



The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

---

Ministry of Public Administration

Speech by the Honourable Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan,  
Minister of Public Administration at a Function to Mark  
'Hindi Day' on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2012

Today is Hindi day so let me say to everyone here “Namaste”. What is interesting is that everyone here understands that it means “Welcome” in Hindi and it tells us how much Trinidad and Tobago is a multicultural marvel in the midst of increasing global parochialism and intolerance. We are a truly blessed society and much of this comes from the fact that we are a melting pot and not a tossed salad. Here the cultures of East, West, North and South mix and merge into a truly unique phenomenon that has already impacted on the culture of the world and is still evolving.

One of the major ingredients of the melting pot is the Indian heritage that still flourishes in our country. In a way it is also an African heritage since the original migrations that formed the different cultural domains started in Africa. However, each of these continents, Asia and Africa, and the sub-continental countries like India developed distinct cultures and rose to great heights in art, culture, language,

mathematics, technology development and astronomy. What I tell people is that while the term “under-developed” may be used by economists, in terms of culture there is no “under-developed” culture, no inferior culture, and no minor or major cultures. The rising tide lifts all ships. Every culture is a learning experience for all those who were not born into it. In the case of India, we share common experiences of colonialism and repression. Though vastly different in size and resources, we have similar aspirations for ourselves and our people – to improve their quality of life and their standards of living. To be sustainable and successful.

It was a long day’s journey into night for those who were first dragged to these shores - the Africans and Indians, the Chinese and the Portugese. Although geography still separates us, technology is binding space and time at blinding speeds and bringing us even closer together.

Tonight we are here to acknowledge, honour and celebrate Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Day. All of us may not speak a word of Hindi beyond “Namaste” or “Shuub Divali” but we mutually benefit from India’s technical prowess, wizadry in fact when you consider the strides the country has made, and from its economic development.

India is the seventh-largest country by area in the world. It is the second-most populous country and has over 1.2 billion people. It is the most populous democracy in the world. It is also an economic powerhouse and has one of the fastest growing economies. According to the World Bank, the Indian economy is the world's tenth-largest by nominal GDP (meaning that its GDP has not been adjusted for inflation) and third-largest by purchasing power parity. In other words, we cannot compete with India in economic terms, but we can cooperate. At the same time we can share our insights, our culture and our unique lifestyle.

The economic and social ties between our two nations has existed since May 1845 and today, 167 years later, these ties flourish and grow even stronger, not just because of Bollywood, or “Zee” Television, or the Indian Premier League Cricket, but through exchanges that take place in technology and economic issues that pass virtually unnoticed, but not unwelcome or insignificant.

The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation as a feature of its global technical cooperation policy has produced opportunities for developing countries to share in India's successes over the sixty years of its existence as a free Nation. I have been to India and will visit again next month and have seen for myself the extent to which we benefit from the many opportunities for technical training and development that India offers to us and other

countries. We have started to use the training opportunities offered by India and other countries to fill the “gaps” we envisage in our human resource capacity to cope with our future development needs. This is one of the key features of this Government’s strategy for the future. One of our major development pillars is to have a more diversified, knowledge intensive economy-building on the native genius of our people.

However, the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago and India is complemented and deepened by many other supporting agreements. These include:

- The Bilateral Air Services Agreement (BASA)
- A Technical Cooperation Agreement in the field of Education
- A Programme of Cultural Exchanges for 2012-2014
- A Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of Traditional Medicine, and
- A Memorandum for setting up a Chair on Ayurvedic Medicine at the University of the West Indies

These agreement are underpinned by trade between the two countries which, in the period 2010-2011, amounted to US \$119.96 million. Products such as petroleum-crude, drugs and pharmaceuticals, iron and steel, garments, rice and other food stuff were all traded.

However, in this age of information or the era of knowledge workers, my primary concern as Minister of Public Administration is to profit not just from India's technology, but also its experience in managing the growth and development of a totally indigenous public service. Like India, the Trinidad and Tobago public service was born when the country became an independent nation and again like India, we cannot become citizen-centric or attain excellence in service delivery without the use of ICTs or Information and Communications Technologies. We know that public sector Modernization and renewal cannot be achieved without the application of technologies that will provide access to all our citizens to the goods and services provided by the public sector and the only way we can make these services cheaper, faster and more accessible is by using to the fullest the evolving ICTs.

The Joint Research Council of the European Commission has been extremely high in praise of India's ICT development. In a recent report it says, "The Indian ICT industry is contributing to the national economic development in many ways and almost all states in India are targeting the ICT sector as a vehicle for economic development." The report quotes Nobel Laureate Professor Amartya Sen who said, "It is not that the IT industry should do something for the country at large, for that it does anyway. It makes enormous contributions: it generates significant income for many Indians; it has encouraged attention to technical excellence as a general

requirement across the board; it has established exacting standards of economic success in the country; it has encouraged many bright students to go technical rather than merely contemplative; and it has inspired Indian industrialists to face the world economy as a potentially big participant, not a tiny little bitplayer... rather, is that it can do even more, indeed in some ways much more. This is because the reach of information is so wide and all-inclusive, but also because the prosperity and commanding stature of the IT leaders and activists give them voice, power and ability to help the direction of Indian economic and social development”.

