

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Powering to the next level

A maturing oil and gas giant with a vast resource of young, energetic, educated and experienced people determined to take their nation to the next level

The largest oil and natural gas producer in the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago has been involved in the petroleum sector for more than 100 years. A key driver of economic growth throughout the last century, the country's energy exports in 2022 were valued at \$9.78 billion and accounted for around 80% of all its exports.

With the sector holding such importance, the recent approval from the US government to waive ongoing sanctions against Venezuela and allow Trinidad and Tobago to develop Venezuela's Dragon gas field, which contains 4.2 trillion cubic feet of the hydrocarbon, has taken on extra significance. The country now has the opportunity to import Venezuelan gas and convert it into liquefied natural gas (LNG) for the downstream petrochemical and LNG sectors, thus helping secure jobs, create foreign exchange and continued business opportunities.

Prime Minister Keith Rowley lauded the deal and hopes that further cooperation in the region can come to fruition, saying: "In today's economic environment, investments in enabling infrastructure and technology can be costly even to the point of being prohibitive. Trinidad and Tobago has the energy infrastructure to monetize hydrocarbon resources produced by its Caribbean neighbors and can do that now. Not only does the country possess 10 ammonia plants, but we have seven methanol plants, four LNG plants and an iron and steel complex."

The deal was also another example of the strong ties between Trinidad and Tobago and the US, with the Caribbean country exporting \$4.3 billion of goods to the US in 2021. "We are reinforcing the closeness, strength and depth of our more than 200 years of friendship and cooperation," said Candace Bond, US Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago when the Dragon field agreement was announced.



Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Keith Rowley with President Biden and the first lady

"We share Trinidad and Tobago's urgency in contributing to global energy and food security. We have listened to the government's message that it has the capacity and willingness to ameliorate economic and humanitarian crises around the region and the world."

A transformative moment for the region's energy security as Venezuelan supply is brought back to the global market, the deal also proved that the US has continued confidence in the leadership of Trinidad and Tobago and its impressive infrastructure.

Leveling up across the board

While the energy sector continues to play an important economic role, with a growing focus on developing renewable energy sources, the government has also identified numerous ways to move the country forward. Under the guidance of Rohan Sinanan, Minister of Works and Transport, there are plans to invest heavily in infrastructure and make the country even more accessible. This covers everything from major road construction projects to upgrading Piarco International Airport — with the construction of a new \$200 million terminal — and overhauling the country's ports.

There is also a growing focus on digitalization across a variety of public utilities, from

using the latest technology to track issues with water supply to ensuring the best possible solutions are deployed across its vast telecommunications network.

KEITH ROWLEY PRIME MINISTER

"Trinidad and Tobago has the energy infrastructure to monetize hydrocarbon resources produced by its Caribbean neighbors and can do that now."

Trinidad and Tobago wants to lead the way in the Caribbean when it comes to utilizing technical solutions and digitalizing the economy. Driving this charge is the Trinidad & Tobago International Financial Centre, which has been mandated to improve financial inclusion, the acceleration of digital payments and the creation of a fintech hub.

Embracing fintech is especially important when it comes to leveraging innovations in robotics, blockchain and even artificial intelligence. This can lead to groundbreaking tech-

nology solutions such as peer-to-peer transfers and robo-advisory services, which can gather information through automated algorithms and choose the best investments.

Investing in the future

This digital future is being firmly embraced by Trinidad and Tobago's leaders, which matches the interests of so many young people in the country. There are more than 300 students a year graduating with a degree in technology and the government want to ensure that this talent is not lost to other countries, but is instead utilized on home soil.

Such is the commitment to providing improved education to its young people, the government allocated a sum of \$1.1 billion to the Ministry of Education in its 2022-23 budget — the single largest allocation to any government ministry, including health and national security.

This comes as no surprise as Trinidad and Tobago has always been willing to invest in its human capital. And under the guidance of Prime Minister Rowley, there remains a want and desire to make sure the collective skills and knowledge of the next generation continue to drive the country forward in a truly exciting manner.

Embracing innovation through collaboration

Keeping domestic energy competitive and on a sustainable path has been brought into focus as the country looks towards the future

When the global pandemic impacted energy markets around the world, the government in Trinidad and Tobago quickly realized that there could be crippling consequences for the economy and immediately took action. There was a need to assess the long-term future of the energy sector and ascertain how the country could move toward a more sustainable future.

One of the people entrusted with this mandate was Stuart R. Young, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister. He held talks with oil and gas companies, petrochemical companies and important players in the field as the country looked to improve the revenue received from the monetization of its hydrocarbon resources.

"We see natural gas as a transitory fuel in the movement to a low-carbon economy and we continue to be a strong advocate for its continued use for the future," says Young. "As part of our carbon mitigation strategy, we are pursuing carbon sequestration capture and utilization and the introduction of hydrogen into our energy mix. A key driver to achieving this objective is the establishment of renewables as part of the energy mix."

"My goal is to keep the domestic energy sector competitive and on a sustainable path by ensuring we keep abreast of developments in the global industry. Our efforts thus far have been fruitful in turning around the sector and in achieving increased revenues for Trinidad and Tobago."

"We have also undertaken a study to determine the potential of offshore wind on the northeast coast of Trinidad and Tobago. The intent is to use the energy to drive a hydrogen economy. We are working with the energy companies including the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago on adopting technology and measures to eliminate greenhouse gases and methane gases."

**MARVIN GONZALES
MINISTER OF PUBLIC UTILITIES**
"The negotiation with BP Lightsource Shell will result in the solar plant generating 119 megawatts of power from renewable energy. That is a major achievement."

A history-making deal

Another form of clean energy has also come into focus in recent months after a host of government ministries and agencies were able to finalize a deal with a major international conglomerate for the construction of the largest solar plant in the Caribbean.

"The negotiation with BP Lightsource Shell will result in the solar plant generating 119 megawatts of power from renewable energy. That is a major achievement," explains Marvin Gonzales, Minister for Public Utilities.

"The construction of that major, massive so-



Marvin Gonzales
Minister of Public Utilities



Stuart R. Young
Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and
Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister

lar plant will commence this year and will be completed in 2024. All of that will assist our transition to renewable energy. The result of that means that every molecule of gas that is generated in the energy sector will now become available to sell to our petrochemical industries and our international customers, as opposed to utilizing our limited gas resources to generate cheap electricity."

Trinidad and Tobago has traditionally had low electricity rates thanks to the country generating and producing gas, but Gonzales feels there must be a change in order to ensure a high level of service and incentivize people to make the move to renewable energy sources.

"We are working with the Regulated Industries Commission to adjust the tariff for electricity, which would allow the electricity company to get enough revenue to undertake massive investment, as well as routine and preventative maintenance on their transmission and distribution grid," he says.

"It would also facilitate that transition to renewable energy and incentivize citizens to invest in solar energy and wind, as well as to conserve the amount of energy we consume on a daily basis. That is also going through some major transformation."

Looking to the future

In order to be successful with its renewable energy goals, the government has also

recognized the need to develop homegrown talent that can work within the sector. That is why the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission has launched a number of training programs aimed at people who have just left school.

"They will train for two years and then the electricity company will have a pool of young engineers and young linesmen. They will have highly trained people upon which they can draw for employment within the organization," reveals Gonzales.

"Some of those people may go and undertake private engagements, work for private companies, or set up their own private companies, but most of them will get permanent employment within the electricity company and the commission."

While this major transformation may take some time, Trinidad and Tobago are determined to lead the way when it comes to renewable energy in the Caribbean. The country has set a target of 30% of electricity to come from renewable sources by 2030 and there are strategies in place to move away from fossil fuels toward clean hydrogen in the future.

"We are on the cusp of major transformation," states Gonzales. "In fact, it is already underway. We recognize the direction we are pursuing and many of our international partners have traversed that road already. Therefore, support is sincerely welcome."

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO FACTS



World Leading Petrochemicals Industry: Trinidad and Tobago is one of the only places in the world producing petrochemicals including; LNG, Methanol, Urea, Ammonia all in one place.



Top 3 in the world: Trinidad and Tobago is among the world's top 3 exporters of Ammonia globally.



