

Leave of Absence

Friday, June 20, 1997

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 20, 1997

The House met at 1.35 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to apologise for the fact that we started five minutes late. I think it is quite proper.

I wish to advise that I have received communication from the Member for Arouca North (Mr. Jarrette Narine) who is unable to attend the sitting today and has asked to be excused, and the Member for Arima (Dr. Rupert Griffith) who has also asked to be excused from today's sitting because he is out of the jurisdiction. This leave is granted.

STANDARDS BILL

Bill to provide for the preparation and promotion of standards in relation to goods, services, processes and practices by the establishment and operation of a Bureau of Standards, to define the powers and functions of the Bureau of Standards and for matters incidental thereto, [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister of Consumer Affairs*]; read the first time.

PETITION

Northern Construction Limited

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport (Mr. Chandresh Sharma): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the petition on behalf of Ynolde Martineau of Gopeesingh, Martineau, Edwards and Company.

I now ask that the Clerk be permitted to read the petition and that the promoters be allowed to proceed.

Petition read.

Mr. Kenneth Valley (Diego Martin Central): Mr. Speaker, before you rule I want the House to know that the Members of the Opposition object to the granting of leave with respect to this Petition.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Petitions for leave of this honourable House to make use of proceedings of this honourable House in courts of law are normally dealt with under this item, "Petitions" on the Order Paper. The procedure that has been adopted and the practice which has been followed in this House is one which has the effect of short circuiting the Standing Orders of the House, and not insisting on the formalities of the relevant Standing Orders which deal with Motions and Notices.

The learning is and the authorities are that such Petitions could be proceeded with provided that there is no dissenting voice in the House. In the circumstances where the Member for Diego Martin Central has raised objection to the Petition which is being presented by the Member for Fyzabad on behalf of attorneys, I am afraid that one will not be in a position to access the procedure which is normally followed with these Petitions.

In the circumstances, I wish to advise that the presenter of this Petition would have to give notice in the normal course of Motions. In the circumstances, I rule that we cannot proceed with the Petition in the way in which we normally do because of the dissenting voice.

I direct that the Member for Fyzabad in pursuing this matter in presenting this Petition would have to file and give Notice of Motion as provided for in the Standing Orders.

Mr. Patrick Manning (*San Fernando East*): Mr. Speaker, out of an abundance of caution, for the benefit of Members on this side of the House, could you be kind enough to indicate exactly what the procedure would be in relation to the Member for Fyzabad giving notice under the Standing Orders as you have outlined?

Mr. Speaker: I would be very happy to discuss that and what I think is the position with both sides of the House, or an individual Member, if one cares to see me in my Chambers afterwards. I would be happy to give the benefit of my views on it.

Question put and negatived.

1.45 p.m.

PAPER LAID

The Forty-fourth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Attorney General (Hon. R. L. Maharaj)*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Patrick Manning:

**Northern Construction Limited
(Award of Contracts)**

- 42.** (a) Would the Minister of Finance indicate whether any contracts involving state expenditure have been awarded by any Ministry, government department, state enterprise or any other state agency to Northern Construction Limited?
- (b) If the answer is in the affirmative, would the Minister indicate the work involved in each contract and the value of each contract?

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, having regard to the wide ambit of Question No. 42, which did not have a time-frame, we are asking for a deferral for two weeks. The Minister has not completed accessing information.

Mr. Manning: If it would help the hon. Members opposite, we are prepared to have the answer to the question from the date of inception of the new government.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, we will take a note of that and within two weeks, we will give them an answer.

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Fishing Agreement
(Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela)**

- 43. Mr. Patrick Manning** (*San Fernando East*) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs:
- Would the Minister indicate:
- (a) when was the last fishing agreement between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela signed?
- (b) whether this contract has expired, and if so, when did it expire?
- (c) the status of the present negotiations for a new fishing agreement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela?
- (d) the estimated time of completion of these negotiations?

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Ralph Maraj): Mr. Speaker, the last fishing agreement between Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela was signed on November 26, 1985.

