason for that is because Trinidad and Tobago, we are a dualist State, we are not a monist State. Monist states are states where, for example, as soon as an international treaty is ratified, it automatically forms a part of that country's legislation. We are very different than that and hence, we are here as a government seeking the blessing of this most honourable Chamber in order to incorporate this

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piece of legislation into domestic law to give this treaty full force and effect in our country.

Now, I also want to address legally the issue of a memorandum of understanding so my brothers and sisters of the Senate can understand the necessity and why the Government has come to you asking your support, especially the Independent Senators, asking your support in the passage of this particular Bill. The issue of the memorandum of understanding I speak to is the current trade agreement, as we all know, as it exists between the UK and Trinidad and Tobago, it is governed by a memorandum of understanding and this memorandum of understanding was actually signed on the 9th of December, 2020. As the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry would have indicated in her presentation, it is due to expire on April 01, 2021.

Now, the issue with a memorandum of understanding is that one, the memorandum of understanding is due to expire so simply “we doh have time tuh stick”. We have to move with haste in order to incorporate this treaty into domestic legislation. Secondly, there was a case, an Australian case, that case was *Masters v Cameron*, [1954] 91 CLR 353 and this is for the *Hansard*. As I said, it is an Australian case and this case spoke to the effect of memorandums of understanding and what it said, Mr. Vice-President, is that a memorandum of understanding is actually a precursor to an agreement. So a memorandum of understanding, one, it is entered into by parties on good faith and it is really not legally binding because parties would have entered into it on good faith.

Why does the law say that a memorandum of understanding is a precursor to an agreement? What that simply means is that there is the expectation that when

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parties, and more so international countries, enter into memorandums of understanding, in the not-so-distant future, what will follow is a legally binding agreement. And because currently our trade position in Trinidad and Tobago is governed by a memorandum of understanding, this we look at as a Government, a responsible Government, we look at simply as a precursor to an agreement. So by coming to the Parliament and by trying to legislate and have this Bill passed, this is the agreement now that we will be relying upon to govern the parameters of trade and manufacturing as it relates to Trinidad and Tobago and our relationship with the United Kingdom.

So in my respectful submission, Mr. Vice-President, the MOU which currently governs trade and industry between Trinidad and Tobago and the UK, it was a temporary legislative mechanism which would have catered for a temporary arrangement between Trinidad and Tobago. But if we are able today to successfully legislate, if we are able today to successfully pass this Bill with the support of this honourable Chamber, what we will be doing is creating a legal document now which binds our relationship with the UK, a legal arrangement which is more than and carries more weight than any MOU, any memorandum of understanding by virtue of law will carry.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, if I move on now to my second point in my contribution to this honourable House, I want to respectfully look at clause 2 of the Bill and this clause is very, very important. This clause, Mr. Vice-President, it must be cross-referenced. For the benefit of the public, it must be cross-referenced with clause 4(2) of the said Bill which is before this Parliament. Now clause 2, it speaks to the commencement clause of the Bill and in that particular clause, it lists

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numerous Articles of the current EPA arrangement and it says that:

“...the Agreement shall come into effect on such date as is fixed by the President by Proclamation.”

Now why is this particular clause particularly important? Now it is very important because, Mr. Vice-President, this particular clause, it states that these particular Articles, as I said before, would only come into effect on a date fixed by the President. What this does is that it actually gives the Government some time. It gives the Government the time necessary in order to put certain legislative and certain administrative measures in place before these particular articles come into full force and effect. And I would not delve too long in this because I know the hon. Minister spoke about the effect of these particular commencement clauses in her presentation.

Mr. Vice-President, on a third note, I would respectfully briefly look at clause 4(5) which deals with the issue of judicial notice. Now judicial notice why I respectfully believe is important is because section 4 of the Interpretation Act, Mr. Vice-President, it states that:

“Every...public Act...shall be judicially noticed...unless the contrary is expressly provided...”

Now 4(5) of this Act, it states:

“Judicial notice shall be taken of the provisions of the Agreement and any amendments made thereto as...they...”—are—“contained in this Act.”

And the question is: What does the judicial notice clause means? And for the benefit of the public, this is simply where in this Bill, we are giving and making recognition of the EPA agreement that is supposed to be read in tandem with the

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Bill that appears before us. So if you notice, the Bill that currently appears before the Parliament, there is not the Economic Partnership Agreement. The 1,078 pages that we all speak about, that is not before us in a physical sense. Now, this judicial notice by putting this particular clause in the Bill that appears before us is where the court is now going to be required to pay cognizance to this particular Agreement, granted it is not before the Parliament today.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, the EPA for the record sake which has already been indicated by the hon. Minister, it was published by *Gazette* but because the Agreement is not attached to the Bill, it was very important by this judicial notice clause for us to make reference to that particular document. Now, if I may respectfully again for the benefit of the public in explaining the concept of judicial notice, by providing for judicial notice in this Bill, the court as I said before, must recognize the Agreement and recognize that once this Bill is assented to, the Agreement has full force and effect.

Now what exactly does this mean? And especially for the benefit of the listening public, throughout the length and breadth of this debate, we may have heard the hon. Minister cross-referencing the Bill that is before us with the EPA arrangement, that is the CARIFORUM-UK Agreement. That is the Bill that this judicial notice recognizes and by simply inserting that clause 4(5) in the Bill that appears before us, this gives the Minister the ability to rely upon and make reference to this particular trade agreement that exists.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, as I always do whenever I have the opportunity and blessings to present in this House, I would look at a piece of legislation or I would look at a Bill and I would usually speak to one of the clauses or the clauses

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that really reach out to me and the clauses that I am most fond of. And in the CARIFORUM-UK EPA 2021, that is the actual Agreement, I must say that one of the Articles, and it is Articles 202 to 206, this particular Article in this Agreement, it particularly speaks out to me because it speaks to “Dispute Avoidance and Settlement”. It is what I call in my own terms “the vex clause” of this Agreement. I am a litigator by nature, right. As a lawyer, you are naturally adversarial sometimes. So I always ask myself when I look at an agreement, when “we geh vex”, what is going to happen. And this particular clause, these Articles 202 to 206, is what I respectfully refer to as that “vex clause” because it guides us on what will happen or what can happen in the event that there is a breakup in the relationship or a fallout in the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, if I may respectfully submit, again, to my colleagues, Part III of the CARIFORUM-UK EPA, this is where it speaks to these Articles of “Dispute Avoidance and Settlement”. Now, this particular clause, it states that:

“Where the Parties...”

In this case, the UK and Trinidad and Tobago, may:

“have failed to resolve the dispute by recourse to consultations as provided for in Article 204, or by recourse to mediation as provided for in Article 205, the complaining Party may request the establishment of an arbitration panel.”

Now, Article 203 sets out that any dispute concerning the interpretation and application of this particular Agreement shall be resolved through consultations,

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mediation, arbitration or a mutually agreed solution.

Now, why am I so fond of this particular clause? For attorneys-at-law, we are appreciative of arbitration, we are appreciative of mediation, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms because as a matter of fact, it is the way our courts are going especially in commercial relationships. So the courts are actually directing persons towards ADR and to see that this is the way in which this particular Agreement speaks to how disputes will be resolved should there be a dispute between ourselves and the United Kingdom, this is something I am particularly fond about and this is something I will certainly advocate for.

Now, as we all know with ADR, which is alternative dispute resolution, there are many benefits to be had. We have a faster resolution of a problem and more so in commercial relationships. ADR as opposed to litigation, what you can have is at the end of a dispute being resolved, you could still manage to a great extent to preserve the relationship that exists between the parties. So that being said, these particular Articles in the CARIFORUM EPA, which is 202 to 206, in my own words, “the vex clause”, is something I am particularly fond of.

As a matter of fact, it took me back to my days in law school sitting down in the class of Justice of Appeal Kokaram’s class and Justice Kokaram, if anybody is familiar with the honourable judge, he would always preach and he will always advocate for settling matters via alternative dispute resolution. So this particular clause is one of the many very reasons again why I am in full support of this particular Bill which appears before this honourable Parliament today. So these were the legal issues that I had hoped, that I intended to address as it relate to the Bill.

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Now, I want to just respectfully in a few minutes deal with some of the averments made by Sen. Lyder. Now Sen. Lyder spoke about our Government's failure to prepare the manufacturing sector, he said that we have forsaken the micro and medium enterprises and this is something that was placed on the record, it has to be corrected.

4.55 p.m.

And I can speak because I am not speaking from the lens of a politician now, I am not speaking from the lens of a Minister of Government, I am speaking from the lens of having sat in the trenches as a director on the Board of Directors of exporTT and having worked personally, having worked personally with exporters in this country, having worked personally with this hon. Minister of Trade and Industry. And I have no difficulty with the record reflecting also the admiration I had as a young director, newly minted director, sitting on this board with very little trade experience, looking on at the hon. Minister, looking on at the extent to which she works to drive trade and industry in this country.

So to sit down here and listen to Mr. Lyder talk about this Government not doing anything for micro and medium enterprises is absolutely untruthful. Because I would have experienced it myself, sitting and having the opportunity to work with the hon. Minister when I was a director of exporTT.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, if I may respectfully say, and I want the record to reflect this, I recall, as a director on exporTT, I personally had the privilege and the blessing to lead several trade missions to different countries of this world. I led a trade mission to Guyana, to Canada, to Latin America and Cuba, which I attended with the hon. Minister. And I would say that having been exposed to these

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missions, I was exposed to the great possibilities that exist for manufacturers and service sectors outside of our shores, especially when there is an existing trade agreement that you can tap into. So trade missions, in other words from my experience as a director of exporTT, it carries more value and carries more weight when you enter into a market and there is already an existing contractual or legal agreement that you could tap into.

And, as I said I would have experienced that when I would have taken manufacturers, small to medium, micro to medium, the same manufacturers that Mr. Lyder is alluding that this Government has ignored and neglected, these are the same manufacturers that I had the privilege of leading to Guyana, to Cuba, to Latin America, and I would have experienced the work that we did as a Government in order to assist these manufacturers in making their business ready to take on an international market.

Mr. Vice-President, I also distinctly recall, I was not a part of FIT4Europe because I had only received my instrument of appointment at the end of 2016, and the mission was completed, but I had the benefit of sitting in that graduation ceremony where manufacturers came. And when I speak of manufacturers, I am not talking about big manufacturers. It is the same micro to medium manufacturers Mr. Lyder has said we neglected. These manufacturers were giving testimonials as to how great this initiative was, and how pleased and how happy they were that this was an initiative by exporTT but supported by the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

I will never forget, there was one testimonial, okay. It is Rachel Rochford and she was from Red Fire Innovations. And Rachel said things to the effect that,

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“I am grateful and will forever be grateful to the Ministry of Trade and Industry”. She said, “I would have never fully recognized the needs” for her line of products. So she was involved in I think batik and those things. And she said, “I would have never recognized the need and the market outside there for my products unless I had personally visited”. And she was grateful that exporTT, led by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, took the time to take her to this mission.

