FEATURE ADDRESS

By

The Honourable Maxie Cuffie, MP

Minister of Public Administration & Communications

"Internet of Things: Smarter Living in the Caribbean"

Hyatt Regency Hotel

April 24th, 2017

Salutations:

Hon. Melford Nicholas, Minister of Telecommunications, Broadcasting and Information, Antigua and Barbuda

Senator the Hon. Darcy Boyce, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office with responsibility for Energy, Immigration, Telecommunications and Invest Barbados, Barbados

Hon. Catherine Hughes, Minister of Public Telecommunications, Guyana

Dr. Alison Gajadhar, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Economic Development, Housing, Urban Renewal, Transport and Civil Aviation, St. Lucia

Ms. Bernadette Lewis, Secretary General, Caribbean Telecommunications Union

Ms. Teresa Wankin, Secretary General, Caribbean Association of National Telecommunications Organisations

Ms. Diane Quarless, Chief of ECLAC Sub-regional Headquarters for the Caribbean

Mrs. Joan Mendez, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, Trinidad and Tobago

Other Permanent Secretaries

Directors of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Dr. John Prince, Chief Executive Officer, Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Cleveland Thomas, ITU Caribbean Representative

Representatives of Regulatory Authorities

Speakers

Other distinguished guests

Members of the Media

It is both a privilege and a pleasure for me to be present with you today at this Forum on the Internet of Things. I wish, first of all, to thank the International Telecommunications Union for its decision to locate this discussion here. This I take to be acknowledgement of the importance that this government gives to the notion of ICT preparedness and the emergence of the Internet of Things.

Trinidad and Tobago used to be known as the oil rich republic of the Caribbean region. But as we prepare to surrender that title to our Guyanese neighbours, the Government is committed to diversifying our economy away from the dependence on fossil fuels. At the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, which has responsibility for telecommunications and ICT, we have embraced the slogan "data is the new oil".

More than a decade ago, Clive Humby made headlines when he declared that "*data was the new oil.*" It is a great metaphor as, just like oil in its rawest form, data is almost useless. But when it is refined it can be turned into something much more valuable. With the amount of data that we are all producing today, we believe we are sitting on a huge reserve of untapped wealth in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean.

The term 'Internet of Things' had been coined by Kevin Ashton since 1999, as he searched for a better way to track inventory. It now references a phenomenal leap forward in the manner in which we can engage each other, or in the manner in which we can improve our connectedness and connectivity, by processing and refining data.

With every passing day, technological developments are changing the way we think, and possess the potential to change, as well, the way we behave, and the way in which we can progress as a society.

It is my understanding that this forum seeks to highlight the significance of IoT as a technical revolution that represents the future of computing and communications. I am certain that your explaining to the wider public, through this Forum, that IoT involves the interlinking of networks, devices and data that have, thus far, never been linked, would certainly generate a great deal of interest among a tech savvy population, where internet use and smart-phone penetration remain amongst the highest in the region.

There is no doubt that Broadband internet is becoming even more widely available in Trinidad and Tobago, and more devices are being created with Wi-Fi capabilities and sensors built into them. This level of potential connectivity presents then, the perfect storm for the mushrooming of IoT and we believe that data is indeed the new oil.

What it means therefore is that there is the increasing capacity to connect any device with an on/off switch, to the Internet and to each other. Think about the possibilities of your alarm clock waking you up at 6:00am, then almost simultaneously notifying the coffee maker to start brewing the morning coffee, turning on the water heater, and waking up the children as well, as you prepare to leave the house in your driverless car.

For those of us in Government and in private industry, we understand the collective power of these formerly disparate elements, which lay at the heart of the power of IoT. Imagine for a minute, your office equipment being able to automatically re-order supplies when the inventory is almost depleted.

In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, the possibilities of predicting traffic flows, of determining which routes are less congested, and of gauging the weather, are all aspects of enhancing the quality of life enjoyed by citizens. It can even improve the crime detection rate by assisting in the tracking and conviction of criminals.

Greater and more effective use of this kind of smart technology has paid handsome dividends for many countries.

Medellin, Colombia for example, once the international symbol of drug wars, was chosen as the City of the Year by the Urban Land Institute in 2013, for its turnaround into a high-tech hub, promoting civic engagement and innovation. We believe the same is possible in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean.

The reality, ladies and gentlemen, is that IoT allows for virtually endless opportunities, but it is not without its challenges, the most critical of all being security. The guarantee of information remaining secure becomes questionable, when billions of devices are being connected together, and this is not only about your toaster or coffee maker going rogue.

The IoT also opens up companies all over the world, to even greater security threats than what they currently face.

Think of the possible implications of national security data or financial data being hacked into, because of the possibilities opened up by the IoT.

Still, it is into this realm of seemingly limitless possibility, presented by the IoT that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago wishes to locate itself. And we do so this morning, by giving the organizers of this forum, our friends in the ITU and our regional counterparts, the assurance that we will do whatever is necessary, on our part, to ensure that IoT is embraced as widely as possible, in increasing the operational efficiency of Government.

Ladies and gentlemen, you will recall that when we gathered last July, in this same place, for the Broadband Caribbean Forum 2016.

