

# **Transcript – Prime Minister Rowley hosts Divali Luncheon**

**Date:** Wednesday 26th October, 2016

**Venue:** Diplomatic Centre, St. Anns

**Notes:** “Even with our divisions of ethnicity, race, religion and geography, the rest of the world does not live as we do in Trinidad and Tobago. In this country we are fortunate to fellowship together and while we may not be perfect, we do very well in living and prospering together.” So noted Dr the Honourable Keith Rowley in his greetings to those gathered for the Divali luncheon, hosted by the Prime Minister and Mrs Sharon Rowley at the Diplomatic Centre today, Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016.

The Prime Minister also reminded his guests that national festival, such as Divali, show the strength and veracity of the words of our National Anthem, “Every creed and race find an equal place”.

Also speaking at the function was Shri Deeroop Teemal, 2nd Vice President of the National Council of Indian Culture, who elaborated on the deeper meaning of well-known Hindu mantra, Om Asatoma, which is frequently chanted at Divali celebrations. Shri Teemal highlighted that the mantra encourages a movement from a focus on the external to greater attention on our inner spiritual nature.

Opening blessings were read by Dharmacharya Pundit Uttam Maharaj. Dancer Alana Rajah and the melodious sounds of Mr Kaveesh Maharaj and his band entertained guests during the lunch. The afternoon’s celebrations closed with a dramatic performance of an excerpt of the Ramayana by the members of the National Ramleela Council and the infectious beats of the Champion Riddim Tassa Group.

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Permit to acknowledge the presence of the Speaker of the House, which is Bridgid Annisette George, The President of the Senate, Ms Christine Kangaloo, Members of the Cabinet, Members of the Lower House, Members of the Senate, Permanent Secretaries, Members of the Clergy Of the Hindu Faith, Members of Religion All, all Leaders all fellow citizens, thank you very much for accepting this invitation to join us for lunch during this period of our celebration of Divali which we, in Trinidad and Tobago accept not as a religious festival but a national festival. I think the last time we had a Divali dinner.

On this occasion we thought to have a lunch because when we look at the schedule, on your schedule, today was the most appropriate day to gather as citizens of this Republic. To acknowledge and to celebrate our diversity our strength and I want to thank the speaker for his intellectual discourse, Mr Teemal, and taking us to those depths of the teachings of Hinduism and other bases, which are the foundations of our culture, our religion, our ethnicities and our Trinidad and Tobago.

It is now one o'clock and I have invited you to lunch and I am sure you didn't come here to hear me make another speech. But you've come here to meet us to have lunch and I simply today want to draw to your attention how fortunate we are in little Trinidad and Tobago to be able to fellowship in the way that we do and take for granted. When we only have to look at the rest of the world and see the way they do not live like we do in Trinidad and Tobago.

We are a society 1.3 million people of huge division. But those divisions are based on differentiations of ethnicity, race, religion and even geography. But at the end of the day we must not sell ourselves short. We must admit that even though we are not a perfect nation and we are not a perfect people, we do very well in living and prospering in harmony.

Trinidad and Tobago is home to all of us and to most of us, it's the only home we have and it's just not the house, it's the living between the walls, between the borders of Trinidad and Tobago. As we go forward Divali after Divali, let these celebrations be reminders to us that we are one people and we enjoy each other's culture and we enjoy each other's success.

So today, as we participate in the vitals prepared for us by those who have prepared this lunch for us, lets us thank them all and as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and behalf of my wife and my family, we are particularly happy to have you all here on this occasion and we thank all those who organize this celebration. We thank the musicians, we thank the cooks and those who brought us here and at the end of it I trust that we will leave fortified in our belief that in Trinidad and Tobago we don't only say it, we live it. Every creed and race finds an equal place and we respect and love each other.

Enjoy your lunch and Shubh Divali.

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