The agreement expired on December 31, 1995. It had an initial duration of two years, but was rolled over for additional periods of one year over a number of years, until the end of 1995.

The tenth round of negotiations for a new successor fishing agreement was held in Port of Spain from May 13—15, 1997. During that meeting a draft agreement was initialled by the heads of the two delegations and would concentrate on co-operation in the fisheries sector in the area south of Trinidad and Tobago and north of Venezuela.

The initialled text will now be considered by both Governments and should it be approved, arrangements will be put in place for its signature and entry into force, once the constitutional formalities in both countries have been completed.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. Minister would be kind enough to give us an estimated time at which these formalities would be brought to a successful conclusion. Secondly, will this new tentative fishing agreement give Trinidad and Tobago's fishermen access to the traditional shrimping grounds in Venezuelan waters?

Hon. R. Maraj: I expect that the completion of the process of the new fishing agreement will be done as soon as possible. We must remember that, as far as the Venezuelan Government is concerned, this requires approval by Congress. I have no doubt that this process will be continued and we will have a fishing agreement in the not-too-distant future.

With respect to the other question, under the new agreement, the fishing community, especially from the Cedros/Icacos area, will no longer have access to the special zone, which they had under the old agreement. In the run-up to the negotiations, it was made clear to us by the Venezuelan authorities, from as early as last year, that they were no longer in a position to allow access to those shrimping grounds because of depleted stocks.

The Trinidad and Tobago authorities, on the other hand, were not in a position to grant access to the Venezuelan fishing vessels to the north and east coast of Trinidad and Tobago because of the depleted fish stocks. So, the situation has completely changed and it was required that we negotiate a fishing agreement based on new fundamentals. That is really the foundation upon which the new fishing agreement was negotiated.

Mr. Manning: I wonder whether the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs would tell us, in light of the request of the Venezuelan Government for an apology from Trinidad and Tobago in respect of certain issues, whether he anticipates any difficulties with the Venezuelan Congress now ratifying that agreement.

Hon. R. Maraj: Mr. Speaker, what I have heard with respect to an apology is what I have read in the newspaper. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has had no request for an apology.

Let me also say that in the view of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we have done nothing that requires an apology. In fact, we exercised a legitimate opportunity and a right to air a matter, and we did so with fair warning to the hemispheric community about a problem that we have been having for a number of years. I am also of the view that the hemispheric community is aware of this, as has been indicated, and I have no doubt that this new fishing agreement, because of what I myself know is taking place in Caracas at this time, will be concluded in the not too distant future.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps I should just indicate to this honourable House that Members would see that more than three questions appear on the Order Paper in the name of the Member for San Fernando West. That does not infringe the Standing Orders. Indeed, these are questions in excess of the three carried over from previous occasions and therefore are not counted.

NHA Apartments (Repairs)

49. Mr. Barendra Sinanan (*San Fernando West*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements:

- (a) Would the Minister state whether his Ministry intends to repair and/or refurbish any National Housing Authority apartments in the constituency of San Fernando West?
- (b) If the answer is in the affirmative, would the Minister state which apartments would be repaired and/or refurbished, when they will be repaired, and the nature of the repairs/refurbishment to be undertaken?

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Hon. John Humphrey): Mr. Speaker, the answer to the first part of the question is in the affirmative. Details of the repair and/or refurbishing works being done or to be undertaken subject to the availability of funds, are as follows:

Buildings 1 and 5, Jamadar Street, built in 1946: replacement of wooden floors in the upper storey—scheduled date, January to March 1998.

Building at 23 Ramsaran Street, built in 1974: replacement of windows—scheduled date September to October 1997.

Buildings 1 and 2 at Lady Hailes Avenue, built in 1972: replacement of windows on ground floor of eight apartments—scheduled date 1997.

Building at McSween Street, built in 1946: replacement of ceiling in 16 apartments—due to be done January–March 1998.

