Chaguanaus Chamber head: 'Indo-Trinbago fusion music could be a hit'

GREATER CHAGUANAS Chamber of Commerce president Richie Sookhai has said India’s film industry, Bollywood, provides unique opportunities for TT to diversify its economy and help both countries market a product which could be enjoyed worldwide.

He expressed this opinion during a webinar on improving trade between India and the Caribbean on Friday.

"Bollywood is over US$1 billion (industry) and is something that we can tap into," Sookhai said he was fortunate in 2019 and 2020 to have visited Mumbai during Holi.

"I was amazed to see the young Indians and how they appreciate a fusion of culture in their Holi celebration," Sookhai said.

He said there were similarities between the music played in Holi celebrations and local chutney soca music.

"Our artists could be blended with the Indian artists to create a unique fusion that I believe could be accepted, not only in both countries but around the world." He cited West Indies cricketer Dwayne Bravo's appearances in Bollywood music videos as an example of what Indo-Trinbago fusion could look like.

Sookei said the pandemic has caused people worldwide to alter their business models as they seek to maintain and grow livelihoods during these challenging times.

He said the plethora of online and virtual events which have increased during the pandemic has resulted in businesses being able to reach millions of consumers in many different ways.

From apart culture, Sookhai said shipping, ship repair and manufacturing are other areas for deeper TT-India partnership.

Trade and Industry Minister Paula Gopee-Scoon said TT’s large Indian diaspora is evident in "our strong cultural identities and practices reflected in our food, religions, festivals and music."

She said Government has always sought to maintain and strengthen relations with India with respect to political, economic and cultural engagements while promoting trade, business and investment opportunities in TT.

Jamaica’s Agriculture, Marine Resources and Livestock Minister Zeddrick Johnson said there were significant opportunities for TT in the areas of agriculture and agro-processing, manufacturing, tourism, maritime activities, financial services and logistics and distribution.

She reminded participants that Government had developed a Roadmap to Recovery plan to provide strategic policy guidance for rebuilding a more resilient and sustainable economy, in a post-pandemic world.

"Critical components include the expansion of non-agricultural exports to traditional and non-traditional markets, improving fiscal incentives to promote investment and improving the ease of doing business," Gopee-Scoon said.

"Our current trade policy, closely aligned to our Roadmap to Recovery, seeks to increase economic growth by diversifying the country’s trade in goods and services and transitioning to an economy that is based on innovation and value-added in both the goods and services sectors," she said.

In an effort to promote Indian-Socar, Gopee-Scoon said the director general of the Indian High Commission in TT, Shyam Kote, said the pandemic has offered great challenges to all big and small economies.

"Today, we are left with no other choice but to find ways to resume international commerce and trade innovatively. With lives and livelihoods at the core, Government has been compelled to ensure a sustainable and predictable domestic legislative environment," the minister said.

"These smaller businesses are significant contributors to our local economy and are key priority areas for expansion and growth. This includes developing our domestic private sector. The importance of these business is to the economy, major contributions to complement generation and poverty reduction cannot be overstated," he said.

Citing India as one of TT’s long-standing international partners, Gopee-Scoon said the country has strengthened its ties with India through the signature of the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) and a double taxation treaty, signed in 2007 and with an initial duration of ten years.

Gopee-Scoon added that TT and India had expressed interest in entering into a new BIT. "A cabinet approval has been obtained and negotiations are expected to commence within the next months."

The renewed BIT, Go-pee-Scoon continued, "will be a useful instrument to enhance India’s Competitiveness and to promote a stable, transparent and predictable domestic environment for business and investment."