

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, August 25, 2021*

The House Met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER in the Chair]

MOTION NO. 1 SPEAKING TIME**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and good afternoon to all.

Madam Speaker, notwithstanding the resolution at the House on Friday, August 28, 2020, in relation to the speaking time during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, I beg to move that the debate on Motion No. 1 only, that is, a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago be extended for a further period of three months, that the speaking time be as follows: A maximum of 45 minutes for the mover and first responder; all other speakers a maximum of 20 minutes, and the reply of the mover a maximum of 45 minutes, all with no extensions.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, we are not in agreement with this and we would like to revert back to arrangements of the Standing Orders.**Madam Speaker:** Member, one, you cannot address me when you are sitting. Secondly, you will address me if I give you leave. You know the proper— You have been the Whip for a long time, you know the proper procedure.*Question put.***Mr. Lee:** Division.

Madam Speaker: Members, you know the procedure. We will wait for three minutes for Members to come in and then we begin the count, if it is a Member comes in after the count has begun but before the vote is announced, that Member will be allowed to vote.

Could I ask while we are waiting if all Members control their devices so that we would not, when we get into the substantive business, have to address this issue? [*Pause*] Okay, so, hon. Members the vote will begin now.

The House divided: Ayes 19 Noes 15

AYES

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Young, Hon. S.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Forde, E.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe, Hon. C.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Cummings, Hon. F.

Leonce, Hon. A.

Manning, Hon. B.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L

de Nobriga, Hon. S.

Scotland, K.

Motion No. 1 Speaking Time

2021.08.25

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Richards, K.

NOES

Lee, D.

Ameen, Ms. K.

Charles, R.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Paray, R.

Indarsingh, R.

Hosein, S.

Padarath, B.

Haynes, Ms. A.

Tancoo, D.

Mohit, Ms. V.

Rambally, D.

Ragbir, Dr. R.

Ram, A.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Kennedy Richards is here.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Ratiram, R.

Question agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

**STATE OF PUBLIC EMERGENCY
(EXTENSION OF)**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

UNREVISED

Whereas it is enacted by section 8(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that the President may from time to time make a Proclamation declaring that a state of emergency exists;

And whereas it is enacted by section 9(2) of the Constitution that a Proclamation made by the President for the purposes of and in accordance with section 8 shall, unless previously revoked, remain in force for fifteen days;

And whereas it is enacted by section 10(1) of the Constitution that before its expiration the Proclamation may be extended from time to time by resolution supported by a simple majority vote of the House of Representatives, so however that no extension exceeds three months and the extensions do not in aggregate exceed six months;

And whereas the President, by Proclamation made on the 15th day of May, 2021, declared that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;

And whereas the House of Representatives, by resolution on the 24th day of May, 2021, extended the said Proclamation for a period of three months;

And whereas it is necessary and expedient that the said Proclamation should be extended for a further period of three months:

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Proclamation made by the President on the 15th day of May, 2021 declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago be extended for a further period of three months.

Madam Speaker, these are unusual times and it is in the context of these unusual times that as Leader of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, that I have had to in the beginning, come to this House and ask that these provisions be

put in place. Madam Speaker, the state of emergency that we are asking for an extension for today, comes at a time in the second year of Trinidad and Tobago and the world being called upon to try and face down and survive a pandemic. Before we had the enactment of the state of emergency in mid-May of 2020, Madam Speaker, as far back as January into February into March of 2020, we did engage this requirement to prepare ourselves and to respond to the Coronavirus, the novel Coronavirus, which was a new virus entering the human population and had the potential and was demonstrating in other parts of the world that it would kill and maim human beings and disturb and destroy economies.

It was the position of this Government, Madam Speaker, notwithstanding any interpretation from any other quarter that the Government will take the population alongside its decision-making, and in its decision-making because, Madam Speaker, the response to this virus, in many ways, is personal. And, Madam Speaker, we rely on the population to first listen to the notices; two, be educated by the explanations; and three, to make decisions at the personal level.

At no time, Madam Speaker, did we seek to force down the throats of the population any aspect of the response. You may recall, Madam Speaker, that before we knew the effect of masking, that we all looked on at what was happening in Asia where people were wearing masks but eventually, the scientific data told us that masking could provide some measure of protection. And it was the Government's position that the population would listen to this and would respond accordingly. And we tried that, Madam Speaker. But, by and large, the response was not satisfactory because there were many persons who were not taking the threat seriously, who were not thinking that they had to respond, or in some instances, Madam Speaker, just think that it was fun to object.

So, Madam Speaker, we had to go and have the regulations made and put into force of law, the wearing of masks in public spaces. And of course, other activities, which persons would not normally 100 per cent comply with, we had to put into the regulations and clothe them with force of law, so that our state security forces could encourage people or enforce the law in such a way that persons would comply and give us the benefit of that compliance.

And, Madam Speaker, that took us through 2020 and into the early part of 2021. And if I was able to show, Madam Speaker, any data in this House, it would be nothing new because I am not in possession of any data, none whatsoever that has not been made public to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And I want to repeat that, as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago leading the team that responded and is responding to the Coronavirus, I have no information, none whatsoever that has not been put into the public domain by the medical experts who we rely on to guide us through this very troublesome process. And, Madam Speaker, it is important for me to say that, because I want to reinforce the reliance of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago on the medical expertise and the integrity of the staff that provides technical and scientific information to the Government.

I want to go further and say, Madam Speaker, that there is no Government in the Western Hemisphere, not in America, not Canada, not Caricom, not Latin America; there is no government that has been as open and forthcoming to a population on this virus than the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Firstly, Madam Speaker, by presenting the technical experts from day one, in a variety of medical and scientific disciplines, to speak directly to the

population, on live television and take questions from the entire media corps, on virtually a daily basis. [*Desk thumping*]

The most highly trained virologists, epidemiologists, public health experts, they have all been made, Madam Speaker, to come before the population once, twice, three times, many times per week, and to take questions and to answer them to the best of their professional ability. As Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, I have lost count of the number of times that I have stood before the media corps and the population and have taken questions to exhaustion. And, Madam Speaker, I do not intend to shirk that responsibility now.

Madam Speaker, we went on until the end of the first quarter of 2021. Much to our disappointment, the virus, rather than be gone, was in fact raging throughout the world as it still is today, Madam Speaker, still is. But what happens in the preparation of the country's response is that the technical experts do projections, scientific projections, and give the Government the benefit of the outcome of those projections. We understand a whole lot better this year than we were last year as to how the virus is spread, how it is transmitted, how it is received, and so on. And on the basis of the incubation period of the virus, and its spread among the population, the experts whose specialty is handling the statistical data, guide the Government on a daily basis on projections going forward. That is why, Madam Speaker, if I was able to hold up—and with your permission, I will just turn this to you, if I was able to hold this up, with your permission as the very large diagram, what you would see the pathway that we have gone is that by April, we started to have an uncomfortable number of daily increases in the infections. And the projections, Madam Speaker, and these are shown to the population at every one of the press conferences, every single one, the projections and the outcomes of our actions.

And what we saw, Madam Speaker, between March leading into April, and by mid-May, the projections were extremely worrisome that our daily increases, the community spread of the virus in our population required that we focus more on the discouragement of our population with respect to congregations, whether it is in the workplace, in the places of entertainment, and even among families. Because the projections were that if we did not come out stronger, as well as we were doing the masking, as well as we were doing the sanitizing, as well as we were doing and saying that we should keep our distance in that physical distancing, the danger, Madam Speaker, was that if the population continued its normal interaction with each other in wherever we interact, that we would have had a major crisis. Against that projection, Madam Speaker, we had to take action.

One of the actions we took in mid-May, was the action of a state of emergency, which allowed the State to encourage a curfew. It was from 9.00 in the evening until 5.00 in the morning, which means that during that period where a lot of socialization takes place, we would suppress that socialization and deny the virus the opportunity to spread as quickly as it would have had we not done so. We have already taken action and that action is still in place, with respect to socialization, in bars, in cinemas, and similar places.

We also, Madam Speaker, discouraged persons from worshipping in a congregation, not because we are against religion or that we are ungodly, but because the socializing of that activity was a danger. Some of these restrictions remain in place. And, Madam Speaker, having had the state of emergency and the curfew, which slowed down and diminished significantly, the interactions with the population at nighttime, we did see that the projections were correct because by June, we had reached the peak that the highest point we had reached and it could have gone a whole lot higher, had we not intervened, Madam Speaker, to

encourage that lack of socialization, it would most certainly have gone far worse and the projections, Madam Speaker, on the diagrams that we show on a regular basis, were virtually a vertical line showing you how fast and how high it could go. And, Madam Speaker, we were not inventing anything here in Trinidad and Tobago, we were simply staving off for our population, what has happened in other populations when these actions were not taken and were not effective. We were not inventing that. We were simply looking at our projections and taking action to stave it off.

So, Madam Speaker, by the time we got to the end of May, we were at the top of where we eventually peaked out and we started to see a significant reduction in the daily infection rates. And, Madam Speaker, you will still hear persons who have not taken the trouble to follow what was being said on a regular basis, or to try to understand it in detail or just simply want to say it did not work. I am hearing people saying now, Madam Speaker, that the actions have not worked. I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that where we were in at the 15th of May, our daily infection rate was 397. And that came up, Madam Speaker, from less than 100 in February and into March where it was approximating 70/80 or thereabouts. By time we got over 100 and we started to be alarmed and that is 100 per day; that is the daily increase. By the time we got to the 15th of May, the daily increase in infections—and these are the confirmed, eh. This is not the total amount of people in the country infected, it is an indication—because very many people who were infected had not gone for testing and had not in fact acknowledged their clinical condition and even if they did, they were not all reporting to the State in the way to get this data. These were the confirmed. So these numbers are to be looked at as a guide as to what is happening with the community spread. Three hundred and ninety-seven on May 15th. That rose, Madam Speaker, to 520 by the 31st of May.

2.00 p.m.

And, of course, Madam Speaker, you know, as I said earlier on, if you have been following the detail from the experts, you see that today, but you have to look for the effect of that 14 days down the road, as people were infecting other people, so the number you see today is not the total story. The real story is how many people they are infecting, and their clinical conditions will show up within 14 days. And, of course, Madam Speaker, our medical and technical experts were tracking that on a daily basis and advising the Government [*Desk thumping*] and it is against that background that the Government could have made decisions.

So we had the state of emergency and the curfew and the discouragement with all the other ways and all the other actions we have taken—discouragement of congregation, ruling out partying, enforcing the law against partygoers, because those were environments that could threaten the whole country's well-being—by the time we got, Madam Speaker, to the 31st of May, 520, by June, 14 days later—the 15th of June thereabouts—we saw the effect of that discouragement, because our daily infection levels fell to 319. By the 30th of June, it was 227. By July 07th, it was 161.

But, Madam Speaker, that tells us that the peak that we were heading for in mid-May, that could have been any number. It could have been “X” where “X” is any number. And these numbers you are hearing here of 500 and 380 and so on, are accompanied by similar increase in the numbers of deaths on a daily basis. And that is what we had to look for, Madam Speaker. Because the higher the level of infection, a percentage of that infected population will require hospitalization and a percentage of those will require high intensive care and a significant number of them will end up in the ICU and, Madam Speaker, the data and the experience has shown that a portion of those persons will die. So, in short, you do not want a high

level of infection because the results are death or serious illness and hospital occupancy.

Madam Speaker, when we looked at our ability to keep the commitment we gave to the population that we will do everything that we have to do to ensure that persons who are infected, that they receive the medical care that their clinical conditions require, we had to always keep our eye on the hospital occupancy rates. And one of the experts who provided that information on a daily basis, every time there was a press conference, was Dr. Maryam Richards, whose contribution was to show us what was our position with respect to hospital beds and with respect to its occupancy. And I could tell you, Madam Speaker, the experts advised us and the Government that once your occupancy is upwards of 75 per cent, you are in crisis with the hospitals once you get over 75 per cent. You do not have to get to 100 per cent occupancy to know that you are in trouble.

If you find yourself in an infecting environment where the hospital beds are occupied in the order of 70 to 75 per cent, you know you are in trouble. You will not have enough beds and you, most certainly, will not have enough doctors and nurses, because as Dr. Richards always points out, a physical bed with a sheet on it and a mattress is not really a hospital bed that can give you the care you require. Each bed calls for a certain amount of input from doctors and nurses and their support staff. And we, Madam Speaker, we came close, very close. We came very close to being in a situation that many countries had been in where their hospital infrastructure had been overcome and there were patients in their corridors and in their driveways and in their towns that wanted to enter a hospital to get medical care and they could not get it, and they died accordingly sometimes in the streets. Madam Speaker, we avoided that. Madam Speaker, we avoided that and that seems to have upset some people. Because some people who always every Monday

morning telling this country we collapse here and we collapse there and who collapse and who did not collapse. They were hoping, Madam Speaker, that we got to that point.

But thankfully, Madam Speaker, the Government took the action required and our technical people gave us the advance notice, and the projection shows that we had to take those actions [*Desk thumping*] and we evaded it, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Our curve came downwards—and you look at the diagram and you will see it—but, Madam Speaker, we have not gotten back to the levels that we were prior to having to take this action. We have not. But it does not mean that we have to sanitize the country before we come back out to do what we were doing before.

And you would have seen, Madam Speaker, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has very cautiously, consistently and systematically, after the restrictions were imposed, we then started again, under the guidance of our technical and medical staff, we started to relax the restrictions. On the 5th of July, Madam Speaker, we relaxed construction and affiliates and allowed construction to resume. On the 12th of July, we allowed manufacturing, automotive industry and elective paramedical to resume. All this time, Madam Speaker, our level of infection was still not back to where it was in the April. But, by the actions we have been taking, our infection or daily infection rates had steadied to what is being called its plateau. But, Madam Speaker, it plateaued in the order of about 200-plus, although some days you might hear even 300, but the plateau is in the order of an increase, a daily increase of about 200 or 250 or thereabouts. Madam Speaker, that is up from where it was well below 100 for a number of months.

So for those who believe that because it has plateaued here, and it has not run away to take us to calamity that overflow in the hospitals and so on, that we

could do whatever we want now because we could now exhale, because it has been finished, and using terms that are completely unwarranted, Madam Speaker, they refused to accept that where we are now, doing the things that we have done in the relaxation—modified border controls, curbside “restauranting”, takeaway food, nonessential retail—all of those things, Madam Speaker, we have allowed to come back on with the full understanding that our baseline now is at a plateau in the order of about 250. And if we do not maintain what works, Madam Speaker, and we end up having a runaway in infections as we had in May into June, then we are starting from a much higher level of infection, and we more quickly will reach the stage where we were in June and go much higher, if we can control it. In short, Madam Speaker, we are operating the economy almost in its fullness, but from a level of infection that is not at its lowest, and we have to be particularly careful that that thing that helps the virus to spread does not have its way.

And, Madam Speaker, that is why today we are here, asking for an extension in the state of emergency, so as to allow us to encourage the population, through force of law, to not congregate during the night, so as to preserve this plateau or, even better still, to bring it down to a lower level. Because, Madam Speaker, the advice that we have from our technical persons and from our own experience looking at what is happening in the world around is that where we are is a dangerous place, and we could easily, by our slackness or by our misinformation and misbehaviour, we could easily end up with a sudden increase as we had in May/June and that could lead us to having to do what we had to do before, and that is last thing we want, Madam Speaker. Notwithstanding any inconvenience now, notwithstanding any loss that we are going through now, notwithstanding any tiredness that we are going through now with COVID-19, the last thing we want is to be in a position where we are [*Desk thumping*] being called upon to lock this

country down again do save lives, Madam Speaker.

And there are those who see lives and livelihoods as one and the same, Madam Speaker, I do not. I see lives first and livelihoods after. [*Desk thumping*] Because, Madam Speaker, that is what this virus is about. Madam Speaker, this is a virus that has already killed over four million people in the world. And, Madam Speaker, countries with far more resources than us, they are struggling worse than we are, but there are those who would not acknowledge in this country that we have managed it well and we are not out of the woods yet. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, we have lost over 1,000 people in this country to the virus and for some people that is a number. For me and for this Government, they are human beings and families. There was pain, there is loss and, Madam Speaker, the virus is still raging.

So, when we are asked: Why do we want to take away the freedom from people? The question has to be, freedom to do what during the night other than to congregate and socialize at the family level or at the party level? That is the freedom that is being asked for, Madam Speaker. The price of that freedom, Madam Speaker, like the wages of sin, is the death.

Madam Speaker, we are saying to the population, we are in a position where if we control ourselves a little longer, we will strengthen our position, and that strengthening our position also allows us to look out through the window at a potential that may come to us any time, and that potential is one of the variants of the virus we talked about, the Delta virus.

Madam Speaker, I do not have to tell anybody in this House—not you, not any Member in this House—what is happening in the world where the Delta variant is raging havoc among people who—and I want to say again—have more resources and more opportunities to deal with it than we have. But thankfully,

Madam Speaker, by the systems we have put in place so far, so good, we have caught on the border, on the edge, the incoming Delta variant. The systems we put in place allowed us to identify persons who were infected and who were on their way into the population. The quarantine system worked.

Madam Speaker, let us give credit where credit is due. The health department staff that worked with the Government, they have guided and insisted that that quarantine system be kept in place even as we open the country. [*Desk thumping*] Had we not taken their advice, we would have now been in the hands of the Delta virus. But some people do not want to understand that. But those of us who work with those people, we know what their input is and we know what advice they gave us. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, when we closed the border, all kinds of accusations were made against the Government. Some ridiculous, some self-seeking and self-serving. Madam Speaker, we were doing nothing that other countries have not done in fighting this virus. The border of Canada was closed. It is one bridge open to the United States, probably the most open border in the world, one bridge open between them up to now.

Madam Speaker, the Australians told their people who were in India, do not come home. If you come home, you will be fined \$10,000. Up to now, Madam Speaker, Australia is still ferrying people, tens of thousands of people outside who could not come home for the last year. But in Trinidad and Tobago, there are those who are encouraging us: "Open the border, open the border, open the border." Yes, we had people wanting to come home, and yes we brought them home and yes we sent money outside for those who were destitute. [*Desk thumping*] You will never hear that, Madam Speaker. We sent money outside at the embassies for those who think they could not find their way to a meal or to a shelter. We did that, Madam

Speaker. And, of course, when we open the border, you would have thought that there were thousands of persons who would flow into Trinidad and Tobago, because they wanted to come. That did not happen. Do you know why, Madam Speaker? You know why? Because the pressure that was being brought on the Government about persons being stateless and want to come home, it was organized and largely contrived. [*Desk thumping*] But, Madam Speaker, we could live with that. We will live with that. We have been living with that. And we are saying today that yes, we have been able to reopen our economic activities cautiously, hoping for the best. So far, by the things we are doing, we have had no major outbreaks in any industry and so on, alongside a vaccination programme that is second to none in the region. [*Desk thumping*]

We have more vaccines available. We have vaccinated more people than anybody else in the Caricom contrary to what you have been hearing, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] contrary to what you have been hearing from some people. Trinidad and Tobago's vaccination programme now is in absolute numbers—in absolute numbers the best—and percentage wise [*Desk thumping*] except for British Colonies, except for Monserrat, Cayman Island, British Virgin Islands and Bermuda and maybe one other Caricom country, we are in a good position for first-dose vaccines and second-dose vaccines. [*Desk thumping*]

In terms of absolute numbers of vaccines into the population, Jamaica has two and a half times our population or more—it is three times our population. They are like us. We were countries that had difficulty in getting vaccines. Fortunately for Trinidad and Tobago, that is behind us now. We are saying that based on where we are, based on where we have come from, based on where we could go, if we reduce for a while longer our nocturnal activities—remember, Madam Speaker, there is nothing preventing people during the daytime from five o'clock to nine

o'clock, whether it is business or social, the normal day is there. What is being restricted and what is intended to be restricted is the nocturnal activities, largely socialization at nights, even among families, Madam Speaker. We want to discourage that for a little while longer.

And, Madam Speaker, I have heard it said in the business community that if we go along with the curfew that the night time shift can be encouraged. Madam Speaker, for the few companies that have a night time shift, I am sure that it can be arranged that all such persons can be authorized to go out to work even during the curfew. That is easy to organize, and we have done that. We have done that, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] But what, Madam Speaker—

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, 55 please. I am not hearing the Prime Minister. The Member for Port of Spain is disturbing.

Madam Speaker: All right. So, let us continue. Please Members, abide by the Standing Orders. Continue, Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, if you could advise me, what Standing Order I was in breach of, I will be able to assist? Is it here?

Madam Speaker: It did not relate to you Prime Minister. Please proceed.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It is not here?

Madam Speaker: It did not relate to you.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you. Thank you. So, what we are saying, Madam Speaker, let us, one, accept that there is inconvenience in this matter. But if the convenience is the convenience that exposes us to an increased level of community infection in a pandemic, Madam Speaker, I do not know that I am required, Madam Speaker, to have to convince anybody in this country that it makes more sense [*Desk thumping*] to be inconvenienced in those matters of socialization, especially after we have already taken the risk of getting you back to work in a

high level of infection that we now call on you, as a population, to give up the socialization at nights for a good reason. [*Desk thumping*]

I am prepared to listen in amazement and amusement at those who tell the population that these kinds of interventions are because of some narcissistic behaviour of the Prime Minister, and talking about power and authority and bullying and whatever. Madam Speaker, every action that we have taken since January 2020 with respect to COVID-19 is for a good reason. [*Desk thumping*]

And I, Madam Speaker, I am empathic with everybody in this matter. I am, because I too have experienced it at the family level, Madam Speaker, at the personal level. So I am not to be advised by others as a stranger to this matter.

So, Madam Speaker, when we say extend this the first time, I told the country, while the law permits it for 90 days, and we ask the Parliament to allow it to go for 90 days as the law permits, the Government will discontinue it at the earliest opportunity, once we believe that that will not unnecessarily increase the risk and expose us to something that we do not want to be exposed to. Madam Speaker, unfortunately, at the end of 90 days I, myself, was looking forward to ending this, if not only for COVID, but to give the police service a rest, to give the nurses and doctors a rest, to give those persons who are inconvenienced a rest. But, Madam Speaker, when we look at where we are after the 90-day period, yes we are in a much better position than we were at the beginning of the 90-day period of the state of emergency, but we are not at a point where we can now dispense with the state of emergency. Because if we do that, Madam Speaker, it is more than likely that the response that will come from the population, at this time, with this level of infection, will see us having huge community spread leading to another phase of activity, which may force the Government to have to take even firmer action of restrictions.