Building at No 23 Ramsaran Street, built in 1974: electrical wiring of apartment—work scheduled for October 1997.

Carlton Lane, built in 1949: restoration of walkways and aprons around the buildings—due between July and November, 1997.

Embacadere, built in 1990: restoration of security lighting in progress—will be completed by June 30, 1997.

1.55 p.m.

Mr. Sinanan: Could the hon. Minister state whether his ministry intends to do any repainting on any of these buildings?

Hon J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that the rental received for the NHA's accommodation, in most cases, cannot meet the cost of maintaining that accommodation.

In terms of which buildings are to be painted, if the Member would file another question, I will get the information and I would be delighted to answer.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. Minister of Housing and Settlements is saying that it is the Government's policy that no NHA buildings would be maintained with sums over and above those collected as rentals from the occupants.

Mr. Sudama: That is not a question, one cannot wonder in a question.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, can the Member please repeat the question?

Mr. Sudama: It is not a question, he is wondering aloud.

Mr. Manning: I am asking the hon. Minister if it is now the Government's policy not to expend over and above the sums collected by way of rent in the maintenance of the NHA buildings.

Hon. J. Humphrey: Mr. Speaker, if that were the Government's policy, we would not, in fact, be doing the work which I announced is being done. The estimated cost of the first item is \$38,000; that of the second is \$70,000; the third is \$50,000; the fourth, \$100,000; the fifth, \$40,000; the sixth, \$15,000 and the seventh, \$7,500. That money is being expended and it cannot be recovered from rentals.

I do not know if that helps the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Road Repairs
(San Fernando West)**

50. Mr. Barendra Sinanan (*San Fernando West*) asked the Minister of Works and Transport:

Would the Minister state whether his Ministry intends to repair and/or resurface any roads in the constituency of San Fernando West in 1997?

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport (Mr. Chandresh Sharma): Mr. Speaker, roads in Trinidad and Tobago are not repaired by constituencies, but as the need arises. The Ministry of Works and Transport is not the only agency that does road repairs. Work is also done by the Ministry of Local Government, and in the case of San Fernando West, by the City Corporation of San Fernando.

It is rather difficult to give the Member a list of all the roads that are to be repaired, but I will make available to him a list of all the roads and he will be able to identify from them, the ones that are from his constituency. The South Trunk road which I know is in San Fernando West, and the Philippine Road are some of the roads which are undergoing repairs at this time.

Mr. Sudama: He does not know the boundaries of his constituency.

Mr. Sinanan: Could the hon. Minister state which roads are the responsibility of the Ministry of Works and Transport; those which are the responsibility of the Local Government and those which are the responsibility of the City Corporation?

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I will make that information available to the hon. Member in two weeks' time.

Cipero, Vistabella and Marabella Rivers

51. Mr. Barendra Sinanan (*San Fernando West*) asked the Minister of Works and Transport:

- (a) Would the Minister state whether it is the intention of his Ministry to effect the widening, dredging and/or paving of the Cipero, Vistabella and Marabella (Embassy) Rivers in 1997?
- (b) If the answer is in the affirmative, could the Minister state the date on which his Ministry intends to commence works on these rivers?
- (c) If in the negative, would the Minister state what are his Ministry's plans for the improvement of the condition of these rivers?

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport (Mr. Chandresh Sharma): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for San Fernando West, and say that it is instructive that Members become more acquainted with what is happening in their constituency.

In fact, work has begun since January of this year at the Vistabella River; in the Marabella River, work began in April of this year. We have not yet done any work to the Cipero River, but as soon as the other areas are completed, we will go to the Cipero River.

It is also important to know that the national drainage programme which has been funded by the World Bank has completed designs for the Marabella and Vistabella Rivers, and construction is scheduled to commence in the dry season in 1998. With respect to the Cipero River, designs are programmed for 1999.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**San Fernando Anglican Girls' School
(Reconstruction)**

52 Mr. Barendra Sinanan (*San Fernando West*) asked the Minister of Education:

- (a) Would the Minister state whether his Ministry intends to undertake reconstruction of the San Fernando Anglican Girls' School this year?
- (b) If the answer is in the negative, would he state when will reconstruction commence?