One thing I have to also address is the issue of Tobago because Tobago is always very dear to my heart. I remember when—again, and the Minister could allude to that—

Mr. Vice-President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sagramsingh-Sooklal: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. And the Minister can allude to that. On that very said day we received our instrument of appointment, this hon. Minister said to us, “Do not forget Tobago”. “Irrespective of what you do as a board, do not forget the development of Tobago”. That I took very, very close to my heart, supported by a son of the soil, Dr. Cyril Collier, I will never forget that. And with the blessings of this hon. Minister, what we did is started the Tobago Development Programme for mom-and-pops shops in Tobago, preparing them with the skills that were necessary for them to take on the export market.

I want the record to reflect that we also had the full support of Mrs. Marceline Jack and Mr. Joel Jack who made it possible. The THA made it possible for us, as the board of directors, to go into Tobago and do some considerable work. We had a cohort of almost 15, of almost 15 mom-and-pops-type businesses that we personally—and this was always my modus operandi, Mr. Vice-President. As a

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board, we had to be prepared to look outside the box and do what—think outside the box and do whatever it took to help our manufacturers in Tobago. And what I can say, it was a policy and a principle that was always supported by this Minister of Trade and Industry and whenever we went to her, with bright eyes, especially me, with my bright ideas, this Minister of Trade and Industry always supported us and gave us the funding and made the possibilities available to us, to even help our brothers and sisters and the manufacturing sector in Tobago.

So, therefore, I may sound very emotional but I take it very personally when statements are made that we have ignored the micro business sector, because I was a part of the process, having served on the board of exporTT, seeing the kind of work that this Government has done and continues to do in order to promote business and manufacturing industry in this country.

So Mr. Vice-President, with this being said, I want to reiterate to Trinidad and Tobago the words by the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Mr. Franklin Khan, when he said to our country, “Let us not underestimate our ability to succeed as a small nation”. He said that and it raised every pore on my skin, and I will repeat for the record and for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago: let us not underestimate our ability to succeed as a small nation, because we can do it. [*Desk thumping*] With a PNM Government we will do it and with this Bill, it will certainly provide the avenues for us to assist our manufacturers and take them to the place that we want them to be. With that being said, I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I am very happy to join this debate on this Bill entitled, CARIFORUM States (the Caribbean

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Community and the Dominican Republic) and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Economic Partnership Agreement Bill, 2021.

Mr. Vice-President, let me say from the outset that the Bill that we are debating today to give effect to what is called the Economic Partnership Agreement between the United Kingdom and the CARIFORUM and the Dominican Republic, I would like to posit from the very outset that this is no new Bill, no new treaty. This is simply a replication of what was discussed, agreed upon back in 2008, under the European Union, the CARIFORUM countries and titled, of course, the Economic Partnership Agreement.

Mr. Vice-President, if you look at this Agreement very closely, you will see a replication, as I said, of almost 99.9 per cent of the provisions that were contained in the previous agreement between CARIFORUM countries, the Dominican Republic, the EU EPA. Therefore, it is important for us to examine this process very closely and to determine what are some of the challenges that this new Agreement will pose for the CARIFORUM countries, particularly those countries of the Caricom region in this new attempt or purportedly new attempt at this Agreement, all arising as a result of the United Kingdom exiting the European Union.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, it is also important to note that this Agreement would have come into effect or signed off sometime in March, according to what we have before us, 2019. This took place in St. Lucia and it is two years later we are now debating this measure, this Bill before us.

I would like to indicate from the outset that one of the areas that I would like the hon. Minister to pay attention to, and to give us some guidance on, because it is

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important. Because this Agreement is not only dealing with trade in goods, which is duty-free, quota-free, within a time frame before all borders are open to duty-free, quota-free goods and services from the United Kingdom. And, therefore, we have to ensure, Mr. Vice-President, that all the measures are taken to ensure that our comparative advantage as a nation is fully exploited.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spoke about energy and energy-related matters. That is an industry that is faced with a number of challenges and we know that in Trinidad and Tobago, we have to move away from the energy sector and get into what is called the non-energy sector for future revenue streams because of the whole revolution that has occurred in the renewables industry, Mr. Vice-President.

So, as we deal with this matter before us, I want to posit very early the need for the Government to focus on trade in services. We know the importance of trade in goods, but let us look at what we can exploit in the area of trade in services. And in this regard, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to ask the Government whether they have taken stock of the need for the establishment of a strong cultural cooperation agreement in this particular matter that is before us.

There are some very strong comparative areas that we can really exploit to strengthen our relations in the area of trade, more so, services. But there is also—we also have areas that we can look at outside of that area that I have mentioned, in terms of the promotion of cultural goods and services, and Mr. Vice-President, the mobility of artistes and other cultural professionals, so that we can have market access for our cultural goods and services.

And therefore, the role of the cultural and creative industries becomes very

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crucial in this particular agreement that we are seeking to give effect to. And I do not know to what extent the Government has paid attention in focusing on this cultural cooperation agreement and have that captured in this document that is before us. Because as you know, Mr. Vice-President, there is a provision in the Bill. And if I may go to the Bill, if you look at clause 4 of the Bill, it says:

“Subject to section 2, the provisions of the Agreement shall have the force of law.”

But it goes on to say:

“Where an amendment to the Agreement is accepted by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Minister may, by Order, give effect to the amendment.”

And that must come through an affirmative resolution of our Parliament. That is in clause 4 of the Bill.

And it is in that context, Mr. Vice-President, I am positive that the Government needs to pay attention to making the appropriate amendment for inclusion in this Agreement of a specific cultural cooperation agreement aimed at promoting our artistes and our cultural professionals, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, the role of culture and the creative industries is very critical and we have to focus on how can we promote capacity-building so that we can have new cultural entrepreneurs and organizations that would be able to focus on the economic and trade dimension of this particular sector, so that the Government can provide specific support in this particular arena.

It is an arena or an area that is underexplored and underdeveloped, and this is why I would like to ask the Government to pay attention to the benefits that can

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be derived from this particular aspect of this Agreement that we have before us. And if we do not have it, and I am not seeing it in the Agreement before us, we are calling for the Government to look at amending this UK-CARIFORUM document to ensure that there is a cultural cooperation programme embedded in it so that we can promote and have the relevant cultural protocols and provisions within this Free Trade Agreement, Mr. Vice-President. So, this is the first area, Mr. Vice-President, I would like us to pay attention to when I call on the Government to address that matter very, very seriously.

Mr. Vice-President, you cannot and we cannot be discussing the UK EPA CARIFORUM, Dominican Republic Agreement without paying attention to our recent experiences. The experiences of the CARIFORUM countries, as it relates to the 2008 Agreement, cannot escape us because there are lessons, there are challenges that we have to face. Mr. Vice-President, and in this regard the work has been done, Mr. Vice-President, in looking at this particular experience that the CARIFORUM-UK EPA, which mirrors the original Agreement, which was signed in 2008. And Mr. Vice-President, to ensure continuity in trade, after the UK exited from the EU, CARIFORUM and the UK signed this Agreement that we are dealing with here today. This was done in March of 2019, and it is taking effect through the exercise that we are dealing with, Mr. Vice-President.

But it is important to note that there are some very rich lessons that we can draw from this experience, for example, Mr. Vice-President, the share of CARIFORUM-UK trade has fluctuated between 20 per cent and 10 per cent of the total CARIFORUM-EU trade.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, it reached a high point shortly after the financial

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crisis. And as the EPA was implemented, what we discovered is that there was a slow decrease in the share, Mr. Vice-President, of trade in this regard. So that today, UK trade constitutes 11 per cent of EU exports to CARIFORUM and 13 per cent of EU imports from CARIFORUM, as it relates to total trade. These are matters that we need to pay attention to and examine, to ensure that in going forward with this new Agreement, we do not make the same errors of the past.

Mr. Vice-President, it is also to be noted that the Member States with the largest trade in goods, values with the Caribbean, are the Netherlands, Spain, the UK, Poland and Italy. And Mr. Vice-President, when we examine further, trade is concentrated in these countries, with the top five trading almost two-thirds, which is about 65 per cent of the EU total with CARIFORUM. So even when you look at within the EU, Mr. Vice-President, you are seeing five countries that have the bulk of trade with the CARIFORUM countries and therefore we need to pay attention to this matter, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to also indicate that when we look at this matter closely, we have been able to see and to discover, based on a report that was done on this EPA, EU-CARIFORUM, and through interviews that were conducted by local business associations, it provided practical information on the existing business opportunities. Now, Mr. Vice-President, in this context, it is important that we pay attention to awareness-raising efforts. Because it is very important that when we deal with this issue of trade in services, we need to pay attention to providing greater advancement and awareness to business associations so that they can better understand the importance of the arrangements that we are engaged in.

Mr. Vice-President, when we look at the whole issue of Caribbean trade

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within Europe, we are seeing, Mr. Vice-President, where there has been a decline in trade between the United Kingdom and the Caribbean, with the main traders now being the Dominican Republic and Trinidad and Tobago. We have seen, Mr. Vice-President, where the Caribbean has moved from having a trade surplus, to a deficit in the context of this relationship. And, of course, when we take into account the 2020 COVID-19 impact, the deficit that is experienced is expected to grow even larger, not only in goods, Mr. Vice-President, but also in services.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, we recognize that one of the key services would be tourism. And this is an area that we need to pay attention to, as we seek to increase our exports to the United Kingdom through this Agreement.

Mr. Vice-President, what we have also discovered is that one of the areas that we need to look at as we navigate this Agreement between the UK, CARIFORUM, Dominican Republic and this Economic Partnership Agreement, we are seeing where in the United Kingdom there is a growing demand for Caribbean food, Mr. Vice-President. It is estimated that the Caribbean food market is now worth roughly worth about £100million. So, Mr. Vice-President, we are not only seeing where cultural goods and services, through creative industries, through our artistes and professionals, will be having a positive impact on trade in services and therefore bring streams of revenues to our country, but what we are also seeing is that there is a growing advantage for us to take on board, and that has to do with the increase in demand for Caribbean food.

So the Caribbean food market is something that we need to pay attention to and the value we have been given, based on the research, is close to £100million. Whether we are talking about Caribbean foods or we are talking about sauces,

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condiments, roots, tea, gluten-free flour, Mr. Vice-President, these are major foods that are emerging and are attracting major food chains in the United Kingdom, and therefore we need to determine how as a country Trinidad and Tobago, and how as a region, because we are part of Caricom, how can we collectively take advantage of accessing this market for the benefit of the Caribbean people, Mr. Vice-President?