So, we are saying, Madam Speaker, in protection of the gains that we have made, not the least of which is all these people who we have been brought back out to work during a fairly high level of community spread, to protect those gains, we need to pay the price of giving up some of the night time socialization [*Desk thumping*] so that we can depress this plateau even lower. We cannot say, Madam Speaker, we cannot say, we are not advised that this plateau allows us to dispense with the discouragement for the population for socialization.

And I must say here on *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, the only reason, the only reason why we are extending or asking for this state of emergency to be extended is so that we as a population, under the terms of the state of emergency as would be described along the way, will discourage the population from socializing at nights between nine o'clock and five o'clock in the morning. That is the only reason.

I have seen it said by some of my parliamentary colleagues and my erstwhile parliamentary colleagues and political colleagues that this has to do with elections. Madam Speaker, let the record show that there was a general election due in 2020, and there was no state of emergency. We went into a general election without using a state of emergency for election purposes and we won it. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, it is being said—I mean, the most ridiculous thing I have heard, the most donkey—and all the donkey logic I have heard is that before the emergency, we had a low number of infection and now we have a higher level of infection, so the emergency is not working. Madam Speaker, that has to be “Donkey logic” with a capital “D” because it is, you cannot look at the low level before to determine whether you should continue with the emergency, because the emergency was invoked on the projection that the numbers will be higher if you do not act, and it is on that basis that we intervened and the emergency created the conditions for us to bring the numbers down. [*Desk thumping*] I mean, if we take

that argument, all medication will now be in trouble, because you will say, before I was sick, I was not taking a tablet and I am taking the tablet now and I am still sick, so do not take the tablet.

Mr. Charles: Standing Order 48(4), insulting language, with donkey. I do not know if that is accepted.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, please continue.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, there is nothing else to say. The only reason that we are doing this, the only reason is so that between the periods of curfew that will be determined that people are encouraged not to congregate. And I know we could spend the rest of the week in here saying all the inconveniences and the disappointments that go with that. But, Madam Speaker, at the end of the day, we want to be able to preserve lives, keep the hospitals from being overflowing, keep the doctors and nurses from being overworked more than they are now and keep people on the job that they have been allowed to go back out to recently.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to give this country the assurance, that at the first opportunity that is medically safe and encouraged, this Government will discontinue this emergency even if Parliament today [*Desk thumping*] approves a 90-day extension, at the first opportunity where it is reasonable for us to do so without exposing the population, I give the country the assurance that we will end it right then and there. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And on that basis, Madam Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Madam Speaker, I join this debate

after having listened to the hon. Prime Minister, as he moved this Motion in relation to the Government's aim and objective here this evening in extending this state of emergency for another three months. And, Madam Speaker, if I am to reflect upon the Prime Minister's words here this evening, the great French thinker and philosopher, Maximilien Robespierre, said that:

“The secret of freedom lies in educating people, whereas the secret of tyranny is in keeping them ignorant.” [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, it is very clear, the writing is on the wall. Over the last 45 minutes, the Prime Minister has not done anything to educate the population of Trinidad and Tobago in making a very credible case for the extension of this emergency, state of emergency. And, Madam Speaker, you know, in this country, we have heard of the “Days of Our Lives”, we have heard of “The Bold and the Beautiful”, we have heard of “Santa Barbara”. Under this Government, the new soap opera is one that is full of bacchanal, half-truths and it can be called “As of midnight tonight”, Madam Speaker, in terms of where we are. And there are a number of things that I want to and I must respond and I must put on the record. During the Prime Minister's presentation, I was constantly disturbed and I had difficulty in concentrating based on the number of horns and noises I was hearing outside of the Parliament of this country, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I really had difficulty in taking notes because of the strong voices of dissent, apparently, I was hearing from outside of the Parliament.

Madam Speaker, and the Prime Minister said, rightfully so, that he is leading a government in unusual times against the battle against COVID-19, and the Coronavirus, and he said that his Government did not seek to force down the throats of the population any measure as it relates, and he went on in the direction of the wearing of masks and the regulations. But I think that because the Prime

Minister offered nothing new this evening in terms of data, in terms of statistics any new information, the Prime Minister really reflected on his Government's incompetence over the last 24 months [*Desk thumping*] in the handling of this pandemic. And the Prime Minister should have reflected when he spoke on masks and the wearing of masks, the incompetence of his Minister of Health in relation to this very said issue. [*Desk thumping*]

2.30 p.m.

Because one day his Minister was saying that the population is not threatened by this particular virus. It will not in fact enter the shores of Trinidad and Tobago. He was so dismissive and flippant about it. [*Desk thumping*] He told a television talk-show host on the Morning Edition that it was—it is by remote possibility, such callousness, such insensitivity. No vision, no understanding that when you are elected to lead and govern people, you have to prepare for any eventuality. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, and the Minister of Health, what he did, he said one day he was wrapping a jersey around his face and then he said that you could make a mask out of a—you tear off a jersey or a “sappi”, if he understands what that is, in relation to wearing a mask, Madam Speaker. And the Prime Minister indicated—he had the audacity to come here this evening and said that he was not in position, possession-of any new data and he has no further information as it relates to where we are and he cannot make a case based on any new statistics and data and so on, because what is out there is already out there, Madam Speaker. And that tells me that the Prime Minister has thrown up his hands once again in the air and there is a lack of leadership.

In fact, this is weak leadership [*Desk thumping*] on the part of the Prime Minister, Madam Speaker. And he indicated that the Government, in terms of the

decisions that they made, whether it was in relation to coming to the Parliament on the state of emergency and this extension and so on, it was based on the medical expertise. And he further indicated that no government in the western hemisphere has been more open and transparent. In fact, the Prime Minister said that he was exhausted in terms of questions and so on in presenting himself to the media of this country.

I want to tell the Prime Minister that when you take the job of the Prime Minister, you cannot be exhausted, you have to lead from in front. [*Desk thumping*] And more importantly he indicated, Madam Speaker, that he has been very transparent and open at these press conferences of his Government, whether it is at his weekly press conferences—and I do not consider it press conferences because I consider it to be a soap opera of the bold and the boldfaced, [*Desk thumping*] starring the Prime Minister and any Minister he feels to pick up on a Saturday and bring them. It was one of “bouffing”. It was one of insulting. It was one of ranting and raving and attacking the ordinary people of this country, Madam Speaker. And when he said that they were very open to the media, I want to reflect on what happened to Akash Samaroo of CNC3 and one Urvashi Tiwari of TV6, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] These are the questions that they have to answer.

They intimidated the press. They did not want a fair and balanced [*Desk thumping*] press in their press conferences. They did not want objective reporters, Madam Speaker, and that is why the Prime Minister could come here and tell the country that he was exhausted and tired of questions. Mr. Prime Minister and your entire Government, when you are in the kitchen you have to learn to deal with the heat. [*Desk thumping*] If you cannot deal with the heat, then get out of the kitchen, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, so the press was beaten into

submission. The press was afraid. The press was intimidated and they were unable to really hold the Government accountable, Madam Speaker, in relation to what they presented. And today, I want the Prime Minister, if he speaks that—and he is not speaking in what we would call double and forked tongue here and engaging in an exercise of public relations and trying to appease the population of this country, and he said that he had been very transparent and open, I challenge the Prime Minister to call a commission of enquiry [*Desk thumping*] in relation to this pandemic and the Government's handling of the pandemic.

Let all and sundry come out in the open so that we could know and hold accountable those who are responsible, Madam Speaker. If you want to say that you want to bare it all and you are open and transparent, go down the road of convening a commission of enquiry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to also ask the Prime Minister on this issue about border closures and citizens who want to return to Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister apparently is so disconnected from citizens who are outside, who wanted to return to these shores of our great country he said that it was staged. It was concocted. It was managed and so on, Madam Speaker. There were thousands of people who were trapped outside of Trinidad and Tobago based on the decision that was taken by the Government and who had a desire of wanting to return to this country and he has not presented any clear and tangible evidence but just to make a wild card, broad-brush accusation here this evening as it relates to patriotic citizens who wanted to return to our shores [*Desk thumping*] and continue to make a viable contribution towards their respective families, their respective communities, their respective place of employment, and by extension to continue their role in nation-building and the development of this country.

So how could the Prime Minister continue to be so callous and insensitive as it relates to the wants and needs of our citizens who were trapped outside of the shores of Trinidad and Tobago. But then again there is a total sense of disconnect by the Prime Minister and his Ministers of Government, because in the middle of this pandemic when there are families starving, people are unemployed, looking for food, pleading for hampers and so on, you had a Minister of Government saying—in fact, the Minister of Social Development and Family Services tell this country that citizens who were looking for food that they are too greedy. That is the disconnect. And also, Madam Speaker, one telling—the Minister of—Tobago West, I think—the Member for Tobago West, that the citizens should be grateful when they get grants from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

But more importantly, Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister also indicated and he went on into the usual use of language, and really, I do not condone or I do not support, but he went on in the direction of saying and coming to the conclusion that persons who are seeking clarification, persons who were asking for data and so on was engaged in what I call “donkey logic”. Madam Speaker, the *Sunday Express* editorial of August 21, 2021, has the headline, Madam Speaker, and it is entitled, “Weak case for extending SoE”, and I read:

“The chorus of protest against the Government’s planned extension of the state of emergency (SoE) is fully understandable. Having advocated the use of an SoE in fighting the...post-Easter spike in COVID-19 infections and deaths, this newspaper now sees no justification for maintaining this extreme constitutional measure, given its lack of impact in putting the brake on COVID-19. We are, however, open to being persuaded if the Government can make a compelling case.”

And the editorial went on to further elucidate and it is stated:

“In presenting its case before the Parliament on Wednesday, the burden of proof will be on the Government to show how extending the...SoE will curb the spread of”—the—“COVID-19”—pandemic—“to a degree that other measures which maintain citizens’ rights cannot.”

Madam Speaker, this is not donkey logic. [*Desk thumping*] This is not donkey logic. This is an editorial of a national and respected newspaper. And, in fact, all the editorials of our newspapers have called upon the Government to provide the data, provide the information and be clear and very transparent. So, when the Prime Minister is using the term “donkey logic”, is the Prime Minister saying that the rationale that is being used or put forward by the editors of the respective media houses in Trinidad and Tobago and respective journalists, are he categorizing what they are putting out there as donkey logic?

That is the usual style of the Prime Minister; his crass, his vulgar behaviour, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] We must not allow the Prime Minister to get away and it is our job here this evening, the Opposition will expose the Prime Minister and every one of them who speaks in this debate, Madam Speaker; every one of them. Because, Madam Speaker, as I said, I have heard nothing new. I have heard nothing different. I have heard of no new plans to go forward and it has basically been, Madam Speaker, a repeat of the roadshow that goes on or has gone on, on the weekly basis that we have come to, grown to, accustomed to, Madam Speaker, to the point that the population tuned off. The population tired. The population “do not” want to listen to them anymore, Madam Speaker.

This extension for the SOE from where I sit, based on the weak case of the Prime Minister this evening, I can only conclude that it is one of power—“I am in charge and I will do what I want.” [*Desk thumping*] “I will listen to no

recommendation from any of the stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago.” So it is one of exercising power and control, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] This is not about curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Madam Speaker. I thought, Madam Speaker, that the Prime Minister would have had in his possession, because he has indicated that he has been listening to the input of the medical fraternity and the medical experts in the country—today, probably, he could have told the Parliament of this country how long will the country take to achieve herd immunity, [*Desk thumping*] whether it is 60 or 70 per cent, Madam Speaker, in relation to the ongoing vaccination rate that is being pursued by the Government.

He could have also provided a clearer picture to the population of this country in relation to the COVID deaths, whether it was vaccinated or unvaccinated people, Madam Speaker. That is data that people have been searching for and they have been yearning for in the interest of good governance, accountability and transparency in terms of what he committed himself to, Madam Speaker. And I must say, Madam Speaker, that the Parliament is the place of our democracy. It is the premier institution where issues are to be fully ventilated in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. And whilst the Government is opening up all sectors of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, the Parliament, in terms of its true functioning from a democratic and democracy point of view, it is still being suppressed, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] because they came here again with a Motion. They moved a Motion to waive the Standing Orders to extend the Prime Minister’s speaking time and to suppress the speaking time of duly elected representatives in this House, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] If you are opening up and you want to return to normal, let the Parliament return to its normal state of affairs [*Desk thumping*] to promote true democracy and good governance in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I am forced to also ask the question, where will we go beyond the next three months? Because it is clear that what was the specific objectives and aims of objectives of the SOE when it was first introduced, was it achieved, was it realized? We were told about the Brazilian variant had reached our country. We were told about the widening of the demographics and that in terms of now being affected by the virus. We were told about the state of the nation's public health machinery in terms of it being—as Her Excellency would have described it at that juncture as being the state of overdrive, Madam Speaker. And we were told about the parallel health care system and the issue of the Government, not through its competence but its incompetence and its weak leadership on the part of the Prime Minister. We were in a state of chaos and confusion because we did not know if we were getting vaccines, if we were not getting vaccines and so on, when it would arrive.

In fact, the first set of vaccines that arrived in this country was not through the leadership of the Prime Minister or any Member of its Cabinet, it was through the goodwill of our Caricom neighbours through the Prime Minister of Barbados and the Prime Minister of Dominica, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] It was not through their leadership and wanting to take the bull by the horns and lead, Madam Speaker. And I am asking the questions: has it led to a reduction in the infection rate? No. Has it led to a reduction in our daily deaths? No, Madam Speaker. And I would have thought that given the proliferation of vaccines now in the country and also the increase in vaccination sites—Madam Speaker, in fact, Members of the Opposition played a fundamental role in even showing the Government the direction in terms of understanding the geography of this country because they did not have a true appreciation of where to put vaccination sites in terms of the demography of the population.

Madam Speaker, at the end of the day, from a vaccine-ability proliferation, vaccine sites and so on, I am of the opinion that the Government would have used this as a guide to not trample upon the rights of the ordinary citizens of this country because at the end of the day the deaths have tripled and we have had over 27,000 cases in the SOE period, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, that carries me to the very important point, what is the real agenda of this Government? [*Desk thumping*] And we have to unveil the real agenda of this Government because are we imposing a state of emergency to punish the unvaccinated? What will be our position after the next three months if we do not realize herd immunity? What have we achieved, Madam Speaker? We have destroyed lives and livelihoods. It has resulted in unparalleled and unprecedented unemployment, poverty, inequality and destabilization of families.

In fact, Madam Speaker, the state of emergency has butchered the small and medium-sized business community in our country. [*Desk thumping*] And they could tell you what because the chamber or the confederation of chambers of commerce carried out a study and they concluded that 6,000 small and medium-sized businesses will remain closed. And while the Minister of Trade and Industry was quick to jump to the defence of the Government and say that the Central Statistical Office and the Ministry of Labour did not say that, Madam Speaker, what were the statistics that she had in her possession? And probably today the Member for La Brea should be brave enough and come to the Parliament, from a Ministry of Labour point of view, and tell the Government, tell the country what statistics he has in terms of retrenchment and business closures, Madam Speaker, because he has a legal obligation under the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act and the labour laws of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, probably—I have to ask the question, how much time, Madam Speaker, do I have again?

Madam Speaker: Your time expires at 3.10.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I want to address the very important issue also of the workplace vaccination policy or the issue of a workplace vaccination policy. Will we see that in the context of the extension of this SOE? And, Madam Speaker, I am forced to ask that question because—

Madam Speaker: I will give you a little leeway but remember we are not talking about the workplace policy. Okay? We are talking about the extension of the SOE, so I will give you a little leeway to see where you are going with that.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I am guided. I have raised it in the context of the SOE and whether workers' rights, because as a Member of Parliament, I have been getting complaints where workers have been coming to myself as the Member of Parliament and they have indicated to me that they have been told to stay at home unless they get vaccinated, Madam Speaker, and they are not being given letters in terms of their status of employment, and that is why I am concerned, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: As I said, in terms of the extension of the state of emergency, which is what we are discussing, you know, I am not sure from anything that you have said that this is relevant. Okay? So that unless you tie it into the state of emergency, I will ask you to leave that point and go on to something else.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, you see the Prime Minister went in the direction of dealing with the question of conditions of work, Madam Speaker—
[Crosstalk]—

Madam Speaker: Member, I do not recall that, but I am going to give you, as I said, giving you a little leeway to tie what you are saying into the extension of the

state of emergency. And this is the last time I am going to repeat it, give you a little leeway; if not, please go on to another point.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Madam Speaker. You see, the proliferation of vaccines that have arrived into Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, there are hundreds of thousands of vaccines and employers are now making it as part of their rules, regulations and so on, whether it is rightfully so or wrongfully so in terms of apparently imposing a condition of employment, and I am saying, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: And what does that have to do with the extension of the state of emergency?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, and the point I am trying to make or establish, Madam Speaker, will workers have that right, will the trade union movement have a right; if workers are unfairly treated in the workplace, will they have the right to congregate? [*Desk thumping*] Will they have the right to engage in protests? Will they have the right to put into the public domain their concerns or their issues, Madam Speaker, and that is why I am seeking to highlight it in the context of asking, what is the true agenda of the Government? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, and as a duly elected representative, if persons come to my constituency office, I have a role and responsibility to raise issues [*Desk thumping*] on behalf of people who do not have a voice and I will continue to exercise that right in the interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I say so because the Prime Minister went into my colleague's constituency, the Member for San Juan/Barataria, and at the opening or the handing-over ceremony of the San Juan Government Primary School, only about two days ago, I saw my colleague posing with the Prime Minister in a picture. And I want to state what the Prime Minister said, I quote:

“The Government will have no difficulty intervening on the children’s behalf, as we’ve done with measles, with mumps, with other aspects of health care, where the children cannot make”—decisions for—“themselves... If at the end of the period that we have set, which is mid-September, we look back on it and we see only a population of vaccinated students which is well below the herd immunity level of 60 or 70 per cent...the Government will have to act,’...”

Fine, the Government apparently has decided that it will unleash a “big stick policy” or its heavy hand, Madam Speaker, and that is why I raise this issue because information coming to me, sources have told me that they are hearing through the grapevine that the Government—and they can answer, they can refute, they can rebut, but information coming to me is that the Government is preparing legislation or regulations to come to the Parliament of this country to make vaccination mandatory in the workplace, taking into consideration, Madam Speaker, and I ask this question against the backdrop or background that the Government is the largest employer [*Desk thumping*] in terms of public sector employees.

And just as you displayed that bravado when you went and you outlined that you will possibly engage the heavy hand of the State as it relates to vaccination for our school children, Prime Minister, where was your bravado as it relates to a workplace policy for workers in the public sector? [*Desk thumping*] Are you coward, Prime Minister? Are you coward? You could go down in San Juan and attempt to unleash your power and control as it relates to the children of this country and I am asking you because your Government bungled the pandemic leave. Your former Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development—I do not know where she is because I see now ex-Ministers of Government are “eating

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ah food” in terms of diplomatic postings, including Permanent Secretaries or former Permanent Secretaries who will tell you that they are independent, Madam Speaker, and probably she did not qualify to “eat ah food” in terms of a diplomatic posting.

Madam Speaker: So, Member, again, please come back.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I am guided, Madam Speaker. The issue is in the context of the workplace policy, the workplace policy which the Minister of Labour, this current Minister of Labour, who seems to be following very closely in the footsteps or the shadows of his predecessor as a non-performer. I am sorry to say that about the Member for La Brea, but that is the track record and that is the reality. So we have to ask, Madam Speaker: Where is the workplace policy on vaccination, and will the Government in displaying its true agenda, as we lift this veil here this evening, use the state machinery and the state apparatus to suppress the will of workers in this context? That is the question that has to be answered by the Government.

Madam Speaker, I must ask the very important and address the important issues because, Madam Speaker, the labour movement has made it very clear that they are in opposition to the extension of the state of emergency. If I am just permitted to read into the record that, and I quote:

“The country’s entire trade union movement,...(NATUC),...(JTUM)...FITUN would like to publicly express our deep concerns, fear and objection to the Government’s decision to extend the State of Emergency...for another three (3) months.

In the absence of any cogent empirical data to justify the success of the first SOE, we find it repulsive for the Government to unleash another period of

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severe restrictions...”

And it goes on to elaborate as it relates to the fears and concerns of the labour movement, Madam Speaker.

This Government has had a track record over the last six years, whether in their first incarnation or in this incarnation their second incarnation, of engaging in public relations stunts, propaganda and drama, if I should use that particular phrase. I say so because this was a government that was up and down “de” place. The Minister of Finance, Diego Martin North/East, in his first budget presentation could not contain himself. He used the word “consultation” on 32 occasions, and I am forced to ask the Government: Did you all consult with the trade union movement? Did you consult with legitimate stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago before you embarked upon this journey to suppress the civil liberties of the people of this country? [*Desk thumping*]

I ask that because it is a known fact that workers, leaders of unions of civil society and so on, will not be able to congregate. They will not be able to lead demonstrations and engage in protest action. The traditional form of a true democratic society and a functioning democratic society is to let the Opposition, whether it is in the Parliament or outside of the Parliament, to have its say, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, I have a lot of documentation. I have a bundle in my hand here, because I have sources on the ground. I have sources all over Trinidad and Tobago. They have told me that they are very concerned because you see, they have unravelled their own policies, and this is why we have to ask what is the real agenda. That is why we will lift the veil here this evening, because one of the policy positions that they have adopted is a report of the Cabinet sub-committee appointed to review the operations of the Water and Sewerage Authority and to

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determine a strategy for—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Regrettably, regrettably, now this is ridiculous. Standing Order 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, really again, this is about the extension of the state of emergency. I have to uphold the objection under Standing Order 48(1) upon the course on which you are about to embark.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, if you understand the PNM, if you go back in history from the days of our Independence and when you had the formation of the Industrial Stabilisation Act in 1965—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Regrettably, I once again rise on Standing Order 48(1).

Madam Speaker: So Member, I am going to give you a little leeway, let me see where you are going, but again I remind you what is the substance of this debate.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Opposition's concern, because as I said, and our leader made it very clear, we came to this Parliament with a very open mind, and having listened to the Prime Minister, we have a responsibility, based on interaction with stakeholders in the society, to raise the issues, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Because workers at WASA, workers at the port in relation to their policy position as it relates to the restructuring of the port—

Madam Speaker: Member, very quickly tie that to the extension of the state of emergency or leave that. This is the second time I have stood on this point, I am not going to stand again.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I am guided. All I am saying to the Government and all I am saying to the wider Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, based on policy positions adopted by the Government, workers are very concerned that the SOE will be used to, [*Desk thumping*] the SOE will be

used to implement their policy positions of bulldozing and suppressing their rights from a recognized majority union point of view. That is the point, and that is why we will be very passionate about workers' rights. [*Desk thumping*] We belong to a party, I belong to a party that is entrenched in the blood, sweat and tears of the workers of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And today, the founding fathers of the labour movement, the late Adrian Cola Rienzi and Uriah "Buzz" Butler, and Nathaniel Crichlow, and Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani and others like Selwyn John and Francis Mungroo and so on, will be rolling in their graves. [*Desk thumping*] They would have been all in opposition to the extension of a state of emergency, Madam Speaker.