The Minister of Education (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. Speaker, the answer to Question No. 52(a) is yes. Once again, this Government is taking steps to alleviate the hardships of students and teachers who have been displaced from their normal classrooms since 1994.

The San Fernando Girls' Anglican School is included for reconstruction as an 840 girls' school in the Ministry of Education's Development Programme for 1997 at a cost of \$3.5 million. The Ministry of Education will make every effort to ensure that the project commences in 1997.

At the present time, the preliminary designs are being reviewed to ensure that it conforms with educational standards. As soon as the necessary amendments to the preliminary drawings are submitted to the board and accepted by the Ministry of Education, the board will be called in to discuss the commencement date for construction.

**San Fernando Government Secondary School
(Disrepair)**

- 53. Mr. Barendra Sinanan** (*San Fernando West*) asked the Minister of Education:
- (a) Is the Minister aware that the San Fernando Government Secondary School is in a state of disrepair?
 - (b) If the Minister is so aware, could he state when his Ministry intends to effect rehabilitation and/or restoration works at this school?

The Minister of Education (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. Speaker, there are some repairs and maintenance works required to the San Fernando Government Secondary School.

In keeping with the continued thrust of this Government's policy of improving the environment for learning, rehabilitation works started as early as December 1995 on the biology laboratory and refurbishment works were completed on the chemistry laboratory in November, 1996. Further refurbishment works are scheduled to be implemented during the forthcoming August vacation works programme. The proposed works include roof and ceiling repairs, replacement of water tanks and drainage repairs.

Mr. Sinanan: Could the hon. Member state whether any windows in the classrooms are to be repaired?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I could furnish the hon. Member with a scope of works during the vacation repair programme at another time.

**Erosion of Coast Line
(Sunset Cove, La Romain)**

54. Mr. Barendra Sinanan (*San Fernando West*) asked the Minister of Works and Transport:

- (a) Is the Minister aware of the serious erosion of the coast line caused by the sea which is threatening the homes of residents in the vicinity of Sunset Cove in La Romain?
- (b) If the Minister is so aware, could he state whether his Ministry has any plans to stop the erosion of the coast line in this area, and, if so:
 - (i) the nature of the works to be undertaken; and
 - (ii) when will such works commence?

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport (Mr. Chandresh Sharma): Mr. Speaker, with respect to Question No. 54, Members would appreciate that Trinidad and Tobago are islands surrounded by the sea, so coastal erosion is something that one should expect at all times. Some areas require more urgent work than others: the area at Sunset Cove in La Romain indicates that work can be delayed to attend to more urgent areas. At the same time, our officers have visited and are about to put a programme of work to start in January 1998.

COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, I want to refer the House to Standing Order 75 and ask that, any Motion coming to the House relating to the privileges of this House be referred as per Standing Order 75(1) to the Committee of Privileges for consideration.

2.05 p.m.

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I do not know, it should be dealt with whenever the Motion is—

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I am also relying on Standing Order 27(1) which deals with Privilege Motions. It says:

“A motion directly concerning the privileges of the House shall take precedence of all other public business.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Standing Order 27 states very clearly that:

“(1) A motion directly concerning the privileges of the House shall take precedence of all other public business.

(2) Any member desiring to raise a matter under this Standing Order shall first obtain leave of the Speaker who shall determine whether the Member is entitled to raise the matter as a question of privilege.

(3) If permission is given by the Speaker under paragraph (2) of this Order, the Member so permitted may raise it any time after question time and move that the matter be referred to the Committee of Privileges

(4) No debate shall ensue on a Motion under this Order but if the Speaker decides that a prima facie case has been made out he shall so state and refer the matter to the Committee of Privileges.”

In the circumstances, I give the Member leave to try to make out his case.