World's largest: Natural deposit of asphalt, the La Brea Pitch Lake holds around 10 million tons of asphalt. One of the world's only three known asphalt deposits.



US Trade ties: Trinidad and Tobago's main exports partner is the United States, accounting for around 52 percent of total exports.



World's Highest: Trinidad and Tobago is home to the highest number of bird species per square mile in the world.

A growing focus on green energy security

The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited is leading the charge toward building a decarbonized energy sector

Incorporated in 1975 as a wholly owned state energy company, the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (NGC) has played a pivotal role in expanding the country's gas-based energy sector. It has also catalyzed the social, economic and industrial development of the country through its investments, strategic partnerships and pioneering gas pricing model.

NGC owns, maintains and operates the country's transmission and distribution gas pipeline network of approximately 1,000 kilometers, comprising both offshore and onshore segments and with the capacity to supply 4.4 billion standard cubic feet of gas per day. However, over the course of almost fifty years the company and its subsidiaries — today, the NGC Group of Companies — have evolved into a global business entity with an asset base of over \$6 billion.

Its many successes notwithstanding, the NGC Group was not immune to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The entire global energy sector was hit hard in early 2020, with restrictions imposed by world governments seeing millions of people confined to their homes. As a result, energy demand plummeted and prices fell.

This led to NGC recording a loss of \$2.1 billion for the financial year ending December 31, 2020. However, thanks to a rebound in prices, a series of strategic decisions and hard negotiation of contracts, the group made a strong recovery to record a profit of \$2.6 billion by the end of the 2021 financial year and it was rated as Ba2 stable by Moody's in 2022.

A strong recovery in 2021

Explaining how the group was able to successfully navigate its way through the difficulties of the pandemic, Mark Loquan, president, NGC, points to the institutional framework that was put in place throughout 2020 and 2021.

"During 2021 there was a resurgence of prices and unfreezing of industrial demand but we also signed some major contracts," says Loquan. "We have a better foundation for the future and we are strengthening the institution with asset integrity and in many other areas."

Expanding on the factors that led to profitability, Joseph Ishmael Khan, chairman, NGC, adds: "Right now the NGC Group of Companies is focused on value creation and building oper-



Joseph Ishmael Khan
Chairman
National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago



Mark Loquan
President
National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago



Vernon Paltoo
President
National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago

ational excellence in all aspects of the business. That is possible because we put a lot of emphasis on capacity building, institutional strengthening and a focus on human capital. If we didn't focus on human capital, we couldn't achieve a sustained competitive advantage in this operating space. And if we were not organized then 2021 may have had a different outcome, even though commodity prices were high."

Part of the discussions that took place during the pandemic resulted in the development of a new strategic plan for the future. Initially looking ahead to 2025, there is now a clear focus on pivoting to sustainability and green energy. Within this, NGC has created a sustainable investing initiative to facilitate investments in clean energy — including the investment of \$6 million of its international portfolio in BlackRock Global Funds' Sustainable Energy Fund.

A greener, carbon-free future

NGC is also looking far beyond 2025, according to Vernon Paltoo, president of the National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago, a subsidiary of NGC that is mandated to conceptualize, promote, facilitate and develop sustainable energy-based industries. He says that, as one of the world's largest ammonia and methanol exporters already, the nation has the infrastructure to be able to transition to a green hydrogen economy.

"While natural gas will continue to play a critical role, the country is moving toward building a decarbonized energy sector," he states. "Trinidad and Tobago has always succeeded in staying one step ahead by understanding that the future is based on renewable energy. And because we already have such an established petrochemical industry, we have a market for hydrogen from methanol and ammonia. By having that market we are already ahead as we have the infrastructure in place — which gives us a unique advantage."

In fact, Paltoo strongly believes that Trinidad and Tobago could even begin to export hydrogen. He adds: "We have set out a hydrogen roadmap and we estimate that the country's offshore wind capacity is sufficient to produce 4 million tons of hydrogen per year."

"The country would need around 2 million to meet its own needs, which leaves us with an additional 2 million that we could export throughout the region. In the next 20 or 30 years, we could well become a hydrogen exporter, not just to the region, but to the rest of the world."

Leading the way to regional opportunities

With Trinidad and Tobago home to one of the largest natural gas processing facilities in the Western Hemisphere — the NGC Group's Phoenix Park Gas Processors complex — gas has

been integral to the economic development and the energy security of the country for decades. And while the focus is now on transitioning to green energy, the NGC Group of Companies continues to assess ways in which it can provide the islands with greater and greener energy security. This area has taken on extra significance for the global group, having witnessed firsthand the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the energy industry throughout the world.

Khan is a strong believer that Trinidad and Tobago must work closely with other Caribbean countries to ensure a bright, secure energy future and the NGC Group of Companies is now leading the way when it comes to opportunities for green growth across the region.

It has even set up an online clean energy portal that provides information on available opportunities, financing and planning within the Caribbean, as well as detailing market and technology developments.

"If we work together we form a much stronger entity than on our own," Khan says. "If we can forge a regional partnership in terms of energy security, we are less vulnerable when it comes to natural disasters, pandemics and conflict in other parts of the world."

"Partnership, knowledge transfer and technical assistance are a big part of how we share in this regional strategy for energy security, energy sustainability and the green transition."



The future use of green hydrogen in Trinidad to produce ammonia and methanol is inevitable

Bringing local products to the global stage

There is much more to Trinidad and Tobago than oil and gas, as leading food manufacturer and distributor ABIL is demonstrating

Established in 1974, Associated Brands Industries Limited (ABIL) has developed into one of the biggest business success stories to emerge from Trinidad and Tobago. The company is now the leading manufacturer and distributor of snack foods, chocolate confectionery, biscuits and breakfast cereals in the Caribbean and its wide range of branded products are distributed to more than 30 countries worldwide.

Having initially started out as a chocolate company, ABIL has expanded progressively over the years by regularly adding new products to its lines and continuously looking to enter new markets. The company has always been export-oriented and was quick to establish a foothold in the region by setting up distribution operations in countries such as Jamaica, Barbados and Guyana.

For the first 30 years of the company's existence, the focus was on penetrating markets within the Caribbean. However, there remained a determination to gain a footprint in other regions and opportunities to reach new customer bases are eagerly grabbed as soon as they arise.

The firm's first extension outside of the Caribbean came through a joint venture with a local partner in Malta and, today, ABIL does business as far afield as Ireland, Jordan and Taiwan. This expansion of operations has seen the company rapidly grow and it now has four manufacturing plants in Trinidad and Tobago and employs more than 2,800 people around the world. "First of all we set up distribution in Barbados, St. Lucia and Jamaica. We rented warehouses, bought trucks and put management in place so that we could ship and distribute our products," explains Nicholas Lok Jack, CEO, ABIL.

"This remains a core part of our business and, in the last six years we have accelerated that business model. We now have distribution hubs in Guyana, the Dominican Republic, Panama and Miami."

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, ABIL continued with its expansion efforts and built a cereal factory in Bogota, Colombia. "We saw an opportunity in the Colombian market. The factory is now up and running and we feel we can pick up a good market share," says Lok Jack. "We recently inaugurated a new



Nicholas Lok Jack
CEO, Associated Brands Industries Limited

snack factory in Malta as we look to increase our supply. The market in that country has now become big enough to require an expanded factory with state-of-the-art equipment.

"This will allow us the capacity to supply more European markets. As we go ahead, we want to penetrate more markets in this manner and to consolidate around Colombia, Panama and the Dominican Republic, where we have our own distribution centers and our own people on the ground."

Exploring the US market

In recent years ABIL has secured a foothold in the Middle East with its products now distributed to the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The company also entered a third European market — in addition to Malta and Ireland — in 2021, when the signature candy bar from its Charles Chocolates division, Catch, began to be sold and distributed within Cyprus.

At the launch of its latest European extension, Minister of Trade and Industry Paula Gopee-Scoon said: "A chocolate such as Catch entering a new business market in Cyprus is a great accomplishment for not only ABIL, but for us as a country. We feel extremely proud of this new venture and I know the company has been working tirelessly to increase its presence internationally." While the company aims



ABIL recently acquired the OCHO brand

to further enhance its offering in Europe, Lok Jack is also keen for ABIL to conquer the US market. "Internationalizing the business is vital and if you're going to be considered a global player then you've got to be strong in the developed world. That means the US," he says.