The terms and conditions of employment, the right to engage in collective bargaining was realized through advancing the interest and concerns of workers since 1937. That is why if you examine the history of this country, you will know that the PNM has always used state of emergencies to suppress, [*Desk thumping*] to attack the rights of workers. They have even gone to the extreme, where they have locked up workers in this country, locked up at the level of the leadership in this country, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, you may not have suffered that fate, but even a Speaker—
Madam Speaker: Member, keep the Speaker, this Speaker, out of the debate. All right?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I am guided. I am just using and referring you to the long arm, the long reach, what is their true purpose and intention, and this is why we will continue to say that the veil, what they are hiding behind in terms of telling you about the Delta variant. I did not hear how much—the Prime Minister did not say how many Delta variant cases and how many samples. He should have been brave enough, from a data point of view, to tell us how many

samples were actually tested for the Delta variant, and even the Brazilian variant, when he spoke about statistics and being open and being transparent as it relates to what he presented in the Parliament of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, all I want to say to you here and to Trinidad and Tobago, is that we will not fall victim to the lazy, the incompetent, the weak, what else I could—

Madam Speaker: Member, your speaking time is now spent. [*Desk thumping*]
Member for St. Joseph.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It was painful to listen to 45 minutes of nothingness. It was painful to listen to a Member of Parliament, first responding to the hon. Prime Minister, say nothing but must lead.

I stand before you today proudly representing the constituency of St. Joseph, and I am proud to do so. I am also proud to do so to support my hon. Prime Minister in moving this very important Motion.

Madam Speaker, the person before me started off by quoting Maximilien Robespierre about freedom and tyranny, but the speaker went on to misquote the Prime Minister, deliberately so, an untruth. The Member went on to speak about the SOE, untruths, but others will deal with that. The Member went on to say that we have never said to this country how many people have died who have been vaccinated or unvaccinated. The Chief Medical Officer has said so innumerable times, that to date, no one who has been fully vaccinated has died of COVID-19. But the Member also said that people do not have rights, cannot protest. The Commissioner of Police, Trinidad *Guardian* 10th August said people:

“...have the right to protest...within...the law.”

So, all these untruths lead me to quote someone, as Maximilien Robespierre

was quoted by Member Indarsingh, and I will now quote Winston Churchill: “The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it,”—as we have seen today—“ignorance may deride it,”—as we have seen today—“but in the end, there it is.” That is the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, why are we here today? In the global context we have 214,244,672 cases of COVID-19, and 4,469,901 people have died, but my friends opposite ignore that statistic; this is real. The world is now in its third and fourth waves, and the CMO of St. Lucia is on record as saying she is fed up, and asking people to stop seeing COVID in terms of political colours.

Eighteen months later after this pandemic started, world experts are saying darker days are ahead. But here we are today, listening to the UNC, as led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia [*Interruption*]
—I am entitled to say both—deride and insult this country by putting up the most spurious arguments against an extension for a state of emergency

Madam Speaker, they want statistics, let us give them statistics. Before the state of emergency, Dr. Maryam Richards, whom the Opposition has insulted, said there were three bed days left for patients, three bed days left. What does that mean? It means that if you got ill with COVID, your chances of getting a bed would have been close to zero.

What prompted the state of emergency on May 15th? Prior to May 15th the seven-day rolling average on 7th of March was three cases, and I remember at each press conference it started to go up: Three to six, to nine, to 16, to 33. By the 16th of May, it was 414, an increase by 138 times. You want more data than that and more justification than that, of why a state of emergency is important? It went up by 138 times from 7th of March to the 16th of May, and a total collapse of the health care system was predicted if this Government, under the brave leadership of Dr.

Keith Christopher Rowley, did not act, [*Desk thumping*] and he acted in the best interest of 1.4 million people, not PNM people or UNC people, but all people, because we foresaw a total collapse as other countries have seen. That was the rationale for an SOE. And why? Because the virus is transmitted from human-to-human contact.

You would have heard Dr. Michelle Trotman, another daughter of this soil who was insulted by the UNC, by calling them PNM propagandists, talk about deathbed confessions of people who said, "I went to a birthday party, I contracted COVID". A woman from Maloney went to a birthday party in Tobago, came back to Trinidad and died. So the SOE, when by May you had 138-fold increase in your rolling day seven-day average, was a measure to avoid social congregation, social congregation. It was also a measure, Madam Speaker, because no one speaks on their behalf, our health care workers are burnt out. Our nurses are tired. Our doctors are tired. Our police are tired, and to preserve their sanity and their systems of policing and health care, we had to do that. We have to speak for them. I will speak for health care workers today. They are tired.

Madam Speaker, what are the vaccinations figures? Because I am hearing all sorts of nonsense about vaccination figures. Because part of the rationale for an SOE is to keep people from moving, so more cases do not develop and at the same time vaccinating people. The partially vaccinated as of last night, 494,625, which represents 35.3 per cent of the population. The fully vaccinated 377,398, which represents 27 per cent of the population. These figures are decent. I am on record as saying I am not happy with them. At the time when I last spoke about two weeks ago, I indicated that we are about 10 per cent behind. We are currently about 5 per cent off pace, now we have made up.

But, Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister has said that he wants school-

aged children to be vaccinated, and we started this programme last week Wednesday. So I now have seven days of data I would like to share with the population to show where we are, and let the population judge for themselves whether these figures are good or indifferent.

On Wednesday 18th, the first day, we vaccinated 3,702; decent start. Thursday 19th, 3,436; Friday 20th, 3,621, so we said good, we have three days of data, it looks good. Saturday 21st, weekend rain, all that, 2,529. Sunday 22nd, 2,064; Monday 23rd, 1,007 and yesterday 1,564. So you start to see a trend going down. To date, that is 18,623, minus 35, which are the Venezuelan migrant children, they are not in school, that is 18,588, which is roughly 20 per cent of the eligible population between 12 and 18. But we need to get those figures up to protect our children. And why do I say that?

Even with the SOE, even with the SOE we currently have eight children in hospital, two at Caura, three at Couva and three at Point Fortin, eight. A week ago, it was three. Remember the rolling average was three and then exploded? With the SOE we had three, now we have eight. Who knows where this will go if we do not have an extension of the SOE, their parents go out and party, social congregation and bring the virus home to their children? That is what we are trying to prevent to save lives, not only of adults, but of our children who are now bearing the brunt of their adults' behaviour. That is why we need an extension of the SOE.

Madam Speaker, in addition to the rolling seven-day average, people need to understand just because things are relatively well in Trinidad with health, as opposed to other countries, Bahamas, Jamaica, Texas, Florida, parts of Europe, it does not mean we need to throw away our gains now. Let me give you a statistic. On March 21st, when our rolling seven-day average was around three, we were using 3 per cent of our ambulance usage for COVID only. By 15th of May we were

using 52 per cent of our ambulance coverage only for COVID. What does that mean for the non-COVID patient? We have to protect our gains, but by 23rd August, it went down to 22 per cent. It is a good decline, but it is not down to 3 per cent as it was in March. That is part of the rationale for an extension of the SOE, to protect every aspect of our health care system.

Madam Speaker, these are not normal times. We need the SOE even in light of hundreds of thousands of persons moving about, because we opened construction on July 5th. That is 45,000 construction workers alone, not only hardwares, tile shops, all that. Manufacturing and automotive opened on July 12th; borders opening, July 17th; food take away, July 19th, and retail, which is hundreds of thousands of persons moving, on August 17th. [*Desk thumping*] It is too soon to judge whether personal services which were opened under the state of emergency on Monday, is having any negative effect.

The point is, the rolling seven-day average from 520 has now been reduced to still an uncomfortably high 159. It has been decreased by 300 per cent due to the SOE, but at 159 we are still miles away from when in early March we were at three. So when we compare these numbers which are lower than ridiculous highs, but when you compare them to the lows which we had in March we are still in a dangerous place. Hospital occupancy now is below 40 per cent, that is good, but we need to get it back down still.

Madam Speaker, what is the rationale for this extension? We have to learn from the experiences of other countries, we must, we must learn, by giving in to public pressure and taking populace decisions, as our friends opposite like to do. They like to take populace decisions. If we do not learn from the experience, the health care system will collapse, which some people may want, because some people see COVID as their political salvation, as a path to political power.

We have no more nurses and doctors. The parallel health care system which we set up before and during the state of emergency of 1,022 beds, simply has no more elasticity. Remember we had three bed days left before the SOE. Madam Speaker, right now, speaking as Minister of Health, we are successfully running our normal health care system, which has gone unnoticed, unparalleled anywhere in the world. We are running a parallel system of 1,022 beds, and now we are running a massive national mass vaccination programme. That is what we are doing, three massive undertakings in health. So we need to protect those gains, because to not do so will be to commit what in tennis terms is called “an unforced error”.

It is better you take some hard medicine now, protect the patient, cure the patient than have the patient limp along for the next year. So from a risk analysis perspective, the extension for this SOE is needed to protect gains, to save lives, to modulate the behaviour of those who insist on partying. Just last week the Commissioner of Police had to go into Real Spring and arrest 21 people. That is a spark that is ready to burst into a flame which is then translated into an inferno. That is what you need an SOE for, and to prevent unnecessary, unproductive congregation. To avert, Madam Speaker, I am pleading to Trinidad and Tobago, through you, I am not speaking to the Opposition because they will not listen, I am speaking to every right-thinking citizen in St. Joseph and all 41 constituencies, let us avert a major public health crisis from which we may never recover. We may never recover from it, if we do not protect these gains.

Madam Speaker, in the four minutes I have left. We do not know if the Delta variant is in the community. We know we have got it in returning nationals. The Delta variant is becoming the dominant strain around the world. The Delta variant is about two to three times more transmissible and deadly than the Wuhan lineage.

It is about three times more transmissible than the Alpha or UK variant, and the Delta variant suggests from the global research so far, it is attacking younger persons. That is why those vaccination rates for children, which have halved in one week, are of concern. It is now being called the pandemic of the unvaccinated.

So we need this state of emergency to do two things, as I close: Prevent those who cannot help themselves, who do not see the truth that by unnecessary congregating in the night for partying, as you saw in Real Spring, is a dangerous thing. Let us continue to intersect two government policies. One, unnecessary movement and congregation, and let us vaccinate, vaccinate and vaccinate.

Madam Speaker, as I close, I will close with a positive quote, and this illustrates the medium to long-term view we must take, because if we give in to populism and everyone has a right to protest, if we give in to populism and lose these hard-won gains, led by the hon. Prime Minister, led by our health team, led by our doctors, led by our nurses, led by our policemen, led by all first responders, we would have squandered an opportunity.

I end with a quote:

If you want to see a rainbow, you must endure a little rain.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

3.00 p.m.

Dr. Lackram Bodoie (*Fyzabad*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join this debate, the Motion to extend the state of emergency. Before I get into the meat of my contribution, Madam Speaker, I just want to refer to a few of the points that the Member for St. Joseph would have made. Some people may want the health system to collapse. I can assure you, Madam Speaker, that we on this side, the United National Congress, are not one of

those groups. [*Desk thumping*] We are here to support country, Madam Speaker, in this fight.

The Member did mention something about the health care system which I will come back to deal with, Madam Speaker. And we want to assure you that we are not here about populism but to deal with the facts and the figures as we go forward in what is a national crisis.

So, Madam Speaker, we understand and we accept that the SARS-CoV-2 is still raging around the world and therefore we in Trinidad and Tobago will have to continue to deal with this virus and the many issues that surround the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, Madam Speaker. Globally, we have crossed 200 million cases with over 4 million deaths. And locally, at the last Ministry of Health bulletin yesterday, we would have recorded 43,344 cases with close to 1,250 deaths, Madam Speaker. And I just want to take the opportunity on behalf of the Members on this side and myself to extend our condolences to the family, friends and loved ones of these, you know, who have succumbed to COVID-19 virus. And in the same breath, Madam Speaker, again to thank all the health care workers and the other frontline workers who continue to battle in very trying and difficult circumstances.

So, Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph advanced the reasons as to why the SOE was implemented on the 15th of May. And those seemed to have been good reasons, Madam Speaker, but we are here today to debate an extension of this state of emergency and therefore we would expect that the Government to come with the reasons to justify the extension.

Now, I just want—so I just want to examine the reasons that have been advanced so far in this debate and in the public domain by Members on the other side. Now, the Prime Minister has stated that increasing the vaccination rates is one

of the reasons for this measure that we are debating here today, Madam Speaker. However, I believe that the Government—what the Government really wants to do is to use the SOE and the curfew to limit the spread of the virus in the hope that enough citizens will be vaccinated to reach herd immunity. And I think this is the crux of it, Madam Speaker, this vacuum that we are facing here with the abundance of vaccines and yet the hope of herd immunity seems to be a distant future. So the question is: Has the present state of emergency served its purpose?

Allow me, Madam Speaker, to just look at a few figures for the period May, June, July. And if we were to look at the number of cases in May, we had 13,085 cases; June, we had 8,884 cases; July, 6,018 cases, and August, 4,334 cases. So we see a trend here, Madam Speaker, that cases are decreasing. If we were to look at the number of deaths, similarly we see a spike in April—sorry, a spike in May; 326 deaths, went up to 352 in June, came down to 293 in July and down to 160 at the last count in August. So one could surmise from this rough analysis of this data that there has been some measure of improvement with the state of emergency for the past three months. But the question, Madam Speaker, is really and truly, you know, can an average of the 200 and less cases now per day, in what we know will be a long state of affairs—in other words, we have to plan—I mean, how are we going to treat with this? And we have seen the experience across the world with various countries having to lock down and open back up and lock down and so on, but really, can we truly justify a state of emergency?

And one of the issues, Madam Speaker, that has not been dealt with—and I thought maybe the Minister of Health, Member for St. Joseph would have treated with this—is the issue of the Public Health Regulations and why that is not sufficient, you know, to treat with the issues we are dealing with. Because we in this House have had the opportunity to support many Public Health Regulations

which give quite an extensive cover, Madam Speaker.

The other thing that we are uncomfortable with, Madam Speaker, is that so far from the both speakers on the Government's Bench, we have had no really well-defined end points and expected outcomes of this extension of the state of emergency. Rightly they may say that it is difficult to predict but, of course, if you are asking for permission for such a drastic measure, then surely one must come with some clearly defined outcomes and end points, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Delta variant—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Okay. Please continue.

Dr. L. Bodoë: The Minister mentioned the Delta variant and that has been forwarded as another reason. I do agree, Madam Speaker, that it is more transmissible. It seems to be more deadly. It is affecting younger children apparently and it can cause another wave. I am in agreement with that, Madam Speaker, and certainly it can overwhelm the health care system. And just in passing, Madam Speaker, I want to make the point, I mean, the Minister needs to stop boasting. I understand that he is fighting—that the Government is fighting the COVID-19 but whilst that is happening, the regular health care system is in a bit of trouble, Madam Speaker, and we see that on a daily basis. We see patients whose care is being put off and so on, especially eyes, joint operations and so on, but I just want to move on, Madam Speaker.

I just want to mention that it is having an impact. It is not as rosy as the Minister would like to point out but there will be another opportunity to deal with that in a subsequent opportunity, Madam Speaker. And, in fact, you know, just as recent as yesterday, I am told that the rapid antigen testing machine—and this is relevant—this is the rapid antigen testing machine, which is used to give you a rapid result for COVID-19, that that machine is not working at the San Fernando

hospital, you know, and I stand corrected. I mean, it is for the Government to tell us if that is so. And if that is so, whether it is going to be corrected in a short time because this is what is required to ensure that we continue to treat with patients in a safe manner by at least determining if they have COVID-19.

So the Delta variant, Madam Speaker, we note that the travel protocol is in place through the legal channels to curb the Delta. I noticed that three cases have been done so far. But I want to ask the question, Madam Speaker, and you know, I mean, is the Government using—trying to use the state of emergency—I am only asking—to decrease a chance of the Delta variant coming in via an illegal immigrant, as happened by the P1 variant? And I think this is a valid concern, Madam Speaker. And if that is so, well then let us know. Because, you know, we have had issues—we know that the P1 variant came through illegal borders. And what is worrisome, Madam Speaker, is that the Delta variant has tripled in Brazil in the last four weeks, now comprising 38 per cent of all the SARS-CoV-2 cases in Brazil. Worrying, frightening, Brazil is a neighbour, it can easily get through the borders—our porous borders to get here. And if this is the reason for extending the SOE, Madam Speaker, then let the Government say so. Let us know, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, I just want to address an issue with regard to where we are right now in terms of vaccination. And I just want to thank all the vaccination staff, hard-working staff and the volunteers, especially the NGOs and so on for the operation of the process. That has not been an issue. We are very happy and we on this side, Madam Speaker, we fully support and endorse the national vaccination effort.

I want to make that clear. We have led by example, Madam Speaker. Just today's newspaper I saw the hon. Leader of the Opposition Kamla Persad-

Bissessar endorsing and asking parents, encouraging parents to get their children vaccinated, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] My colleague for Cumuto/Manzanilla, Dr. Rai Ragbir, is himself a vaccinator in the process, so he is leading by example as well. My colleague from Oropouche East, I read in the newspaper today, Madam Speaker, is supporting the effort for children to get vaccinated at the Debe Health Centre, very commendable. I myself, Madam Speaker, have been publicly endorsing and supporting the effort of the Ministry of Health to get pregnant women vaccinated. And I am happy, Minister, that that programme is rolling out today, as I understand. And as you know, I have a professional interest in that and I just wanted to state, Madam Speaker—and this is just an example of how we can now go forward as Members of Parliament—that in my own constituency of Fyzabad we have embarked on a project with the SWRHA and the local government councillors to bring the Johnson&Johnson vaccine to those in remote areas, as I am sure others Members of Parliament would have done, Madam Speaker.

But the question, Madam Speaker, remains is that we have 400 to 500,000 vaccines that need to be given out in a timely manner in order to avert any possible wave of the Delta variant. I think that is our concern, Madam Speaker. And I am not convinced, Madam Speaker, that a state of emergency extension, whilst it might be useful, I am not convinced that it is going to fix our problem. Because we have these vaccines and we have to address, Madam Speaker—we do not want to be in a position where three months down the road we are here again debating another extension simply because, Member for St. Joseph, we have not been able to vaccinate. I know you have that challenge. I just want to throw out a few suggestions here, Madam Speaker. And, you see, we have to examine the situation as to why this is so. You know, why it is less than 50 per cent of some of our

health care staff are not vaccinated? This is for example, Madam Speaker. Why it is that we have a level of hesitancy with the police service? And these are frontline workers. And what is the issue? We have seen this issue with parents having concerns about their children.

So the question really is that: Have any sub-groups have been identified and targeted in a very specific manner, Madam Speaker? I am concerned because on a daily basis, both in my own medical practice and as a Member of Parliament, I encounter people who come to seek help in other ways, and I ask them, have you taken the vaccine? No pressure. And if the answer is no, sometimes a simple bit of education on the spot, you know, will help and assist the process. And this is something needs to be extended, needs to be pushed out, Madam Speaker. And the worrisome thing about this, Member for St. Joseph, is that some of these people are the people who are at very risk of getting COVID-19 and suffering badly from it; those who are diabetic, who are hypertensive, who have cardiac diseases and so on. So, I think that we need to look at this and I do not understand, Madam Speaker, how the SOE is going to assist with this in this regard.

Madam Speaker, I know that the Attorney General has made some statements with regard to using the SOE to have other categories of staff become vaccinators. I am not sure if that is just the only avenue or whether there might be other avenues that can be used to have those volunteers and non-medical staff become vaccinators but we will hear about that further. So, Madam Speaker, I am saying that speeches and appeals to emotions as we get at the daily and weekly press conferences alone obviously is not doing the job.

Madam Speaker, I would want to take the opportunity to publicly commend one Tahirah Mohammed, 18-year-old who suffered an adverse reaction to the vaccine but took it upon herself to publicly come out and tell the public, tell the

other young people who would have developed a certain amount of fear and hesitancy and share her experience in terms of speaking to the media. And, Madam Speaker, I think this is the kind [*Desk thumping*] of advocacy we need to see, Madam Speaker.

Now, I know the Ministry has tried—I see ads on the TV and the radio and so on, we have some prominent figures. But I think what we are encountering now, we have reached 400-plus thousand, Minister, of first shots—300,000 something. We have reached a gap, we have seemed to be stuck and the question is: How do we move forward? Where do we go from here? And I am saying, Madam Speaker, that the Government needs to partner with key stakeholders in a more structured and focused manner to roll out vaccinations if we are to achieve this desired level of herd immunity, this 70 per cent we talk about. We are 300 to 400,000 short, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, with your permission, I would like to share with this House an Australian study on vaccine hesitancy, if only to show where we do not want to reach. But before I go there, Madam Speaker, I just want to remind the Minister of Health because he himself was part of a seminar that was hosted by the Ministry of Health and the University of the West Indies where our own study was presented, Madam Speaker, a survey of those who would not take the vaccine in Trinidad and Tobago, and this was as early as March of this year. And that figure was an alarming figure of 21 per cent.

So, in other words, our educators, the Minister of Health and those at the Ministry of Health had an idea that we were going to encounter some level of vaccine hesitancy. And it is showing now. We have vaccinated 25 per cent fully and we seem to be stuck, and therefore we have to analyze the reason for this, Madam Speaker. I am saying that—sorry, I meant to go back to the Australian

study and there are three things that came out of this in a survey of 1,000 people. They came across three groups of people. There were those who you call the “vaccine resistant” which we will have in Trinidad who may not be amenable to vaccination or whatever method used. Then you have the “watch and wait” group. And, Madam Speaker, I will tell you Trinidad and Tobago, that is a big group. We have the watch and wait group. Your friend, your neighbour takes it, nothing happens, then they go and take it. We have to find a way to get around that, Madam Speaker. And interestingly, they have a call group called the “hesitant, but cash motivated”. And, Madam Speaker, I am saying this so that we really do not want to reach that place in this country. And the study did show in Australia that if you gave an incentive of AUD \$500 that you would get three and four times the amount of people in that group to go and get vaccinated. But I am saying that, Madam Speaker, because I just want to ensure that we do not have to reach that point in this country. I think we can do better than that, Madam Speaker.