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, earlier today the Member for Fyzabad attempted to seek the leave of the House, by way of petition, to have the matter entered into the court and you ruled, Mr. Speaker, based on my objection, that the matter would have to come by way of motion.

The matter dealt with by the Member for Fyzabad touches upon the fundamental characteristic of the Parliament dealing with the privileges of Parliament. The purpose of the petition, as I understand it, is to waive the privilege of the House, in effect, retroactively. Since it touches to the root of our parliamentary system, I move that this matter be referred, subject to 71(1) of the Standing Orders, to the Committee of Privileges.

I beg to move, Mr. Speaker.

Seconded by Dr. Keith Rowley.

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, may I, in order to assist this honourable House, say, yes, it is correct that Standing Order 27 says what the Member quoted, and one cannot dispute Standing Order 75. But would this situation not arise whenever the Motion is presented? The petition which was presented is no longer before the House and, as ruled by the Speaker, that petition could not have proceeded in that way, having regard to the reasons given in the ruling. It would seem that the point being made by the Opposition can only arise when the Motion is before the honourable House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I shall give thought to the representations that were made and I shall rule later in the proceedings.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: If I may, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 38 says:

“(1) It shall be out of order to anticipate...”

It says, “a Bill” but I suppose the same principle applies.

“...by discussion upon a motion dealing...” [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I will simply indicate that this is not a matter that could be debated. It is a matter in which I would take a decision. That decision will be taken before the House adjourns this afternoon.

Mr. Manning: And please say a prayer as I always do.

Mr. Speaker: You will say a prayer?

**PROGRAMME CO-ORDINATOR
(HIRING OF)**

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure, given what has happened this afternoon, whether I should proceed with this Motion for fear that I might be exposed to retroactive action, and exposed to slander and libel charges. However, I have confidence that the integrity of this House will be preserved and, therefore, I will proceed as I anticipated.

I will begin by reading the Motion for the benefit of those Members of the House who do not have their copy with them or those who might not have taken the opportunity to read this Motion.

This Motion was filed on March 20, 1997 and it reads as follows:

Whereas on February 14, 1997, in the House of Representatives, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in answer to Question No. 6, stated that the hiring of the 6th ranked person as Programme Co-ordinator for the US \$75.0 million, Agricultural Loan Programme was based on a recommendation of the IDB which caused the interview panel to change its original ranking;

And Whereas reliable information subsequently received indicates that the information presented to this honourable House by the Minister was incorrect;

Be it Resolved that this honourable House express its total displeasure with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources who provided incorrect information which had the effect of misleading this House.

This Motion is very clear and it relates to, what I will call, misconduct in ministerial office. As I outline the case, I can tell you that one could even interpret it as another act of corruption in public office. Let me, by way of background, indicate how all this came about.

This country has been embarking upon reform exercises for the last few years, the last of which was reform of the agricultural sector. As part of that reform programme, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago negotiated a US \$75 million loan called an Agricultural Sector Loan. It is, in fact, a policy loan, which means that while the money comes into Trinidad and Tobago—if borrowed—it would contribute to our balance of payment arrangements, our currency strength, and it would be used as the Government sees fit, in arrangements worked out between the Government and the Bank. Some of it has to do specifically with agriculture.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the negotiation for this loan was completed by October, 1995 and the new Government came into office and the actual loan contract was signed in July, 1996. One of the requirements for carrying out this loan programme was the appointment of a programme coordinator to manage the whole loan programme. This would ensure that it stays in line with the Government's commitments and the bank's expectations, so that the Government could drawdown on the various tranches of the loan. All of these details are spelt out in the negotiated documents and the loan contracts.

The setting up of a programme monitoring unit was integral to the effecting of this loan programme. To head that programme was the programme coordinator. As is standard in Trinidad and Tobago—and expected by the bank—the post to be filled in this monitoring unit required advertisement, and certain categories of persons with certain skills and training were required to be hired to staff this monitoring unit, to put this loan programme in place.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has the responsibility of guiding this programme. From the very beginning, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources sought to handle this matter in a way which raised a number of eyebrows across the country. He sought to have these contract positions filled without advertising the positions, and advanced the names of hand-picked persons whom he selected to be put in the position. These are not junior positions. These are senior positions to manage a very sensitive part of the Government's programme, and this requires a certain kind of procedure to ensure that you identify and hire the correct person.