"We have to make sure the company is in the right position to support a thrust into that market, but that's why we are starting with distribution in Miami, which will be the tip of the spear for entering and properly understanding how the market works."

One step into the US has already taken

NICHOLAS LOK JACK
CEO, ASSOCIATED BRANDS INDUSTRIES LIMITED

"It's vital that we remain customer focused and are always innovating with new products."

place, with ABIL acquiring the OCHO brand. Originating from Oakland, California, it specializes in producing organic chocolate candy bars and is already an established player in the organic and fair trade market.

"The OCHO product is different as it is not only organic, but it is more of a Swiss-type of Bon Bon chocolate," explains Lok Jack.

Building brands

Over the course of close to 50 years, ABIL

has developed an extensive portfolio of more than 200 products that are marketed under the brand names Sunshine Snacks, Charles Chocolates, Devon Biscuits, Sunshine Cereals and Universal Cereals. Nevertheless, the company is always looking to explore new areas and makes bold decisions when it comes to diversifying its ranges.

This is helped by Lok Jack having grown up in the company that his father, Arthur Lok Jack, founded. Having worked in departments such as merchandising, sales and even supermarkets, he has become comfortable in making critical decisions. And he believes that organic products have a lot of potential moving ahead.

"We're now looking at plant-based products and eco-labels that are good for the planet," he states. "It's important we understand this growing market as plant-based demand is here to stay and it has very engaged followers."

"Internationalization and product innovation are the two main areas we are concentrating on, so it's important that we understand the different markets' demands. Ireland, for example, wants chocolate to be milky and sweet, while Taiwan has a preference for low sugar."

"Therefore, it's vital that we remain customer focused and are always innovating with new products. We recently developed fully plant-based caramels with no dairy or milk under the OCHO brand, for example, and it's innovation such as this that we want to continue pushing."



NGC+ENERGY = A Sustainable Future

Our journey began with a pipeline and a dream.

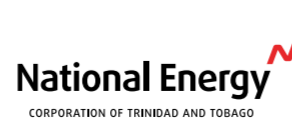
We took an underutilised resource and created exceptional national value.

NGC is now up to the challenge of transforming our business for the evolving energy landscape.

This means optimising the value of our core business in natural gas while transitioning into the green energy space.

NGC will endeavor to implement a sustainability vision by:

- ✓ Reducing our carbon emissions/footprint
- ✓ Supporting T&T's targets for Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)
- ✓ Exploring green investments and financing
- ✓ Pursuing partnerships for sustainable development
- ✓ Investing in carbon capture, energy efficiency and green hydrogen



MEMBERS OF THE NGC GROUP OF COMPANIES



What's Inside Counts!



Delivering improved transport connectivity

Trinidad and Tobago is investing in its airports, sea ports, roads and ferries to strengthen links between the islands and to ensure the country remains a hub for logistics

In the following interview, Trinidad and Tobago's Minister of Works and Transport, Rohan Sinanan, explains how serious investment in infrastructure will make the country even more accessible.

You became Minister of Works and Transport in August 2020, what have been some of your biggest challenges and greatest achievements since taking office?

When I came into office, the country was facing a collapse in the price of oil and gas, so it was a very challenging situation. We had several major projects ongoing and we had promised the country we would improve our infrastructure. So as a ministry, our challenges were how we restart the construction sector and continue the projects that we have promised the population with minimal financing.

I think the highlight has been the fact that we were able to start three major highways all at the same time using a competitive tendering process with local contractors. For the first time we had local contractors dominating the whole construction sector. We also introduced a new system where we had the licensing office, courts, police and more on one single platform.

In addition, we introduced technology to improve the usage of our roads, which brought road fatalities down in 2022 to the lowest figure in 65 years. This was a significant achievement.

What are your plans for land, sea and air transportation in the next 10 years?

The last national transportation plan we had as a country was in 1967, so we championed the need for a new national plan and we got approval from the cabinet for that last year. Coming out of that plan, we will develop a roadmap for connectivity, not only for Trinidad and Tobago but for all the way up the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) islands.

We are working on the needs of the future and if we have to assist some of the other CARICOM countries as well then it is to the benefit of the region. The whole idea of infrastructure is to bring everybody together and to facilitate trade. There are discussions taking place with regional heads to come up with a solution for inter-island travel. We are working with them to see how we can get

that program going so trade, especially the agriculture sector's products, can move from island to island. It's easier to get from some of the islands to Trinidad and from there to Guyana than it is to go straight from those islands to Guyana, for example. That's why we play a key role in how trade is facilitated between the islands and the continent.

What are the highest priority projects with an allocation of public funds?

Right now, we are working on a major infrastructure upgrade of the entire road network from several aspects. One is to create a new highway grid around the country. We have a major highway program underway in the south of Trinidad and we are hoping to have this completed later this year.

Secondly, we have another major highway construction in the east and we are building some bridges down in the west of that island. In fact, we have four major road upgrades happening right now that will link all the points in Trinidad by a highway network.

What investments is your ministry implementing to maintain Trinidad and Tobago as a regional and global logistics hub and what opportunities are there for international investors in your infrastructure plan?

We work hard to make sure that Piarco International Airport is recognized as one of the top airports in the Caribbean and we are now in the process of rebuilding Tobago's airport. We are hoping to complete that some time next year. In terms of the port infrastructure, we are in the process of implementing a public-private partnership in the Port of Spain. We are working with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to put out a request for proposal because the location of the port is quite attractive for regional trade.

However, we do have to spend a lot of money on the infrastructure to expand the port, so we are working with the IDB to secure a PPP program for operating its international port facilities. Furthermore, we are in the process of sending out an RFP for investment in a major dry-dock facility. My ministry was recently given responsibility for the Caridoc facilities at Chaguramas, which is one of our major dockyards in Trinidad. We are now



Port of Port of Spain is the country's largest container-handling facility



Rohan Sinanan
Minister of Works and Transport



Ashley Taylor
President, Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation

responsible for implementing an upgrade program for that and we will be looking to secure a PPP with interested parties that want to come and partner with us to get that operational.

Finally, we also have the pitch lake — the largest natural deposit of asphalt in the world. Only three exist globally, this is the largest and we are looking for a partner to develop that site.

A bold new roadmap

As explained by Sinanan, the leveling up of infrastructure is helping to positively shape the country's future. And this covers everything from airports and ports, to road construction projects and inter-island ferries. In fact, Trinidad and Tobago has invested heavily in recent years as it bids to bring its infrastructure up to speed and boost economic growth. The work has already been underway for a number of years, but the outline came in 2018 when the Caribbean nation announced its pioneering plans for the future under Vision 2030. The 15-year framework placed a huge emphasis on quality infrastructure and transportation, with \$62.5 million handed to the Ministry of Works and Transport that year to continue the expansion of its infrastructure works program.

While work began in many areas, the global pandemic that hit in early 2020 led to the delay and suspension of numerous projects, as bringing building materials and goods into the country presented a severe challenge. However, that did not prevent the country from delivering on its promise to improve its transport infrastructure and capabilities. "When I first took office, we had the challenge of a major collapse on the sea bridge between Trinidad and Tobago," says Sinanan. "That happened within the first month and we had to deal with it as it threatened connectivity between the two islands. We were able, for the first time, to bring in new custom-built vessels and now we have a first-class sea bridge." The new sea bridge came in the form of two new passenger ferries, the APT James and Buccoo Reef. The high-speed aluminum catamarans can carry 926 and 995 passengers respectively, and can complete the 97-mile journey in around three hours. Improving links between the two islands has been high on the agenda for a number of years, with the idea of constructing a bridge first discussed in the 1990s.

While this ultimately failed to come to fruition, the Ministry of Works and Transport is looking to build a port in Toco — the most northeasterly village in Trinidad and the closest point to the sister island of Tobago. "We are looking at a more domestic port in Toco, which will link Trinidad and Tobago," says Sinanan. "The reason being that, right now, to get to Tobago from Trinidad you go around the island. If you go to the two closest points it's about one-third the distance. That project is at the early stages because you have the statutory requirements, like the reefs and other important factors, that have to be taken into consideration."