Mr. Vice-President, what the evidence is also showing, as it relates to this Agreement and how can CARIFORUM, which is the Caricom countries, some 14 Caricom countries, how can we take advantage of this new Agreement that we are debating today?

Again, the evidence is emerging that there is a demand in the United Kingdom for products such as cosmetics, hair and skin care products. These are areas that may not be taken on board as we seek to take advantage of the trade in services in this Agreement with the United Kingdom. It is not only about petroleum and petroleum products, we have to look at other areas, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, you know, in the United Kingdom we have a local population located there. It is what we call the diaspora.

5.25 p.m.

And if we are going to take advantage of this Agreement, we have to determine, Mr. Vice-President, how can we utilize that local Trinidad and Tobago population to our advantage. So I am giving examples based on the research that has been done, that there are products that are in demand in the United Kingdom that we can take advantage of and these are some of the products that I am identifying for our attention, Mr. Vice-President.

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So, Mr. Vice-President, we also have to—when we talk about trade in services, the Government has to think about looking at the possibility of establishing in the United Kingdom, through this Agreement, a national bank in the United Kingdom. Can we not, for instance, introduce the FCB in the United Kingdom through this Agreement? Can we not negotiate with the United Kingdom the need for us to have a bank to service the local diaspora, so that we can generate revenues, so that we can gain the kind of income from this particular arrangement that we are debating today?

So we have to think outside of the box and we have to be very conscious of some of the limitations, some of the realities that we are faced with as a Caribbean nation. Because whilst we are debating, Mr. Vice-President, UK/T&T, whilst we are looking at our interest here within this framework, it is CARIFORUM that we are talking about and CARIFORUM incorporates all our countries within the region of Caricom; 14 of them.

Mr. Vice President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: So I think this is a matter that I would like to put on the table for the Government's consideration, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, in terms of aid for trade—that is part of the Agreement, development aid. What we have discovered, based on the research, is that the United Kingdom recently reduced its development assistance from 0.7 per cent of its gross national income to 0.5 per cent. This reduction, we have not been able to estimate what impact it will have on the CARIFORUM countries, but is something that we need to pay attention to, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to emphasize the need for us to properly

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monitor this Agreement. Too often we enter—we pass legislation to give effect to Agreements and, Mr. Vice President, there has been no monitoring, no benchmarks have been established to determine, for instance, whether Trinidad and Tobago—the CARIFORUM countries that are part of it but we are part of it, that is why we are debating it today, that is why we have a special Bill to give effect to our part of the arrangement. How will this impact on us? And therefore, you need to be properly monitoring, Mr. Vice-President, this arrangement, we have to monitor.

Now, I noticed in the Agreement that we have here, Mr. Vice-President—and the Government—there are very sensitive products we know; very, very sensitive products and the Government needs to explain what I have seen on page, I think it is, 194 of the Agreement.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, I saw on page 194 of this Agreement the following—these are products that have been excluded from this schedule of goods that will not be impacted upon as it relates to trade with the UK. And I am seeing where under item 1902:

“Pasta, whether or not cooked or stuffed with meat or other substances or otherwise prepared, such as spaghetti, macaroni, noodles...”—and the whole works.

And it goes down, Mr. Vice-President, and it outlines and every one of them between 2019, of the signing of the Agreement, to 2033, all of these products have been excluded from this Agreement and will not be impacted upon.

Now, as I said, we have no problem if the Government and so on believes that it is in the interest of this country that one of their financier's products must be excluded from this Agreement, we have no problems with this. But they must

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explain to us why other products have not been excluded. How come only the product of this particular manufacturer who is a top financier of the PNM, Mr. Vice-President— and we just imposed a 40 per cent duty via common external tariff, on imported pasta products. How come, Mr. Vice -President, in this Agreement, pasta and everything surrounding pasta, from 2019 to 2033, have been excluded; why?

I would like the Minister of Trade and Industry to explain this to this Parliament. And why other products have not been excluded, because there are many sensitive products in this country? So why only one man, Christian Mouttet's products have been excluded from this Agreement? The Minister will have to answer, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, as I have said, this Agreement is not new, this is a replication of what has gone in the past. And we need to objectively analyze what we are doing, to ensure that the people of this country end up benefiting at the end of the exercise and to do that, the Government must be able to ensure that our comparative edge and advantage is taken full advantage of, and I call on Minister to address this issue of a cultural cooperation agreement, and have it inserted in this Agreement. Mr. Vice President, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this matter. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Minister of Trade and Industry. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. And I want to say thank everyone who has participated in this Bill, because by and large all of the contributions, even though there were some criticisms within, I think everyone meant to be very

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forward thinking about utilizing this Agreement and entering the UK market. Bar one, which is Sen. Lyder, I was a little bit disappointed but I will come to that after. But I sincerely want to thank all my colleagues, but I will start with the master, Sen. Khan, really, but I was not expecting this. I expected that he would stick within the realm of energy. But he went outside of that and he really hit the nerve that we all have to get up and get. If we are talking about building this economy, it requires all sectors and especially, he attached—the language he used is focused on confidence and building a better Trinidad and Tobago. And Sen. Khan, I will always thank you for that very wide, but meaningful contribution.

And Sen. Sagramsingh-Sooklall really drew on her experience as a board member at exporTT and she worked very, very well with the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Of course, she is quite fortunate, she is an attorney, and she was able to attach herself to the legal side of things. And in particular, your—I was very pleased that you were able to speak to Articles 202 to 206, which you called the “vex clause” but which really is the dispute resolution clauses. And I am surprised that Sen. Vieira, had not spoken about them. But certainly, I am glad you brought it up because in any agreement, you will have some disagreement, and parties will have to come to the table at times and it is always good that it is set out there so that, there can be meaningful approaches. At the end of the day, the outcome is going to be—must be suitable to all, so I thank you very much for that.

And Sen. Vieira, and you are so right, we really have to work together, work through agencies like CEDA, and I am so happy that a Trinidadian is now at the head of CEDA. I have had a meeting with him already but the Caribbean Export Development Agency has been doing its part and they are beneficiaries—when I

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say—they are beneficiaries on behalf of partners in the 11th EDF. So that there are several programmes that the Caribbean Export will be doing with all CARIFORUM countries, but with the development aid coming from this Agreement—through this Agreement. And yes, you are so right, we really cannot rely on a few products.

But I will tell you something, when you look at the products—I do not have everything in front of me but I certainly can remember, the non-energy products, the ones that are going there are really niche products, eh. And those are the things—I do not think we can compete with things manufactured in Europe or in the UK; these are manufacturing giants compared to Trinidad and Tobago. So that what will sell is those things that will appeal to a strong diaspora market in the UK and of course, those niche products, so that our rum is there or aromatic bitters are there, our curry and spices, and you are right, Sen. Mark, our pepper sauces. And there are many other products that we can refine that perhaps are a little bit not in a state of readiness for export, but we can do it.

Our chocolates are of the finest world standard. And we must do like Ghana. The President of Ghana made a statement quite recently that he was not—Ghana was not to sell any processed cocoa to the rest of the world, and that the focus will be on the value added. So that they were going to invest in the value added, so that they would be selling and it is certainly more beneficial to go that way. So, I am very thankful for your contribution.

Sen. Mark, you talked about market access to cultural goods and you wondered whether or not—I had stepped away, but my colleagues said you wondered whether or not there was any Cultural cooperation agreement embedded

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in the UK-CARIFORUM Agreement, and I did speak about it, and perhaps you missed it.

So it did—there is a protocol three, which is on cultural cooperation in the CARIFORUM-UK Economic Partnership Agreement and it allows for the development of the sector's economic potential. So I did speak to it, it is there, it has to be an area of focus. We are such a creative bunch of people and we are doing—I mean, I think there is an aligned approach by the Government in terms of the development of the film and fashion, and so on, but apart from that, our Carnival and everything that comes with it, our calypsoes, et cetera, soca, has to be exported.

So I am just giving you the assurance that there is this inclusion of cultural cooperation under protocol three, and there is going to be a renewed focus on our creativity, and ensuring that the export of these kinds of services and the creation of jobs as well.

Sen. Mark, you also asked—I came in at the point where you were speaking about trade in services, and the need for Government to focus on trade and services and you are so very right. I mean, trade and services country is the largest contributor to our GDP. And in terms of employment, there are something like 534,000 persons involved in services, but we could do more and we could export our services. And the Agreement allows for that export of professional services, and so the focus has to be, and it is embedded in our National Trade Policy 2019 to 2030, that the services sector has tremendous potential to positively contribute to the growth and sustainable development of the domestic economy, particularly through exports. So, the intention is there but we are doing the work.

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So we are in fact working—that is, the Ministry of Trade and Industry—we are working with the TTCSI, the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Services Industries. We have launched—we are doing two big projects with them. One is a National Services Exporters Registry. Sen. Mark, I am sure you would find interest in this. And so that project started in September last year, and we are doing it in two phases, that is along with TTCSI: the establishment of a services statistics database, so we understand what is going on, and of course, we would have access to the disaggregated services data, that is very much needed. And CSO itself does not have much on—in terms of data on the cultural industry. But certainly we are doing another project called—the other aspect of this project is the development of Trinidad and Tobago online services exporters registry platform, and that is going to bring together all of our local service providers, and potential local and foreign clients and partners on this platform. So work has commenced on that.

I want to tell you that, generally, there is quite some work going on with CEDA in this regard and services; this is a Caribbean Export Development Agency. There is a project called “Services Go Global programme”. And again, this is geared towards capitalizing on export opportunities under the EPA, both the EU EPA and the UK EPA as well. This programme is on and already during fiscal 2019 to fiscal 2020, 51 Trinidad and Tobago nationals from the business and professional animation, energy and tourism services subsectors would have graduated on this Services Go Global programme and we will be focusing on that.

In addition to that, we are at the stage in the Ministry developing a National Services Policy that will take us from 2021 to 2025 and of course, there is at the level of Caricom, the development of regional services sector strategy, including a

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strategy for the export of our energy services. So that is what is going on with that and of course, we have not forgotten the Tobago House of Assembly. I can tell you that we are working with them to establish a trade in services unit at the Tobago House of Assembly. So there is—I can give you the assurance, Sen. Mark, that there is a lot of work that we are doing in terms of services.