Programme Co-ordinator
[DR. ROWLEY]

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Involved in this programme is a technical corporation unit which would take into account a completely new water management system for the country—and I am talking about flooding in Trinidad and Tobago. It had to do with a land management system in the country—and I am talking about managing state lands, squatters and land markets; it had to do with providing Caroni (1975) Limited with support for increased technical performance; it had to do with the complete restructuring and modernizing of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; and it had to do with effecting a social mitigation programme for all farmers and agribusiness industries which were affected by the reform and liberalization programme embarked upon by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is a serious matter. The hiring of the programme coordinator was a major activity of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, under the portfolio of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Mr. Speaker, I want to put on record, a letter written by an aggrieved member of Trinidad and Tobago's national community. This letter was written to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, complaining about the conduct of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. That citizen wrote the Prime Minister and had reason to copy it to the Leader of the Opposition. I want to put it on file in this Parliament.

The letter is dated January 10, 1997. It says:

“As the national community is aware, the Government of the day has signed an Agricultural Sector Loan (ASL) with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This agreement took effect June 1996. One of the components of the ASL is the formation of a Project Coordinating Unit to oversee its implementation of the Agricultural Sector Reform Programme.

Because of the stringent and potentially impactful nature of the programme on domestic agriculture, the Programme Coordinating Unit needs to be staffed by persons who are technically competent and knowledgeable about the agriculture sector in all its diversity.

In going about the staffing of this unit, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Dr. Reeza Mohammed first sought to put up two (2) names for the posts of Programme Coordinator and Deputy Programme Coordinator to the Cabinet without first advertising the posts.”

I will make this letter available to the House. I want to read it in detail. It was written to the Prime Minister and copied to the Leader of the Opposition. The writer goes on to say:

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“The Hon. Prime Minister has indicated that allegations of corruption within his government will be investigated and has set up a mechanism to do this. Let us now see how good is his promise not to let corruption take root in his Government.”

I will make this available to the House.

Mr. Speaker, this letter is dated January 10, 1997. I then filed a question to the hon. Minister in this House. The question was answered on February 14. The question was:

- “(a) Could the Prime Minister indicate whether a qualified panel of interviewers conducted interviews in the Ministry of Agriculture for the position of Programme Coordinator to oversee the \$75.0 million Agricultural Sector Loan Project?
- (b) Could the Minister say whether the applicants were ranked by the panel in order of suitability and, if so, what was the order?
- (c) If any selection and appointment was made, could the Minister indicate who was selected and whether this appointment follows on the recommendations of the interview panel?”

It is very straightforward; accusing the Minister of nothing, just asking him for straight and accurate information.

The Minister came to this House and said that:

“...a qualified panel of interviewers conducted interviews in the Ministry for the position of Programme Coordinator...eight applicants interviewed were ranked by the panel of interviewers in order of suitability.”

And that was the end of the truthfulness that the Minister gave to this House. From there on, the Minister deviated and became a total stranger to the truth. Mr. Speaker, in seeking to deliberately mislead the House and hide his misconduct in his ministry, the Minister being asked to name the people who were put in the positions, chose to speak to this House in coded language by only using the initials of the individuals.

He went down the list: Applicant No. 1, VTR; applicant No. 2, MR; applicant No. 3, NG; applicant NO. 4, GN, and so forth. We took him at his word, because what I thought he was trying to do was not name non-members of the House in the answer, and I let that pass. You know what shocked me, Mr. Speaker? When I

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found out that the Minister, in fact, used that as a ruse to hide the fact of what he had done. He told the House that applicant No. 1 was VTR. I can tell this House without fear of contradiction that there was no VTR. What there was, was a VT, because Mr. VT was name No. 1, and he was the man who was shafted by the Minister. The Minister comes and says that applicant No. 1 VTR—R means that he rejected him.

