

COMMENTARY

Why still pay TTRA employees?

THE EDITOR: The new UNC government repealed the TT Revenue Authority (TTRA) Act. But the TTRA hierarchy who were already hired before the repeal are still within the Ministry of Finance. Taxpayer dollars still pay their salary? I ask this question of Finance Minister Davenandranath Tancoo: Why still burden the taxpayers with salary expenses for them?

The TTRA was a political entity with the top officials receiving in excess of \$150,000 per month. If the organisation was established under a previous administration's policy agenda or political vision that is no longer aligned with the current government's priorities, continuing to fund it undermines democratic accountability.

Each government is elected on its own platform and is expected to allocate resources consistent with its policy objectives. Funding legacy entities that no longer serve the current administration's goals wastes taxpayer money on outdated or irrelevant initiatives.

Many organisations created by past administrations may have been politically motivated or established hastily without proper feasibility studies or governance structures. Before continuing payments, the current government should assess whether these personnel are legally constituted, effective, and still necessary. Continuing to fund an entity that lacks clear value, performance metrics, or transparency could perpetuate inefficiency or corruption.

Governments have a duty to ensure that public funds are used efficiently and transparently. Paying bills for the TTRA – including staff wages – that may no longer be operational, relevant, or producing measurable results contradicts sound fiscal management. Instead, funds should be redirected toward current national priorities or more impactful programmes aligned with present needs.

The current administration should not automatically inherit financial responsibility for organisations and related personnel created by a previous government unless those entities continue to serve a clear, lawful, and strategic national purpose. Otherwise, continued funding represents poor governance, weak accountability, and a misallocation of public resources.

NIZAM GANGA
via e-mail

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The frontline players of Dixieland Steel Orchestra play Jamtown which earned them third place among the large conventional bands. PHOTO BY ALVA VIARRUEL

Celebrating our diversity, strengthening our unity

AS THE GLOW of deyas lit our streets last week and now the sounds of parang fill the air, Trinidad and Tobago once again finds itself in the middle of our most festive time of year. The Divali and Christmas seasons remind us not only of faith and tradition, but also of what it means to live in a society where many cultures, beliefs, and histories intertwine to form one national identity.

Every few months our calendar reflects the beautiful diversity that defines us. We celebrate Divali, Christmas, Eid-ul-Fitr, Hosay, Emancipation Day, Phagwa, Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day, and Indian Arrival Day, among others. Each occasion brings its own rituals, colours, and meaning, but all share a common thread: they unite us as a people. In workplaces, schools, and communities we share in one another's celebrations, tasting the food, exchanging greetings, and learning about traditions that may not be our own. That openness is what keeps the fabric of our nation strong.

At the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), this spir-



it of inclusion and respect is at the core of our work. The Equal Opportunity Act, Chapter 22:03, was established to promote equality of opportunity and to eliminate discrimination based on seven protected status grounds: race, ethnicity, origin, religion, marital status, sex, and disability. The act recognises that everyone, regardless of background or belief, should have an equal chance to participate fully in the life of the nation, whether in employment, education, access to goods and services, or accommodation.

When we celebrate each other's festivals, we practise the very principles that the act upholds. A workplace that recognises Divali by allowing staff time to observe the festival, or one that shares a Christmas lunch inclusive of all faiths and dietary needs, demonstrates equality in action. Respecting diversity doesn't mean merely

acknowledging it; it means creating spaces where differences are valued and no one feels excluded or disadvantaged because of who they are or what they believe.

The EOC continues to promote this message through public education, sensitisation sessions, and advocacy across TT. These efforts help citizens and organisations understand how discrimination can occur, sometimes unintentionally, and how to build environments that reflect fairness and mutual respect. For example, ensuring that religious observances are accommodated reasonably in the workplace, or that cultural symbols are treated with sensitivity, contributes to a more harmonious society.

As we move from Divali into Christmas, it's worth pausing to appreciate how unique our national experience is. Few countries can claim such a rich blend of cultures coexisting peacefully. It is not by accident but by a collective choice to respect and learn from one another. That spirit of mutual respect is also what the Equal Opportunity Act seeks to protect.

The commission's role is

Historically and geographically, we are the closest to where the drugs are coming from...I think we have a different reality in TT. We are drug-ridden, cartel-ridden, gang-ridden, and therefore our approach will have to be different.

– Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar in response to Caricom's zone of peace statement



not only to address complaints of discrimination but also to encourage understanding before conflict arises. By fostering awareness and dialogue, we aim to prevent the kinds of divisions that can emerge when people feel unseen or disrespected.

So, as the lights of Divali fade and Christmas decorations go up, let's celebrate with renewed appreciation for our differences and what they represent: the freedom to believe, to express, and to belong. Every festival is an opportunity to live out the values of equality, empathy, equity and unity that the EOC promotes every day.

In TT, diversity is not a challenge to overcome; it is our greatest strength. When we embrace it fully, we create a society where everyone feels included and valued, a true reflection of the vision behind the act.

From all of us at the Equal Opportunity Commission, may the seasons of light, love, and togetherness inspire us to continue building a nation where equal opportunity is more than a law; it's a way of life.

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