

**Statement to be delivered by Senator the Honourable Dennis Moses
Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad
and Tobago in celebration of the 69th Republic Day of India on
Saturday, January 27, 2018**

I am pleased to address you this evening as we join the High Commission of the Republic of India in celebrating the 69th Republic Day of India. I do so not only in my own capacity but also on behalf of Prime Minister Dr. the Honourable Keith Christopher Rowley and the Government and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ladies and gentlemen, on August 15, 1947, India, once known as the 'brightest jewel in the crown', gained freedom from British Rule. However, the independent republic of India was officially born on January 26, 1950, with India cutting her last ties to Britain with the enforcement of the Constitution of India and India's first President, His Excellency Dr. Rajendra Prasad, replacing King George VI as the country's Head of State, making India the world's largest democratic republic. Trinidad and Tobago is indeed proud and honoured to commemorate this day and pay homage to the great Indian leaders and freedom fighters including Mahatma Gandhi, Lala Lajpath Rai and Lal Bahadur Shastri, among others.

Since that faithful day sixty-nine years ago, India has become known for excellence in sport, culture, literature, innovation, information technology, its pharmaceutical industry and space programme. Undeniably, there is much to applaud when speaking about the achievements of India.

Ladies and gentlemen, Trinidad and Tobago and India have a long standing relationship, which goes back for more than a century with the arrival of the first group of Indian Indentured labourers, who brought with them the rich culture of their motherland. The relationship between our two countries continued to deepen and I am pleased to say that India was one of the first countries to formally establish diplomatic relations with Trinidad and Tobago in 1962.

In reflecting on our diplomatic relations a particularly memorable event comes to mind, that of the historic visit to Trinidad and Tobago by the late former Prime Minister of the Republic of India, the Honourable Indira Gandhi. The visit took place on October 11, 1968, just shy of fifty (50) years ago, on the invitation of Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister, Dr. the Rt. Honourable Eric Eustace Williams. During her visit, former Prime Minister Gandhi remarked, and I quote, "I have come across the ocean from a city – New Delhi, which is very far apart from your beautiful city. But in today's world, distance hardly counts. There is a bridge linking our two countries, a strong bridge of friendship. I hope it will forever remain strong," end quote. Her words continue to ring true today.

In the years that have followed, that bridge has certainly been fortified through fruitful bilateral engagements including the negotiation and implementation of numerous bilateral Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to facilitate technical cooperation and collaboration in areas such as agriculture, culture, education, health, tourism and trade. In this regard, Trinidad and Tobago, for example, has benefited through the

Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, which provides training to our nationals in various fields including information technology and energy and environmental management. There have also been a number of cultural exchanges with visits by Indian artists to Trinidad and Tobago and our artists travelling to India. Most recently a ten (10) member Uttar Pradesh Folk Dance Group “S.G.K. Sanskratik Kala Samitee” visited Trinidad and Tobago from December 7 to 12, 2017. The Group’s final performance was at the Central Bank Auditorium where the dancers shared the stage with a local pan side, thrilling the audience. It was a fine demonstration of the unique cultural fusion between our two countries.

Accordingly, people-to-people contact through exchange-visits has become a significant means of maintaining our relationship. In fact, we have had a number of High-Level visits from India such as the visit of General Vijay Kumar Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs responsible for Latin America and Caribbean, which took place from April 25 to 28, 2017. More recently, a number of Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentarians were invited to New Delhi to attend the First Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) - Parliamentary Conference. The Conference was held on January 9, 2018 on India’s celebratory day called Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas (PBD) that acknowledges the contribution to India by persons of Indian origin (PIO) overseas.

Ladies and gentlemen, the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago and India has also met with success at the multilateral level, at which we have collaborated on major issues of common interest such as United Nations reform, sustainable development, climate change and other environment-

related matters, as well as combatting violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations.

Notwithstanding all that has been accomplished, there is always room for growth. In this regard, Trinidad and Tobago looks forward to continued cooperation with India and to strengthening the bonds of friendship between our two great nations in the years ahead for the mutual benefit of our peoples and future generations.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in conveying best wishes for the continued prosperity of the Government and People of the Republic of India on the occasion of the 69th Republic Day of India.

Thank you.