So I am saying, Madam Speaker, that we need to engage leaders in all communities who are in direct contact with the people: school principals, local religious leaders, local cultural icons. I am not talking about national here now. I am talking in local communities, local government councillors, sporting clubs and so on. And I am saying we should get the Ministry of Health personnel, preferably doctors. The issue here is authority and trust. And I am not taking about political authority. We are talking about authority and trust in the medical field, Madam Speaker, to join in the company, and you have to get the local trusted, vaccinated advocates. So you must have people in the community who are already vaccinated and are trusted to speak to these leaders who can then communicate with their followers. This is not about any breaching of social distancing. We are talking about small groups, even by technology and so on, but those are the ones you have

to engage, Madam Speaker. And I do not see how, Madam Speaker, how an extension of the SOE will assist in this process.

So, I am saying that let us use the power of education and persuasion before we resort to the big sticks of mandatory vaccination and state of emergency extensions, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this pandemic is a disaster but an even greater disaster will be if we were to continue to allow citizens to drown in the sea of COVID-19 whilst surrounded by a lifeboat full of vaccines. And this is what we are facing here in Trinidad and Tobago as we speak, Madam Speaker.

As I close, I just want to say that the country has a lot of work to do to bring us from the 25 per cent fully vaccinated to the 70 per cent fully vaccinated. The Government needs to get its act together and work with many more stakeholders. I am not saying that they are not working with stakeholders but they have to work with many more stakeholders to take us out of this.

As always, Madam Speaker, we on this side, as a responsible Opposition, we stand ready to support any reasonable measures, Madam Speaker, intended to help our fellow citizens in this battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. As I close, Madam Speaker, I urge citizens to continue to wash your hands, to wear your masks, to watch your distance and please take your vaccine. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Attorney General.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to support the Motion for the extension of the state of emergency. And I wish to take the opportunity to address, not only the reasons that we as a government proffer for the extension of the state of emergency but also out of need to address some of the

points raised by my learned colleagues opposite.

Madam Speaker, we are here because the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago says that in order of an extension of a state of emergency to be considered that the House of Representatives has to resolve and must make a decision under section 10 of the Constitution that the state of emergency be extended. The Constitution allows for the calling of a state of emergency and that constitutional construction is why we here. Our state of emergency, triggered under the provisions of section 8 of the Constitution, section 8 of the Constitution sets out very clearly that:

“(2) A proclamation...”—of—“the President...shall not be effective unless it contains a declaration that the President is satisfied—

(a) that a public emergency has arisen as a result of...”—certain factors.

And the one that is important for us is in section 8(2)(b) of the Constitution:

“(b) that a public emergency has arisen as a result of the occurrence of...”—in this case an—“...infectious disease, or other calamity whether similar to the forgoing or not...”

So let us deal with the facts. The COVID-19 SARS virus was declared to be a dangerous infectious disease under the Public Health Regulations. The WHO declared it as a virus which stands as the root of a pandemic, a global pandemic. When the Public Health Regulations were introduced, the hon. Prime Minister led this Government in saying that we had considered a number of options in law to manage the pandemic. Firstly, the dangerous aspects of the disease could be measured under the Disaster Measures Act. Secondly, that we had considered the state of emergency provisions under section 7 onwards of the Constitution. And thirdly, that we had considered the Public Health Regulations coming out of the

Public Health Ordinance.

When we implemented the Public Health Ordinance, we were met with an immediate response from the Opposition saying, “You must declare a state of emergency.” That was echoed in the courts of Trinidad and Tobago because the Opposition, as it is entitled to do, and attorneys-at-law who are Members of the Opposition, as they are entitled to do, approached the courts of Trinidad and Tobago and have sought to strike out the Public Health Regulations and to strike out the constitutionality of the Public Health Ordinance itself. Fortunately, each of those attempts have been met with failure on the part of the Opposition Members but it is relevant to the continuation of a state of emergency because today we are being told Couva South, the chief advocate for the Opposition, that the state of emergency is not an appropriate tool to be used and that we must revert to different laws.

So, Madam Speaker, if we take the advice of the Opposition, what law are we to use? What law will satisfy the Opposition? They are clearly dissatisfied with the Public Health Regulations. They are dissatisfied with the constitutionality and the savings of the law which is the Public Health Ordinance. They recommended a state of emergency when our numbers were nowhere near where we are right now. And, Madam Speaker, the Motion before us, the resolution that we are asking for, for the extension of the state of emergency, is born on the back of constitutional proportionality. What are we talking about? Why should we extend the state of emergency? Is there a legitimate aim? Is that aim—is the state of emergency rationally connected to the legitimate aim? Are we taking steps in law that are no more intrusive albeit in a state of emergency than they ought to be? Let us deal with it from a constitutional perspective.

First of all, the legitimate aim is clearly that there is a global pandemic; that

the various iterations of the virus, now at the Delta variant, which is described as being eight times more infectious than previous variants, with the WHO keenly looking at the Lambda variant following the Delta; that situation, globally and regionally, in the Caricom has demonstrated that we are fighting, as the hon. Minister of Health put forward, the pandemic now of the unvaccinated. What does it result in? The legitimate aim is to avoid the crash of the public health care system so that people's lives may be saved. And the hon. Prime Minister was pellucidly clear in saying that the objective is to save lives and after that the hon. Prime Minister mentioned, of course, the factoring of our livelihoods. So, this legitimate aim of stopping the crash of our public health—the parallel health care system by ensuring that beds are available to treat persons who are infected with COVID-19 and more particularly to preserve bed space for other people who may be infected allows us as a country to constitutionally be assured that we are taking the right steps.

When the state of emergency was declared we had three bed days left, three days after which there would be no more beds in the parallel health care system and we would have to start using the primary health care system. The primary health care system, if it is utilized, would mean that we would have to progressively shut down elective surgeries or other types of users of that system, and therefore more and more people would be at risk of losing their lives, and then we would have to take the steps of closing the country, as every other country around the world has done, they have engaged in lockdowns. So, there is a legitimate aim there.

That legitimate aim is now rationally connected to the mission of saving lives and of preserving our economy and allowing us to reopen progressively, not for the first time, not for the second time but now for the third and fourth time as

we progressively ease restrictions. Our borders stand open. Our businesses stand open as to only a few sectors still yet to be reopened. We have our eyes fixed on the rational connection of encouraging our students to go back to school. Madam Speaker, all of us understand that we are fatigued, we are tried, we are frustrated as a nation by the COVID pandemic.

Madam Speaker, should the best part of your high school years, Form 1, Form 2, Form 3 where you meet people who stay with you for the rest of your lives is your pack, there are generations now of never having had years of students not having had their first day of big school. Standard 5 students, Standard 4 students not having the joy of having their T-shirt signed as they leave school after SEA. Parents who are now confined to becoming teachers and staying at home, productivity in the workplace confined to minimal levels because of the manner in which we have to manage the absenteeism for necessity.

Now, this rational connection of lives and livelihoods in the laws is to be found in the Public Health Regulations and in the state of emergency regulations issued as a consequence of the extension of the state of emergency. And, Madam Speaker, it is important to bear in mind that when we look at the Emergency Powers Regulations (No. 2), all of the song and dance of the hon. Member or Couva South, all of the protestations, all of the questioning about the Government taking positions and suppressing rights, et cetera, Madam Speaker, if you look to the Emergency Powers Regulations that are in law published, as they have been for all to see on the 29th of May, 2021, what you will notice is that the regulations associated with the extension of the state of emergency are not regulations of the type that you have seen in this country since the first state of emergency that we had or the second state of emergency. Look at the regulations in the 1970s, look at the regulations in 1990, look at the regulations in 2011, you do not have in this

country state of emergency regulations that resemble military-type regulations. There is no power of preventative detention, none, as there are in other regulations. There is no power to stop the printing of presses as there are in other regulations. There is no power preventing, in absolute terms, marches and protests of the kind and description that you find in other state of emergency regulations which have been issued in Trinidad and Tobago. I find it disingenuous for my colleague, the Member for Couva South, to stand up today to ask about workers being suppressed and trade unions being suppressed.

4.00 p.m.

The hon. Member raised up a strawman and promptly knocked it down, ascribed to the Prime Minister words that the Prime Minister never uttered in this Parliament or elsewhere, and then stood up in a feigned sort of advocacy to cry for the rights of workers. Madam Speaker, this extension of the state of emergency does not resemble the state of emergency triggered in 2011, back then, and by way of connection and relevance. The hon. Member for Siparia declared, as Senior Counsel—I do not think she was Senior Counsel yet—that we had a limited state of emergency in Trinidad and Tobago, and then had to quickly correct herself in understanding that there is no such thing in law as a limited state of emergency, confined to hot spots, as the hon Member, as Prime Minister declared. Workers' rights under the extension of this state of emergency cannot ever resemble, because of the way the regulations are designed, the 7,000 people that were locked up in the 2011 state of emergency. Seven thousand citizens in Trinidad and Tobago were locked up in differently designed regulations under the Member for Siparia, Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Senior Counsel.

Madam Speaker, where is the cry by way of comparison and relevance

from the Member for Couva South for the potential constitutional attack that could come to this extension? When as a matter of record, Madam Speaker, when called upon to defend a different type of arrangement in 2015, November 09, 2015, the Attorney General's Office under my hand had to write to Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia, and past Attorney General Anand Ramlogan, asking them to defend the constitutionality of the state of emergency in 2011, to provide evidence to save the taxpayers money, and you know what happened, Madam Speaker?

Dr. Moonilal: Please, this is about the state of emergency 2021 not 2011.

Madam Speaker: I acknowledge, continue.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And Mrs. Persad-Bissessar the Member for Siparia, Senior Counsel, and Anand Ramlogan SC, when written to on two occasions by the office of the Attorney General, refused to give evidence in the courts of Trinidad and Tobago as to why the state of emergency was called and why it was constitutional.

And, Madam Speaker, I can put on record now that the State has had to pay millions of dollars in damages as a result of the dereliction of duty of the Member for Siparia and the past Attorney General. Let us connect that to this debate. Because I am answering the Member for Couva South who made a song and a dance and a famed cry in terms of advocacy for the rights of workers and the rights of citizens, claiming that the state of emergency before us now which we are seeking to extend, could be an abuse of the rights of trade unions, the right of association, the right of expression. But, Madam Speaker, I am now demonstrating in conclusive terms why you ought not to listen to the Member for Couva South. Because, when called upon to justify to the courts of Trinidad and Tobago the reasons for states of emergency being declared, we are

absolutely sure that Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia and Mr. Anand Ramlogan will not turn up if they were in charge.

Now, Madam Speaker, the point that I am making as well is that if there is to be any challenge to the extension of the state of emergency, that is why we have the separation of powers, that is why I am talking about the proportionality of the law in the way that I am right now, a legitimate aim, a rational connection to the extension of the state of emergency. A state of emergency is one where under this state of emergency, we have given police powers to the army. We have allowed for the Commissioner of Police to call for aid. But, Madam Speaker, we have not drafted the regulations and applied them in the abusive fashion that the 2011 regulations resulted in, which were challenged in court. So if there is a complaint, one of the safeguards to the extension of this state of emergency is that the courts are there to offer protection. We say, Madam Speaker, that that is not necessary because this state of emergency, and the application of the rules that we are putting in by way of the regulations to the state of emergency, they are proportionate and tailor made to treat with a pandemic situation. We are asking in the extension of the state of emergency, Madam Speaker, for some very critical support.

Madam Speaker, is it not a matter of fact that this country had a very significant discussion on what is private and what is public? We had a division in our society about the boundaries that the police could exercise without three-fifths majority rights of intrusion into private property under the Public Health Regulations. It is a matter of fact for all that are honest to speak it, that our country witnessed a limitation in operationality to stop congregation in private spaces. Is it not also factual today, Madam Speaker, that that conversation is at an end? That there is no more conversation about where the limit of authority to

disrupt congregation is? But, Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Fyzabad in making a by far more measured contribution, asked a lot of questions and then fell short of answering what the position of the Opposition is in relation to the very questions that the Member asked. Because, you see, Madam Speaker, in a Westminster style democracy you are obliged to put your own position forward too. And I want to point out here that the Emergency Powers Regulations that deal with vaccinations allow for 10 categories of persons to administer vaccinations. And if we accept the exhortations of the UNC to not extend the state of emergency, I would like to ask for the record, how would medical laboratory technicians, how will radiographers, how will nursing personnel, dentists, veterinary surgeons, medical interns, dental interns, paramedics and pharmacists be able to operate lawfully at mass vaccination sites?

Madam Speaker, those two reasons alone demonstrate the constitutionality of what we are doing. And I ask the population to pay careful attention to what the Opposition is recommending here today, they are saying no to mass vaccination sites to be continued to be operated with ease. They are saying no to state of emergency regulations, which are carefully tailored, and in respect of which there have been no allegations of abuse. We have had no allegations of police or army abuse made. No applications have been made to the courts in relation to the regulations that I am aware of. So, Madam Speaker, from a proportionate point of view, proportionality point of view, I support the hon. Prime Minister's resolution, the Motion before this House, and I thank you for the opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*San Juan/Barataria*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to join in this debate on a Motion, ideally to extend the state of emergency that was proclaimed by Her Excellency on the 15th of May, 2021.

And as the Attorney General indicated in the public domain, this SOE, the first extension will expire on midnight of the 29th of August, 2021, and this Parliament has been summoned in a very urgent and extraordinary manner in order to extend the SOE by another three months. Thereby, there would be a full SOE of a period of six and a half months under this present Government.

Now, Madam Speaker, there are three speakers that preceded me from the Government Bench, that being the Member for Diego Martin West, the Prime Minister; the Minister of Health, the Member for St. Joseph; and the Attorney General, San Fernando West. And I am yet to get, or have heard one credible or convincing argument for an extension of this draconian SOE by three months. [*Desk thumping*] Not a single compelling scientific or convincing argument, Madam Speaker. Not a single apology, not a single reason, not a single concern for those thousands of persons who have lost their jobs because of this draconian SOE. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we are yet to hear from this Government what is the plan for the next three months? What is the plan to get the population at a high vaccination rate so we can obtain herd immunity? What is the plan? You come and you say you want three months more of the SOE to implement a curfew, but yet you did not roll out a plan and tell the country, “Well, by the first month or the first two weeks we expect to achieve this, and by the next month we expect to achieve that, and by six weeks this and that.” We are not hearing those reasons or plans from the Government in order to really fight this virus. This is absolutely nothing new. Their entire response to the COVID-19 virus was just to lockdown the country and suffer the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Nothing new.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister said that they are not forcing down

the response of COVID down the population. But is the Prime Minister aware today how many persons have lost their jobs? And it is easy for the Attorney General to come and say that they want three more months of an SOE when some persons in this country cannot even pay their rents. Madam Speaker, there has been no data that is properly provided to Trinidad and Tobago in this debate by the Government. Because the burden of proof lies in the Government, it is not in the Opposition. And that burden of proof rests solely on the Government to justify why they need an extension of three months. So, coming here and just frightening the population and saying that we have three more days of bed space is not enough. Because when you look at the daily reporting from the Ministry of Health something is wrong. And I say this, because you complain about, or you speak of the burden of the health care system, when today you have over 4,499 persons in home quarantine; and the hospital has 311 patients.

Madam Speaker, that 4,499 persons, are they being monitored properly? Madam Speaker, do you know that there are persons who are COVID positive that are not being monitored properly and that could actually be one of the reasons for the spread of this deadly virus. Where is the technology? Why has this Government not looked at what the other countries in the Caribbean such as Barbados is doing in order to properly trace and detect and have proper surveillance of persons who have tested positive with COVID-19? Then I hear the Prime Minister say that the nationals that were locked out, their actions were organized and contrived. Madam Speaker, that is a most unfortunate statement. Because when Mr. Kadath Gajadarsingh died in the UK, who was a patriot of this country, today his family is mourning because they were not able to attend his funeral. When a British MP had to speak out on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago nationals in the UK Parliament, it was quite embarrassing to us. [*Desk*

thumping] When the Attorney General of Barbados, the hon. Dale Marshall asked this Government to show compassion on their own citizens, how can you say that the actions of the nationals of Trinidad and Tobago were organized and contrived? It is most unfortunate. It is most unfortunate.

Then two speakers, the Minister of Health and the Attorney General mentioned the right to protest. Madam Speaker, there were some individuals outside this Parliament today in a peaceful demonstration by just honking their horns and turning on their lights. Madam Speaker, you know what happened? They were all issued tickets and asked to disperse, and that is the dictatorship that we are facing under this SOE, and you now come here and ask for a three-month extension when citizens of this country are asking for a voice to be heard, when Members of Parliament of the Opposition are asking for our full time and our voices to be heard in this Parliament, we are being shut down. Madam Speaker, when last was the media allowed to enter these Chambers of the Parliament? When last was the media allowed to enter here? But when there was a debate regarding the THA reform, the PNM Assemblymen were all allowed to enter this Chamber.

Madam Speaker, we have seen the selective policy of this particular Government when it comes to implementing COVID policies and COVID guidelines and regulations. That is what we have seen. Then I hear the Ministry of Health in the most “hippocratic” manner, it is hypocrisy to the highest level.

[Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, he spoke of the hard-working—*[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker—*[Inaudible]*

Madam Speaker: Attorney General, everybody in here has freedom of speech.

Mr. S. Hosein: It is bare hypocrisy, Madam Speaker, when he comes here to talk about the hard-working frontline medical workers. Madam Speaker, do you

know that there are many doctors who are under three-month contracts who do not have a single day off, and if they do stay home, they are denied their salary. They are denied pay for that day. Madam Speaker, they are burning out the medical staff of this country. You have nurses that were engaged in mass migration. That is due to the policy of this Minister of Health and his incompetence. When you speak about that there are no more nurses and doctors, this Government was the same one that shut down the nursing academy that was established under the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar as—

Madam Speaker: Member! Member, we are talking about the extension of the state of emergency. Okay. So please get back to something that relates to the extension.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I do take your guidance and I am just responding to some of the points that were made by the Minister of Health.

Madam Speaker, the Attorney General spoke of the 2011 SOE and he spoke of that the Opposition was asking for an SOE since last year, and he is right, that the Opposition did in fact called for an SOE to deal with COVID. Madam Speaker, we called for that SOE at an appropriate time in order to keep the cases down. But, Madam Speaker, you know what this Government did? This Government, under the leadership of the Member for Diego Martin West, invited over 50,000 persons to Tobago during the Easter vacation that caused this massive spike that we are dealing with. This COVID spike that we are dealing with has to be bolted strictly at the chest of the hon. Prime Minister and this particular PNM Government. That is what has to be done. And to boast about the parallel health care system, how it is working. Madam Speaker, do you know that they have to be very honest in this House because they are called honourable Members. When they speak, and the Member for San Fernando West

should know this, because the San Fernando General Hospital is in his constituency, that when he said the parallel health care system is functioning as normal, he must note, and he must be honest, that when there is a memo coming out from the South-West Regional Health Authority, dated the 13th of July, 2021, where they indicated that only clinics and elective surgeries will begin from the 3rd of August and the 9th of August, 2021, respectively. Is it not that during the lockdown the parallel health care system was working. Staff had to be removed from those areas and be placed in frontline response.

Madam Speaker, so those are the issues with respect to the health care system that I would like to raise. But when you look at the justification for the SOE, I would just like to give some numbers. Madam Speaker, when you look at the 15th of May, 2021, when you look at that date, we had 15,899 total positive COVID-19 cases, and 276 deaths. As of yesterday, there are 43,344 COVID-19 positive infections, and 1,244 deaths, which means that during this three-month period of a SOE there were 27,445 new cases of COVID-19 and 968 COVID-19 deaths in just three months. Madam Speaker, something must be wrong. Because, you know why? When you did not have an SOE, and you had no vaccines, you were number one in the world, according to Oxford. But you have thousands of vaccines now, you have a parallel health care system, you have doctors and nurses, and yet today you are coming to report to the country, after three months of an SOE, you have 968 COVID-19 deaths. Madam Speaker, that is totally unacceptable. [*Desk thumping*] It is totally unacceptable. So, when the Leader of the Opposition calls for a commission of enquiry into the Government's response to COVID-19, Madam Speaker, I will stand here and support that particular position.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister spoke of these freedom parties, and I

will just like to get some statistics that the state of emergency is in fact preventing the COVID-19 freedom parties. Madam Speaker, on the 15th of August, 2011, 51 persons were arrested at a Valsayn house party; on the 2nd of August, 25 held at a pool party during curfew; on the 1st of August, 2021, 18 arrested at a curfew party; the 17th of July, 21 arrested at a birthday zess in Sea Lots; 31st of May, police break up a private Valsayn zess, arrest 26. Madam Speaker, and this is the curfew that they implemented and say that it is working.

Madam Speaker, under the Public Health Regulations there are two sets of laws that deal with this state of emergency. You have the Public Health Regulations and then you have the Emergency Powers Regulations. When the Emergency Powers Regulations were promulgated under the state of emergency, Madam Speaker, it was a copy and paste of the Public Health Regulations in terms of limiting the number of gatherings and defining what essential services and businesses are. So, Madam Speaker, even without an SOE you still have the Public Health Regulations which you can go back to in order to restrict gathering, assemblies and to define opening and closing hours for essential and non-essential businesses. So that is why we are saying on this side, Madam Speaker, it is not essential that we have a state of emergency to restrict movement. It is not essential that we have a state of emergency to restrict businesses from operating. Madam Speaker, the Attorney General can in fact do that under the Public Health Regulations that are made under the Public Health Ordinance.

Now, there is another point I would like to raise, Madam Speaker, and this is a most unfortunate and ridiculous submission made by the Attorney General, that we need a state of emergency to encourage mass vaccinations. Madam Speaker, ridiculous to say the least. Madam Speaker, I had a look at the Public

Health Ordinance, and section 105 of the Public Health Ordinance—I will probably give the Attorney General a copy to read, because it seems as though he does not have a copy. And if he is advising the Cabinet and the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the Prime Minister is misinformed with the law. Madam Speaker, section 105 states that:

“The Board”—which means the Minister—“shall have the direction of all measures dealing with dangerous infectious diseases, and”—may—“make regulations with regard to the control of any dangerous infectious disease for all or any of the following purposes.”—and I go to:

- “(f) the provision of medical aid and accommodation;
- (i) the doing of any such matter or thing as may appear advisable for pertaining or checking such diseases.”