Sen. Lyder, you talked about diversification, you talked about the height of tax structures and you did not even say, and I am sure that you know, that we have in this country, a zero tax regime on agriculture—in the agricultural sector. What more could you ask for? And I think you—I got the feeling you were out of it today. And so, you spoke a lot about Government's lack of a deliberate action to push the growth of industries and so on. And perhaps you have not been listening but I have been in the public domain, speaking a lot, quite a bit about boosting the manufacturing sector. And of course, working along with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in terms of boosting agro processing as well. You know, that we would have developed the, the Agro Processing and Light Industrial Park in Moruga, and we already have clients, we already have tenants to go into that park, so that there is much going on. But I really know you are an importer and a distributor, and I think you know of the successes in that trade licensing unit in the Ministry of Trade and Industry where your licence and so on is processed in under six hours—Sen. Lyder, I think you know that—in the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

So—[*Interruption*]*—*you said that? I must have missed it, I am sorry. And I mean, you went on and you spoke a lot about the SMEs, we were not do anything for SMEs, and I will come to that because I am not going to leave that off the record at

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all. I am going to pay some attention to that shortly. But yes—and you said were are the investments, no investments. We have had—I said before—more than 50 UK companies currently operational in Trinidad and Tobago in energy, in manufacturing, warehousing, and distribution services, construction, air transportation, accounting, education, et cetera. And I told you—I said more recently about the investment in Tobago, with the Rex Resort in Turtle Beach.

5.45 p.m.

So I can say that up to in 2019, we would have had net direct investments from the UK of 314 as measured by the Central Bank. This is Central Bank data. It is measured in US dollars where we would have had net direct investment—net, eh, from the UK at US \$314 million, and that is up from the record in 2015 when it was just US \$75 million. But again, we are going to continue on working on these, on facilitating investments into Trinidad and Tobago and you have my assurances there. Sen. John, I really note all of your comments and I thought the contribution was quite good and you have laid bare your concerns about tourism and returning to normalcy, and we share your concerns.

I know that the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts is working steadfastly on being ready for the opening of the sector. And, yes, I share with you this desire and this readiness that we must be in a position to move on in a post-COVID era. And, yes, you talked about non-tariff barriers and so on, the joint institutions are the ones and we have it at every level; at the level of the Ministers, at the level of the private sector, at the level of the Parliament, at the level of the technical staff. I had spoken to all of the various institutions and that is where the reliance would be in terms of settling matters of dispute, settling non-tariff barriers,

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making suggestions on how we may improve things and so on.

So, I can give you every assurance that I think the structures of the Agreement, the strict structures are there and would provide every opportunity to ease any barriers that may come in the way of exports. And then of course you spoke about the narrow list of products and I spoke about—I myself just mentioned some of them; they are energy products, non-energy products and what we have to look at and focus on really is really expanding the list of niche products. When you are talking about the UK and so on, niche products are what we have to look at. I lament that I saw in Houston, a frozen package of paratha which when you follow the instructions and so on, you really had a delightful plate of paratha in front of you, and I said to myself we have to work on exporting all of these products that are really indigenous to our country just as well.

Sen. Mark spoke extensively about the foods—yes, the foods that persons crave when they come to our country—we can find a way to export these things and have them flown out to our diaspora communities, not only in the UK but beyond as well. So I did want to—but someone would have mentioned the whole question of monitoring and I did speak to it. It is not something to leave out because what is the point of signing an agreement and you really do not monitor what are the benefits and the opportunities and so on. So it is not just about signing. And I wanted to say that Article 5 of the CARIFORUM-UK EPA provides for continuous monitoring of the Agreement so that a comprehensive review of the Agreement shall be undertaken, and this is apart from the joint institutions. You would have a comprehensive review of the Agreement not later than five years after the date of signing the signature—at the date of signature and at subsequent

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five-year intervals and so on in order to determine the impact, the utilizations, the compliance and the cost associated with the implementation of the Agreement.

I want to tell you that that is something that we learnt from the CARIFORUM-EU EPA because we are now at the point of undertaking the second five-year review under that Agreement, and the monitoring system is now being developed for the EU EPA. But here we are, we have learnt from them and the CARIFORUM-UK EPA has developed this and I think it will all serve us well in terms of getting our products out there, in terms of getting our services out there and building trade. There is something that I did not get a chance to say and I will reinforce it now, that this Agreement that we have signed with the UK is an Economic Partnership Agreement and I just wanted to raise a distinguishing feature that EPA's WTO compatible agreements that go beyond the conventional free trade agreements, in the sense that they really focus on the country's development and taking into account their economic circumstances. So that they include matters of cooperation and assistance in a wide range of areas to ensure that the EPA is a true success.

So we are very happy with what is before us, this EPA will serve us well. I mean, I think the agreement is focused on sustainable development on ways to increase the competitiveness of our manufacturers and so on. So the UK market is a large size, 67 million people. If we can get out an oomph out of that, carve out a little space for us, our diaspora market and their friends and families and so on, I think we are on our way in terms of generation of revenue, earning foreign exchange, creating employment, and so on. So, I know you raised the point, somebody said, "What is Government's plans in terms of alignment with the

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agreement which we will approve today?” And that—not the Agreement, sorry, we signed the Agreement already; moving international law, which I am sure everyone is in agreement with. What is Government’s plan? Yes, there is a trade policy and it would be good, if as Members, we can all familiarize ourselves with the trade policy for Trinidad and Tobago. We are actively implementing and the trade policy identifies the Government’s specific trade-related policies geared towards enhancing competitiveness, accelerating economic and export diversification, and so on.

It speaks to upgrading the competitiveness of business services, infrastructure, improving the capacity for e-commerce, developing human capital and a whole range of matters. It talks—it addresses matters of infrastructure, modernization, including the engineering and technological facilities being upgraded and designed to increase the capacity of exporters to adopt and adapt, global technologies, and so on, leading to greater participation in global value chains, and that is another area of opportunity involving ourselves in regional value chains and also beyond the region, global value chains as well, so that we can really supply international markets.

The ease of doing business, you talked about it; we are doing the work. We are doing the work. It is this Government in 2007 that began that single electronic—that put together that SEW platform, 46 e-services. I am agreeing with you, we are not where we want to be but I think that we have done quite a bit. We are working with—and our hon. Prime Minister has committed a Ministry to look after the business of digitization. And there are a number of initiatives that are going to have far-reaching and long-term effects, many things that are in the

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implementation stage, entering the electronic processing of customs declarations, ensuring that there is increased interoperability between the port and customs, and so on, and the SEW system, and that is called the Port Community System. All the streamlining and expansion of new e-services under the SEW include other Ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries—

Madam President: Minister, I think Sen. Dillon-Remy—

Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy: Minister, can I—a question, please, on services. As far as it concerns physicians from Trinidad and Tobago and from the Caricom countries as far as this agreement is concerned, how does it impact or how can it positively impact the services sector?

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Sen. Remy. Now, as far as I have read into this 1,370-page document, with regard to the contracted services, it is that physicians are included in that grouping of 29 professionals. So that if there is a contracted service you can in fact go within that contract to the UK for six months. Now, there are other visa considerations outside of that but, of course, looking directly at the Agreement, that is what I saw. But then looking at the group of independent professionals not contracted, “physicians” was not there. So I just looked within the confines of the Agreement and that is where it is for physicians.

Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy: Okay.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I know you may have personally spent some time in the UK, either working or so and hence your concern, but that is the situation. But I am sure outside of that there are other visa implications for those kinds of professionals.

Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy: Thank you.

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Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Right. So as I was saying, I was speaking to some of the new matters that are being done under the—in terms of the ease of doing business; the automation of construction permits, we have gone very far with that. It has been rolled out from Chaguaramas to Port of Spain, to Couva, to Chaguanas. We are now going down to the south. This is the Ministry of Planning and Development with the Ministry of Trade and Industry doing the project management as well.

We are developing our trade information portal, and somebody talked—Sen. Lyder spoke about trading across borders. Well, I will tell you sometime in 2017, we would have gone through the procurement process and by 2018, we had a UK consultant in ECORYS and they would have done the business process, re-engineering as it relates to the trading across borders. And they came up with something like 65 processes which we took to our Cabinet; at the senior level, at the level of PSs and so on, we decided that we are going to work on 45 of them and within that 45 we took out some and we are going to work on those for the next six months. So that the work is there. We know what we have to do. The commitment from all of my colleagues, all of the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries that are involved, the commitment is there. Sen. Lyder, this is particularly for you.

So we are doing our work with regard to the activities relating to the ease of doing business. Also—I am not sure, how much time do I have, Madam President?

Madam President: You have seven more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. Thank you, Madam President. Now, I will tell you that this business of competitiveness, especially wanting to go beyond the region into these extra-regional and these very relatively new markets

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and so on, Europe, UK, and even beyond that, China as well, and even getting things into the US, this whole business of quality is important. And so we have—this Government has established what is called a National Quality Policy and we are now in the implementation stage, and, you know, in this world of competition we really have to focus on delivering products and services that can differentiate themselves in the world marketplace on the basis of quality, value and innovation rather than just on the basis of price.

So it is not that we could give it cheaper, that is not good enough. If you have an item that is out there that is of a high quality standard and of great value and there is a need for it, that is going to pass muster and get into these, what are non-traditional markets to us. And we have done a survey and in this consultation with our stakeholders we recognized that quality-related products problems were perhaps the number one challenge, and this is why—and those are challenges with regard to public laboratories, the legislation, the awareness of standards, the cost of certification and accreditation—

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah. Thank you, Madam President—and so on. So those are the kinds of issues and so this is why we have focused on this business of certification, and I will come to that. But here we are developing this national quality infrastructure to satisfy Trinidad and Tobago's economic and societal needs.

So the institutional framework would include things like standards, metrology, conformity assessment services—and you were talking about some of those things, Sen. Lyder; it is in place and you must read—accreditation,

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information awareness and education programmes, and so on. And the aim is to really develop a functional and effective national quality infrastructure, which brings me to the Export Booster Initiative. And I know that Sen. John would have gone onto the website, she said, and saw the 16 initiatives under Export Promotion and Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening, and I would not go through all of them but one in particular is quite important. And I just spoke about quality and the problems we have in terms of certification and standards and that is where we are going to spend \$20 million on that particular programme, and that is for only SME exporters and those involved in import substitution; \$20 million on small and medium-sized.

This was launched about a week ago and already we have seven applications towards it. It covers things like labelling and product testing, a special programme for Tobago, a Tobago capacity-building programme. Sen. Sagrainsingh was so right, we are focused on Tobago because we must develop. We must find in there, niche products that can be developed into products that are exportable; green packaging, and so on. And then we also are spending on an external consultant, so that there is going to be that—Joel “Monty” Pemberton has joined the TTMA as a consultant on expanding trade and he brings to us all of his experience from the energy sector and we are quite happy to have him. He is involved with the TTMA but we are all working together to ensure that we grow; not only grow our numbers but grow our base in terms of our small and medium-sized businesses that are involved in the production of goods and of course services that are exportable.

