



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

For immediate release

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MEDIA RELEASE

Unprofessional and Biased Reporting by the Media on the Global Forum 2024 Bill

On Friday September 13th the Minister of Finance led a debate on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Global Forum): Bill, 2024 that involved both Government and Opposition. On Saturday September 14th and Sunday September 15th, the *Trinidad Newsday and Trinidad Express* carried coverage of the debate and astonishingly reported the Opposition's false allegations in the debate in full, without reporting the comprehensive rebuttals made by the Government.

In five stories entitled *"Saddam: Minister would be privy to taxpayers info"*, *"Saddam chides Imbert over new tax law"*, *"Kamla hits Government for 'disrespect' over Blacklist Bill"*, *"Penalty now one-time fine of \$10,000 and Imbert: Bill will get Trinidad and Tobago off of EU Blacklist"*, two veteran journalists, in the Newsday and the Express, running counter to good journalistic practices of fairness and balance, carried the contributions from MPs Hosein and Persad-Bissessar respectively and only published the technical and explanatory clause by clause introduction to the debate by the Minister of Finance, but did not publish the rebuttals by the Minister of Finance and other government Ministers in the debate to the misinformation and falsehoods uttered and perpetuated by the Opposition.

MP Hosein in his contribution, as reported by dailies, accused the Minister of Finance of subterfuge claiming *"In 2017 you agreed, after that joint select committee, to remove the minister as the competent authority and insert the BIR. And now, surreptitiously, you go back on that particular position and place the minister as the competent authority."* Yet, the Minister of Finance's response that "

However, the Minister of Finance pointed out that *In all of our 13 double taxation treaties some of which go back 50 years and still subsist to this today, the competent authority is named as the Minister of Finance or his authorised representative.*

That was so throughout the five years and three months of the UNC government. The Minister of Finance also pointed out that in the 2017 US Tax Information Exchange Agreement, also known as FATCA, even though in the domestic legislation the competent authority was defined as the Board of Inland Revenue based on an unreasonable demand from the Opposition, in the actual FATCA Agreement that was executed with the United States, the competent authority is defined as the Minister of Finance or his designated representative.

Minister Imbert made it clear that designating the Minister of Finance or his representative as the competent authority for tax information exchange agreements is the global standard and established practice in almost every country, but none of this was published by either the Newsday or Express, who tumbled over themselves to publish a one-sided UNC version of events, which was replete with factual errors and falsehoods.

Further, Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar, in a weird attempt at conflation during her debate contribution, insisted that the Global Forum Bill was somehow interlinked with the UK's new Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) and that Trinidad and Tobago now requires a visa to travel to the UK. That assertion from the Opposition Leader is a most egregious lie and rather than also report the factual response of the Minister of Finance who clarified that the ETA is not a visa and is in fact a digital travel permit system and advance passenger information system that allows the UK government greater oversight of its borders for travellers who already have visa waivers such as ours, the Newsday and Express chose instead to publish the foolishness posited by the Leader of the Opposition.

A simple Google search by the two newspapers would have revealed that the ETA is a new system being applied by the UK Government to all countries that do not require a visa to visit the UK, including the USA, Canada and all EU countries, among many others, totalling almost 90 countries, yet the Opposition Leader falsely insinuated that the ETA is a sanction placed on Trinidad and Tobago because of our status with the Global Forum and the Newsday and Express reported her false and misleading statement as if it were factual, without any analysis or determination of the truth.

The Leader of the Opposition also falsely claimed that the legislation will allow police officers for the first time to search people's homes for documents. Minister Imbert debunked that falsehood as well and showed that the existing anti-crime laws have allowed police officers to search premises for documents with a warrant approved by a Judge for over 15 years. That rebuttal was also not published.

What Friday's debate and the weekend media reports have demonstrated is that neither the Opposition nor the media are prepared or inclined to do their respective jobs, and the media is quite happy to publish lies without checking the true facts.

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The Honourable Colm Imbert M.P.
Minister of Finance