The importance of ports

It is no surprise that there has been an emphasis on ports, with maritime transport dating back more than 100 years on the islands. The two container ports, the larger Port of Port of Spain (PPOS) and the Port of Point Lisas — both located in Trinidad — have long held great significance and are vital to the economy. PPOS is ideally positioned to service the major sea lanes between the Americas and the islands of the Caribbean. It also has trading links between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans via the Panama Canal. Due to the local population relying heavily on PPOS container terminal's operations for vital goods, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago has continually invested in ensuring it has state-of-the-art equipment.

Similarly, the Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation (PLIPDECO), the owner and landlord of the 862.6-hectare Point Lisas Industrial Estate that is focused on the energy sector, has ensured that the Port of Point Lisas is evolving with the times. "We're trying to reposition ourselves not just as a port operator, but as a logistics services provider," explains Ashley Taylor, PLIPDECO's president. "The port was developed to capitalize on the country's natural gas and support activities on our industrial estate, which has made it one of the world's largest exporters of methanol and ammo-



nia. As the estate matured, the port has morphed into a general facility that handles a substantial amount of the continuous cargo as well as goods like break-bulk cargo, steel and lumber," he adds.

Some of that cargo has played a crucial role in improving the road network throughout the country, which was in dire need of attention, especially after the storms in 2018 that caused widespread flooding across close to 80% of the islands. Most recently, construction began on an extension of Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway in Trinidad. The project involves building a four-lane highway that runs for 29 miles from San Fernando to Point Fortin — thus further improving connectivity between the north and south of the island.

ROHAN SINANAN, MINISTER OF WORKS AND TRANSPORT
"We have four major road upgrades happening right now that will link all the points in Trinidad by a highway network."

Furthermore, the Ministry of Works and Transport has also been tackling the problems that came with unprecedented rainfall. New projects have had to assess the potential of larger volumes of water and new roads and bridges are being built to mitigate the effects of flooding. "Coming out of the rainy season last year we had a lot of landslips taking place, so we have some aggressive infrastructure programs this financial year and the next to get that rectified," reveals Sinanan.

Preparing for more visitors

Perhaps the most important development currently taking shape within the country is the expansion of ANR Robinson International Airport at Crown Point, Tobago. The government has allocated \$200 million for the construction of a new terminal and associated facilities during the 2023 fiscal year, with the aim of creating an international airport with sufficient capacity to support tourism development and air travel in Tobago.

The Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago will also receive a sum of \$31.7 million to continue upgrades in infrastructure and security works as the country aims to attract an increasing number of visitors in the years to come. While Trinidad and Tobago has a much more diversified economy than many of its Caribbean peers, some of which rely heavily on tourism, there is growing interest in the country as an eco-tourism destination — hence the continued improvement in infrastructure to ensure visitors can easily navigate between the two islands.

Continuing to look to the future, the country is working with the Development Bank of Latin America to plan and develop the first new national transportation plan in more than 50 years. The plan will guide the country over the next 20 years and will not only develop connectivity in Trinidad and Tobago, but also with other CARICOM Islands. The long-term vision is that Trinidad and Tobago will play a crucial role in the future of inter-island travel in the Caribbean and, by building a strong infrastructure when it comes to land, sea and air, the economy will go from strength to strength.

A world-class transport hub with an exciting future

Putting a spotlight on customer service and introducing a wealth of new technology will further improve the offering at Trinidad and Tobago's two airports

Home to two first-class airports that between them welcomed close to 3 million passengers in 2019, Trinidad and Tobago has ambitious plans for attracting increased numbers of travelers not only from the US, but also from Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Having shown plenty of resilience in dealing with the challenges associated with COVID-19, the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (the Authority) is now also focused on making the country a transshipment hub through a variety of innovative programs.

The achievement of these goals is helped by the country being home to Trinidad's Piarco International Airport — which was named the Best Airport in the Caribbean by the international air transport rating organization Skytrax for the third time in 2023 — and ANR Robinson International Airport on the island of Tobago. Both airports continued to operate during the pandemic, ensuring vaccines and essential supplies arrived in the country. Now operations are beginning to return to normal, there is growing confidence that arrival numbers will steadily rise and, by the end of 2023, could have returned to the figures that were seen before COVID-19.

However, the aim is for numbers to substantially increase in the years ahead and the country is planning for that. Substantial works are taking place at ANR Robinson International Airport, with a new terminal currently under construction. But it's not just the addition of physical structures, the Authority also has plans to significantly enhance the customer experience, increase the knowledge of airport workers and introduce new technologies to ensure they stay on par with the competition. The Authority will benchmark against best practice at international airports and utilize cutting-edge technologies and the latest innovative solutions for digital signage, custodial maintenance, communications and other elements of its airport operations.

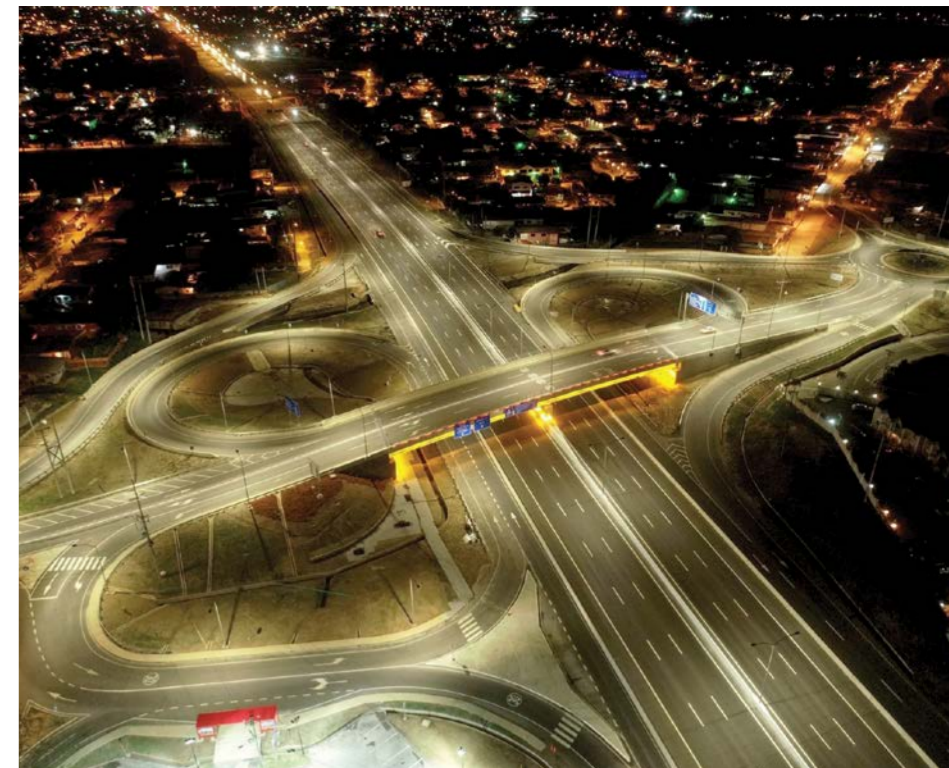
"We already comply with the requirements of the international civil aviation organizations, which is important in terms of safety, security and operational efficiency. But we have also spent time on customer service and training our people," says Hayden Newton, general manager of the Authority. "One example is that more than 95% of our managers have attained the Air-



Hayden Newton
General Manager
Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

ports Council International and International Civil Aviation Organization's International Airport Professional certification. This is a significant achievement, worldwide." This rigorous three-year program has ensured that staff from administrative to management level are among the best in the region, while the Authority is also working with government agencies to improve digitalization across the board. This is all with the aim of providing the best possible service in Latin America and becoming a hub for traffic from even further afield.

The Authority also places great emphasis on the use of green technologies, environment preservation, climate action initiatives and the use of renewable energy sources in its operations. A 0.5-megawatt solar park is currently being installed at Piarco International Airport. The plant is expected to produce a minimum annual generation capacity of 767,034 kilowatts per hour with the potential to avoid approximately 500 metric tons of carbon emission annually and the opportunity for expansion. The Authority is also pioneering the Caribbean's first Airport City. This involves commercial development of estates surrounding Piarco International



Trinidad and Tobago is investing heavily in its transport infrastructure

al Airport, which gives opportunities for businesses for which close proximity to an airport is a logistic advantage. At present, a Four Points Hotel by Sheraton is about to be built on vacant lands north of the airport and will serve as the anchor tenant for the urban development of the northern lands along the aerropolis concept.