We have been focusing on the SMEs. The Minister of Finance would have announced the incentives in the last budget which are focused on encouraging

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small and medium-sized enterprises to list onto the junior stock exchange to access—what is the reason?—equity financing. The biggest problem among SMEs, apart from quality, is the question of access to finance and that is why we introduced those incentives to encourage them to join on the junior stock exchange, and so on. There are a number of other grants—grants, grants, free money available at the Ministry of Trade and Industry in terms of—for purchase of machinery and equipment, the RDF, the Steelpan Manufacturing Grant Fund, and so on. And of course the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has a number of grants—has a huge grant programme in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

I will conclude, Madam President, that we will continue to aggressively pursue, as a Government, our mandate which is to drive the non-energy sector, creating opportunities for manufacturers and business suppliers and maintaining opportunities, particularly under this instrument which we are speaking of today, the CARIFORUM-UK EPA. And I want to say that this comprehensive EPA marks a milestone. It is just not we are regurgitating or just mirroring or so, it is a milestone in our trade and economic development as it covers a range of areas that are developmental and I am very, very pleased to pilot this Bill and pass it through this House today. And the fact remains, Madam President, that this CARIFORUM-UK agreement will allow Trinidad and Tobago, a small state, continued preferential market access into the UK. Madam President, with these closing remarks, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Senate in committee.

Madam Chairman: Minister, are you ready?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Clauses 1 and 2.

Question proposed: That clauses 1 and 2 stand part of the Bill.

Madam President: Sen. Deonarine.

Sen. Deonarine: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I have one general question with respect to clause 2 which speaks to providing for the commencement of certain provisions of the agreement. Now, the objective of the agreement, the Minister did indicate during the piloting of the Bill that one of the objectives is to reduce and is for the reduction and eventual eradication of poverty. My question is, without updated poverty figures how is the Ministry of Trade and Industry tracking whether we are achieving that objective?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Sen. Lyder, and I mean that is—I am not prepared—[*Crosstalk*] Sorry, Sen. Deonarine. I have called his name so many times this afternoon. I do not know if to apologize. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Lyder: You know you could call my name any time. Any time. [*Laughter*]

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Sen. Deonarine, a very valid question and the concerns as to whether or not there are statistics that would be available to us to show whether or not that the poverty levels are being reduced and perhaps directly on account of this, and we would work with the—

Sen. Deonarine: CSO.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon:—CSO and I expect—and as a matter of fact, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has assisted the CSO in terms of facilitating trade data. We have also helped them with their website, to improve their website so that it is

more encouraging for business people to access trade data on it. We are also, through the SEW loan programme, providing them with some hardware that they need. So insofar as trade data, I think it would be more accessible and available. And in terms of data on poverty, certainly from CSO, and I think to some extent, Central Bank, we are looking to statistics on that.

Sen. Deonarine: Madam Chairman, I have one more question with respect to clause 2 and it also goes with the objectives of the Agreement. Another objective of the Agreement is to integrate CARIFORUM countries to the world economy and, Madam Chair, through you, the Minister of Trade and Industry did allude to the trade policy and I note that the trade policy identifies that Trinidad and Tobago has decreasing trade complementarity with extra-regional trade partners. So my general question is, how are we going to deal with this under this Economic Partnership Agreement?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Right. And one of the last things I spoke about was quality for instance, because we know competitiveness—trade complementarity has to do with competitiveness; it has to do with development of niche products as well, and that has to be an area of focus. So I talked about the quality, development of the quality, infrastructure. I also spoke about standards and the availability of funds to the extent of \$500,000 per applicant with regard to SMEs when it comes for certification to be able to enter these extra-regional markets in particular. So that we are actually investing with them. So that a small company can get up to 100 per cent of their requirements in meeting these international certification programmes.

So the policy is there. We have actioned it by ensuring that the funding is there and we are working very, very closely to have that cadre of business persons and of course the focus has to be on the niche products as well. And, you know, especially with regard to—maybe I am talking too much but I will tell you

something, people are doing some fine work that can be exported and so I encourage others, like yourself, that if you have a product that you must monetize, monetize, monetize; quality, develop it to a quality standard, and so on. You have the assistance of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Government, and this is how we will build niche products for niche markets in extra-regional territories.

Madam Chairman: Sen. Richards.

Sen. Richards: Thank you. Madam Chair, through you to the Minister, following the question of Sen. Deonarine, does the Ministry intend to incentivize? Because we are talking about export in this CARIFORUM Bill and very often the manufacturers in Trinidad and Tobago will have challenges, even getting on the local shelves in a competitive manner. So what is the Ministry's strategy for increasing local sales which will redound to improving product quality and standardization for future export?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Well, I mean, in terms of product quality and certification and standardization, the assistance is there in terms of the preparation of development plans, especially new entrance to the market, exporTT does these sector development profiles. So that any young company wishing to get involved and to develop their product to a state of readiness for the international market can get the assistance of exporTT, and of course through the Booster Initiative. When you talk about things like—we are going to help with labelling, as small as that. We are actually going to pay for that when it comes to a new product and so on, labelling, product testing and that kind of thing; not perhaps the merchandising as which you are suggesting, but I do not think we must pay somebody to pack their shelves.

Sen. Deonarine: So what—

Madam Chairman: Sen. Deonarine, I just want to say that we are at the committee stage and while I encourage discussions, remember that we are now

dealing with the Bill, the details of the Bill. The general policy is at the second reading stage. Okay? So I will allow—[*Interruption*] Yes, you can ask your question but I am hoping that it will be something that does not require too much detail into the policy.

Sen. Deonarine: I crave your indulgence, Madam Chair, but the question is with—and you could determine whether it could be answered or not—but the question is with relation to the extent to which the Export Booster Initiative is going to invest in identifying the import demand from the UK itself as opposed to us trying to just boost what we are trying to export.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: You are talking about the risk in the market research?

Sen. Deonarine: Yes.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: And that is a fundamental part of the work of exportTT.

Sen. Deonarine: Okay.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah.

Madam Chairman: Any other questions?

Question put and agreed to.

Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 and 4.

Question proposed: That clauses 3 and 4 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Madam Chair, through you, under Article 201 we talk about cooperation, I just want to get clarification, Madam Chair, in terms of the legislative framework that we are supposed to establish to ensure that there is proper cooperation and monitoring of this Agreement. Is there any provision that we are going to insert in the legislation to ensure that we have a role as a Parliament or is this parliamentary role going to be CARIFORUM-wise and how is

it manifested?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: It is there. It is embedded, the joint institution for parliamentarians is there. In fact, I am surprised you were not, in another life, a member of one of those meetings.

Sen. Mark: No. Well, I never attended those meetings to be quite frank.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Sorry?

Sen. Mark: No. I am saying the joint parliamentary consultative body that you mentioned in terms of its manifestation, could you explain how it operates because I have never been—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: The parliamentary?

Sen. Mark: Yes.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: So you actually meet in a jurisdiction—and I am sure that we can do it—so there are Member States—I remember I think I said—no, I did not give a number. I think I gave a number for the joint institution that relates to businesses; there are 25 members on the CARIFORUM side, 25 on the UK side. But with Parliament I participated in one of these joint meetings and there were Ministers from every CARIFORUM State and as well as with the technical meeting, every Member State is there. So there is participation without a doubt. It is not that one person is going to represent CARIFORUM, it is somebody from each territory. And you actually—there is an agenda, you sit and you discuss and you make recommendations to go to the higher body.

6.15 p.m.

Sen. Mark: But are reports submitted, Madam Chair, through you? Are reports submitted to their respective Parliaments on discussions and decisions arrived at?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Whether reports are?

Sen. Mark: From the parliamentary joint meetings.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, of course, there are reports, and if you would research, you can find reports.

Sen. Mark: So they are tabled in these Parliaments?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: That is right.

Sen. Mark: Okay, thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Clauses 3 and 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 5 and 6.

Question proposed: That clauses 5 and 6 stand part of the Bill.

Madam Chairman: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Hon. Minister, through you, Chair, I noticed that in 4, which we have already concluded, you had an affirmative resolution but, in fact, why do we not establish consistency?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Because regulations—with my experience I can tell you, there have never been regulations made for any agreement. To my knowledge, not at all. My colleague is saying hardly ever.

Sen. Mark: Okay.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: It is not something that is done.

Question put and agreed to.

Clauses 5 and 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Preamble approved.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be reported to the Senate.

Senate resumed.

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has been granted for two matters to be raised. Sen. Mark? Sen. Thompson-Ahye.

Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation**(Decline in Service)**

Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye: Thank you, Madam President. The need for the Government to address the steady decline in the delivery of the postal services by the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation.

I smiled when I opened the *Sunday Express* and read the headline for former Independent Senator Martin Daly's column, January 24, 2021. The title, "Another letter for Thelma". It reminded me of my childhood, when my dear deceased mother would sing the calypso in the kitchen, while merrily doing her chores, "Post, Post Another Letter for Thelma".

Mr. Daly's column was not about pleasant memories, but about his frustration over the postal services being delivered, or more aptly, not being delivered by TTPost. He wrote:

"Like many other citizens, I am fed up with the inefficiency of our postal service. Despite the facility of doing business online, we are still dependent on the post office to receive certain documents and plastic cards in exchange for payments we have made online."

Mr. Daly's view of the continued relevance of the postal service in a digital age is supported in an article entitled, "The Importance of Postal Services", published by

on Click & Connect on July 01, 2019. It states:

“Internet competition has had a major impact on the demand for postal services. Even before we move into the digital age and have our fancy electronic way of communication, postal services are”—still—“a necessity. It allows people to send just about anything to any part of the world. Though we have an advanced way of reaching out to people, postal services will always remain relevant to us.”

It is because we need a postal service, and its non-performance impacts our lives in significant ways, that I raise this Motion on the decline in the postal service. Mr. Daly complained of:

Making—“...unnecessary rounds—adding to traffic congestion and to carbon monoxide pollution—to collect a document and a discount card”—because—“The alternative was to risk waiting for four weeks or more for postal delivery.”

It was then he said:

“Thelma then popped into...”—his—“head because...the reality underlying that old calypso was the regular delivery of mail.”

So Thelma getting more than one, and some of us cannot get any.