Applicant No. 2 was MR. That is correct. There was an MR. Applicant No. 3 was NG. There was no NG. There was an MG; Mr. Gosine. He, too, was shafted by the Minister. He said applicant No. 4 was GN. Mr. Speaker, there was no GN; there was a J. Neptune. He, too, was shafted by the Minister. Applicant No. 5 was KB That is correct. He, too, was shafted. Applicant No. 6, SH was the lucky one. She was selected.

2.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, he went on to speak about G.N., when in fact, it was G.M. He actually scrambled the initials so as to fool you into believing that there was nothing underhand here. So he tried to put us off because if we knew who these people were, by scrambling the initials, the House would be misled. So that was the first action.

Mr. Speaker, he went on to say, before selection and appointment was made to the post, the IDB made a recommendation attesting to extensive knowledge, experience and competence of applicant No. 6. That is when my ears pricked up. I was wondering what is the role of IDB in this matter? Secondly, the Minister told us a qualified panel of interviewers interviewed the public and selected this person. How then could a person ranked No. 6 in the interview suddenly, on the recommendation of the IDB, become No. 1 and is put in the job. When I looked at the letter that was written to the Prime Minister I wanted to find out who the interviewers were. For the record, let me tell you who the interviewers were, who the Minister agreed to this House were the qualified panel.

The interviewing panel members are as follows. Dr. V. Moe, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; Mr. Alvin Seereeram, Director of Agricultural Planning Division; Mr. W. Gibson Director of the Regional Administration, North of the Ministry; Mr. T. Murray, Deputy Director, Agricultural Planning Division; Mr. R. Rampersad, Director, Restructuring Support Unit, Ministry of Planning and Development. That is a qualified panel of interviewers and the Minister agreed with that. That was the panel that interviewed

the persons and ranked them according to their suitability. The Minister tells us that the IDB made some recommendations that caused this panel to reverse its position and put the No. 1 person in sixth position, and put the No. 6 person first, thereby throwing out the No. 1 person completely.

Mr. Speaker, listen to recommendations of the panel. The panel's recommendation after ranking the various people, giving them marks according to suitability. Mr. V.T. was ranked No. 1 with 81 marks. The Minister intervened and threw him completely out of the process. Mr. M.R. was ranked No. 2 with 80 marks. Mr. Gosine was ranked No. 3 with 79 marks. Mr. J.N. was ranked No. 4 with 75 marks. Mr. K.B. was ranked No. 5 with 75 marks. Miss S. Harrysingh was ranked No. 6 with 74 marks. The Bible said, in the last days, the last shall be first. So, Miss S. Harrysingh, No. 6, with 74 marks was placed in the first position, we are told in the House, on the recommendation of the IDB; she was pole-vaulted over all the other applicants—Mr. Thomasos, Mr. Ramsaran, Mr. Gosine, Mr. Neptune, Mr. Beckles—and she became the choice of the Minister. So, he told us that the panel reversed itself.

Mr. Speaker, listen to what the panel said.

"14. On the basis of the average marks and rankings, the panel's recommendations are:

- (a) the post of Programme Co-ordinator be filled by Mr. V. Thomasos; and
- (b) the post of Deputy Programme Co-ordinator be filled by Mr. M. Ramsaran.

15. In the event that either one of the selected candidates is unable to accept, the third ranked candidate, Mr. M. Gosine, is submitted for consideration."

Mr. Speaker, that is the recommendation of the interview panel to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. That Minister came to this House, and seeking to cover up his action of favouring a particular individual, told us he did not follow this recommendation. In fact, he did not even tell us what was the recommendation. He told us the IDB recommended, and based on the IDB's recommendation the interview panel changed. Mr. Speaker, the interview panel never reversed its position and that was another action of the Minister seeking to mislead this House.