Madam Speaker, section 105 is wide enough to ensure that we can widen the pool of individuals who can administer COVID-19 vaccines. So you do not need a state of emergency to tell a medical intern, or you do not need a state of emergency to tell a dentist or a vet that they can administer vaccine. You can do this under the Public Health Regulations made under the Public Health Ordinance. [*Desk thumping*] So it is a totally ridiculous submission from the Attorney General that we need to lockdown an entire country and have a curfew from 9.00 p.m. so that we can widen the pool of individuals to administer a COVID-19 shot—after 9.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, sometimes it leaves the population to wonder what is really going in the minds of some of these Ministers of Government. Madam Speaker, there are other issues with respect to this Delta variant that they seem to have. We got two or three positive confirmed cases of the Delta variant in Trinidad and Tobago, and according to the Government, those cases have been

contained. Now, Madam Speaker, none of the speakers, including the Minister of Health who has the sole responsibility with respect to testing, has indicated to the Parliament, what is the testing capacity for variants. What are the criteria to determine who or which samples are being sent to test for the Delta variant? Because, as the Prime Minister said, we may very well be uncertain that the Delta variant is in the community. But in order to determine how we can stop the spread of that variant we have to first identify and detect where the variant is. And if we are not testing for the variant, how are you going to identify those individuals that may have in fact been infected with the Delta variant?

So you can lockdown for three more months, but if you do not know where the cases are or where the cases are coming from, then this makes absolutely no sense. But, Madam Speaker, you see, the state of emergency gives this Government a free hand, and although the Attorney General points that there is no abuse, they have in fact been abusing the taxpayers of this country by going into the HSF several different times. They have been abusing the Treasury, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Madam Speaker: So, Member for Barataria/San Juan, Member, I uphold the objection.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, how much time I have again?

Madam Speaker: Till 4.28.

Mr. S. Hosein: 4.20?

Madam Speaker: 4.28, I am sorry.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I also encourage the Prime Minister to look at other regional leaders, because there is a level of vaccine hesitancy in Trinidad and Tobago, and that vaccine hesitancy stems from distrust of the authority. And

Prime Minister Mia Mottley, Madam Speaker, I commend Members of this Chamber to look—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1), and also on the general privileges. We are not here to discuss other leaders of other governments in this Chamber.

Madam Speaker: Okay. I am going to give the Member a little leeway to tie his point in to the substance of this debate.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, in order to get over the vaccine hesitancy, there must be proper public education, and there must be a strong public education campaign if we are to achieve that level of herd immunity. And that is the point I am making, that we do not just live in a bubble, but we look at what other countries are doing and maybe we can follow it so that we can be as good as how they are responding to COVID-19.

And, Madam Speaker, I took the opportunity to look at other countries that may have larger populations than us and I compared Trinidad and Tobago, our death rate per million, to those countries because that is important to look at what those countries are really doing to keep the death down. Because at the end of the day we want to ensure that we save the lives of our citizens. So, Madam Speaker, there are other countries, such as for example, Singapore. Singapore has a much lower death rate than Trinidad and Tobago with a comparable population. And I do not understand why this Government is not looking and implementing some of the technology that those countries are using. Madam Speaker, three more months of a state of emergency under this present administration is not going to help Trinidad and Tobago. It is going to place us in a worse situation than where we were from last year March. Madam Speaker, this Government must also look at how we are going to ensure that livelihoods

are sustained as well as the lives of our citizens. We cannot in good spirit say that we are supporting this SOE because there is no plan to help the poor and the vulnerable in Trinidad and Tobago during this three months.

Madam Speaker, today is a very important day because there are some members of the PNM who may not be in support of this particular Motion that is being brought by the Prime Minister, so maybe those Members today can in fact vote with their conscience and show Trinidad and Tobago that they are real patriots and that they have sworn true to their oath to ensure that they protect the law and uphold the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member for Tobago West.

The Minister of Sports (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate today, as we as a government and as a country seek to extend the state of emergency in our efforts to treat with the COVID-19 pandemic here in Trinidad and Tobago.

4.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I will be the first to tell you, I am not excited about the extension of the state of emergency. Most young people are not excited about it. We were told to vaccinate to operate and we did just that. As far as we are concerned, we have done our part. We are ready to get back to our regular life, we are ready to go to the beach, ready to go out to birthday parties and limes. As an MP, Madam Speaker, I am ready to conduct my constituency business in the way that I am accustomed to where we visit homes and sit with the seniors. We used to sit and chat up close and personal with seniors prior to COVID-19. We visited the schools and interacted with the little children in our civil engagement exercises and all of that has changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are now grappling,

trying to prevent the collapse of our health system.

We used to visit homes, Madam Speaker, and engaged in community activities, sporting activities, village leagues and so on, coaching clinics and many different engagements throughout the communities and we have seen far and wide here in Trinidad and Tobago and throughout the Caribbean, all over the world, this COVID-19 situation has changed the way we socialize, has changed the way we interact. So, for the average young person who has gotten vaccinated and ready to go back to work, we are not excited about an extension of the SOE.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as much as we want to be free, we must accept that we are a part of the whole. We are part of families where the seniors are still very fearful and some of them, for instance, in my family are physically unwell and they are slow to accept taking the vaccines. We are part of communities, communities with a very high level of vaccine hesitancy, we are part of this country of 1.4 million people where our Minister of Health reported today that over 370,000 people have gotten their two doses or are fully vaccinated. We still have to look out for the other one million people who are still at risk.

So while we want to get back to our regular programming or to our regular social activity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to look out for the unvaccinated among us. We cannot be selfish or we cannot just think about ourselves, we have to look out for those who have not been fully vaccinated as yet. So, we have to embrace and accept this whole concept of collective responsibility and be our brother's keeper, do all we can within our power to provide the necessary assistance and support to those who are not yet vaccinated in our communities.

As a responsible child, I would say child because my mother would still see me as that and for the other seven children in our family, during this time where

our parents are not fully vaccinated or grandparents are not fully vaccinated, though we want to move around at our liberty, we have to protect them. So, there was once a time when we were all at home and we felt that sense of safety because everybody is locked in at home, but then work places reopened and many of the children started going back out to work and going out to—or my mother's children I should say, started going back out to work.

Now you have more areas of activity that are opened, so now hairdressers are opened, spas are opened, you can go out and do so many different things. And every time we go out and come back in the house there is this fear of bringing COVID home to our parents or our elders. And many of our cases in Tobago where you have heard of elderly people who have died due to COVID, you would hear people in the village say, “but this person never came out, this person stayed home every single day”, but the other people within the household are moving about and the chances are they can bring COVID into the household for those older people who have been so slow to accept taking the vaccines and so on, in some cases. And not just the elderly, also the children, those who are under 12 who are unable to be vaccinated right now, so we have a responsibility not just to ourselves but also to the others among us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a responsible Government we want to resume economic activity and expand activity that would help to bring income and revenue and so on, so we could continue to provide social assistance and continue to expand industry within Trinidad and Tobago, but we must protect the people among us. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought nations around the world, very rich, very poor from all different backgrounds to their knees. Today we speak about 4.46 million deaths throughout the world as a result of this COVID-19 pandemic. To date there is no cure and the virus continues to mutate to more

infectious or more dangerous variants are coming to the fore, seeping in to all countries throughout the world.

We cannot foresee the future, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to exactly when this tragedy will end and there is so much that we do not know about COVID-19 because it is new to all of us throughout the world and the scientists and those in the technical areas of health, they continue to do their research and we discover more and more each day, each week. But there are some things that we do know and I think that we do have the responsibility to act prudently and responsibly based on what we do know. And we do know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that movement and congregation cause the virus to spread more quickly. Yes? We also do know that vaccination prevent severe illness, vaccination reduces deaths, vaccination saves lives.

So from March last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen countries throughout the world implement state of emergency measures, curfew measures, lockdown measures in an effort to prevent nonessential movement and unnecessary activity, trying to fight to keep the number of positive cases down, trying to restrict and control the spread, trying to shield the health care system and to prevent chaos, confusion and collapse of our health care—our hospitals, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I remember—right now in Tobago we have over 500 cases—

Mr. Lee: 48(1), Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mean respectfully, 48(1) relevance where the MP is going for the last 10 minutes.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Tobago right now we have over 500

active cases and the burden is quite heavy on our health system. It has affected the general operation of our hospitals in Tobago. There are people who need general services that cannot access such because of the heavy burden that COVID-19 has placed on the medical sector. I have read that, in our ICU system we are close to capacity, we have already reached capacity at the hospital in Signal Hill. You have challenges in getting ambulances to come on time and so on, and you hear many people complaining about contact tracing not being done on time or swiftly enough. And all that is part and parcel of this COVID-19 pandemic.

So, yes, we are trying to reduce the spread, keep the numbers down. It is not just only about getting vaccines in the arms of people but also on shielding and protecting our health care system so that we can still operate at a level of normalcy. Last year early in the pandemic the world looked on hoping that the scientist would crack the code and develop vaccines. We stuck—we come to our TVs day in day out wishing and hoping that a vaccine would come to the fore, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At the end of the day, now we are here in August 2021 and vaccines are much more available than they were last year. Now we have vaccines and there is one thing all of the world could say, vaccines save lives.

When vaccines first came on the scene or became available, we had problems with accessibility, affordability and insufficient supply. Today in this country we can speak to having hundreds of thousands of vaccines available for our people. We have Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Johnson&Johnson and Sinopharm, and day to day they are becoming increasingly available.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1). I mean the Motion, respectfully, if she can get back to the Motion please, state of emergency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, day by

day these vaccines are becoming increasingly available, but I am here to say that our battle especially in Tobago is not so much the availability of vaccines, it is getting the vaccines into the arms of people, getting vaccines to the people who need it the most. And this is where we, the 400,000 or the close to 400,000 people who have been fully vaccinated have to carry the one million or have to carry the others, we have to do our duty to protect them, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Delta variant is more infectious and a more dangerous strain. It has totally changed the game as it relates to this COVID pandemic forcing countries that were once opened or had a feeling that they would have gotten over the whole COVID pandemic situation now have to reintroduce or reimpose nationwide and region wide lockdown, state of emergency, curfew measures and so on. Over the last week, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we saw countries like Iran, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, New Zealand and even Australia. Australia, Mr. Deputy Speaker—it is interesting to see Australia having to reimpose these measures.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the most part of the year Australia had been seen as a COVID free paradise and it was being referred to fortress Australia. But it was in June that a taxi driver, unmasked, unvaccinated, transported a crew, an international crew and the Delta variant made its way into Australia. So, many weeks ago Australia was experiencing or should I say the New South Wales area was experiencing 12 or so cases or dozens of cases per day and now they are looking at over 800 cases per day. Eight weeks ago they did not envision that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is to tell you how swiftly and how dangerous this Delta variant is.

So, countries around the world and here in the Caribbean we are preparing for the Delta variant. The Delta variant is already in Trinidad and Tobago and we expect a quicker spread just by what we have seen in other countries in the region,

just like what we have seen throughout the world and we cannot let our guards down at this point in time or take any chances. So, throughout the communities we see numbers turning into names and names turn into family members and people close to us. So we cannot be selfish and we cannot be imprudent, we have to think about others, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For us in Tobago especially it is a matter of public education, it is a matter of enlightening people. The reason for hesitancy in Tobago it varies from house to house, from person to person. There are those who are afraid of needles, there are those who are not taking the vaccine due to—

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), please. I mean, I am trying to understand the Motion and the MP's contribution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reason for vaccine hesitancy varies from person to person and we have to implement different measures to get people on board to help them to change their minds, to get them more comfortable, to get them to take up this whole responsibility, this whole idea to embrace, going out there and getting the vaccines done, becoming vaccinated, helping to take care of themselves to protect themselves and to protect others. There are those who feel they do not know what ingredients or so make up the vaccine and they do not understand how quickly or why the vaccines were developed so quickly. So, there are different conversations.

We as Members of Parliament have been charged by our Prime Minister to go out in to our communities and to ramp up our vaccination drive. We are the ones who are on the ground who are speaking to our constituents day in, day out and I would tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reasons are different from house to house so we have to sit and we have speak to them. I see social media is rife with so many comments pretty much beating down on people who are not vaccinated but

we have to be more patient and we have to be more compassionate and really get to understand why each person has chosen not to take up the vaccines and provide the necessary education, assurance and encouragement.

So, for us in Tobago the uptake has been slow, the TRHA has been doing drive-through exercises. We did one on July 31st and we have others coming up and I think that this state of emergency and the lockdown measures would go a long way in giving us some more time to reach out to those who need be vaccinated, to limit the movement to allow our health care system to catch up in order to carry the weight of this Delta variant and to provide the necessary support so we can get more people on board to get the vaccines done. At the end of the day, it is about getting back to a level of normalcy for the young folks, for the old folks and we are the ones who know better and have access to the information, we have a duty to provide that necessary assistance. At the end of the day lives are more important than livelihood and we as a Government have been providing some assistance to the best of our ability but we want to keep people alive and we want to keep our health care system running and we are operating by the advice of our health care professionals and learning and working based on what we have seen work for rest of the countries throughout the region and throughout the world who have used state of emergency, lockdown measures, curfew measures and so on, in order to treat with this COVID-19 situation.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not an arbitrary measure, we are learning based on the example set by others and learning from their lessons. When we were open there were those who said, “Oh, we opened up Tobago too quickly and that is the reason for the spike”. Now, today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are operating in a more cautious manner based on the advice of the health care professionals and we have to do what is in the best interest of our Government, what is in the best interest of

our people, get more people on board and as the Prime Minister said if we get to a state where it is, where it would be safe to lift these measures before the 90 days have passed, we are going to do so as a Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Hon. S. Cudjoe:—we have to carry each other. What did you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have two more minutes.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Two more minutes. So we have to do our part as a responsible Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to work with our health care professionals, to educate more people, to bring more people on board. There are different measures, different ways from the drive-throughs that the Tobago Regional Health Authority are doing. I must commend the business people within the Tobago West Constituency, for instance, Renmar's, Fairways, you have Kingdom Creations and a number of business people who have ensured that their staff, members are vaccinated to operate. You have the church folk like Pastor Frank, Pastor Sonia Whitlock, Pastor Nevin Lewis and the church community getting involved, getting the job done, reaching out to their congregation in order to carry the message. At the end of the day, we have to look out for each other and we cannot be selfish in this battle. It is a battle for all of us and we have to ensure that we get through this together.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I support this SOE and I support all the measures taken by the health professionals and this Government to get Trinidad and Tobago to the other side, stronger, better, wiser, more healthy, that we get out of this COVID pandemic a stronger nation. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that said, I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Vandana Mohit (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute in this debate. Mr. Deputy Speaker, whilst we are here to consider a Motion to extend the state of emergency brought by the Prime Minister here today, we have sat and we have been listening and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last speaker, the Member for Tobago West, I sat and listened and then I stood here and I listened.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Tobago West I can safely say after listening to her contribution that the Member has not given any reasoning for supporting the extension of the state of emergency by her Government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that the Member spoke about the average young person would have been excited to not continue with a state of emergency here in Trinidad and Tobago, let me state that in case the Member for Tobago West is not aware, many young persons are not excited about many moves by your Government. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, in listening to the Member for Tobago West again I would say that the Member simply admitted that her Government has failed in educating the youth of Trinidad and Tobago when it comes to this pandemic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, Members before would have spoken and it is amazing to listen to Members on the other side use a statement that lives are more important than livelihoods at this time. The Member for Tobago West mentioned protecting lives over livelihoods. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me inform the Member for Tobago West that protecting the people does not mean just protecting lives, it means protecting livelihoods as well and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a shameless statement to say that lives are to be protected over livelihoods. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a reason why the word “livelihood” is spelt and has the word “live” in it. Stress and sufferation can lead to the loss of lives as well, that is why livelihoods are so important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been under a state of emergency since May

2021 and I would take this time given to me here today to deal with the social impact of the state of emergency in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to reflect a bit on the state of emergency over the last three months. And in that reflection I would ask, what has happened during this time? Let us reflect. What has happened during this time? How many persons have lost their homes? How many persons have been evicted from apartments? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I refer to two press releases two days apart from the Minister of Social Development and Family Services. One on August 10th and if you check the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' official Facebook page you would see and you would have also seen in the print media as well where the Minister made a call, and I quote:

“...humanitarian”—Minister of—“Social Development...”—and Family Services—“makes a humanitarian call to landlords as evictions are on the rise.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know what occurred but just two days later on August 12th the Minister had to come out again and I quote in another release state, the Minister of Social Development is appealing—

“...to landlords to withhold evictions.”

What does that tell us? What does that tell the Government of Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Deputy Speaker, in reflecting again we ask how many children have been abused. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I refer again to an article June 06, 2021, where Dr. Stacy Murray says, there has been an increase in cases of emotional abuse being reported to the Children's Authority. And the reason being given and I quote:

“It could be multiple factors. Yes, it could be the fact that they are in their homes...It could be because everyone is in the home environment and there

are stressors in the home: mother not working, father not working, and taking it out on the children.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what does that tell you? In reflecting again, how many persons are facing problems in sustaining their homes? And I move on to ask those on the other side, how does this extension of the state of emergency fix these things and I should say fix this crisis, this growing crisis.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I continue in reflecting on those few matters as it relates to the social impact of the state of emergency, we can simply stand and refer to this extension as an extension of added hardships, as an extension of added sufferation on the population of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened to the Prime Minister earlier and what the Prime Minister should be considering and assessing at this time is not a state of emergency, he should be assessing and considering the state of the nation. Mr. Deputy Speaker, time is clicking, time is clicking, you have to focus on both lives and livelihoods. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with all of this, all that I have just reflected on in terms of evictions, in terms of child abuse, things that would have occurred during this state of emergency, in terms of the reporting system, with all of this the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the people who, the vulnerable people have not gotten the following and I go on to list. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we look at Salary Relief Grants, persons are unable to get that fully.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, sadly, sadly, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled Member, but I would give you the opportunity to proceed.

Ms. V. Mohit: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was simply referring to what was happening during this time over the last three months and with that being said persons are still unable to access the relevant COVID-19

relief grants and hence I was referring to the Salary Relief Grants where 11,000 screened persons are still—their payments are still outstanding. After a boastful comment of a sophisticated system for the application of these grants and you still have 11,000 persons as of August 2021 awaiting these grants.

Mr. Imbert:—nothing to do with the state of emergency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, just tie in your point quickly.

Ms. V. Mohit: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I relate again, as I said before I was dealing with situations arising out of the state of emergency and the relief efforts proposed by the Government during this time. [*Desk thumping*] As I try to tie up this point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me just state during this state of emergency you have curfew hours that citizens have to abide by, being evicted from their homes and this said Government has not deliberated on the rental grants for persons who are facing eviction during this time. No deliberation just yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I understand where this is going but I move on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, instead they chose during a state of emergency, during times where persons are facing crisis within their homes to call them greedy versus needy. Instead, the Minister of Public Utilities, right, thought that it was reasonable for WASA to go along with a disconnection, a debt collection drive towards the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1). This has nothing to do with the state of emergency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, move on to your other point, please.

Ms. V. Mohit: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move on as it relates to vaccinations which a former speaker spoke on and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say that being a Member of this honourable House, I have been working around the clock as it relates to vaccination. And I would like to commend

the members of the Chaguanas East Constituency for their positive response towards the vaccination drive. Mr. Deputy Speaker, working around the clock with organisations, volunteers from the constituency of Chaguanas East were all a part of my work as a Member of Parliament to help get us out of this state of emergency. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we could have been at a much better place as it relates to getting out of this state of emergency, but what can I say at this point? It is not what you do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is how you do it.

5.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago is at a stage where he needs the cooperation of citizens. [*Desk thumping*] And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government crisis communication is at its lowest and I would elaborate on that. I would like to just refer to a *Guardian* article and I quote from Communication Studies, Prof. Rebecca Rice, where she stated:

“One international Crisis Communication specialist said...”—yesterday that—“these breaches may be because people do not feel respected when these messages are put out.

...showing empathy is really important...”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I quote, I say that as it relates to the Prime Minister and his communication to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in a time where he needs the cooperation of the citizens, that, Mr. Prime Minister, you need to speak to the people better and you will get their cooperation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the utterances by the Prime Minister over the last three months, some adults contacting me speaking generally have grown old, and some of the things that the Prime Minister has been uttering they have not even said it in front of their parents. If we respect the citizens, show them a little more respect when we are trying to get them to cooperate with us, I am sure we will get

a little more respect. But instead, the Prime Minister would choose at times when he goes on air on a Saturday to speak to people about goat, to speak to people about weed, to speak to the people about how they are going about the scene. That is not how you carry about yourself, the level of decorum you carry about yourself with in a time of crisis like this where you need the cooperation of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, citizens of this country, they have been referring to the general press conferences as it relates to the state of emergency as the national “bouf”; and the Member for Tobago West spoke about the average young person. Do you look at social media? You would see that persons say “as of midnight tonight”, yes, “let us prepare ourselves for 2.30 for the national “bouf”. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying that first the Prime Minister and his Government need to respect the people, respect the people situations, and you will then get some respect.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that being said, I say that livelihoods matter just as much as lives. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Laventille West. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand today representing the people of Laventille West and bearing in mind that Laventille is not a place, it is an experience and could be found all across Trinidad and Tobago, I stand in support of the Motion here today as I represent “Laventee”, many of whom, Mr. Deputy Speaker, took the occasion to tell me, as their Member of Parliament, including the business people, small and medium as they might be in the constituency that they

support the continuation of this measure in the protection of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, I come here today battle ready and understanding that I regard the petulant, childish, pesky conduct of our colleagues on the other side, nitpicking, talking about salary grant, talking about all the other things that they should be complimenting the Government on, understanding that nothing is perfect. But Trinidad and Tobago, led by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and more specifically led by the hon. Prime Minister Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, performed exceedingly well in the most trying circumstances for the last year and three-quarters in Trinidad and Tobago. But they “cyah” find it in themselves to support that which is good. Not even the need for continuing to protect the people. They know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there are persons who flout the law among them and their supporters are fragrant law flouters too. They know that.

They know there are people who are reckless. There are people who are selfish, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the measure of the state of emergency as all the other control measures were designed for one purpose and one purpose alone and that is to protect those of us who are not selfish from those who are, to protect those of us who will easily flout the law and go by a bar and line and drink without a mask, and share the same bottle and share the same glass, and spread this—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. One second. Member for Naparima, please, when it is time for you to enter the debate, you will have your say.

Hon. F. Hinds:—and hug up.