Welcoming the world

The country already welcomes visitors from the Eastern Caribbean and the northern part of South America, with many from Suriname, Guyana and Venezuela coming into Piarco International to get to Europe and North America. And there has now been an increase in traffic from Panama and Colombia. "We are also seeing an increase in the commercial aspects of our business, coming out of Latin America. This is in terms of industries such as oil, gas and manufacturing sectors," explains Newton.

"A lot of our manufacturing products are now finding space in Latin America and we're seeing substantial commercial cargo traffic going between us and Panama. The Authority is seeking to create additional sister arrangements with other airports in Latin America in recognition of our potential in terms of the development of cargo. But we want to make Piarco a larger hub, where we're not only picking up traffic from this part of the world but also from Europe, the Middle East through Emirates and Africa via Ethiopian Airlines. These things are being talked about as we have certain advantages over other airports in the region," he adds.

One advantage is that aviation is thriving in Trinidad and Tobago. Not only is the aircraft side booming, but there are a variety of helicopter operators providing support to the country's oil and gas industry. "We have a number of helicopter businesses operating from Piarco; this includes Bristol and PHI," explains Newton. "Some of these provide support not only within

Trinidad and Tobago but also to the oil and gas market in neighboring territories."

While the country is working on strengthening its well-established ties with the oil, gas and manufacturing industries, it is also looking at ways to increase tourist numbers, with a specific focus on North America. One answer is by promoting Trinidad and Tobago as an eco-tourism destination, as it is a nature lover's dream. There are numerous waterfalls, tropical forest reserves and wildlife sanctuaries on the islands, as well as 2,500 species of plants, 433 species of birds, 100 mammals, 37 amphibians and 93 reptiles. Trinidad is also one of the world's most important sites for leatherback-turtle nesting.

HAYDEN NEWTON, GENERAL MANAGER, AIRPORTS AUTHORITY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

"Trinidad and Tobago is open for business, which is why we have been speaking with interested parties about creating new routes."

To capitalize on such a varied offering, the Authority is in talks with a variety of North American carriers. "Trinidad and Tobago is open for business, which is why we have been speaking with interested parties about creating new routes into the country. There is significant interest and, were it not for COVID-19, they would already be operating in the country," says Newton. "There is so much potential for US eco-tourists in Trinidad and Tobago. We also already receive a lot of North Americans who are coming to visit friends and relatives — and we are ready and open to welcome even more visitors."

Relentlessly pursuing improvements in infrastructure

NIDCO is helping to transform Trinidad and Tobago's transportation system

Tasked with executing the government's large-scale infrastructure projects, the National Infrastructure Development Company (NIDCO) has spent the last 18 years helping to overhaul Trinidad and Tobago's transportation infrastructure. There have been many challenges along the way, from landslides and flooding to dealing with temporary material shortages and delays in construction activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, this has not prevented NIDCO from helping to transform the country by completing several projects that have vastly improved the transportation system. "One highly visible project is the extension of the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway in Trinidad. It involves the construction of 29 miles of a four-lane highway — with provision for future extension to six lanes — from the second city, San Fernando to Point Fortin, the southernmost borough," reveals NIDCO Chairman Herbert George. "The net effect is that there will be easier north-south connectivity, which will lead to improved productivity. We should be opening most of the newly built highway to the public later this year."

Another significant project undertaken by NIDCO is the construction of the Curepe interchange, located at the intersection of Churchill Roosevelt Highway (CRH) and Southern Main Road. This had led to a significant decrease in congestion and travel time along these key routes. In addition to carrying out development projects, NIDCO also procured and now maintains two new passenger ferries for the sea bridge service that runs between Trinidad and Tobago. "These ferries travel at average speeds of 40 knots and accomplish the 97-mile journey in about three hours," says George. These ferries have therefore made travel between the two islands significantly quicker and easier. "We're also responsible for the operation of a four-vessel fleet of coastal water taxis between the two main cities of San Fernando and Port of Spain. This reliable and efficient service has improved the commute of workers between the cities, thereby improving productivity."

The effects of climate change is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing road infrastructure development nationally. In 2018 and 2022, for example, the country experienced extremely heavy rainfall that led to almost 80% of the nation struggling with flooding, landslides and property damage. George indicates that in the aftermath, having first focused on road rehabilitation, drainage works and landslips repairs, NIDCO also increased its design rainfall intensity from 1 in 50 years to an intensity of 1 in 75 years — a change which will result in the use of larger drainage channels and other features.

Another important mitigation response being



Herbert George
Chairman, NIDCO

pursued by NIDCO is transitioning to the use of Trinidad Lake Asphalt modified bitumen (TLA) in the production of asphalt for use in the construction of all roads. George opines that "it is a superior product, which we have been using in special applications, especially in the construction of airport pavements. It is also more expensive than the previously used refinery bitumen; however, improvement in performance and durability of the end product will produce good value for money spent."

To date NIDCO's implementation model is generally that of design/bid/build, design/build, while for the Tobago Airport project that is currently under construction, the turnkey model is being used. George however believes there are plenty of opportunities for investors to partner in the infrastructure growth of Trinidad and Tobago through public-private partnerships (PPPs). He notes that the government is already pursuing this mode of procurement, within the regulatory environment established by way of government's PPP Policy.

George concludes that NIDCO's scope remains the provision of a range of projects from sport facilities to marinas, fish depots, roads and associated structures, landslip repairs and drainage structures.

In so doing, he gives the assurance that NIDCO will continue to work relentlessly with the government to deliver improved infrastructure necessary for economic development of the country.



Taking port expertise to the next level

Introducing new technology and purchasing the very latest equipment will have an immediate impact on marine transport

For more than 100 years there has been port activity in Trinidad and Tobago, with the Caribbean country having a significant impact on the marine transport world thanks to its enviable geographic location.

While there are a number of ports on the islands, the largest and most modern container handling facility is the gateway to the nation's capital: Port of Port of Spain (PPOS). Located in a sheltered natural harbor, this government-owned port provides ships with easy access to the rest of the Caribbean, the Far East, Europe and the eastern seaboard of the US.

Not only is it extremely well connected, but its workforce boasts expertise that is on par with the very best in the world, enabling the port to offer its clients a full range of first-class services. In relation to cargo handling, those include berthing for international container vessels, towage, freight services and warehousing. PPOS is also home to the inter-island ferry service that transports people, vehicles and cargo between Trinidad and Tobago, plus it welcomes numerous cruise ships every year.

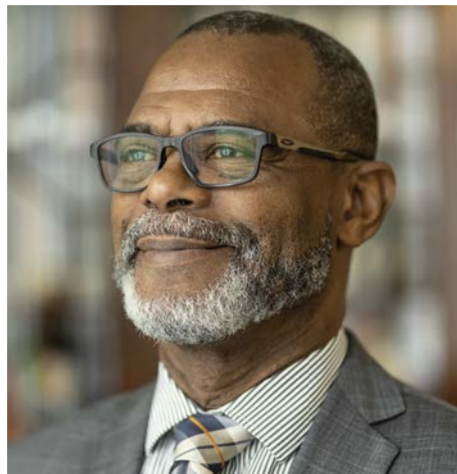
While the knowledge of the highly skilled personnel at the port is second to none, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago — which is responsible for PPOS's facilities and services — is always looking to improve its offering and has ambitious plans to ensure all of its operational areas are on par with the world's best marine ports.

This will require the introduction of more of the latest technology and state-of-the-art equipment, which will put the authority in a better position to realize the potential of PPOS.

Closing the gap

The person tasked with achieving this feat is Lyle E. Alexander, chairman, Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. A graduate of the UK's famed Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, the retired army colonel has worked hard to make sure that the port is as efficient as possible.

"Getting the port's executives to work together was an extremely important part of that," says Alexander. "This is what I did in the military, I brought people together to work as a unit. When I first joined the port organization, I found this to be a gap and I needed to get the executives to function as a cohesive team. They



Lyle E. Alexander
Chairman, Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

have certainly lived up to the expectations and the trust I placed in them."

