



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Finance

SPEAKING NOTES OF THE

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MINISTER OF FINANCE

DIVALI NAGAR

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THEME: "LOKA SAMGRAHA"

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INTRODUCTION

[Salutations]

Aap ko mai pranaam kartaa hoo.

(I pay my respects to one and all.)

It is a profound honour to stand before you tonight, here at the Divali Nagar: a place that, year after year, serves as the vibrant centre of culture and spirituality.

TRIBUTE TO THE NCIC

I want to begin by paying tribute to the memory of the late Senator Deeroop Teemal, former President of the NCIC.

Senator Teemal will be remembered as someone who was committed to public service and ensuring that our traditions continued to inspire national pride and spiritual reflection.

His legacy will live on in every deya lit, and in every act of seva performed in the name of culture and faith.

May his soul find eternal peace, and may we keep his spirit alive by nurturing the light he so passionately kindled.

For decades, the NCIC has carried the torch of heritage, of service, and of unwavering devotion to community and this year is no different.

Let me take this opportunity to extend sincere congratulations to the National Council of Indian Culture and its esteemed President, my friend and brother Shri Surujdeo Mangaroo.

Through your organisation's leadership and tireless efforts, the Divali Nagar has grown into more than just a premier global event - it is a living symbol of unity, tradition, and pride.

You all have created a space where our customs are not only showcased – but also celebrated.

A space where people of every creed and race can come together, to experience the uniquely Trinbagonian essence of our local Divali observances, while sharing in the warmth of camaraderie.

For this and much more, I offer my deepest thanks.

Thank you for your vision.

Thank you for your commitment.

And thank you for this extraordinary contribution to our nation.

LESSONS FROM SHRI RAM'S RETURN

Among the reasons for celebrations during this auspicious season, devotees around the world gather to commemorate a moment etched onto the core of our Hindu faith, the long-awaited return of Lord Ram to Ayodhya after fourteen years of voluntary exile.

His journey was not merely one of distance, but of profound trials, deep sacrifice, and an unwavering commitment to *Dharma* - to righteousness.

Shri Ram walked the path of virtue, even when it was steep... even when it was difficult.

And when he returned, the people of Ayodhya did not simply welcome a king. No.

They welcomed the amplification of justice, optimism, and of authentic leadership rooted in service.

The lamps that lit up the kingdom were not just flames of celebration upon the triumphant return of Shri Ram.

That light heralded the advent of Mother Lakshmi into the world to boost prosperity in all its forms.

They were flames of hope.

Symbols of renewal.

A declaration, that the light of *Dharma* stood victorious over the darkness of injustice.

And let us not forget - Shri Ram did not sustain Ayodhya by himself.

It was bolstered, glorified, and uplifted by the love of his family, and the devotion and the tireless effort of its people.

Each person had a role to play.

Each citizen took responsibility.

Each family member contributed.

And together, they built a city that became a model of peace, prosperity, and good governance.

This is the legacy we inherit.

And it is one that the Honourable Prime Minister has instilled in all her Ministers: to put God in front, and we walk behind.

This is the spirit we must carry forward: that when we unite in purpose, guided by Bhagwaan, we too can build a society worthy of celebration.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AS OUR AYODHYA

My friends, tonight let us reflect on this lesson.

This land - Trinidad and Tobago - is **our** Ayodhya.

Our ancestors, may have arrived here on different ships, and they all bore unimaginable hardship, but they carried with them the values of resilience, sacrifice, and devotion to family and community.

With those values, they transformed

- cane fields into communities,
- barracks into villages,
- and adversity into opportunity.

Like the citizens of Ayodhya, they too lit their deyas - deyas of hope, survival, and faith in a brighter future.

Today, it is our duty to uphold that sacred responsibility.

To build Ayodhya right here - a land of righteousness, justice, opportunity, and prosperity.

THIS is our Ayodhya.

CALL TO THE DIASPORA

When Shri Ram, Sita Mata, and Lakshman returned from their exile, it marked a joyous homecoming: brothers were reunited, husbands embraced their wives, and mothers were once again with their sons.

In that divine reunion, the house of Raghu was bathed in the light of unity, and the family stood whole.

Today, as we gather in Trinidad and Tobago, we took too long for such a reunion.

Just as the citizens of Ayodhya celebrated the return of their beloved, we aspire to cultivate a spirit of togetherness and shared purpose among our fellow citizens: to bridge divides, strengthen our bonds, and work hand in hand to build a future that reflects the harmony and prosperity we all envision.

And it is not just **resident** Trinbagonians I wish to see united.

Across the seas, live thousands of our sons and daughters - the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora.

They are scholars in London, doctors in New York, teachers in Toronto, entrepreneurs in Miami, engineers in Dubai, and professionals in every corner of the globe.

To you - our brothers and sisters around the globe - I say this:

Your exile is over... and your Motherland... your *janma bhoomi* calls for you to come home.

Just as the people of Ayodhya longed for Shri Ram's return, Trinidad and Tobago longs for yours.