A few days before, on January 22nd, Veneisa Baksh, writing in the same paper, shared her unhappy experiences with the TTPost. She said a friend of hers had sent her a book, a novel, on September 15, 2020, and more than four months later she had seen no sign of it, and there was no indication from TTPost that there was a package for her to collect. She said many citizens receive utility bills via TTPost that are months overdue, but disconnections are rigidly adhered to. She noted bank statements from the same source arrived simultaneously—I am sure

many of us have experienced that and Mr. Daly had also made the point that when the statements arrived late, you may have to pay interest and late payment charges.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Now, this situation did not arise from the pandemic. The rot in TTPost had begun to set in long before Mr. Corona took up residence here. On Wednesday, September 25, 2019, *Newsday* published a letter from one Clyde Alphonso with the caption, “Postal service worsens daily”.

The *Express* had published that same letter three days earlier with a different headline, “TTPost, we deserve better”. Mr. Alphonso had said he had written many letters about TTPost before, and this time he was writing again about late delivery and non-delivery of letters. He also complained that a registered letter mailed to him from Canada a few years before had not yet arrive. On two occasions, he had to ask his bank to reissue bonus point cheques when they were not delivered by TTPost after six months. He hoped the relevant authorities had not been ignoring these complaints by citizens.

July 19, 2019, a letter from Colin Wills of the UK was published in the *Newsday* with the caption, “TTPost a failure”. He wrote:

“The time has come for the management and board of TTPost to pay the ultimate price for failure and stand down. They are just going through the motions trying to dream up gimmicks instead of sorting out the basic problems with the corporation.

I mailed a package in the UK to a relative in Princes Town. It took three days to travel 4,260 miles...”—but when it reached Trinidad, it took—“14 days to travel the 38 miles from Piarco to Princes Town.

And this has been going on for years”—he said—“but no one is held

accountable. Everyone at TTPost just continues drawing a salary. They need to study their mission statement. It is a joke.”

TTPost is a statutory company established in 1999 under the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation Act. Its mission statement is:

“To provide innovative, competitive, quality postal services and solutions for business and consumers. We do this...”—it says—“through knowledgeable, customer-focused employees and effective systems.”

Its vision is:

“To be a world leader in the provision of postal and consumer services, while achieving economic viability and sustainability”

You see why I said it was a joke?

Section 8 of the Act states:

“Trinidad and Tobago Post is responsible for the appropriate development and supply of postal services to satisfy all reasonable demands, current and anticipated, of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and in the conduct of its business shall—

(a) operate according to sound business principles and efficient human resource management practices;”

But where is the evidence of the sound business principles and efficient human resources management practice?

It also vows that it shall:

“ensure that the performance standards of its services, including the better delivery service...reasonably meet the social, industrial and commercial needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago .”

Our demands of TTPost are not unreasonable. They pledge to satisfy all reasonable

demands. They contracted to reasonably meet our social and commercial needs, and have failed us. TTPost stands guilty of breach of promise to marry commitment to performance.

We suffer daily through failure of TTPost to perform at a satisfactory level. Like Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*:

We have borne it with a patient ear—"For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe."

We do not ask for a pound of flesh, just an efficient postal service.

Section 20(2) of the TTPost Act says:

"Where the Board forms the opinion that matters have arisen which adversely impact upon the attainment of the objectives of Trinidad and Tobago Post and its subsidiaries under the corporate plan, the Board shall immediately notify the Minister."

Is TTPost attaining its objectives? Has the board informed the Minister?

Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are frustrated and angry. Sure, the newspapers are read by government officials—but then I assume. I had have my share of stress from TTPost. In 2017, I received a call from the PS in the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs. She wanted to know the reason I had not responded to her letter. "What letter?" I asked, "I have not received any letter from you." She was shocked. "But I wrote you weeks ago and it was marked urgent." Welcome to the real world, Madam, of Trinidad and Tobago. Not even the PM's office is respected by TTPost. The letter was delivered by hand.

A few weeks after the incident, I called a bank two blocks away from office to ask when I could expect a response to my letter.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have two more minutes.

Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation
(Decline in Service)
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Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye: I was told they had sent the response weeks ago. The widow for whom I was acting was desperately in need of the money in the estate.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have two more minutes.

Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye: I personally walked to the bank, retrieved the letter and was back at my desk in 10 minutes. Thank you, Sir. I suggested they could have tied the letter to the back of a snail.

Three years ago, I received an urgent phone call from a solicitor in London. He informed me that the judge hearing a case involving the adoption of a special needs Trinidad child was anxious to conclude the matter, but could not do so without the expert opinion I had been asked to provide. I informed him that I could not proceed without documents. He was shocked. He said, "I sent that package by priority mail weeks ago." He was incredulous. I was able to convince him, finally, that I had not received any documents. He agreed to scan the voluminous file and email it to me. On receipt of the document, I had to run my blood in the water to meet the court deadline. As I completed the opinion, the precious notice came to collect the package. It was battered and bruised as though it had come through World War III.

To add insult to injury, in this very Parliament yesterday March 23rd, I received a letter from the Ministry of Finance. It was dated January 25, 2021. When a letter takes about two months to reach the Red House from the Ministry of Finance, can this be deemed an efficient service?

It is not only on the business side that we have been hurt, you know, but also on the social side of our lives. I received a package from my bosom pal from my teenage days. She had long immigrated to the US, but we kept in touch. I was happy to hear from her. Soon my joy turned to sorrow, the packaged contained the

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programme from her husband's funeral. I looked at the postmark in disbelief, it had been mailed six weeks previously.

On December04, 2020, my daughter's mother-in-law died in Florida. I could not attend the funeral. I decided to send flowers to the funeral home. Around mid-February, I received a handwritten thank you note from the widower. I immediately phoned him and told him I had just received his thank you note. Now? "Yes, just this moment," I replied. It was postmarked December29, 2020. He is a native of Nigeria, and he told me it takes two weeks to get to Nigeria from Florida.

The level of service being provided by TTPost to consumers in Trinidad and Tobago belies its vision and mission. Did TTPost ever intend to live up to its vision and mission? Is it that the ball that all devoted students of Shakespeare's favorite play *Hamlet*, their favourite line is Hamlet's response to Polonius, when Polonius asked, "What do you read, my Lord?"

Mr. Vice-President: Senator—

Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye: And Hamlet's response was, "Words, words, words."

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, your time is up. Time is up. Thank you. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Mr. Vice-President, to use the words of my colleague Sen. Khan, I wish I could withdraw with serious injuries. My colleague, Sen. Thompson-Ahye has invoked our esteemed Senior Counsel Martin Daly, so I "doh" want to run afoul of him. Shakespeare, I cannot contest Shakespeare; numerous letter writers and other citizens who have laid these complaints at the feet of TTPost. "Ah doh" mind taking licks for myself, but I have taken a beating from Sen. Thompson-Ahye on behalf of TTPost. I am sure even my mother, who is in Rio Claro and loves to

receive her mail, has a story of her own.

The irony is that I was going through my own mail, and saw a letter from Dipnarine Rampersad & Company, dated 18 February, 2021, and it reached by me March 17, 2021. Mr. Vice-President, I would point to two separate issues. One relating to the changes in the industry, and the second one, undeniably, postal services have been affected by COVID.

So in relation to the first point, the fact is that the technology has led to decreasing volumes in traditional mail; the use of traditional mail, the volumes available and the structure of the postal corporation—the postal corporation having transitioned from the traditional public service post office/postal service arrangement, into a corporation, with the support of the Government of New Zealand and New Zealand Post, and then itself having to deal with the reduction in the need for its services.

So, Mr. Vice-President, long before COVID, in fact, in 2015, the standard delivery time for the delivery of domestic mails was two days. From 2015, TTPost revised that to three days. In 2018, a further revision was undertaken by TTPost, and that was driven by declining mail volume, and the delivery time was moved from three days to four days. So the fact is that TTPost has been making changes and we have now a longer delivery time as of 2018.

But, Mr. Vice-President, COVID has also had an impact. As a result of the lockdown, the restrictions in work and the restrictions in the working environment in terms of staff loading, and numbers and the activities, led to a 50 per cent reduction in the employees who turned out to work on a daily basis. It also led to restrictions on the operations in the shift environment, and the processing and delivery of mail.

TTPost tried, as far as possible, to manage and was able to provide support, for example, to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, to verify and deliver the grants which were available during the COVID period, that particular period, and was able to do some of that, but it is a fact that local delivery of mail suffered.

Mr. Vice-President, the international area suffered even worse, and that has to do with the unavailability of the regular arrangements relating to airline entry into Trinidad and Tobago , bringing the mails to Trinidad and Tobago and taking the mails out of Trinidad and Tobago . This situation is not unique to TTPost. In the Universal Postal Union, the United Nations agency that coordinates postal policies amongst member nations, has issued advisory notices on behalf of several other member countries like Canada, Antigua, New Zealand, Portugal, Jamaica and Barbados, advising of delays in processing and delivery of inbound and outbound mail, as a result of COVID measures taken around the world.

So, Mr. Vice-President, the current state is that TTPost says that with the exception of delivery of airmail, which accounts for 5 per cent of its mail deliveries, it believes its operations are almost back to normal. The airmail is normally facilitated by the commercial flights, but that continues to be significantly affected. TTPost tried to make arrangements for the delivery of airmail via cargo couriers, and it turned out to be at 10 times the normal cost of the airline arrangement. Furthermore, attempts were made, working with Jamaica and Barbados, to get mail into the UK, and that had to be curtailed with the appearance of the variant of the COVID strain in the UK, which meant that mail already in Barbados, for transmission to the UK, had to be returned to Trinidad and Tobago .

So, Mr. Vice-President, in conclusion, I acknowledge on behalf of the

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Minister of Public Utilities and TTPost that since 2015, there have been some changes—has to do with the reduced volume and the need to make changes. From 2018, the delivery time for internal mail was set at around four days, and with COVID there have been serious challenges on both internal local delivery, and the delivery out of Trinidad and the receipt of mail in Trinidad from outside. TTPost believes that things are almost back to normal in terms of internal delivery, but the constraints in relation to external mail remain the same.

I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark.

**National Tripartite Advisory Council
(Trade Unions' Withdrawal from)**

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. This matter on the Motion for the adjournment deals with the failure of the Government to address the concerns and decision of the trade unions to withdraw from National Tripartite Advisory Council, and the impact on industrial relations in Trinidad and Tobago .

Mr. Vice-President, the relenting assault and brutality visited upon the working class by this PNM administration, led ultimately to the resignation, withdrawal of the three trade union federations some time on March 11th. They withdrew from the National Tripartite Advisory Council, and they proffered a number of reasons for doing so.

The federations: the Federation of Independent Trade Unions and Non-governmental Organizations, FITUN; the Joint Trade Union Movement, JTUM, and the National Trade Union Centre, NATUC.