While the team has come together and excelled, Alexander has still identified further areas in which the port needs to strengthen. He says: "We function as a public port and, given the rapid advances in technology and different models of port operations around the world, others in the global industry have moved ahead of us.

"Having accepted this gap in our operations and the potential that we have as a port, we believe there are a couple of areas that we can optimize. One is transshipment. We are in a great position to act as a feeder to the Caribbean and Latin America, especially now that Guyana is becoming so active.

"The entire world is moving toward containers as well. We have been doing a pretty good job at PPOS in terms of moving boxes, but we think we can move more as we have underutilized berths."

Building for the future

The Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago also wants to improve its transshipment potential throughout the region and hopes to attract larger vessels that will improve productivity. But for this to happen, it wants to first upgrade the infrastructure within the port — such as its cranes, trucks and other vital equipment — to



The marine gateway to Trinidad and Tobago's capital: Port of Port of Spain

further boost its efficiency. This requires significant investment and Alexander is currently working on a request for proposal for a public-private partnership at the port.

"We think we can better maximize our potential if we partner with a private investor," he says. "We are looking for an investor that can come in with its own vision and can work with us to minimize the gaps we have in the areas that we have identified as offering the greatest potential moving forward.

"Since COVID-19, the shape of this business has been changing and we see different types of patterns emerging in the industry, but the one thing we are sure about is that ships will continue to sail and boxes will continue to be moved.

LYLE E. ALEXANDER
CHAIRMAN, PORT AUTHORITY
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

"We think we can better maximize our potential if we partner with a private investor that can come in with its own vision and work with us to minimize the gaps we have."

"We are hoping an investor will be willing to look at the risks and opportunities PPOS presents and that they will decide to fund activities here. Based on the initial analysis that we have carried out, the data shows there would be a good return on investment — so we are very excited and hopeful that someone will be knocking on the door soon. In fact, we have already received quite a bit of interest from Europe." The Trinidad and Tobago government is fully

behind the PPP project, as is the Inter-American Development Bank, which has stated that it is committed to supporting the authority to help bring the PPP to fruition.

While it will be the first time that the port authority has engaged in a PPP, it has a proven track record when it comes to working with international partners.

"All the big projects we carry out at PPOS involve large-scale international companies — dredging, for example, is one area where we've had a successful international partnership, while our cranes are built in Ireland," says Alexander.

"In addition, we are members of most of the international associations related to marine operations and transport. Through those engagements, we have formed strong relationships at the global level. We are familiar with working in collaboration with international agencies, which means there are no issues in this regard that might deter someone from working and investing in Trinidad and Tobago's port operations.

"Right now, we are the only public port in the Caribbean basin, which speaks to where we are in terms of world-class operations. Having said that, we are extremely confident about the capability of our people and about our history in the sector. So, we have the correct mindset to succeed."

Alexander believes that Trinidad and Tobago's economy presents a wealth of possibilities for incoming investors across various sectors. "However, I would suggest that the marine transport and cargo-handling area presents a particularly excellent opportunity for investors that want to expand their global reach when it comes to moving cargo," the chairman asserts. "I would say to all potential investors: come on down, PPOS and the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago are open for business."

A versatile space for every event

The Hyatt Regency Trinidad boasts a wealth of business options and has held a number of high-profile conferences and conventions

Ever since it opened in early 2008, the Hyatt Regency Trinidad has become the leading option for international conferences in the country. Most recently, the hotel hosted a groundbreaking regional symposium that addressed crime and violence as a public health issue.

Aimed at promoting dialogue and mobilizing regional action for crime prevention and a reduction in violence across the Caribbean, the two-day conference was attended by heads of government from across the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) — including CARICOM Secretary General Carla Barnett and Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

The conference had numerous guest speakers and touched on everything from organized crime and domestic abuse to mental health and justice reform. It was also used to identify possible solutions and strategies that could help countries throughout the Caribbean.

The hotel's substantial offering includes a spacious ballroom, business center and 13 private meeting rooms. It also has event planners and catering can be requested.

It is not the first time that the Hyatt Regency Trinidad has been picked for such an important event. Just one year after opening, the hotel held the Fifth Summit of the Americas, which was one of the first large-scale international engagements for former US President, Barack Obama.

That event brought together 34 democratically elected heads of state and government who exchanged ideas and opinions on social, security, political and economic challenges that confronted the region.

Just a few months later, the Hyatt Regency Trinidad hosted another conference of world leaders as the Commonwealth Heads of Government staged its biennial meeting in Port of Spain. In addition to the 51 leaders of the Commonwealth, the hotel welcomed the then Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon.

The summit took on huge importance as the Commonwealth countries agreed a \$7.5

billion-a-year climate change fund that promoted low-carbon emission development and adaptation in developing countries.

An enviable offering

The hotel continued to host numerous events before undergoing a renovation in 2017 when the 43,000 square feet of flexible event space was given a total refresh. This included work on the venue's column-free Regency Ballroom that spans 16,000 square feet and a 10,000-square-foot multipurpose facility that includes numerous conference rooms.

With the hotel located just 45 minutes from Piarco International Airport and offering sophisticated open-air dining and sweeping views of the Gulf of Paria, it is no surprise that it has firmly established itself as the country's flagship conference center.

Used for a variety of events, it also held the 2nd Caribbean ESG & Climate Financing Summit in 2022, which saw more than 300 corporate, government and finance leaders attend a series of talks about the extraordinary threat of climate change across the Caribbean.

The summit made full use of the hotel's substantial offering, which includes the spacious ballroom, business center and 13 private meeting rooms. The Hyatt Regency Trinidad also has event planners and catering can be requested, while there is a team of translators on hand to help with everything from exhibitions and conferences to business meetings and conventions.

As well as the impressive business and conference offering, the hotel, which is just a five-minute walk from the Trinidad and Tobago Water Taxi and Ferry Terminal, boasts an outdoor infinity pool and a state-of-the-art gym. Other guest facilities include one full-service waterfront restaurant, a spa, lobby bar and lounge.

Situated within the Port of Spain International Waterfront Development, the hotel, which also provides laundry services and valet parking, was specifically designed as a meeting, convention, business, event and leisure travel property.

In addition to the first-class amenities and impressive business offering, the hotel's general manager, Richard Westell, has a wealth of experience and has ensured that all members of staff have been trained to world-class standards and embody the warmth and openness that is characteristic of Trinidadians.



Siemens Somatom go Platform Computed Tomography (CT) Scanner

Making a real difference

Biomedical Enterprises is providing modern medical technology throughout the region

A dedicated provider of world-leading healthcare and biomedical equipment and solutions, Biomedical Enterprises of Trinidad and Tobago (BMETT) was founded in 2017 and now supplies products to private and public medical institutions throughout the Caribbean.

Looking to change the level and quality of healthcare systems, the company's industry-leading products help these institutions to offer patients a full spectrum of solutions, from treatment to the best options for recovery.

In order to achieve this, BMETT has partnered with major brands to bring the very latest technology to the region. "For example, we are the authorized distributor for Siemens Healthineers Radiology and Laboratory portfolio. We are also the authorized distributor for Varian Medical Systems for oncology equipment," reveals Stephanie Ramaya-Hingoo, general manager, BMETT.

"Our core focus is radiology equipment which drives the business, while other supporting product lines such as medical equipment and lab solutions support the business. We have been partnering with other companies to align our business needs to create a robust portfolio to drive the business forward."

As well as providing the healthcare sector with the latest advances in medical technology, BMETT holistically supports its customers by providing turn key solutions from project management, design and installation to after sales maintenance.

"We operate from the point of consultancy to equipment purchase, installation, to end user applications training. The most critical aspect is the servicing of equipment to ensure optimum equipment uptime," explains Kieran Thompson, managing director, BMETT. "We are fo-



Kieran Thompson
Managing Director Biomedical Enterprises of Trinidad and Tobago Ltd

ocused on providing quality service to enhance equipment uptime because this affects the quality of care for patients. It essentially means the difference between life and death for someone."

Currently providing equipment and solutions to more than 10 countries in the Caribbean and South America, BMETT is determined to ensure that the people within these nations have the best possible healthcare.