I saw in Grenada a few days ago—it would have been their normal Carnival activity, and some of our brothers and sisters from that island defied the considerations about COVID and they came out there to claim their day of expression and freedom. I saw that. That is how human beings behave. But on the

other hand, my friend, the Member for Couva South, stood up here today and as he began his contribution, he told us he could not hear himself well in the Chamber from all the noises coming from across the street, on Abercromby Street, hinting to us that there were people out there protesting against the extension—a handful of UNC supporters and sycophants. But later on in his speech, in a great example of internal and self-contradiction, the Member for Couva South told us the people “cyah” protest. They do not have the right to protest. What confusion, but that is the UNC.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would have heard the Prime Minister, you would have heard the Minister of Health, you would have heard our other speakers, and they would indicated to you, I am sure, the condition in the United States, in India, in Brazil, in Russia, in France. In Trinidad and Tobago mercifully we recorded yesterday, according to Mr. Deyalsingh’s statistics, a mere 199 new infections. That I submit is a direct result of the fact that human beings have not been interfacing with each other in the way we normally do because the virus needs to jump from one human body to another.

We went last evening, Minister Deyalsingh and I, to the prison, to the Rise prison radio, because we understand that in the conditions of the prison with men in a cell, the business of social distancing is not as easy to achieve, if possible at all. So, we went there. Not only did we make vaccines available for every prison officer, we made a vaccine available for every prisoner. National Security did that. And then we went beyond that. We went to the radio station last night where we were wired up with every prison in the land and we spoke to them and took their questions. Minister Deyalsingh whispered and confided in me—I hope he does not mind my breaking his confidence—and told me it was one of the best interfaces that he has had with these young men, incarcerated. But they had the wisdom to

take time to research rather than come and press panic buttons and cry out in a petty and pesky manner as some of our friends are now known to do. And we did that.

The Minister of Education, battling with this issue, trying to get the nation's children back into their places of learning, those are the decisions we have to make and we understand full well that COVID-19 has disrupted everything that human beings did. Planes have come out of the sky, ships do not move around the world as they used to, goods have not moved from one part of the world to the next. Human beings, now we have mastered the art of having online meetings, Team, Zoom and other platforms. For my part, the Ministry of National Security, through all of our divisions, including general administration which managed the exemption policy and the exemption process that was established by the former Minister of National Security, I went in there, I met it up and running. And I told you before, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while they told us about close—while the concept was about closed borders, during that period so far, we moved almost 40,000 people both ways, those coming in and those going out.

The general administration at the Ministry of National Security oversaw that as our contribution to this. And we are talking about state of emergency; let it not escape you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that back in 2011, one weekend there were 11 murders in this country. We are talking here about 1,244/1,250 Trinidadian souls would have died as a result of COVID and we must not have an emergency concern and protect them with a state of emergency. Eleven persons died, very sad; very, very sordid, especially in the Arima area. Six of them I think in the Arima area one weekend, and you know what? We got a state of emergency in this country and they considered that that was justified.

They went and they arrest 100 people. Not one convicted, costing millions of dollars for wrongful arrest and false imprisonment. They had with it a 9.00 p.m. to 5.00 a.m. curfew—state of emergency and curfew—and let me quote the then Prime Minister, Madam Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia. I quote her as saying at that time:

“The situation cannot continue like this without a response commensurate with the wanton acts of violence and lawlessness; it must be a response as well that will halt the current spike in gang activity and crime in general in the shortest possible time...”

The Member was complaining about a spike in crime. We are talking about a pandemic affecting countries all over the globe, and the enemy on this occasion was not a gun toting ignorant, selfish, wanting your money or wanting to kill. The enemy is an invisible one roaming the earth, moving seamlessly from one unwary soul without a mask, and without having sanitized, and without having kept distance. And in some societies where they ignored it and they allowed people to gather en masse as business as usual, the results are to be seen.

She went on to say:

“After much deliberation with the national security council and members of the cabinet it has been agreed that the government consider the imposition of a limited state of emergency in the hot spots...Trinidad and Tobago...”—for the—

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). We are dealing with a curfew of 2021 not 2011.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. F. Hinds: That is what COVID looks like and sounds like, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is why you—

Dr. Moonilal: He knows I am speaking after?

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they were talking about hotspots. Trinidad and Tobago, and all countries and continents of the world, is a hotspot and yet they thought it was justified in 2011 and they have a problem with it now. When all my Prime Minister leading this country, taking tough decisions, understanding that we will be inconvenienced and it would not be business as usual—no fault of ours. It is the cards we were dealt beginning in Wuhan and all nations of the world had to respond to it, and I am proud of the Trinidad and Tobago response.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fire service, the police service, the defence force, the prison service, every one of the agencies of national security chipped in in order to make our contribution to this national effort without guns and ammunition, but with social controls and now with vaccines. When the UNC complained some time ago it was about no vaccine, no vaccine, no vaccine, according to my Prime Minister. Now you do not hear a word about vaccine again. Now they do not want no state of emergency and have the temerity to encourage their supporters in the national community to honk horns and make pests and trouble of themselves.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this curfew in this state of emergency, as the Prime Minister so wisely and acutely pointed out earlier, is to contain people's movement and liming largely in the night, the socializing that we know takes place around the country until the wee hours of the morning especially on holiday weekends and moments, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I tell you this, from the Ministry of National Security, even though we had the curfew from 9.00 to 5.00, or whatever hours of the night as the Prime Minister pointed out, we had a system of curfew passes and those who had to work in factories and warehouses and that sort of thing we have permitted that. So for an example, Bermuda Biscuits Company, they did not shut

down because of the state of emergency and the curfew. Their workers were permitted by being issued with their appropriate passes to go to their workstations and contribute to the development of the economy. Oil and gas and such like, all of them continued.

We make special arrangements so that they could continue. So that the state of emergency to regulate human movement, gathering, conduct, supported by the curfew was to attack unnecessary activity that unnecessarily jeopardized us all, and to me the logic is as simple as that. It is as simple as it is compelling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And therefore, I cannot for the life of me understand why the Leader of the Opposition and her friends on the other side will take the position that they have taken here today especially in light of their conduct in 2011 that had no value to cost nowhere and the cost us millions of dollars, and today we still have crime to fight with which we are doing from the Ministry of National Security.

Our role in all of this was to support the efforts of the Ministry of Health. We played a very backroom role. I attend the meetings of the COVID team with the professionals led by the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Health, and the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, and week after week—I only joined them four months ago—they would sit, and think, and act on the advice of the professionals and draw international knowhow, and techniques, and understanding, and information into the discussion and come up with things, ideas, policies, measures, all designed to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The police service played a critical role in enforcing those laws, restricting gatherings, ensuring that people wear masks, the number of passengers in vehicles, enforcing the curfew. It led to arrests in some cases and fines for example. They say they want statistics for breach of curfew: 1,371 people were arrested for breach of the Public Health Regulations; 1,446 persons were arrested and charged and

were made to contribute to the national account; face mask tickets issued, 15,984. The Commissioner of Police led that.

All police officers—in Tobago in particular I understand they were very effective at it in Tobago led by ACP Nurse. And the police did that understanding that without your mask you were contributing to stymieing the growth and the development and the economy of the country, and if we have to get out of this quickly, we have to behave sensibly. Number of police officers—front liners you know. The entire Ministry of National Security front liners—116 tested positive for COVID-19. We have 19 of them at present and officers quarantined at present, 357. Three hundred and fifty-seven officers are out of whack, out of operation, out of the theatre of operation because they are affected by COVID-19. So the measures are very well worth it.

The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force—do not talk for the air guard. When other Caribbean countries made vaccines available to us and the wise Prime Minister, particularly when there was a dearth of vaccines, when we could not get them though we paid our bits in the COVAX system, we had to go here for 2,000, there for 3,000, there for 5,000, and so the air guard out of public view, night and day they took up the responsibility and collected them and brought them to put them in people's arms, all designed to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I wish there was a vaccine to protect us against the UNC.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you very warmly. All the agencies of national security did their part. As I say the defence force contributed substantially as well alongside the police to law and order, the maintenance of same, public safety and protecting our borders, because at one time the UNC was out there talking about a vessel coming, a vessel coming and they bringing COVID. No evidence to support it. The Minister

of Health repeated it over and over, but the coast guard was out there and I have proud statistics here about some of their patrols: 508 patrols—land patrol hours because they work the lands too on those borders—433 hours; and 2,168 hours in maritime patrols, and now that they got two new vessels recently we will expect that to triple and quadruple; search and rescue, 23; and all of that. The prison service did particularly well in managing COVID inside of their walls.

As I told you up to last night they allowed us in to share with the inmates. They established a quarantine facility in the Eastern Correctional and Rehabilitation Centre, introduced virtual visits to facilitate family members and friends visiting prisoners, and they daily sanitized the entire prisons. All of them daily, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the list of the contribution of national security to this in support of the Minister of Health and the team was well recorded and well done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise today in support of this Motion to continue these measures, understanding that it will bring some inconvenience, but at the same time it will protect lives which is the highest priority of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on a very important Motion before us that has interrupted the recess as provided for by the Standing Orders of this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a debate on the extension for a state of emergency is not a debate to be taken lightly. It is not a debate that one must dismiss or reflect in any way with a measure of flippancy. It is a very serious debate. And while we appreciate some of my colleagues on the other side may be new to parliamentary

affairs and participating in Motions that carry very serious and very deep constitutional implications, I want to begin by saying that a Motion to extend the state of emergency is effectively a Motion to suspend freedom, and no society that is a member of the communities of democratic nations should take lightly a Motion that suspends freedom because we are in a Parliament that is a result of centuries of struggle for freedom and democracy. So today while we meet it ought not to be taken lightly. And from what I have heard by colleagues on the opposite side, it is almost as if colleagues do not understand the sacrosanct nature of democracy, of freedom, of the right of citizens to assemble, to speak, to hold a government to account.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker, I will begin by noting the seriousness of this Motion but also to indicate that I would like to reflect on some of the contributions made by speakers opposite and to start obviously with the mover of the Motion, the Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West. The Prime Minister told us at 1.49 p.m. that he had no new data. He had no data that was not already in the public domain. He indicated that all the data he would have is data that already would have been in the public domain. But the Prime Minister and other Ministers of the Government are making a most fantastical jump in terms of their argument today.

The Prime Minister has told us, in a way, that COVID operates like a “lagahoo”. It comes out in the night and we must be careful because COVID comes out in the night like a “lagahoo” and it can attack the society, and we can regress and we could undo the so-called good work if we do not take this step today. But COVID do not come out in the day you see. If you have mass assemble, people breaking the law and the rules and regulations in the day, somehow it does

not affect you as it would affect you in the night. That is a most fantastical assumption.

The second assumption that the Prime Minister and the speaker before me had was that—somehow, Madam Speaker, I am picking up from Members opposite that we have to control this population because we are really, according to the PNM, a bunch of wild animals that will roam in the night, in this nocturnal. Once nightfall comes, we are nocturnal and we will fly out of our domain, of our homes and community, and go and interact in some improper and obscene manner. Madam Speaker, I am no expert on nocturnal activity but I do not accept that. I do not accept that.

If it is that there are persons who are prone to—and I am hearing this term now “freedom parties”. So when is the “unfreedom” party? In the day? I am hearing this term now. The Prime Minister is using a term—where you have knowledge of freedom parties from? Are you organizing them? Are your friends part of them? Because I do not know what is that. And we are hearing that we must take this step today so persons do not come out and roam at night and engage in freedom parties, and feting, and zessing and so on?

Madam Speaker, while we have had one or two cases reported in the press about persons coming out to party and so on, I do not think that is a widespread island wide phenomenon that should shock this population into accepting a curtailment of their freedom. [*Desk thumping*] The Prime Minister says no Government in the western hemisphere has been as open and forthcoming in this manner and so on, the importance of cutting the time. Now a state of emergency is not a curfew alone. The Government is portraying today that the state of emergency equates the curfew. It is not so. A curfew is one element but it is the suspension of fundamental and constitutional rights, and I want to alert Members

opposite there is a physiology of suppression of rights. It is not just the physical and the daily behaviour of persons.

It is the physiology of your rights has gone, and I think members of the trade union movement were making this point. Persons do not come out to protest. They do not come out to take action, to show their critical remarks and so on in a state of emergency because their rights no longer exist. They are in fear that the police and law enforcement have powers that they do not normally have. So it is more than the physical protest, and let us just reflect on physical protest during state of emergency and curfew. Do you know when the curfew is nine o'clock that does not mean you will get home for nine o'clock? A taxi stops working at eight o'clock or 7.30 because the driver has to go home for nine o'clock.

So, if you are engaged in any sort of activity you must curtail that by six o'clock or so, so you can get your public taxi, or maxi-taxi, or your PTSC bus. You know we sometime assume that everyone has a private motorcar. Sometimes my friends in the Government assume that everybody benefits from no tax, and no duty, and they have mustangs, land cruisers and so on. The majority of people depend on taxi, maxi-taxis, PTSC bus.

5.30 p.m.

You cannot end the curfew at nine o'clock and think that activity ends at 9.00. It ends before and hardships come before. So that persons do not assemble to take part in any activity of critical—against the Government or any agency of the Government.

Recently we had a situation, I will say in 10 seconds, involving water in my community. When I asked a few people to come to the office just to discuss it, they said, “No, no, no, it have state of emergency”. “It have curfew. If we come two o'clock, what time we finishing? What time we reaching home?” This is the effect

of a state of emergency. So it does not end at 9.00. That is the point I am making.

And the Prime Minister, the Minister of Health ended his statement with vaccine, vaccine, vaccine. I will come to that in a minute. I want to correct the Prime Minister. When he says that Canada has one bridge open, that was not the issue. The issue is that Canada has never closed its borders to its citizens, never. They closed their borders to other citizens, not to their own. And you can check that out, Madam Speaker.

And, of course, the Prime Minister came with “donkey logic” issues, and so on. I will get back to him in a little while. But the Minister of National Security spoke just before me and I want to reflect a bit. In fact, I am sure he was not aware I would speak after him. He has fled the Chamber as he normally does when anybody is responding to him. But I want to tell him that he should concentrate on dealing with crime and confess that 11 people were murdered in a few hours. But crime is his responsibility. It is his responsibility. And I want to ask the Minister of National Security, he came here today to boast that “policeman wearing mask” and that is an achievement of the Ministry of National Security. Madam Speaker, the achievement of the Ministry of National Security is getting crime down, murders down.

The Member for Laventille West said he went in his constituency and the people support a state of emergency. We have to see that to believe that. Because the last time he went in his constituency, I think he was water skiing out. I think he was skiing out of the constituency on water skis and then had to go to the Magistrates' Court to complain against a constituent. But the people of Laventille West, as elsewhere, are concerned with a state of emergency.

And I want to reflect on his contribution. He was boasting, of course, that he was on a radio talk show or a radio programme and prisoners were hearing him,

and so on. Let us assume that is true. We have no reason to doubt that. But the Minister of National Security did not tell us what is the vaccination rate of police officers, of prison officers, of prisoners. As today, the Government did not tell us what is the vaccination rate of teachers, of nurses.

Madam Speaker, I want to make a quick analogy. The state of emergency is linked intrinsically to this need to reduce the infection rate. The infection rate is linked to your death rate. All of that is linked to your vaccination rate. So this is why, understandably, the Prime Minister said in an interview on Monday in the *Guardian* newspaper that an objective of this state of emergency is to increase vaccination. What is the connection between vaccination increase and the state of emergency? You are not giving or what? What is the connection?

In fact, Madam Speaker, do you know in the United States and elsewhere in the night you can go in Walmart, Walgreens and elsewhere and you can take your vaccine in the night? You go in Walmart to do some shopping 10.00/11.00 in the night, you say, "Hold on, nobody is here, let me get my shot". That is what they do in developed countries.

And in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, there is a crisis brewing. The Government is pushing down the throats of the members of the national community this state of emergency. You do not need, Mr. Prime Minister, to get a "buss head" to understand that people will not stomach it anymore. You heard the horns in the streets today, saw the lights on. This is a successful day of demonstration and protest with limited time to plan, Madam Speaker. So we do not need a "buss head" for the Prime Minister for him to learn that he has to listen to the people of Trinidad and Tobago when they give their views.

Madam Speaker, this Government has been six months behind, in terms of managing COVID, six months, and I will show you. When they should be getting

vaccines, in February they turned down an offer by the private sector to get 351,000 vaccines to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That could have saved lives. You know the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health in particular, today, unless I am wrong and the records are there, I did not hear the Prime Minister or the Minister of Health give a sincere condolence message, send empathy to the families and the loved ones of over 1,230 families that have lost their loved ones to COVID. If a stranger listened to this debate today, the stranger would not know that 1,230-plus citizens have lost their lives.

During this debate, Madam Speaker, we have learnt that eight more died in the last 24 hours, eight more. So it is 1,240-something now. But if you heard the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health, you would not know that. And the Prime Minister tells us, "Do not ask for no data". "I have no data more than you know." That is what he was saying. "I doh know nothing more than de papers, so doh ask me." But we have to ask the Minister of National Security and the Minister of Health. He came and beat his chest. He said, "yuh want data, take data". Minister, how many persons have died in the IC Unit? Is that a place for death? Well, Mr. Minister, how many have died in the high dependency units? Is that a place of death? Is there criminal negligence in the IC and HD units? You have to answer that. Tell us why it is that people die in the IC and HD units. Mr. Minister, you are presiding over death, Minister of Health, and you will one day face that. You will face questions, because your COVID management is an undocumented scandal and crisis and one day we will document it.

Why over 1,200 people had to die under your watch, Member for St. Joseph? Why? It could have been much less if you had purchased the 351,000 vaccines in February. Six months later, you have a million vaccines and you have no vaccinators, "or people tuh give de vaccine". There is a brewing crisis here.

When you should have had a vaccine roll out in February, when the private sector said, “We will take our money and pay”, you not did take it. Today, you have vaccines and nobody to vaccinate people. How many of the vaccines will be dumped, Mr. Minister, because you do not have the capacity to distribute those vaccines?

Madam Speaker: Okay, So Member—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes.

Madam Speaker:—this is not about vaccines.

Dr. R. Moonilal: This debate is not about vaccines.

Madam Speaker: No.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay. I hear you. I hear you, Madam Speaker. This debate is not about vaccines. Mr. Minister, you were wrong when you ended your speech by saying vaccinate, vaccinate, vaccinate. This debate is not about vaccines. So we dare not raise anything there about vaccines.

Madam, there is another issue that is related here, and I think people take it lightly. I am just reflecting again. Well, I will not raise vaccines, the Minister of Health, right. The issue is about work and the state of emergency. Now, it will not dawn upon colleagues, and so on, that a state of emergency by definition, and a curfew, more so, curtail employment, curtail economic activity. Now, the Prime Minister declares, “I stand on the sides of lives, not livelihoods”. Now, you cannot make an artificial separation between lives and livelihood as if it is a dichotomy, as if it is one or the other. You cannot do so. To do so is almost imbecilic, to use that term. Lives and livelihoods go together. When people suffer the pangs of hunger, it is their lives. When people lose their jobs, it is their lives. When their families break up, it is their lives. When you go into a state of depression, it is your life. So when you put a state of emergency and tell people this is the curfew, we are trying

to control infection, and so on, infection is linked to “how much people” will die and “how much people will”—the “V” word, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, businesses close down because of the time, 9.00 p.m. and the Prime Minister signalled today that he wants to keep that. He was very clear with that signal. But there are sectors of the economy, like the entertainment sector, like the hospitality sector, the beverage sector—I do not want to use the word bar; they do not like that—the entertainment sector, hospitality, and so on, that operate and generate income in the afternoon and evening. They have closed. People have lost their jobs. Because of that, some people have gone into depression. They have no income. They cannot pay their rent. The Prime Minister says, “No, no, no, I not concern about that, I concern with life”. But how “much people” have been dying? You know the Prime Minister speaks as if it is a tossup between lives and livelihood. He stands on the side of lives. But how “much people” have been losing their lives?

Right through the state of emergency, Madam Speaker, I have the data in front of me; data all of us have because we monitor on a daily basis, a weekly basis, and so on. Madam Speaker, you look at the deaths, they have increased dramatically during the period of a state of emergency, and not just hanging over the 14 days, because the Prime Minister used a 14-day window to say if you reflect today, it is not just today, it is 14 days before.

But, Madam Speaker, when we see death, for example, on the 15th of May had 11. You started the state of emergency on that day. Madam Speaker, if you jump 14 days after, you had deaths of 16 on the 2nd of June; 14 on the 3rd of June; 19 on the 4th of June. How do you explain that death rate? How do you explain this? It is more than 14 days into a state of emergency, people are dying; 10, 17 on the 9th. But let us skip and come down. Ten on the 21st of June; 22nd June, 14; 25th

of June, 16; 27th of June, 17. Madam Speaker, 352 deaths in the month of June. In the month of July, 230 deaths. I want to skip from May because we are debating here the extension of a state of emergency and a curfew. So I do not want to stick on May because then you will tell me that is not relevant because the state of emergency was not effected and it did not grip the society at that time.

You have had, in the month of August until, my data is to the 24th, 167 deaths. So clearly something is wrong with the COVID management of patients. This is not related to a state of emergency. When you die in the ICU, it is not because it has a curfew or does not have a curfew. It is something else that is happening, and the Minister should reflect on that, not to clamp down at nine o'clock. You know at nine o'clock what happens in this society now? People are chasing the clock. They go on the road, they do not want to get a ticket for being outside after curfew, they race home and regrettably and tragically someone died a few days ago, rushing to curfew. Now, Government Members will say, "Well, that happened because you ought to be home by 9.00, you ought to know better, you ought to leave". But again, you do not just—

Their hash tag in this crisis is blame the people, blame the people, blame the people. That is their hash tag. So if someone died and that person was rushing home before curfew, well, you will blame him, he is wrong. No, Madam Speaker, as a Government when you understand extenuating circumstances and the behaviour of human people, you match policy and law to that. So the death rate is there for all to see. I do not have time to call out the death rate. How many minutes do I have, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: You end at 5.45.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, the death rate is there and the death rate is not linked at all, if you look at the death rate

emerging, to a curfew or a state of emergency. They want to tell you that somehow they have intelligence that hell will break loose and everybody will fly out of their house at nine o'clock and go to party down the place if curfew is removed. That is not so, and if and when that happens, the police can have authority under health regulations, because you can monitor the industries that are open. You could monitor bar licences too; "how much people have bar license for party", and all that type of thing. You could monitor that.

Madam Speaker, there is no need for a state of emergency when you are already on a vaccination programme. I do not want to stick on it because you told me this debate is not about vaccines. So I do not want to stick on that. But Madam Speaker, if they increase the vaccination programme the infection rate will go down, the death rate will go down. It is not a state of emergency and I warn my colleagues opposite, do not talk about vaccination again for the rest of this day before you trip me.

Madam Speaker, in other places in the world, in the state of Georgia, in the state of South Carolina, millions of people there. They have restricted now and they have removed states of emergency. Throughout the world there is this tendency now to open/remove states of emergency but keep strict protocols, keep strict protocols. They are doing that across the world while we, six months behind, want to extend a state of emergency. Madam Speaker, thank you.