If anyone was unwise enough to question the significance of ITEC and ITEC day, this is the answer. India is way ahead of us in ICTs and we have been handed on a platter the opportunity to profit India’s experiences, India’s technology and India’s expertise in growing these technologies and the business aspects of these technologies. We want to use ICTs as India did and is doing, for economic success, for business success and for public service transformation. They all go together, all complement one another, and are all important to our future.

We are already on the information super-highway though not at the same level and extent as India. In our own way, my Ministry, the Ministry of Public Administration or MPA, is trying to take full advantage of the technical cooperation

training programmes being offered by countries such as India, Japan and Singapore, as well as by international donor agencies. There are many such opportunities in a variety of fields, and while we are making sure that we publicise them through our Scholarships Website. We are also using new or “push” technologies, such as e-mails, instant messaging, online chats and blogs to get disseminate notices of training courses offered. We are trying to reach and encourage persons to apply for these externally offered training awards. Traditionally, we issued memoranda to Permanent Secretaries and depended on the receiving agency to circulate the information. Using this approach, it takes a long time to reach interested parties and by the time MPA receives the nomination from the Ministry or Department there is not enough time to process the request with the donor country or agency. This is not an efficient way of doing business in the information age. We still send out the memoranda, but increasingly we are going outside of the formal channels by using the Communications Units of the various Government entities to circulate information via email as well as other social media mechanisms already mentioned. We are also examining the feasibility of getting a LISTSERV started. This would be a mechanism where we collect the e-mail addresses of persons external to the public service who are interested in being notified of such training opportunities. These are small steps using the available technology, but they are important in that they demonstrate our willingness and readiness to embrace change and to share information.

Let me return briefly to where my Ministry wants to go with public sector transformation. In this year of our golden anniversary of independence, we have launched our 'Gold to Diamond' thrust. The major underpinning of this initiative is Human Resource Management modernization. We recognise that we must modernise our Human Resource Management function to ensure that public service agencies have the required human resources to deliver a 21 century public service. This means revising our organisational structures to ensure that we have modern and relevant jobs that are consistent not just with our present needs, but with our future development as a public service and as an independent nation.

We are improving our Human Resource systems and processes to ensure that we recruit the right persons for these new jobs. What is important is that we are broadening and deepening the professional streams both at the managerial and support levels and simultaneously creating opportunities for persons who are within the system to aspire towards promotion to the higher levels. Training is the key that will unlock the opportunities for advancement. In terms of training, our Public Service Academy or PSA is the entity that works closely with the High Commission to disseminate information on ITEC Awards. The Public Service Academy has also been trying to move more and more towards using applied learning. It is a process we have already started using in our Leadership Training programmes. Essentially what we

are trying to do is to combine on-the-job training in a real work, real time environment with academic studies and all within a controlled learning environment. Course objectives are not merely for the classroom, but also for the workplace. These courses are necessarily longer, but we value learning that is internalized and the opportunities we choose are increasingly meant to be developmental and designed for public officers who require hands-on and practical training to advance their work and upgrade their skills.

I wanted to end as I begun. Let us join our Indian hosts in celebrating Hindi Day. Hindi is the second-most spoken language in the world and according to UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon during the 8<sup>th</sup> World Hindi Conference at the United Nations in 2007, “Hindi is a language of harmony and understanding.”

There has certainly been harmony and understanding between Trinidad and Tobago and India and, in fact, there are many programmes and activities to support the growth of Hindi as an additional language. These include:

- Hindi classes at 7 centres across various parts of the country over the last 18 years

- Support for socio-cultural organizations through grants, dissemination of reading material and software
- Two Hindi Samman (awards) given every year, one on Hindi Day and the other on World Hindi Day
- Regular workshops for training Hindi teachers are conducted by the High Commission, where guidelines are given to Hindi teachers on methods and techniques of language learning, and
- Experts from India are invited to hold seminars and programmes to discuss various aspects of the language as a heritage language and its modern day use.

The important thing now and in the future is to grow even closer to India as it helps to illuminate the way ahead for us and for many other developing countries. In this context, it is important for as many of our citizens who want to and see the benefits, to learn to speak Hindi. It will always be useful to you and to our country's development.

In closing, I would like to thank Your Excellency and the members of staff of the High Commission of India for their

on-going efforts to help the development of our country and its people. You are all true representatives of your country and, at the same time, true friends of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.