"It's always been quite personal for us," says Ramaya-Hingoo. "We consider that if it were one of our own friends needing healthcare services, we would like them to receive the best quality diagnostics and that has been the driving force for the past five years. We want to make a genuine difference in healthcare throughout the region by providing product and service integration to support our customers."

Continually building on a family legacy

A businessman and boat racer, Ken Charles has overseen the rise of Solo Beverages and written his name into the history books

Established in the 1940s by Joseph Charles and initially employing just a handful of workers, Solo Beverages has developed into a hugely successful soft-drink manufacturer that now has more than 200 employees and exports its products throughout the Caribbean.

A homegrown business with its roots in Trinidad and Tobago, much of the company's success has been overseen by Joseph's son, Ken Charles. Since he became the managing director of Solo Beverages, the company has achieved significant growth and now exports to niche markets within Canada as well as to New York and Miami.

"Solo Beverages started with my father, who was working as a salesman in a bakery when he found out that the local factory was for sale. He had around \$350 saved up and borrowed some more money from a good friend to purchase the business," explains Charles.

"One day while selling bread, he started to sell some bottles of soda and that was the start of the company you see today.

"At the start there were only two or three employees and the operation was run entirely by hand. My father then installed a semi-automated line that could produce 60 bottles per minute in 1950. Through his ingenuity, he was able to increase the efficiency of the machinery to produce 120 bottles per minute.

KEN CHARLES
MANAGING DIRECTOR
SOLO BEVERAGES

"I worked hard and I have all the confidence in my son to keep moving the company forward."

"My father was completely self-taught and worked extremely hard and he passed those skills on to me. He also ensured that all of his children were always honest and kind to our staff. These lessons have been crucial as we now have more than 200 employees, with increased shifts to accommodate higher volumes, and some of our workers have been with us for more than 50 years."

A true pioneer

As well as continuing his father's business legacy, Charles has also carved out a career in powerboat racing and is seen as one of the pioneers of water sports within Trinidad and



Ken Charles
Managing Director, Solo Beverages

Tobago. His exploits even earned him a place in the 2019 Guinness World Records when he became the oldest professional powerboat racer at the age of 75 years and 17 days old.

Charles has been involved in powerboat racing since the 1960s and has been a regular competitor in the Great Race — one of the longest-running offshore powerboat races in the world that sees entrants travel from Trinidad to Tobago in the fastest possible time.

Now running for more than 50 years, Charles has attempted the race on 49 occasions and has claimed the "fastest boat" title an impressive 18 times.

"Sometimes there are up to 30 boats racing and it can be very dangerous. I lost my two sons in a boating accident in 1993 but I continued racing because they also loved it so much and would have wanted me to continue and overcome my fear," he says.

"I have one more year of racing before I retire and still hold the record for the fastest time to Tobago, which is 58 minutes."

While Charles may soon retire from racing, he has no plans to step away from his role at Solo Beverages and is continuing his family's legacy by passing on his vast knowledge to another of his sons.

"I like to think my legacy will be that I worked hard and I have all the confidence in my son, Hayden Charles, to keep moving the company forward," states Charles. "I truly believe that he's going to take Solo Beverages beyond what I achieved so I am very excited by the future."



A selection of organic OCHO candy bars

Exporting organic chocolate to the world

A top Caribbean manufacturer meets growing demand for natural and fair-trade foods

Associated Brands Industries Limited (ABIL) is beginning its foray into the organic market after adding OCHO Candy to its burgeoning portfolio of brands. Founded in California, OCHO produces chocolate candies that are USDA certified organic, free trade and free of genetically modified organisms and gluten. It also offers a variety of organic vegan options.

The move comes as ABIL, the biggest manufacturer and distributor of snack foods, chocolate confectionery, biscuits and breakfast cereals in the Caribbean, begins to explore the huge new market of consumers around the world who are increasingly looking for healthier and sustainable foods.

"Those who want organic goods don't have to compromise on taste with this range and the delicious-tasting products will also satisfy those not actively seeking organic," says Nicholas Lok Jack, CEO, ABIL.

Having become aware of the OCHO brand, Lok Jack felt it would be the perfect addition to ABIL's portfolio. "I found the products very interesting, so we went to California to explore the opportunity. Most importantly we met like-minded people with shared values. There were also great benefits as ABIL had the manufacturing prowess and 49 years of experience to add significant value to the manufacturing of the products and the incumbent OCHO team understood the US market.

"On completion of the acquisition we moved the factory to Trinidad and Tobago and we're now operating the fully functioning OCHO factory with high-tech equipment in the Caribbean. This was a monumental task against the backdrop of COVID-19, but we now have, for the first time ever, United States Department of Agriculture-certified organic chocolates being made in Trinidad and Tobago and sold to distribution outlets in the US, including Wegmans, Rite Aid, Stop & Shop, Publix and Target."

Global demand for plant-based and organic products will continue to rise, states Lok Jack: "People interested in these products are very engaged and will seek them out, which is why we developed OCHO fully plant-based caramels with no dairy or milk. We began production last September and launched them this February. We will have many more new products coming out under the OCHO brand, are very confident about its potential and have been exhibiting it at a variety of international conventions."

Moving into the American market

Initially, OCHO products made in Trinidad and Tobago will be exported to over 20 countries in which ABIL currently has a presence. "OCHO Candy will be marketed to our local consumers, the Caribbean region, major US retail stores and soon globally. This is the vision of internationalization that we have embraced, as we look toward the future and continue to expand our portfolio with innovative products," adds Lok Jack.

One of the first candy brands in America to make organic chocolate bars, OCHO only began manufacturing in 2013, but ABIL has a proven track record in building up brands and sales. And Ronald Sampath, general manager of Charles Chocolates, one of ABIL's other brands, is confident that OCHO will continue to thrive both in the US and as it reaches new markets.

"We're truly excited to introduce OCHO chocolates to local, regional and international markets. We have more than 49 years of chocolate expertise and our chocolates are sold in some of the most demanding markets," he says. "Not only does ABIL have the industry knowledge and skill set to launch and manufacture products like these, we have the necessary resources along with a state-of-the-art and modern manufacturing plant with the necessary certifications that meet international standards."

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Leveling up public utilities to boost economic growth

The continued transformation of public utilities was signified by a first-of-its-kind regional water conference

As Trinidad and Tobago begins to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for utility reform has become a pressing matter and there has been a concerted effort to upgrade public utilities in order to improve quality of life and spur social and economic growth.

Looking toward the future, the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT) is undergoing a significant technology evolution and is partnering with some of the leading brands in the world — including Huawei, Optiva, Cisco, Ericsson, Microsoft and Oracle — to ensure its network deployment and solutions are on par with the best in class.

Originally designed to provide analog voice services, TSTT has transformed into a true digital company offering voice, mobile, broadband and entertainment services that are all supported by a robust digital infrastructure. It also has the only data center in the Latin American and Caribbean region accredited with both TIA 942-B Rating 3 and Data Center Operating Standards Maturity Level 3.

In addition, the company provides cloud services to businesses through its data center and is set to play a key role in the digitalization of the economy. “Fintech is a big focus of ours going forward and in August last year we launched our e-commerce platform, Parlour,” reveals Lisa Agard, CEO, TSTT. “It was designed and developed by people within the country and presents products created and produced by people in Trinidad and Tobago to the rest of the world.

LISA AGARD
CEO, TSTT

“In February of this year the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago awarded a provisional registration for TSTT to issue e-money. This milestone marks a significant step.”

“Similarly, in February of this year the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago awarded a provisional registration for TSTT to issue e-money. This milestone marks a significant step toward providing the country with a robust and secure e-money platform via a mobile wallet that will



Lisa Agard
CEO, TSTT

support financial inclusion and drive economic growth.”

Having seen a recent change in the way people use and consume technology and how the pandemic impacted the telecommunications industry, TSTT is determined to further develop the ecosystem of digitally connected platforms and roll out a new suite of digital services.

A new strategic plan for the company was approved by its board of directors and is reflective of the reality of a fundamentally changed telecoms industry. No longer can it solely focus on telecommunications, it must now become a forward-thinking technology company.