Mr. Keith Scotland (*Port of Spain South*): Madam Speaker, what we have been hearing here is a chorus of scare tactics, orchestrated to bring this country to its knees with fear and to bring us to ruins. This extension and this move to extend the state of emergency for another three months, Madam Speaker, is a measured move. It is measured and it must be seen in a global context. Madam Speaker, looking to our Caricom neighbours up at Jamaica, for the next seven days there is a no

movement in Jamaica. No one moves in order to combat this new phase of this pandemic that we are faced. In Australia there are similar measures that are put in place. What is being done in Trinidad and Tobago is a measured approach, an approach that permits incrementally the opening up of the country, and not in a way that is irresponsible, as is being touted by the hon. Members on the other side.

But, Madam Speaker, I heard that you have declared an edict against the mention of vaccines but I would want to say that the measures—*[Interruption]* Thank you, Madam Speaker, the measures implemented at this time and this measure here of extending the three-month period for the state of emergency, cannot be seen in isolation. It is part and parcel of a total package that represents good governance, something that may be alien to the learned and honourable friends on the other side. Simply put, it is wrong to accuse this Government of being uncaring and not looking after the welfare of the people. That is not so. But the tactic is, if it is said and repeated often enough it will get out there and get some traction. Let me say, apart from this application to extend the three-month period of the state of emergency, this Government has implemented social packages to go along with it. So it is not to be seen in isolation.

And, Madam Speaker, if this country soberly reflects on the measures that have been taken, for example, those whose jobs have been affected by the closure of bars, by the closure of establishments after 9.00, can access grants to assist not only in their income but in also paying rents. Madam Speaker, apart from that, there are other measures taken by this Government in order to ensure that not only would we have—and this is a state of emergency that has no preventative aspect to it, I will get to it, but this measure that is being taken is accompanied by a very critical aspect from the hon. Minister of Health.

Madam Speaker, for the record, in Trinidad and Tobago, apart from having

this state of emergency, there is this, 1.2 million Sinopharm vaccines, 900,000 Pfizer vaccines, 400,000 AstraZeneca vaccines and 800,000 Johnson&Johnson vaccines. If we get all people on board, it means that by tomorrow morning at least each citizen in Trinidad and Tobago, apart from the state of emergency, Madam Speaker, each of us can be vaccinated at least once and in three weeks' time, or six weeks' time, according to the science, the entire population of Trinidad and Tobago can be vaccinated. Is that not something that ought to be applauded, Madam Speaker? What we have, however, is tales that some four months ago some vaccine was being offered. I heard—

Madam Speaker: While I understand vaccines are coming in. This is not a debate about vaccines.

Mr. K. Scotland: Yes Madam, and I will move on. What I would say, Madam Speaker, just as a responsible approach was taken in that sphere of governance, so in this extension of the state of emergency, a responsible approach is being adopted.

Madam Speaker, for clarity and avoidance of doubt, I say that in this incarnation of the state of emergency, that although rights have been curtailed, they are not in truth and in fact suspended. Because these rights are still actionable under section 14 of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. So much so that preventative, Madam Speaker, preventative measures have not been utilized in this incarnation of the state of emergency. And if they were and they have not, there is the safety net of the tribunal that persons are allowed to access. There was no need to appoint it but out of an abundance of caution, the tribunal has been appointed. And more importantly, the High Courts and the Magistrates' Courts remain open for those who feel that their rights have been infringed.

Madam Speaker, there have been several outpourings of talk of infringement

of constitutional rights. We know that in the past, if you passed the Red House, it will create a challenge from associates or Members from the honourable other side. How come, up to now we have had not one successful challenge of the state of emergency that has existed for the past three months? Because no rights have been infringed. How come, Madam Speaker, we have not had one person from the other side?

I heard the hon. Member for Couva South speak about trade union rights. Which trade union has approached either the High Court or the Industrial Court to say that their rights have been infringed under this state of emergency? None. What are the statistics coming from the Police Complaints Authority of abuse under this state of emergency? None. Without being combative and unnecessarily vitriolic, was that the same narrative that obtained 11 years ago, Madam Speaker? The answer is no. What we are saying then is that with all the talk, Madam Speaker, this state of emergency seems to have met with the approval of all right-thinking citizens. And I ask and urge all right-thinking citizens to continue to support it. And what you are observing is that there is a gradual opening up.

So for example, Madam Speaker, I could not go to the barber two weeks ago but I can go now. I refuse to, but I can. I claim the rights of Sampson. [*Crosstalk*] No, Madam Speaker, nothing upon the hon. Prime Minister. My hair is growing. The thing I am saying is this, I will not, Madam Speaker. Now you are seeing that gradually, persons no longer have to apply for a visa to come home. You get your ticket, you get your PCR test, you get your approval to travel and you are back home. Where is the sting? Where is the fear? But the fear is, if you say it enough, people will start to believe it and then you will have 10 persons out of 100 persons blowing a horn whilst they pass this august House. I say to you that that is not a multitude. That is a minority. That is a minority. Madam Speaker, there were not

more than 20 or 30 people outside, out of 1.3 million people. Do the math. Do the math.

Madam Speaker, as we advance the reasons for this legitimate implementation and extension of the state of emergency, I ask this House to consider the benefits that will redound to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The science says that the time between the hours of 9.00 and 5.00, not that I know, but that is when Trinidadians congregate. That is when they occupy the Avenue, St. James, Chaguanas. And that is giving live fodder for the spread of this virus. What you are doing, Madam Speaker, is trying to curb that, to give the country a chance to catch itself, so that it could withstand any variant that comes in the country, and it is from 9.00 to 5.00. If you do the math, Madam Speaker, if you say nobody sleeps but give them four hours. From 12.00 to 5.00, that is sleeping time. So what is the encroachment? Three hours? Are we that inconsolable in Trinidad and Tobago? Madam Speaker, we have to get real. We have to get serious about the science and about beating this deadly, deadly disease. And, in doing so, this Government is proposing an extension of the state of emergency for a further three months.

But there is another point, Madam Speaker, that I wish to address you on, and that is respectfully the rule of law. This Government respects, accepts and adheres to the rule of law. The Constitution is clear that it cannot come from any pronouncement from any order but it must come to the Parliament. And that is what we have done, and under article 14 of the Standing Orders, we have made this a special Sitting, Madam Speaker, whilst we are on recess, during the interregnum, in order to ask this Parliament to support this proposal. I have not heard one, one legitimate reason from the honourable Members on the other side why this proposal will not be supported by them. Not one piece of empirical data that will

show that there was an abuse in the last three months, and, therefore, we should not support it.

Yes, we understand that some businesses who may make the bulk of their earnings during 9.00 to 2.00 may be adversely affected. But there are measures in place to deal with that. There has been a ceiling on the, I hope the hon. Minister of Finance would bear me out on this, that will deal with loans persons can get. There is also, Madam Speaker, the call on the Government for landlords to be more empathetic, and also at some point in time, Madam Speaker, we will congregate again and businesses will catch themselves. This is what we are about. Why not support us? Why? Why the opposition? Is it for opposition's sake?

Tell us what is your jurisprudential and empirical basis. List them out. What is the basis for not supporting this?

6.00 p.m.

This state of emergency extension will have the following benefits in Trinidad and Tobago, and let me list some:

1. It will allow a period of respite in the atmosphere for the virus not to be able to take root.
2. For a period of at least eight hours, it will not allow a certain interaction and congregation which will breed, or which will fester, which will encourage the spread of the virus.
3. It will limit movement and movement of persons who may be unwittingly carriers of the virus from spreading it to others.

Madam Speaker, I have listed at least three benefits from this process and from this tool that is being utilized by the Government.

The hon. Attorney General spoke about the concept of it not being overboard because we say that this policy of a limited time of three months to see how things

go in Trinidad and Tobago is proportionate and proportional. Madam Speaker, I want—Madam Speaker, how much more time do I have?

Madam Speaker: You end at 6.06.

Mr. K. Scotland: Thank you. Madam Speaker, we say on this side that if this measure is supported, it will show a maturity in Trinidad and Tobago that is needed at this time. This is not a time for partisan politics when people's lives are at stake. And there was a question asked by the hon. Member, I think, for Oropouche, "lives and livelihood". Let me live and then I could get a livelihood. It is not an issue. Because what is the sense that you are six feet under? What can you earn then? These measures make you live and when you live you then can earn a living which is called "livelihood". Persons who are affected we say to you, bear with us, it is just three more months to see how things go. Look at Jamaica. Madam Speaker, when I saw no movement, I did not understand it. It was so simple that it escaped me. But no movement means no movement. Now, what we have is the ability to move and we are moving slowly, measuredly, back into a form and a sense of normalcy in Trinidad and Tobago. I call upon the Members, the hon. Members of the other side, let your conscience be your guide and support this measure from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Before I join the debate on this Motion, allow me to wish you Happy Birthday, Madam Speaker. I think you are celebrating your birthday today and we wish you all the best. [*Desk thumping*]

So, I have sat quietly and patiently for most of the part during the course of this debate which concerns a Motion to extend the state of emergency in Trinidad

and Tobago. I just want to reflect a moment on the timeline. On Saturday 15 May, 2021, on the advice of the Cabinet, the President issued a proclamation declaring a state of emergency on the basis that a public emergency has arisen as a result of the outbreak of the infectious disease, COVID 2019 novel Coronavirus, and a state of public emergency exists in the State of Trinidad and Tobago. This was made pursuant to section 8(1) of the Constitution and indeed the Proclamation was made on the advice of the Cabinet, under the hand of Her Excellency the President.

Thereafter, a few days later, Sunday 16 May, 2021, Emergency Powers Regulations 2021, were published. And I think it was sometime late on that Sunday night these EPRs were published. Monday the 17th May, the statement of the President delivered to the hon. Speaker of the House and thereafter, we came on the 19th of May to establish the Emergency Powers Tribunal that my colleague on the other side, the last speaker referred to, and I beg to disagree with him that we did not have to establish the tribunal but that is what the Constitution mandates that we do.

Then we had the initial duration of the proclamation for 15 days. Then we came to the Parliament, Monday 24 May, 2021, to debate the first extension of that initial proclamation made under the hand of the President. Then on Monday 24 May, said day, the resolution was passed in the Parliament extending the SOE by three months.

And my colleague on the other side, the previous speaker, spent a lot of time talking about, “Look, is just three more months, is three more—let us just give it a chance. Let us see how it works.” Well, we already had a three-month, so you are now going into six months, you are asking for this SOE to be in effect. And it is not just another three months. If you say— “Look, let us see. Let us see what will happen. Give it a try. Let us see.” Well, we had three months to see. [*Desk*

thumping] We had three months have gone already and those initial days to see what would happen, and what happened?

The hon. Prime Minister was very honest in his opening statement when he, in effect, admitted that there was a spike in May; spike in May. He gave us some numbers and so on. And then we had the Minister of National Security saying that the Opposition was reckless. But what was more reckless than at Easter time saying, “Come to Tobago, everybody welcome. Come to Tobago.” And that spike came about soon thereafter, the Prime Minister speaks on the 14 days and so on, clear as to the numbers.

So here we are today now for a second extension of the SOE. What are the issues that will arise here? We are dealing with a constitutional instrument, our instrument made under the Constitution, and the question that will arise is, following section 7(3) of our Constitution and I quote, Madam Speaker, under the heading:

“Exceptions”—for enshrined rights—“for Emergencies”

“Exceptions”—to enshrined rights—“for Emergencies”

So I disagree with the hon. Member, the last speaker before me, previous to me, when he said that we are not trampling rights, we are not violating rights. This is not so. The proclamation is made and under that proclamation from the Constitution again, you get Emergency Power Regulations. And this is what section 7(3) says of our Constitution:

“An Act that is passed during a period of public emergency and is expressly declared to have effect only during that period or any Regulations made under subsection (1) shall have effect even though inconsistent with sections 4 and 5 except in so far as its provisions may be shown not to be reasonably justifiable for the purpose of dealing with the situation that exists during that

period.”

So it is very clear that the EPR, the Emergency Power Regulations, are in violation of entrenched rights, of fundamental rights contained in sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution because they prohibit or restrict freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, privacy. I know the Attorney General had once declared we have no privacy rights but interferes with your family and private life, because you are giving powers now to the police to go on private premises, notwithstanding or in spite of the fact that there may not be a crime taking place, or you are in hot pursuit and the police do have powers to enter where a crime is taking place, or a police reasonably suspects that the crime has occurred can enter into any premises. So, what we have done is we have curtailed these rights and therefore I disagree with the hon. Member of Parliament who spoke before me that we are not entrenching rights, we are not violating rights.

We come then, Madam Speaker—there is a rider. Whilst it is that the EPR, the regulations made under the state of emergency can constitutionally therefore make exceptions and breach rights in that sense—constitutionally breach the rights under section 7(3), there is a rider to the statement which it says that:

It could—“...have effect even though inconsistent with sections 4 and 5...”

But this is what it says further, and I think this is very instructive for us to ask that question now:

“...except in so far as its provisions may be shown not to be reasonably justifiable for the purpose of dealing with the situation that exists during that period.”

So the question then arises: Is the state of emergency, is the trampling or the curtailing of rights, can it be shown not to be reasonably justifiable for the purpose

of dealing with the situation? How can we answer that question truthfully and honestly when we listened to all of the Government Members, not one member on that side has really given us data and science to say, “Yes, this SOE is justifiable, it has cut down the COVID.” [*Desk thumping*]

Indeed my colleague—one of my colleagues who spoke—and I commend all my colleagues for their contributions here this afternoon. [*Desk thumping*] One of my colleagues who spoke gave us the data, that on May when you came to impose—when you declared the state of emergency, the numbers were far less than what we have now and have had during the state of emergency. So there is no correlation and made difficult—be difficult to show that correlation that the SOE is the thing, is the weapon, is the tool, is the medication for COVID. The data is not telling us that. And not one speaker on that side was able to really share with us new information and new data to say, “Well, yes, okay, we really need this SOE.” Instead—and it was a pleasure listening to a real doctor, Dr. Bodoë, this afternoon [*Desk thumping*] giving us some of the stats, some of the data. It is always a pleasure listening to him when he shared it. So is it reasonably justifiable?

The hon. Attorney General, you know, we say, his lawbook probably has two cases. I did not hear him mentioned them today, but it is Suratt and the Northern Construction. I do not think—he hardly ever speaks without telling us about the legitimate expectation, legitimate aim and, of course, referring to Suratt and Northern Construction. And, of course, if he does not call my name, I do not think I feel happy at all. I am very happy you called my name about three or four times today. Thank you, hon. Attorney General.

And you asked about the state of emergency in 2011 and several of you have raised it. So, Madam Speaker, I am responding. I am not raising, I had no intention

so to do, but more than one speaker on that side felt it so necessary to go back to 10/11 years ago to justify what they are doing today because they could not find a reason today to really justify the extension of the state of emergency so you want to go back 10/11 years. You said that you sent letters to myself and then AG Anand, you sent letters for us to come to court to give evidence. Hon. Speaker, the record is there for all to see. It is in the *Hansard* of this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] The reasons for the SOE, we came in the Parliament, it was debated in the Parliament. You have all the evidence on the public record, in the newspapers and so on.

So let us not go back 11 years. Maybe that is why you are there and I am on this side. Maybe that is one of the reasons because you felt something went wrong. But we came to this Parliament, we debated the SOE, and the reasons were stated in the proclamation itself, and during the course of that debate which the other side anticipated. [*Interruption*] Wow, that is a fast 10 minutes, thank you—the other side anticipated.

So is it reasonably justifiable? Yes, I do think that the first state of emergency—the first extension after the proclamation when we came to Parliament in May, I do honestly believe that it might have been reasonably justifiable then. It might have been then. But three months later, we have seen no shifting in the results, we have seen nothing from the numbers of the deaths, and the numbers of cases and so on. Instead, it continues to climb. I believe that even under the SOE we have had more cases and more deaths [*Desk thumping*] than we had in the whole of the last year; all of last year. And therefore, I do not—for the life of me, I cannot see the justification for carrying on this—now extending it for this further three months.

You know, Madam Speaker, I know you have made a ruling that the debate

is not about the vaccines but I know Members on the Government side have talked about using this SOE to assist in a massive vaccination drive. So I will not speak about the vaccines per se but I would like to say, this is one of the reasons that were given. I do not see how, when, why, what, where the SOE will help you to vaccinate people. How? Tell us. [*Desk thumping*] Tell us how it is you had an SOE for the past three months and you could not vaccinate the people. How is a further three months going to help you to vaccinate more people? It does not make sense. That, to me, is donkey logic if you are looking for donkey logic. That is donkey logic. It does not make any sense at all.

So, is it reasonably justifiable? What additional powers are you seeking that you cannot exercise under the Public Health Ordinance Regulations? What is it that the SOE gives you that you cannot get under the Public Health Regulations? One Member of the Government is reported in the newspapers to have said that this allows them—the state of emergency allows them to get nurses and vets and dentists and other technical assistance to actually vaccinate, but you do not need that. [*Desk thumping*] You have the Public Health Ordinance, section 105 which tells you—and it has a catch all phrase in that—seven—sorry, section 105, which says you can do all such other manner of things that are necessary for the contingencies and exigencies of the time and of the situation. So why do you need this to say, “Okay nurse, you could go and give a vaccine?” Why? That does not make any sense whatsoever; none whatsoever.

You have the Public Health Regulations. If you use them properly, which is what you were doing all along, we will be fine; we will be fine. You would get your job done through the Public Health Regulations. So what are the additional powers that you are seeking under the SOE that you cannot get under Public Health Regulations?

Under the SOE you are going to—you are able to:

“Prohibit...restrict the possession or use by a person of a specified article;”

Under an SOE you are:

Prohibiting—“...a person from travelling except in accordance with permission that may be given...”

You can:

“Require a person to leave or to not go to a place or area;”

So all these are dealing with movement. A colleague who spoke before talked about Jamaica and the lockdown in Jamaica, no movement. So you are dealing clearly there with freedom of movement. You are dealing with giving the authority:

“To disperse a gathering...”—or—“direct a person to return to his home, or to remove a person from the place if...”—the police is—“...of the view that the number of persons gathered in the place contravenes the SOE Regulations.”

Again, this can be done through the Public Health Regulations. The social distancing issues, the numbers of persons who can gather any one place. You do not need an SOE to do that. So I am asking, you tell me which is it that you really want the SOE to give you? What new power, what new rules, what new regulations that you need that a SOE will give you? And the only one, I think, and the hon. Attorney General made reference en passant is—the AG said, you know, there was a big debate about public and private place and who could go to a public place and a private place and the SOE gives that power. That is the only power that I see maybe that the SOE is going to give you. All the other things you can do through section 105 of the Public Health Ordinance. You do not need to lock down a country.

Look, let me ask you, Madam—through you, Madam Speaker, to the Members on the other side. Guyana is next door to us; Guyana is next door to us. Guyana is experiencing COVID just like other parts of the world but Guyana has no lockdown, you know, but they have a curfew. They have a 10.00 p.m. curfew, if my information is correct. They did not need an SOE to put that curfew. We could probably find out how and why they did it. Their Constitution is similar to ours. So they have the curfew, they have the social distancing, they have all the other things that we have been talking about, but they do not have a state of emergency. Again, I am asking please tell us, what is required? What do you want to do that you cannot do without the state of emergency that will help you to deal with the COVID pandemic that we are in?

So, at the end of this debate, Madam, the Motion is going to be passed, we know that. It requires a simple majority. I just want the public to understand that because many have expressed a dissatisfaction and in fact are against the extension. I want make it very clear that the Opposition is not of the view that a SOE is needed at this time in this country [*Desk thumping*] for the purposes that they are advocating in the debate.

When this debate ends today, it will be a continuation of the derogation of rights—fundamental rights of our citizens, required or not required, or justifiable or not justifiable in this pandemic. Only time will tell; Only time will tell. But the cases are not going away and therefore the answer may be not in the SOE but in the management, in your management of the pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago. Always boasting, “We are number one, we are number one, we are number one.”

Hon. Member: In the world.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “In the world”, yes. “We are number one.” And you are crying here today. One Member almost cried that she could not go to the

beach. The Member could not go to the beach, the Member could not do this, could not do that—I said, “You know what? Give me a reason why you need a SOE.” Why you tell me what you cannot do? Tell me what the SOE is going to do to enable you to do those things? And we have not heard—the debate is still open and hopefully some Member of the Government would give us some of those explanations.

So whether certain management issues need to be implemented—I just want to take one moment of the time I have here. I have to use the word “vaccine”, I am sorry, but I just want to congratulate and thank all those volunteers who are out there. [*Desk thumping*] I went to a vaccine site. There were 250 persons who were volunteering at that site. I know many others are volunteering. I know Dr. Rai on our team is an actual volunteer. I want to thank all these people for the voluntary work they are doing in putting the vaccines—giving—injecting persons with the vaccine.

So, Madam, I am saying we can do everything under the Public Health Regulations. I am saying Guyana has similar kinds of lockdown—not lockdown, no lockdown, no SOE. They have similar kinds of cases as we do. They have no SOE. They are using their regular law which they are allowed to do. The Public Health Ordinance is really old and in that way it has a lot of the things that allows you to infringe upon certain rights because we did not have the written Constitution and all those things at that time. And therefore, there is a lot of the power given to the Minister of Health under that that Ordinance in terms of dealing with the pandemic we are facing.

I want to share—well, my colleagues here have already said condolences to all those families who have lost loved ones. Over 1,200 people have died in this pandemic. Let us work together and let us make it happen. Let us get people

vaccinated. We are taking people out, we are transporting and so on. That is the way and the sure way. Everyone please go and get your vaccine. I thank you very much, Madam. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I rise to conclude this debate, I must say that stranger things have happened. There was a vote taken earlier in the day with respect to our time and how much time should be given to persons taking part in the debate. It even went to a division, Madam Speaker, and I as mover of the Motion, I took 45 minutes and I was really hoping that the Leader of the Opposition would have taken the opportunity for 45 minutes to respond, but my colleague chose to lead from behind, and now I clearly understand why. Because, Madam Speaker, as I am about to respond to the comments made from colleagues in this House—and let me first respond to the Opposition Leader that has treated us to some spectacular unpreparedness, and again, strange logic and misleading information.