Tonight, wherever we gather in the glow of Divali - the Festival of Lights, we are reminded of the power of light over darkness, of knowledge over ignorance, and of hope over despair.

And in that spirit, I say to you:

Whether you were born **on** our twin isles, or born **of** them;

Whether your feet once touched the soil of Trinidad or Tobago, or your roots reach back through the memories of your parents and grandparents;

If you are proud to call yourself a Trinbagonian, then know this:

Your nation beckons to you.

Your homeland - by birth, by blood, or by bond - bids you return.

Not just to a **place**,

But to a **promise**.

Bring **your light back** to the land that raised you - or **raised those** who raised you.

Let your light shine upon these shores, whether for the **first time** or for the **first time in a long time**.

Raise up this land - with your vision, your gifts, your presence.

Return to your Trinbagonian roots;

Whether they lie in the hills of Trinidad, or the shores of Tobago,

In the scent of Divali delicacies by the deya's flame,

In the songs and stories of your childhood,

In the vibrations of prayer,

In the celebration of culture that lives on proudly in all of us,

Two islands.

One people.

Bound by history and heritage.

United by optimism.

This is your **time**.

This is your **home**.

And **you** are part of this family.

So as the diyas burn bright this Divali, **let us rise together**.

And let the world see what **can be built**, when a people, scattered across the globe, come home to **light up** and **lift up** their nation.

Let us, like the family of Shri Ram, stand together once more - united in love, in faith, and in purpose.

For when children of the soil return, when the absent hearts of our diaspora beat once more with the rhythm of this land, Trinidad and Tobago will shine brighter.

Our family will be whole again.

The exile of **necessity** and **circumstances** have kept many of you away, but your skills, your resources, your networks, your experience, and your love for this land are vital for our nation's renewal.

Now is the time to come home.

Come home:

- to invest,
- to teach,
- to mentor,
- to share your experiences,
- and to help us build a Trinidad and Tobago that will shine as a beacon in the Caribbean and the world.

We are asking you to stand shoulder to shoulder with your brothers and sisters here, to light deyas not only in foreign lands, but right here, where your navel strings are buried.

Let us build a homeland that we can proudly pass on to our children.

And in the decades to come, when our descendants rest beneath the shade of trees we once planted as seedlings, they will speak with pride of the **homecoming generation**: the generation of a family reunited to ignite a new era of hope, prosperity and rectitude.

THE NATIONAL VISION: BUILDING AYODHYA TOGETHER

The Ramayana teaches us that one of the reasons, Ayodhya was great, was because it was built upon a foundation of *dharma*.

Likewise, the greatness of our Trinidad and Tobago must rest on a few pillars:

1. **Justice and fairness**, so that no citizen feels left behind.
2. **Prosperity for all**, where opportunity is not the privilege of a few, but the right of every citizen.
3. **Unity in diversity**, where race, religion, and economic circumstances do not divide us, but enrich us.
4. **Service to humanity**, where we measure success not by what we accumulate, but by how many lives we uplift.

This is not just a dream.

This is the plan, and it is within our reach.

But it requires all of us:

- citizens at home and abroad,
- young and old,
- Man and woman,
- Hindu, Muslim, Christian,
- every creed and race

answering the call of *Loka Samgraha*, both **within and beyond** our shores.

CALL TO ACTION

So tonight, as we light our *deyas*, let each flame carry a pledge.

A pledge to banish the darkness of corruption and greed.

A pledge to illuminate the path of fairness and opportunity.

A pledge to unite as one people, one family, one nation.

Let us build our Ayodhya right here in these blessed isles.

Let us show the world that a small nation, with a big heart, and a united people, can achieve greatness.

And to our diaspora - come home, help us build, help us shine. The doors of Ayodhya are open, and your homeland awaits your return.

CONCLUSION

On this sacred night, may Mother Lakshmi bless us with exponential growth;

May Shri Ram inspire us with righteousness, and may each of us commit to the welfare of all humanity – the *Loka Samgraha*.

Together, let us light the way forward.

Together, let us build Ayodhya here.

To the **artistes and creative icons** who delight us with their stunning performances and productions every Divali - I honour you as the torchbearers of a rich and ancient culture.

To the **business entities** whose generous support and investment in the arts, contribute to preserving our festivals, traditions, and shared values,

I salute your commitment to corporate social responsibility and for helping to sustain our nation's cultural life.

To our **revered pundits, gurus, and religious teachers**, I am truly grateful for your invaluable wisdom, guidance, and the care you provide in overseeing our rites and rituals.

May you continue to carry the banner of *dharma* with courage and pride.

To **our nationals - both at home and abroad** - every time you perceive our beloved Trinidad and Tobago, may your hearts brim with the same love and devotion that Shri Ram felt for his Ayodhya.

Once more, congratulations to the NCIC for your enduring vision and service in making Divali Nagar possible, year after year.

Your efforts remind us that with commitment and unity, we can preserve our culture, strengthen our identity, and inspire our nation.

Shubh Divali to all!

Jai Shri Ram!

And long live Trinidad and Tobago!