Mr. Vice-President, the Government, according to this particular body of federated unions, has really demonstrated a certain degree of disrespect. It started

when they withdrew sometime in 2017, when the Government unilaterally took a decision to shut down the Tourism Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago, leaving in its wake, instability in the tourism sector.

The Government followed up this decision when it closed down Petrotrin, under the guise of restructuring, leading to massive job losses, and social and economic fallout. The result of that not only led to a weakening of trade union representation, because the trade union was literally removed from that place, that is Petrotrin, because Petrotrin disappeared, and all collective agreements fell by the wayside.

Mr. Vice-President, during this period, the Government engaged in massive retrenchments at TSTT, UTT, as well as other state enterprises, and there are growing threats to job security at Lake Asphalt. What is becoming very clear is that the Government has taken a decision to undermine, compromise, subvert the trade union movement and, by extension, the collective bargaining process.

The Government has continued its merry way, no consultation with the trade unions on very important matters. For example, the purchase of the island ferries, namely the *APT James* and the *Buccoo Reef*, the sale of the *T&T Express*, all have taken place without any consultation with the recognized majority trade union.

6.45 p.m.

The Government has announced its intention to reorganize T&TEC, TSTT, TTPost and SWMCOL. Again, Mr. Vice-President, no consultation with the recognized majority unions or their federations. Then to compound this, we have had utterances, public utterances by the Minister of Finance which has been viewed as an attempt to violate the free collective bargaining process. This involves the failure of the Government to honour existing collective agreements

involving NIB, the Port Authority, as well as sanitation workers.

Mr. Vice-President, it has now become pellucidly clear that the Government's intention is to not only undermine, but to weaken the trade union movement to move towards, in many instances, the eradication of some of these unions in terms of the state enterprise sector. So the Government has disrespected the trade union movement, and the trade union movement has responded by resigning from the National Tripartite Advisory Council which by the way, Mr. Vice-President, was established sometime in 2016.

So I have brought this matter to the attention of the Senate today so that we can record our concern over the Government's decisions as it relates to its conduct and behaviour towards the trade union movement. Mr. Vice-President, if the Government continues along this destructive path, it will have serious and severe consequences for industrial peace and industrial relation stability in our country. And therefore it is important that the Government really reflects, take a deep look at its anti-worker outlook, its anti-trade union behaviour and begin to recognize the rule of law in the context of recognizing well-established international labour organizations, conventions and recommendations. Recognize at the same time, Mr. Vice-President, the Industrial Relations Act.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have two more minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: And, Mr. Vice President, the fines that are in the Industrial Relations Act for an industrial relations offence is too small. It is about \$4,000. The Government has brought legislation to penalize poor people through the demerit system and it has also increased fines in many other areas of the law. The time has come for the Government to pay attention to the continued violation and breaches of the Industrial Relations Act by rogue elements posing as employers in

this country. So the time has come for the Government to up the ante by amending the law.

And in closing, Mr. Vice-President, in the last six years this Government has brought no changes to industrial relations either to the Industrial Relations Act, to the Retrenchment Severance Benefits Act, to the Workmen's Compensation Act, to any amendment to the Occupational Safety and Health Act. Nothing has been done to improve legislation dealing with labour and labour relations and labour rights. So, Mr. Vice-President, I look forward to the Minister of Labour addressing this very important issue, and we look forward to action to stabilize the industrial relations front in our country. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Minister of Labour. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Labour (Hon. Stephen Mc Clashie): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I rise to respond to the Motion on the Adjournment raised by Sen. Wade Mark. Sen. Mark attempts to level allegations and I quote:

“The failure of the Government to address the concerns and decision of the trade unions to withdraw from the National Tripartite Advisory Council NTAC and the impact on the industrial relations in Trinidad and Tobago.”

Mr. Vice-President, let me commence by stating categorically that any such perception by Sen. Mark is unfounded. The tripartite process involves employers, organizations, trade unions and the Government to work together through mutual cooperation, consultation, negotiation and compromise with an ultimate aim of improving the lives and livelihood of our people through economic prosperity of our country.

The unexpected and sudden withdrawal of the labour sector bodies from the National Tripartite Advisory Council without as little as a forewarning was

definitely not as a result of any failure of the part of this Government.

On Tuesday March 09, 2021, two days before the unfortunate decision of the labour sector to depart, the 27th meeting of the council was held. Members exchanged views and ideas in normal spirit of comradery, congeniality and objectivity. We completed an agenda which covered a total of 30 very in-depth items and exited the meeting filled with expectation and optimism.

Mr. Vice-President, NTAC received official notification of the labour sector's resignation by letter dated March 11, 2021. The chair of NTAC responded on behalf of the council on Tuesday, March 16, 2021. The labour sector's concerns, the major concerns were as follows: One, Cabinet's lack of consultation with NTAC on national issues. Two, a perception of an attempt on the part of Government to eradicate the trade union movement and the collective bargaining process. Three, the claim that over the past five years NTAC has not developed a single policy perspective that impacts the socioeconomic development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me seek to bring some clarity to these issues, Mr. Vice-President. On the matter of the concerns regarding what is alleged to be Cabinet's lack of consultation with NTAC on national issues, the records will show that NTAC's labour sector social partners were party to the adoption of a broad outline mechanism to provide a greater level of interaction between the council and the Cabinet.

NTAC has been consulted on all major pieces of legislation namely, the amendments to the Industrial Relations Act, the Workmen's Compensation Act and the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act. Arrangements are being made, are being finalized for actuarial studies to be undertaken in search of a formula for

the payment of appropriate severance benefits. True, members may be at variance on the extent of the consultation, but it is also true that they were engaged in the development of legislative papers now before the Cabinet.

Mr. Vice-President, on the issue of allegations of an attempt on the part of Government to eradicate trade union representation and collective agreements, this is indeed proof of how far the human mind can be stretched.

In NTAC response to this allegation, the labour sector was reminded of their involvement in high level committees mandated to find solutions to national development issues, the most recent being the post COVID-19 Road Map to Recovery Committee. Their engagement in updating so many pieces of legislation, their representation on the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee, and the decision taken to bring NTAC including the trade union movement closer to the highest decision-making mechanism of governance. This is but a sample of Government's recognition of the value of trade unionism and as a consequence makes such an allegation, one without substance.

Mr. Vice-President, this brings me to the labour sector's third concern which stated, over the past five years NTAC has not developed a single policy perspective that impacts the socioeconomic development of Trinidad and Tobago. Contrary to what is being alleged, the council had made considerable progress. Cabinet has adopted NTAC's recommendation to enhance the overall level of productivity and work ethic in Trinidad and Tobago which is currently being implemented by the Ministry of Planning and Development.

In addition, Mr. Vice-President, on its way to Cabinet is NTAC's deep-dive strategy designed to ensure successful implementation of one-for-one recommendations of the post COVID-19 Road Map to Recovery Committee. And

by no means least, Mr. Vice-President, NTAC's recommendations to bring about a mutually satisfying, satisfactory resolution to the long outstanding public sector negotiation are on its way to Cabinet. Six leaders of the trade union movement are earmarked to be engaged in this exercise. This allegation against the council is also comprehensively refuted.

Mr. Vice-President, NTAC is at a crossroad. In addition to what I have just mentioned, this honourable Senate will be pleased to know that at the 27th meeting held on the day before labour's sudden and inexplicable withdrawal, all parties including the labour sector adopted the paper listing the wide range of national sustainable development initiatives which we proposed that the Cabinet should be referred to for NTAC consideration. It formed part of the mechanism for greater interaction with the Cabinet. Mr. Vice-President, the facts are clear and unambiguous.

Mr. Vice-President: Minister, you two more minutes.

Hon. S. Mc Clashie: Yeah. There is no justification whatsoever for the labour sector's withdrawal from NTAC, none whatsoever. Throughout the world, establishing a national tripartite body is not a straightforward and smooth undertaking as many perceive it to be. It is about bringing around the table three diverse national institutions, political, social and economic, traditionally confrontational toward and having low trust in one another. But we come together with great expectation and hope that somewhere and sometime along the way the social partners will settle down and become a collaborative and consensual institution that it is meant to be.

The period of time that it takes to achieve this varies all over the world. It takes time, tolerance, patience and mutual understanding which are social partners

striving for a better way for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but all hands must remain on deck. It is not for the faint-hearted, it is about perseverance, it is for those who are prepared to endure to the end.

So, Mr. Vice-President, in closing, NTAC's door remains open to the labour sector for it to return. It is the place where their expertise and their influence can be most constructively optimized. We await the opportunity to welcome them back. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Greetings

Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I now invite you to bring greetings of the occasion of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day to be observed on Tuesday, March 30, 2021. Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing.

Sen. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. It is my pleasure to bring greetings on the occasion of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day and on this the 70th anniversary of the repeal of the Shouter Prohibition Ordinance of 1917.

Mr. Vice-President, the Prohibition Ordinance of 1917 banned worship and practises of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist and made it a criminal offence for members of that faith community to assemble or meet. This institutionalized discrimination led to this faith community being systematically designated a social pariah according to Rev. Ingrid Ryan Ruben.

For 34 years for simply being thought to be too noisy, the Shouters were repressed. Shouters whose faith is indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago, Shouters whose faith is what that can be deemed Afro-Christian, a coalescence of Afro-spirituality brought here with our ancestors who were enslaved, and the

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Christian beliefs of the Europeans who brought them here. Shouters who sing, ring bells, dance and praise with passion and joy were prohibited from worshipping.

The thrust towards dismantling that systemic bondage took flight in 1940 when Mr. Elton Griffith petitioned the Legislative Council asking for the Ordinance to be repealed. It was not until 1951, many years later that that Ordinance was finally repealed.

Mr. Vice-President, this is our history, our Trinidad and Tobago history, and from our history we must learn. It took great faith, a faith to conquer seemingly insurmountable challenges, strength and courage of conviction for the Spiritual Shouter Baptist faith community to endure that repression and suppression.

This Government stands committed to supporting and helping elevate the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community not only through words but through deeds and actions. In 2020, the Prime Minister pledged \$10 million to the Baptist community's cathedral and its disbursement is ongoing.

Mr. Vice-President, it is no secret that a fundamental way of life in Trinidad and Tobago is the freedom to worship and the right to engage in the religious persuasion of our choice. Ours is a country that is diverse in many respects, and so as this faith community celebrates, our entire country celebrates.

It is my hope that as one people and one nation, that as we build this new society as envisioned by this Government that we too like our Shouter Baptist brothers and sisters will persevere through trying times and that perhaps knowing their story and in their honour we will be more tolerant and respectful of each other.