Madam Speaker, the thesis of the contribution of the Opposition Leader who has just joined and concluded her 20-minute contribution is that we do not need a state of emergency because we can use the powers—the wide powers of the Public Health Ordinance. That is a fact just put on *Hansard* by the Leader of the Opposition. Let me remind this country in the context of that statement coming from the Leader of the Opposition, that when we first embarked upon treating with COVID in January 2020, and going forward using the Public Health Ordinance, the same one that the Opposition Leader has just said we can use with its wide powers, our colleagues from this House and other people on the outside, led by the Opposition Leader, traversed the courthouse tens of occasions challenging the Government at every step of the way, including challenging us on the

constitutionality of the Public Health Ordinance.

So ask yourself, Madam Speaker, if the Opposition is really serious about the country and its management, whoever the Government is, getting involved in engaging and fighting the COVID in the pandemic of the year 2020 and 2021? The records will show that their position is that the Public Health Ordinance could not be used and ought not to be used, and they challenged about 60 times and they lost every single time in the court.

And then, when you do not have an argument, you make up one because I presume that my colleague from Siparia was asleep when I spoke today, because she was present. And, Madam Speaker, what I said to justify the Government's position, maybe it was too simple and they were looking for something more complicated, but at least they could reference what was said. What was said was that the biggest problem we have in facilitating the virus permeating the population was by members of the population moving about, mixing and interacting. That is what I said, Madam Speaker. And what the curfew does is ask us to stop doing some of that, not all of it but some of it and we choose to do that reduction in the night-time as against in the daytime. Because in the daytime, we want to be able to go to work, do normal daytime things, and in the night-time, that is when we give up the mixing, and the congregating, and the socializing. That is what I said.

But, of course, I deliberately did not go into talking about the vaccination programme because I knew the debate would then turn about vaccines, because I know how my colleagues behave on vaccines. When vaccines are not available, they demand that it be used in Trinidad and Tobago, even though, we could not buy a single dose of vaccine anywhere in the world, but they were jumping up and down the country for the whole of 2020, "Vaccinate the country, vaccinate the country, vaccinate the country." So I did not do that and I said the main

justification is to prevent people from socializing and congregating.

So I was amazed when my colleague from Siparia in her major contribution just now said, “What is the state of emergency going to do?” and “How many persons is it going to allow you to vaccinate?” No argument was made here by me, Madam Speaker, the mover of this Motion. No argument was made by me about a state of emergency to vaccinate anybody [*Desk thumping*] because I knew that that would have been on the misrepresentation that was on the PNM. And even though it was not said, when she chose to go and speak at the end of the debate, my colleague from Siparia had to pretend as though that is what I had said and what the Government had said.

Madam Speaker, I want to be clear again, we vaccinate in the daytime and we stay home and do not congregate in the night-time. [*Desk thumping*] So it was quite wrong for the Opposition Leader to try to give the impression that this requirement for an extension is to vaccinate. Of course, we will benefit if we continue vaccinating. We have a vaccination programme going on. We have a vaccination programme going on and the more people we vaccinate during this period, emergency or no emergency, the better and stronger will be our foundation in the event that we are assailed by the Delta virus. And, of course, with the current load of COVID-19 in our country, vaccination is the best response, Madam Speaker. We have said that over and over.

6.30 p.m.

And all of my colleagues who got up and said they did not hear a reason. Madam Speaker, that falls into maxim, a man and woman convinced against their will, is of the same opinion still. Because if they did not hear, if they have not heard me say that all the scientific and technical reasons available to the country, coming from the authorized experienced trained specialists, who are the ones who

talk to the country, every single week, every single day in this country, that is how we do it. We do not let the politicians give the technical and medical advice. We have our technical team doing that talking directly to the people, taking questions directly from the media. Madam Speaker, that is how it is done in this country.

So, when I say I have no new additional information, that is what it is, because that is where I get my information from and we have hidden nothing from the people. [*Desk thumping*] Because where the politicians seek to give advice, Madam Speaker, what was that advice? What were they telling the country? The last Minister of Health before the Minister of Health in the PNM Government, the last Minister of Health, Member of Parliament, then for San Juan/Barataria, who is now a major purveyor of information in the public domain, his position as Minister of Health in this country, is to tell the country first and foremost COVID is a hoax, secondly, is a normal flu and there is no need to respond anything. Let the flu take its course, and let us not disrupt the economy. That is the view of the last UNC Minister of Health. And he is telling people that, even though we respond after 1,252 persons have died in this country from COVID. That same UNC Minister of Health is telling the population in undermining the Government's effort, telling the population that the reason for these disruptions and these lockdowns and these what, is because of the election in Tobago. That is the UNC says contribution. But we are not surprised, Madam Speaker, because the Leader of the Opposition asked to see me as Prime Minister in this very building; I saw the same day. She brought two doctors to the meeting, one of whom spoke about readiness in the hospitals and I gave the assurance that the Minister of Health and the health departments all over the country we are readying ourselves to treat with COVID.

The other one was giving advice about how to treat with COVID infected patients. While the WHO was saying that there was no treatment for it, he was

advising this Government to get a shipment of hydroxyl chloroquine. And, Madam Speaker, some of them are still on that. We were advised to use sunshine, we were advised to use hydroxyl chloroquine, we were advised to drink bleach, we were advised now to use ivermectin instead of on sheep and horses to use it on human beings. That is their advice.

So, Madam Speaker, when the Opposition Leader gets up here today, and makes a song and a dance, and been talking about tyrannical and talking about draconian action for an extension of 90 days in a pandemic. 90 days we are asking and we are saying that we may not even have it for the full 90 days. That is draconian, that is—and Madam Speaker, it will take me to the point of how to take these people? Because my colleague from Siparia, as Prime Minister in this very country, all these rights are being protected today by their utterances. In response to criminal activity in one part of the country, the Prime Minister did not even know what to do. So we got up and being told that, it was August, on August 21, 2011, out of the blue, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago who today is talking all this thing about draconian tyrannical in a pandemic, declared what she considered to be a limited state of emergency. And in fact, so confused and incompetent was she, she did not realize that there was no such thing as a limited state of emergency. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: 48(5), 48(5), insulting language, referring to the political leader as “she”. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: All right, well, whoever, whoever declared the emergency for your benefit, it would be “he”. Madam Speaker, he declared a state of emergency on Sunday 21 August 2011, in six hotspots, Arima, Chaguanas, San Juan/Laventille, Diego Martin, San Fernando and Port of Spain. So, apparently, when he declared that state of emergency, these rights today that are being

“draconianly” and tyrannically taken away, did not exist. And then, two weeks later, “he” declared a further state of emergency—

Madam Speaker: Okay, while I know it is artificial, to every minute be saying honourable, honourable—

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: No, Madam Speaker, I was just told it was not the Prime Minister who did it.

Madam Speaker: No, no, no, no, no, please. I am not addressing what you were told, all right, what I am saying is when referring to a Member, and it is certain we all know what protocol is one minute and while it might be artificial, to be saying, honourable, whatever, repeatedly and I am not standing on that, I am saying that we should try to respect that. All right, thank you, please proceed.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker. I was responding to the Member from Naparima who advised me that it was not the then Prime Minister who declared the state of emergency—

Madam Speaker: I am not going to— [*Inaudible*] —use your precious time, with this, if you please proceed with your contribution. Thank you.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Okay, Madam Speaker, just to avoid any confusion, the state of emergency that was declared then, was widened to Toco, Carli Bay Cedros, Moruga and that went on until the curfew was lifted on November 7th, from August to November, that curfew, lifted. And when we thought it was going to end, there was an addition in a very curious situation, where the then Prime Minister, advised the country that she was under assassination threat, and they extended the state of emergency until the 5th of December. Madam Speaker, that is the person who today giving us a treatise. [*Desk thumping*] That is how, sitting in the office of Prime Minister, that colleague of ours from Siparia, that is how a state of emergency was used.

Madam Speaker, we found out later on, that there was absolutely no basis for any assassination response. And of course, it had nothing to do with suppressing gun crimes to zero, as we are being told now that the state of emergency that we have now in a pandemic must suppress the infection levels to zero. It is only because they want to oppose for opposing sake, they are making these arguments. [*Desk thumping*] It is only that. Madam Speaker, trying to paint it as though there is something special and different happening in Trinidad and Tobago, draconian and tyrannical, even as we are here, Madam Speaker, the Government of Barbados today implemented new curfew conditions and an extension of their response.

And of course, Madam Speaker, if you think our condition is draconian, and tyrannical, let me tell you how the Jamaican Government is handling their situation. There will be seven no movement days. Madam Speaker, we have not implemented one of those. We made some adjustments in July, on weekends and public holidays, for the same reason to slow down the movement and to reduce the congregation. But Jamaica is now saying that Sunday August 22nd, Monday August 23rd, Tuesday August 24th, Sunday August 29th, Monday August 30th, Tuesday August 31st, and Sunday September 5th, no movement.

Madam Speaker, if that is as we were told this evening by our colleague from Siparia, actions must be taken, actions which are deemed acceptable in a society that respects the norms, what would you say about the Jamaican Government? Are you saying that the Jamaican Government does not respect and act decently in a way where standards that they are following are beneath what is expected of a Commonwealth country, eh? No movement with a curfew from 7.00 p.m. to 5.00 a.m. Madam Speaker, you know why they doing that? Because they know that they have to protect their citizens, and they are prepared to do what has

to be done to protect their citizens, as we are doing here in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what they doing. And fortunately for the Government of Jamaica, there is nobody jumping up and down there accusing the Government of being draconian and tyrannical. They know that COVID-19 is dangerous, it is killing people and whatever it is doing now it can do worse if the Government does not intervene. And that is what, Madam Speaker, we are talking about.

My colleague from Siparia talks about congratulating volunteers. Yeah, congratulate volunteers, but you are suing and belittling every public servant who is fighting this fight for us in Trinidad and Tobago. How many times have you sued Dr. Parasram and his team? How many times have you done the unthinkable of casting aspersion on the professional conduct of the doctors in this hospital in here? [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, even before we had a COVID death, my colleague from Siparia and her team were telling this country that doctors and nurses were hiding dead people in the hospital and we were hiding COVID patients who were dying in the hospital. They went as far as saying that there were dead bodies piling up in Mount Hope Hospital, a statement had to be made by Davlin Thomas and the other people in the hospital saying this is not true.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, 48(6).

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Eh?

Madam Speaker: I have overruled 48(6). I am hearing an undertone of a word. I am not sure if I am hearing wise, or if I am hearing a word that I have repeatedly said is unparliamentary, so I am just alerting people that I am hearing something I am not sure, I think it is wise, but if it is not wise, that other word is not permitted in here. Continue.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So congratulating volunteers, and let my colleagues as uncomfortable as they are squirming in their seats now,

because they now have a chance to reflect and it appears as though they are coming to the conclusion that it was not appropriate for their Leader and themselves to be attacking public servants, while public servants fighting to save our lives. [*Desk thumping*] So, I am not surprised they are getting up to object because they do not want me to repeat what they have done.

And, Madam Speaker, when the first person in this country died from COVID, on a roll doing that, resulting in the Leader of the Opposition from Siparia announcing the person's death even before the hospital was able to tell the family. The first public person who spoke about a death in COVID in this country did so with glee and gusto.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, 48(1) please, on relevance.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: What is your problem?

Mr. Hosein: 48(1) on relevance please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Charles: What is the relevance?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And the relevance of my contribution, Madam Speaker, I am saying that my colleagues are not engaged in the protection of the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, they are playing politics [*Desk thumping*] and have played politics and continue to play politics with it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(1). This has nothing to do with state of emergency. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, would I get injury time for the unnecessary interruptions?

Mr. Indarsingh: No seating outside there.

Madam Speaker: Member? Prime Minister, continue.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I will continue, and I would crave your indulgence to have injury time.

Another Member from the team opposite claiming that the Government was saying that COVID comes out only in the night and therefore, we need a curfew in the night to prevent COVID from coming out in the night. Just in case there is anybody in Trinidad and Tobago who takes that Member seriously, it is not that we are saying that COVID comes out only in the night, it is saying that we maximize our activities in the daytime in the livelihoods of people but having done that, we reduce our contact at nights to reduce the exposure to the virus. That is what we are saying. Yes, I have not heard one of them say that we should not reduce our exposure and we should not congregate. Not one of them said that. You know why? Because they agree with us, that the congregation and the socializing and all of that, that is what the virus would love to have. So we have to reduce, ameliorate, eliminate that. But it is not a matter of in the night, we could do it in the day too as we had done some time before. But we want to have people go out to work so they could earn a living, even while we are living with the virus and that is why the daytime is not used for lockdown, we use the night for the lockdown and the separations. Is that too difficult for our colleagues on the other side to understand?

And, of course, to make it look as if there is some problem that we imposing on the people, people are being treated like wild animals because the Government saying that wild animals roaming during the night. I ask the population to disregard the statements made by the Member for Oropouche because it is unhelpful and at this point, Madam Speaker, let me do what I am surprised I have to do. Let me congratulate the Leader of the Opposition from Siparia, for finally doing something useful, telling the population of parents to get their children vaccinated.

It would have been so much nicer if on many more occasions when the country is fighting COVID that the Leader of the Opposition takes a leadership position for positive action in Trinidad and Tobago. It will be so much better. But

every single thing we have tried to do, every single thing we have tried to do so far, they have opposed. Even when it does not make sense. Even when they have to misrepresent like she did this evening, Madam Speaker, Member from Oropouche saying that we can have a curfew without a state of emergency and quoting Guyanese law. But I do not know what happens in Guyana and what law they use, but what I do know, in Trinidad and Tobago, if there is to be a curfew, as we say we require for this purpose, it has to be under a state of emergency.

Madam Speaker, these who have gone to court to sue every public servant, you could imagine if we try to impose a curfew in this country under any interpretation of any other law, how fast they will be in the courthouse with their ten cents clothes. So, the advice they are giving us is bad advice and the population that are not legal experts might even want to believe what they are hearing and they got they would not believe that a senior counsel could come into the Parliament and make a statement like that. And then quoting Guyana to give them the impression that is done elsewhere and we are doing this because we are oppressing people in this country, because we want power. That is what they saying all the time. What power? The only power we want is the power to fight the virus. And since you would not help us, we are gonna fight it, we are gonna defeat it and we are gonna win it without you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, they argue about freedoms. Madam Speaker, we all love our freedom. We all have entrenched rights in the Constitution that gives them freedom to do certain things. But there is one quote from a particular source that says freedom does not mean an absence of restraint. If there is freedom without restraint, you will then be allowed to or find yourself doing all kinds of things, that even you might be ashamed of.

So, today we come into Parliament, to protect ourselves from the virus to do the right thing, to encourage the population to do the right thing and you are asking people to blow horn round the Parliament. What “all yuh” have with horn? Madam Speaker, you would think they would have got enough. Yeah, they are coming outside to make noise outside the Parliament to what avail, to give the impression that in the Parliament something tyrannical and draconian and dictatorial is going on. All that is going on in this Parliament, Madam Speaker, is that there is a government that has assumed the responsibility for the decision making and the leadership of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the pandemic of the 21st Century. The record will show that. The record will show that.

And, Madam Speaker, even as we are grappling with the virus, giving you all the information, you know their names, they know their rank, you know—the only thing we are not giving you is the names of patients and their private health records. That is the only thing you do not get in Trinidad and Tobago. But you want commission of enquiry, commission of enquiry, in the middle of the pandemic, you want a commission of enquiry. Well, Madam Speaker, at the appropriate time, right, if there is any enquiry to be had, it will be had, but we will not be building any fire station while the fire is blazing.

Madam Speaker, they want to know if we consulted, one of them asked whether we consulted with labour and NGOs. Madam Speaker, when that state of emergency was called in 2011, who did they consult? Which NGO they did talk to? It took three weeks for them to decide that it is not a limited state of emergency, is a full-blown emergency affecting from Charlotteville to Cedros, from Sangre Grande to Carenage. Now, I am being told in a pandemic that we are acting, we cannot demonstrate that we consulted. We consult as deeply and as widely, local, regional and internationally on this matter. When we sat in the Chair

of Caricom, leading Caricom in the fight to get a dose of vaccine, never once did one of them stand up in defence of Trinidad and Tobago and Caricom or our Prime Minister. Every night, every day they are in our case, because they have not supported anything this Government has done because as far as they are concerned, Madam Speaker, we must fail so that they can succeed. That is their approach. Never once in this pandemic, have they supported a single initiative of this Government, eh.

When vaccines became available to the international community, and it was being cornered by the rich and wealthy countries, they find a way to convert our effort into racial arguments in Trinidad and Tobago. Vaccine story became race here in Trinidad and Tobago, and all kinds of nasty allegations being made against the Government and the Prime Minister about vaccines along racial lines, Madam Speaker. That is what the record will show. That is what I have been living with in this country. We are the only country I know that has gone on in and I think our Opposition Members must take an example and look at other people and examine yourself and see how history will deal with you because history will be very unkind to you.

Madam Speaker, you know, they just want the facts. We just want the figures; that is what they saying. Are those not the items we produce every single day, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday? What other facts and figures do you want? The Chief Medical Officer and his whole team will come to you, you call them all kinds of things. Only today in the Parliament I hear you call them denigrating names, but they are the ones who have the facts. I as Prime Minister, I might be leading the country but I do not have a single line of data on anybody's clinical condition. And I am not the authority to speak about numbers in the hospital. There is a Minister of Health who does that on an ongoing basis, but you

so want to give the impression that something bad is going on that you are coming in the night like a knight in shining armour and on your steed you will come to defend the country by misrepresenting the whole situation.

Madam Speaker, I never thought I would live in a pandemic having been told about the one in 1918 by my grandfather, who told it to me in great detail. And today, it falls to me as Prime Minister, to lead this country's response and I will not shirk my duty, I will not shirk that duty and the Government I lead will not shirk its duty because at the end of the day, we want to live, we want to survive this pandemic and by God we will. I only ask for the support of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, including my colleagues on the other side.

Madam Speaker, even as the Opposition Leader called on parents to vaccinate their children, I detected the ongoing subliminal message, which is not helpful. And the message is, yes, you can vaccinate your children, the FDA has approved it, you can do it. What does that say about the other vaccines that are not FDA approved? The reason why—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: 48(6), improper motives to the Opposition.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has said publicly over and over, we are using vaccines that have the clearance and approval of the WHO, the World Health Organization. And therefore, when a vaccine from China had got that approval, and we said we are going to make it available and we were getting some from China, the first thing an Opposition Member said to this country, is that we are going to be the guinea pigs. And that, Madam Speaker, was the first shot fired across the bow of vaccine acceptance, and set the tone for vaccine hesitancy in this country.

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, again 48(1). He said vaccines must be—
[*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I am sure you do not mean that to me?

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Madam Speaker: I am certain and if you do, then you could exercise your option, I am certain you do not mean that. Continue, Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So, Madam Speaker, the FDA approval is a United States internal arrangement, the FDA is a United States body within a country, a sovereign country. The FDA approval in no way improves or changes the status of the vaccine as far as we are concerned because it had to be WHO approved before we can use it. And by pointing out that this one is FDA approved, it raises the question, Madam Speaker, what about the others that do not have or will never get FDA approval? Because I do not expect a vaccine from China, or from Russia, or from Cuba to ever get an FDA approval. But by speaking in that way, you create the question mark about the others. So when the Member for Oropouche spoke about guinea pigs, and Madam Speaker—

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, 48(6), the Member from Siparia dealt with the issue in relation to children. The Prime Minister cannot prove improper motives on the part of the statement of the Member for Siparia.

Madam Speaker: All right, we are both standing. And I want to say, Whip, that you know the Standing Orders very well. And I am sure there is another Standing Order that might be available for what you want to do. Overruled, continue.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I know it is uncomfortable when confronted with facts in this way. But if you want to avoid that, Madam Speaker, the best thing is if you do not know what you are talking about, just restrict yourself to the facts as known to you. Madam Speaker, this is the Parliament, we are the parliamentarians, we are the country's leaders, and therefore, we have to be more responsible. You cannot just get up and say

anything. You believe, Madam Speaker, that a former Minister of Health could say anything in this country now in this pandemic and not be influencing people. So when a former Minister of Health says that COVID is a hoax, and it is a normal flu, and there should be no response in terms of shutting down the country in its response, you think that that is not causing some people to act on that statement? But Madam Speaker, I am not gonna engage anymore in this argument. I am not. I know my colleagues know better. I know my colleague from Siparia is a senior counsel and I know that she knows that we cannot use a curfew in this country without a state of emergency. I know that she knows that. And what you have to ask is why then would you advance in the Parliament in a debate that we could do it, if not to mislead people?

Madam Speaker, I leave it to their consciences. But what I do say to end is that those who wrote our Constitution did a fantastic job giving the Government enough authority to act in defence of the people of Trinidad Tobago. Had they not done so, had they not done so in their wisdom and write into our Constitution that this state of emergency could have been extended by the Government using its own majority, today the Opposition would not have voted for this measure and this country could not have used a state of emergency to have a curfew to protect itself in a pandemic and that would have been a tragedy indeed.

So, Madam Speaker, I thank those who wrote the Constitution and I want to encourage my colleagues on the other side, to examine, take a close look at themselves and get away from this position that the country has to fail so that you could succeed and bad mouthing the country left, right and center, everything you look at, this one collapse, that collapse, this collapse, that collapse. What is your role in strengthening the people of this country as we gird our loins to fight in a

State of Emergency (Extension of)
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

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pandemic? Your role cannot be to break our spirit and to expose us to this virus that will do all of us harm. Madam Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put.

Hon. Members: Division.

Madam Speaker: So, hon. Members, as we know, a division has been called. Members will be allowed three minutes to come to the Chamber. And, again, we are reminded, if a Member's turn has been passed, once the Member comes into the Chamber before the vote is announced, the Member would be allowed to vote. [*Pause*] Okay. Members, the division will commence now.

The House divided: Ayes 21

AYES

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Young, Hon. S.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Forde, E.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe, Hon. S.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Cummings, Hon. F.

Richards, K.

UNREVISED

State of Emergency (Extension of)

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Manning, Hon. B.

Leonce, Hon. A.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L

De Nobriga, Hon. S.

Scotland, K.

Monroe, R.

The following Members abstained: Mr. D. Lee, Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar, Ms. K. Ameen, Mr. R. Charles, Dr. R. Moonilal, Mr. R. Paray, Mr. R. Indarsingh, Dr. L. Bodoie, Mr. S. Hosein, Mr. B. Padarath, Ms. A. Haynes, Mr. D. Tancoo, Ms. V. Mohit, Ms. M. Benjamin, Mr. D. Rambally, Dr. R. Ragbir, Mr. A. Ram and Mr. R. Ratiram.

Question agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Proclamation made by the President on the 15th day of May, 2021 declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago be extended for a further period of three months.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, on behalf of all of us here, Happy Birthday to you, and I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.09 p.m.