A significant upgrade

Another significant moment came recently when the Inter-American Development Bank approved an \$80 million loan to boost the efficiency, quality, sustainability and resilience of Trinidad and Tobago’s drinking water supply and security. This came as part of a \$315 million conditional credit line for the Trinidad and Tobago National Water Sector Transformation Program, with the initial operation including institutional strengthening and capacity building to help the government improve the sustainable management of water resources.

This is just one of the ways that a positive change in public utilities can make a huge impact on the day-to-day life of people. And one company that is also looking to bring about considerable change is the Trinidad & Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL),



Minister for Public Utilities Marvin Gonzales at the Regional Water Loss Conference 2023



Abigail Whitehall
Head of Programs and Technical Services SWMCOL

which is currently prioritizing sustainability.

Established by the government in 1980, SWMCOL has also outlined a strategic plan that in the next two years focuses on sustainability and creating a culture of care for the environment.

“We give priority to waste minimization and diversion, because that is the key strategic pillar that is impacting the future of SWMCOL and the future of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of our landfills,” explains Ria Ramdeen, CEO, SWMCOL.

“Our landfills have surpassed their capacity and, as a result of that, we have been looking at two or three key initiatives to minimize waste entering the landfills and to divert recyclable waste away from them, so that we can enable the landfills to accept waste that is non-recyclable and cannot be utilized in any other form.

“We are looking to create a new landfill system that can manage the waste in the country in an integrated and sustainable way. We want to be able to capture and divert waste from our streams and landfills and redirect them into value-added processes.

“Capturing gases from the landfills will not only contribute to reducing our carbon emissions but we can look at commercializing the gases as well.”

SWMCOL is also working closely with the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that there is a focus on sustainability and that people within the country are aware of the importance of recycling.



Ria Ramdeen
CEO, SWMCOL

“We recognize that to move the country forward, in terms of the management of our waste and even our attitude and our practices, we need to educate,” says Abigail Whitehall, head of programs and technical services, SWMCOL. “Therefore, we continually engage in public awareness and public education, especially when it comes to the impact your behavior as a citizen has on our environment and economy. That is why we put so much effort into our public outreach.

Ramdeen adds: “Recycling has been built into the curriculum at primary and secondary school level to create a better understanding of what happens to garbage and to create a culture of care for the environment.”



Helping to build a stronger and greener energy sector

The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago is helping the country transition to a low-carbon and more sustainable future

With the Caribbean being one of the most biodiverse regions in the world and one of the most vulnerable to climate change, Trinidad and Tobago has long been working on a strategic plan to transition to green energy. Playing a key role in this proposal has been The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (NGC) and its group of subsidiaries.

The company was quick to support the green agenda and, following the country’s annual Energy Conference in 2021, it launched an innovative website that provides information on energy markets and technological developments within the clean energy space throughout the Caribbean.

The aim was to build mindfulness regarding energy efficiency and renewable energy, as well as ensure that knowledge and data was widely available to investors, businesses, government officials and the public.

The website also lists all of the clean energy projects currently in development across Latin America and the Caribbean, many of which are taking place in Trinidad and Tobago. One of the most important is the first large-scale solar project to take place in the country.

A milestone moment for the future of the country’s energy transition, the project sees BP Alternative Energy Trinidad and Tobago, Shell Renewables Caribbean and Lightsource BP coming together to develop a solar plant that will produce 302,500 megawatt hours of renewable electricity a year — enough to power the equivalent of 42,500 homes and save 165,500 tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually.

It will be the first time that BP, Shell and Lightsource BP have ever worked together on a joint project and the deal has demonstrated that energy companies are willing to combine experience and expertise in order to support the national decarbonization targets of Trinidad and Tobago.

A more resilient energy sector

Fully committed to creating a greener future, NGC has also been working to improve the awareness of energy-related matters among the public. For example, it has launched a mobile app called EnergySmarTT, which shows people how much money they can save by converting

to more energy-efficient devices. The company also created a weekly program called New Energy Conversations on a local television station to raise awareness among the public about energy issues.

Furthermore, NGC has conducted numerous studies to see how natural resources, such as solar and wind energy, can be converted into energy people can use. The ultimate goal being to study how to use wind to generate electricity for fully green hydrogen production in the near future.

“NGC has been working closely with the government and key industry stakeholders across the energy value chain over the past few years to build a stronger, greener and more resilient energy sector, with greater alignment and understanding of the challenges ahead,” says Mark Loquan, president, NGC.

Stuart R. Young, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, has also been working closely with NGC and is delighted that the company is focused on a greener future. Following a recent visit to the company, he said: “It is heartening to see NGC taking the initiative to create opportunities that encourage open sharing, knowledge transfer and, above all, constructive conversations about the present and future of our industry.”

Attainable targets for the future

NGC has also set out medium- and long-term goals to help with the country’s aim of arriving at net zero carbon by 2050 — a figure that countries around the world agreed to following discussions at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2021.

These include achieving a 75% reduction in the venting of methane and a 50% reduction of fugitive methane emissions from the NGC Group’s operations by 2030.

The group is also aiming to achieve 30% of the country’s nationally determined contributions target for greenhouse gas reduction by 2040 and carbon neutrality across the entire NGC Group by 2050.

“The NGC Group has emerged as a major advocate for climate adaptation and energy transition,” explains Loquan. “And we are determined to continue to lead by example in the energy industry.”

Utilizing technology to transform the water network

The Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) of Trinidad and Tobago is confident it can address leakage issues and increase efficiency across its network of pipelines thanks to an increase in funding and its introduction of the latest technology.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government signalled its intentions to address legacy issues in the water sector and the wider challenges posed by changes in rainfall by launching and hosting the first-of-its-kind Caribbean Regional Conference, Water Loss 2023.

“Our water treatment plants are outdated and we realized the need to advance our existing infrastructure,” explains Ravi Nanga, Chairman, WASA. “We used the conference to highlight the difficulties we have and attract experts in particular fields to assist us.

“We did not know how many leaks we had across our network, so we had to start using technology to map them out. We located specific software that allows us to track leaks in real time and that’s now the route we are taking, to embrace technology.”

In order to further transform the water network, a loan of \$65 million from the Inter-American Development Bank was secured. “Earlier this year we opened a new wastewater treatment plant that was funded by the IDB,” says Nanga.



Ravi Nanga
Chairman, WASA

“There are now several projects that will involve advancing our existing infrastructure, such as pipes that are more than 100 years old and water treatment plants. These will especially help those communities affected during the rainy season when water becomes very muddy and very turbid, which in the past has overwhelmed our treatment plants.”

Embracing the digital age

While some Caribbean countries have been slow to implement technical solutions in the financial sector, Trinidad and Tobago is leading the charge when it comes to digitalization and a willingness to adopt technological change.

Both the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce (T&T Chamber) and the Trinidad and Tobago Financial Centre (TTIFC) are pushing for digital transformation and believe a well-developed fintech ecosystem will significantly strengthen the country’s economy.

“We want to see the ease of doing business in the country substantially improved,” says Stephen de Gannes, CEO, T&T Chamber. “Digital transformation is key and is being looked at by the government in everything from paying a bill and registering a birth to buying a car — any kind of transaction really.

“We also want to ensure that we don’t lose our best and brightest to other countries. We have people coming out of university who have been exposed to foreign technology and I believe they could provide some excellent technology solutions in the future. We want to encourage this through small and medium-sized

enterprises and develop that entrepreneurial spirit in them. That way they can become a think tank that could even develop solutions for the rest of the world.”

Richard Young, chairman, TTIFC, is also a firm believer that Trinidad and Tobago must utilize the talent within the country, from the 300 students a year graduating with a degree in technology to the young entrepreneurs and startups that are utilizing fintech.

“We’re going to create a virtual hub to build the ecosystem for fintechs,” says Young. “We’ve already received a fantastic response from some of the big technology players who are prepared to fund the hub.

“Visa, Huawei and the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago want to be part of it and this will help to bring about significant change, helping to move the country forward.

“We’re already fairly advanced when it comes to digital government payments and we’re trying to introduce online payments for licensing, transport and immigration.

“We are also introducing e-money issuers and e-wallets. However, there are some people who want to continue paying with cash. Therefore, we realize that some education will need to take place.”