On behalf of the Government Bench, I extend warmest compliments to the national community and I say, happy worshipping to the Spiritual Shouter Baptist

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community. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Wade Mark: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, I am very happy to bring greetings to this Spiritual Shouter Baptist community on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. On behalf of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the alternative Prime Minister of this Republic, on behalf of the Opposition Bench, on my own behalf and that of my family, we today pay tribute to the warrior men and women of the Baptist faith who with resolution and determination refused to surrender in the face of massive discrimination.

Mr. Vice-President, their struggle and eventual victory should serve as a reminder that freedom is never given, you have to fight for it. It was under the former Prime Minister Basdeo Panday whose Government granted the first national holiday in honour of the Spiritual Baptists, a holiday which was promised but never delivered. The United National Congress consolidated this holiday by not only providing lands to the various Baptist faiths at Maloney, but proceeded to construct the first primary Baptist school in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the first secondary school, both were done under the distinguished leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Many may recall the part played by Archbishop Elton Griffith who was labelled champion for the cause. Mr. Vice-President, he led the campaign for the repeal of the Shouter Prohibition Ordinance. Today and on Tuesday 30th of March marks 70 years of the repeal of this infamous Ordinance in this country, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago may boast as being the only country globally to celebrate a public holiday for the Spiritual Shouter Baptist

community. I want to remind this Senate that locations such as Belmont and Morvant, just to name a few, were popular for hosting feasts and thanksgivings as expressions of gratitude to God for his blessings and after special occasions in members' lives such as success in an undertaking or recovery from illness.

Mr. Vice-President, in closing may I say on behalf of the peoples of this country, [*Laughter*] on behalf of the alternative Government of this country, and indeed on my own behalf, it is my honour and pleasure to extend to all members of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community warmest greetings of peace, love and blessings on this the 25th anniversary of the celebration of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community. [*Desk thumping*]

In closing, Mr. Vice-President, may I extend to you and to your family and to all my senatorial colleagues on the three benches happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. And I also want to extend to all members of staff of this Parliament and to the parliamentary police and their families happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Richards.

Sen. Paul Richards: For many—thank you, Mr. Vice-President. For many, Tuesday is just a holiday, but it is not just a holiday. Tuesday is the observance and celebration of the triumph and perseverance of the Spiritual Shouter Baptists in Trinidad and Tobago.

Tuesday is a celebration and observance of equality of treatment. Although slavery was officially abolished in 1834, many of the unjust, discriminatory and demeaning practices continued into the 20th and 21st Centuries. Imagine having to justify, fight for your culture, your ideology, your legitimacy, your very sense of identity. Imagine the struggle in the face of laws that said to you, your culture,

religion and identity is less than, base, unworthy, illegal even. Imagine the strength of spirit, character and level of belief in self and the tenacity it took to stand up for what you believed in, to stand up for your birth right. It must be applauded, celebrated, modelled and appreciated.

From 1917 to 1951, the Spiritual Shouter Baptist faith was banned in Trinidad and Tobago by the colonial government of the day. The legislation to enact the ban was called the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance passed on 16th of November, 1917. The reason given for the Ordinance was that the Shouters made too much noise with their loud singing and bell ringing and disturbed general peace. During worship participants danced, shouted, shook and fell to the ground in convulsions. Such behaviour at the time was deemed unseemly by the more traditional and conservative elements in society, also the established churches regarded such behaviour as heathenous and barbaric.

Although it was not said openly, the real reason for the antagonism toward the Baptists, was that many of their practices were of African origin. These African origins and associations were the shame and degradation of slavery and the large part of the population of Trinidad and Tobago that did not want to be reminded of this. These 34 years of prohibition were difficult for the Spiritual Shouter Baptists. It was when Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler emerged as a labour leader that the attitudes to what the Baptists gradually began to change. Butler himself was a devoted Baptist and controversial figure at the time.

1996 saw another victory for the Spiritual Shouter Baptists in their fight for recognition. The then Government the United National Congress granted them a special annual public holiday. The holiday is celebrated on the anniversary of the repeal of Shouter Baptists Prohibition Ordinance on March 30th.

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The lessons and message of the struggle of the Spiritual Baptist faith and worshippers is extremely applicable and valuable to us as a nation today. Belief in God and strength, belief in self, unity, perseverance and the importance of equality of treatment are the lessons. Let us apply these principles and practices to today's many challenges.

On behalf of the Members of the Independent Bench, I want to wish the members of the Spiritual Baptist faith a happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. And to the Members of this honourable House and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. [*Desk thumping*] In the words of Brother Resistance:

Ring the bell for freedom,

Ring the bell for justice,

Ring the bell for equality,

Ring the bells all over.

Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I too wish to join you in bringing greetings on the occasion of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. As we celebrate the destination, let us also remember what gave rise to the journey. The journey was sadly born out a lack of tolerance and respect for the Shouter Baptists. What allowed us as a nation to rise out of this dark period was the perseverance to those Baptists who fought to have the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance repealed and who never stop believing and practising in their faith. Let us never forget that in Trinidad and Tobago here every creed and race will always find an equal place.

I therefore wish on behalf of the Parliament to the Baptist faith, happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day, and to all of Trinidad and Tobago the same. [*Desk thumping*]

Easter

Mr. Vice-President: I now invite Senators to bring greetings to commemorate Easter celebrations 2021. Sen. Bethelmy. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Yokymma Bethelmy: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. As I rise at the sitting of the Upper House to bring Easter greetings on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, my mind constantly replays the re-enactment seen by many of us of the passion, and subsequent crucifixion of the son of God, Jesus Christ.

Mr. Vice-President, there was and there is no greater love or sacrifice than His. To sacrifice one's life for the greater good of all is the greatest gift of all. To make sacrifices for the greater good of all is a symbol of love, and it is this symbol of love for humanity that led to Christ laying his life down for us.

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, during this pandemic, we the Senators in this august Chamber, we the Government, we the people of Trinidad and Tobago, have all made sacrifices, all of which redound to the benefit of the greater good. Anyone who has truly adopted the mantra of putting country first during this pandemic would understand the true meaning of sacrifice. This Easter as we remember the sacrifices that Christ made for us, let us remember the sacrifices that we have made during this time. Less time spent with loved ones, doing more with less, and most importantly the disruption of many social norms during this era. As Christ rose from the dead on the third day, we must recall that he did so with much condemnation and disbelief by many. Today, this is my message to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, do not be daunted by the small sacrifices, the new normal or

even the fact that we must adapt to changes created to save our very own lives. Our ability to jump the sacrificial hurdle leans heavily on the behaviour of Trinbagonians during this season.

This Easter holiday, now more than ever, our country needs every citizen to be their brother's keeper. Our grandparents, neighbours and siblings, and even some of our immunocompromised citizens need you to make that sacrifice and be on your best behaviour. Mr. Vice-President, as enter this Holy Week into the Easter triduum, we reflect on this time during the pandemic. This, Mr. Vice-President, is an experience we will never forget. But, we are comforted for Isaiah, chapter 41 verse 10 tells us:

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Mr. Vice-President, this is my message to the population of Trinidad and Tobago that I have sworn to serve. For like Christ ascended, so shall we. Mr. Vice-President, on behalf of the Government, I wish the population of Trinidad and Tobago, the Christian community, my colleagues on the other side, and you, Mr. Vice-President, a safe and holy and wonderful Easter. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Jearlean John: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. I start this Easter greeting with a scripture verse which as children we had to recite for my grandmother. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16.

This widely quoted bible verse summarises the cornerstone of the Christian belief. Easter's message of renewal is especially meaningful now during this challenging period in our nation's history. Through his ministry and sacrifice, Jesus demonstrated God's unconditional love for us. He taught us the importance

of helping others and loving our neighbours. His selfless devotion and mercy provide a remarkable example for all of us. Next week there will be the observances associated with Holy Week activities, including Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday and Good Friday, which remind the faithful of the events leading up to Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and it is a chance for people everywhere to gather with family and friends to celebrate the power of love conquering death.

Our world these past few months has certainly undergone pain and suffering, from the pain of illness and instability to the emotional pain of isolation and missing the sacraments. We have truly been given our own crosses to bear. How we see our cross all depends on whether we are able to see past the fear of death to take hope in the resurrection. For Christians, the life and death of Jesus are the ultimate expressions of love, and the supreme demonstrations of God's mercy, faithfulness and redemption. Christ's extraordinary sacrifice and compassion continue to inspire people around the world. His promise of new life gives hope and confidence to his followers. His service and love for his neighbours offer a profound lesson for all people. Many traditions associate with Easter and have become a part of our Trinidadian and Tobagonian way of life. Although these customs may differ, the universal message of Easter draws all communities together.

Mr. Vice-President, on behalf of the United National Congress, I urge our brothers and sisters in this Senate and across the country to be mindful of some of the words of Pope Francis expressing his message for Lent 2021:

“In this time of Lent and especially during the pandemic be faithful and encouraged to speak words of reassurance to those feeling abandoned and isolated, and to help others to realize that God loves them as sons and daughters.”

Pope Francis wrote:

“It is only love that will enable humanity to rise above this time of increased isolation and build a civilization of love where effective paths of development are available for everyone.”

Have a happy Easter, Mr. Vice-President, and the rest of the Senate. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Charrise Seepersad: Thank you. Mr. Vice-President, in a few days the Easter weekend will be with us. Easter is so much more than bunnies, bonnets and baskets. It is about celebrating the resurrection of Jesus, and it is a time for Christians throughout the world to join together and give thanks for God’s unconditional love, compassion and understanding.

On this weekend Christians will also spend time in church following the Stations of the Cross as Christ is led to his crucifixion. The symbolism and message are universal in that faith conquers all and even in death this is hope. Easter is also a special opportunity for families and loved ones to come together and celebrate with one another. In family traditions there may be an Easter bunny, Easter decorations, lots of chocolates, and the simple meal of salted salmon and provisions. It is my honour to bring Easter greetings to this honourable House, and to Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of the Independent Bench. May you find hope, health, love and faith in God. Happy Easter. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, I also wish to join with you in bringing greetings to the Christian community and the nation in the celebration of Easter 2021. A commemoration of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, resulting in the fulfilment of God’s promise to us. This also symbolises that Christ was delivered over death for our sins and raised to life for our justification. The

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events of Easter lead us to realize that he so loved the world that he gave his only and one son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important day in the Christian calendar as it embodies not only the message of love, but one of hope and renewal of life. Christ rose for the dead because death could no longer hold him. As such, we must all strive to show love to one another as Jesus Christ and God loves us. It is through the repetition of the simple act of passing love on that we can truly reach our full potential. It is the capacity for love that God placed his faith in us and the realization of his that we put ours in him.

To all of Trinidad and Tobago, from the office of the Vice-President of the Senate, the President of the Senate, and this Senate, happy Easter. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.23 p.m.