I shared with you Government's intention, as articulated in our manifesto and budget documents, to launch a broadband strategy that will bring the internet into the home of every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago. I intimated to you then, that as part of a wider policy to increase exponentially the level of broadband access by citizens, the government has committed to providing a free island-wide public broadband wireless network.

We are aiming to do this my friends, because we remain convinced that this singular policy will enhance meaningfully, the quality of life enjoyed by our citizens, opening up vistas of possibility for those with ambition and purpose, to realize dreams they once thought unreachable.

One of the knock-on effects of this policy, we believe, will be a reduction in internet rates. There can be no disputing the fact that an island-wide broadband system will allow access to goods and services, at reduced rates, because the Internet ecosystem is based on competition.

Our intention then, as it is now, is not to usurp the role of the private sector in leading the internet revolution in Trinidad and Tobago, but to play the role of facilitator in this exercise.

Cabinet is now considering a refining of our ICT road-map *fastforward II*, which sees a component of this facilitative role as ensuring the provision of ICT infrastructure. Our ICT infrastructure must be continuously upgraded and enhanced to keep in stride with the country's growth and development path.

In an era where ICT is burgeoning and influencing every sphere of life, the potential of ICT as a development tool rests on its ability to, not only transform how our citizens conduct day-to-day activities and how they access information, but also how public and private entities operate and deliver services as well.

In that regard, the Government's initiatives will be concentrated on strengthening the strategic and effective use of ICT to facilitate fast and efficient delivery of public services, as well as the growth of business.

Ladies and gentlemen, all of this is necessary because we have identified the ICT sector as one of the pillars for the diversification of the national economy.

We believe Trinidad and Tobago is ideally placed to encourage and receive investments in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector, with the attendant benefits of providing employment and generating foreign exchange.

BPO has been stigmatized in some quarters as largely being about low-level and low-skilled, rote work. In fact, BPO is an industry that is highly dependent on advanced information and communications technology (ICT), generates significant revenue (much of which is retained in the country of operation to cover operational expenses), and is an integral component of the business operations of many other industry sectors.

I am happy to say that Trinidad and Tobago is now being considered a major centre for business process outsourcing.

There could be no greater evidence of this than the recent announcement that global mining and energy powerhouse BHP Billiton has moved its North American Petroleum Accounting and Reporting functions from Houston, Texas, to Port of Spain.

By relocating accounting services from Houston to Port of Spain, BHP Billiton (which is headquartered in Australia) will be exporting accounting services from Trinidad and Tobago to the USA and other countries in the region.

They add to RBC and Scotiabank, which are already utilizing BPO services in Trinidad and Tobago, and discussions are ongoing to attract more companies in the financial services and energy sectors.

Two weeks ago, officials of Amazon Web Services, the world's largest provider of cloud services, visited Trinidad and Tobago to explore business opportunities.

What was not announced, is that Amazon already has a toe-hold in Trinidad and Tobago by partnering with iQor, the business process outsourcing provider, to provide its services to Amazon from new offices, located in Barataria, that will be dedicated to Amazon. This is in addition to iQor's offices in the Tamana In-Tech Park, which already serves US telecom providers Sprint and Metro.

The Barataria location will see iQor moving up from not just voice, but also SMS, on line chat and, of course, email in due course. This will make them an employer of over 1,000 nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, you understand why I say, "data is the new oil".

Three weeks ago, Cabinet approved an offer from the Government of India, to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Public Administration and Communication, for the establishment of an ICT Centre for Excellence and Innovation in Trinidad and Tobago. Consideration is being given to locating the Centre in the Tamana In-Tech Park.

The Centre will bring Indian training and expertise in ICT to Trinidad and Tobago.

Ladies and gentlemen, these two pieces of the puzzle which I have identified, – the development of an island-wide broadband strategy and the reprise of the Government's role as facilitator in transforming the ICT landscape, are not occurring by chance.

The developments at Tamana and Barataria are just the first green shoots of our data-driven diversification efforts.   They are, in fact, located within the wider context of an overall plan for the development of Trinidad and Tobago – Vision 2030.

Vision 2030, which is securely nestled in the principles previously outlined in Vision 2020, builds the pathway to the future that will transform Trinidad and Tobago into a developed country, sustaining growth and development and optimising the quality of life of all citizens.

By 2030, we anticipate that most public and private sector organizations will provide free wireless internet hotspots, most people will bank on the internet, and more routine transactions between persons and the government will be via the internet. In short, ladies and gentlemen, the Internet of Things will be in full swing.

In concluding, I have no doubt that your discussions over the coming week will provide tremendous food for thought on how we can progress technologically as a society. It would be remiss of me though, if I did not sound one note of caution. In our desire and exuberance to explore and implement fully the Internet of Things, let us always be mindful that those who are affected are people first. Let us never sacrifice personal interaction for technological connectivity.

Let us never become as cold and unfeeling as the machines that allow us to accomplish so much. And may we always remember that the machines were made to serve humanity, not the other way around.

I truly wish you a rewarding and extremely fulfilling week of discussions and I look forward to learning the outcomes of your deliberations. I thank you.