Mr. Speaker, the person appointed was a Miss S. Harrysingh who was ranked No. 6 and five persons above; Mr. Thomasos, Mr. Ramsaran, Mr. Gosine,

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Mr. Neptune and Mr. Beckles, who had gone through the interview, were shafted by the Minister. Incidentally, the person who came second got the second position and the person who came first got no position at all. The person who was tops in the interview got no position at all, and the person who was at No. 6 got the position.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister sought to implicate the IDB I found that something was wrong here. I asked him the question—for the record, let me go back to what I asked him. He said to this House, and he is talking to you, Mr. Speaker. "Mr. Speaker, this resulted in the applicant being reranked to No. 1 by the interview panel. Applicant S.H. was selected and appointed to the post of Programme Co-ordinator. This appointment followed the recommendation of the interviewing panel." Mr. Speaker, I just read for you what the interview panel said. I just read for you what they said to the Minister in writing. The panel never met after, so they have no subsequent correspondence to the Minister. They had no subsequent meeting and interviews.

So when the Minister came to the House and said, this appointment followed the recommendation of the interview panel, the Minister was telling a deliberate falsehood to the House and it was done deliberately to cover his nefarious action in the ministry. When he used the term 'reranked' he is giving the impression—he went on to say earlier, "before selection an appointment was made." The IDB made a recommendation. So how could the IDB make a recommendation before selection and appointment. Then he is saying it was reranked. If the IDB's recommendation—if there was one—was taken into account by the panel, then it would have found its way into the ranking. It did not, as I read for you a moment ago. He comes and tells us that a reranking took place by the interview panel.

Mr. Speaker, I then asked the Minister: Are you saying that the IDB—When you said that the panel selected a candidate for the position after a recommendation was made by the IDB? The Minister had an opportunity then, to back away from his falsehood. You know what he said? He said, Yes. I asked him again: Who selected the sixth ranked person for the position? He had a second opportunity to back away from his falsehood. You know what he said again: The recommendation was made by the IDB at the interviewing panel. How many times did Peter deny Christ? Three times. I gave him three opportunities to back away and he insisted on telling a deliberate falsehood in this House. Mr. Speaker, this country must not tolerate that kind of behaviour from any public official. So, I left it. I went home—that was February 14, 1997. I am sorry the Prime Minister is going because I am speaking to him. He has a responsibility for this Cabinet and to this country.

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Mr. Speaker, I went home got on my computer and I typed a letter, because, my colleague in the House told me that the Bank was making recommendations which were causing qualified people in position Nos. 1 to 5 to be thrown out on the recommendation of a sixth ranked person. So I wanted to know, what is the role of the bank in this and how could this happen? Because we both agreed, the Minister and I, that a qualified panel of interviewers did the interviewing and on the basis of suitability, this woman was ranked No. 6. Mr. Speaker, I wrote to the Bank. I said:

"The Representative
InterAmerican Development Bank
17, Alexander Street
St. Clair
Port-of-Spain
Trinidad
1997-03-10

Subject : Appointment of Program Co-ordinator
for ASL Project for Trinidad & Tobago

By way of agreement with the IDB we have a project ... In order to meet the commitment applications were invited and prospective candidates were interviewed and ranked according to their suitability by the panel of interviewers.

It turned out that the person who was initially ranked sixth by the interview panel was subsequently selected for the top position. It has been reported that it was as a result of the intervention by way of recommendation from the IDB that the interview panel reversed its decision and re-ordered the rankings so as to facilitate the appointment of the sixth-ranked person.

As a representative of the people I am kindly requesting further clarification on this matter. I will be very grateful if the IDB could:

- (a) Comment generally on its stated involvement in the selection process of the program Co-ordinator.
- (b) Indicate the official channel of communication through which the alleged IDB communication was forwarded to the Government agency i.e., Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources or Planning and Development.

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- (c) State the date of the relevant correspondence bearing the alleged recommendations.

In anticipation of an early reply I thank you for your kind assistance in clarifying this matter."

2.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that letter was dated March 10, 1997. I received a reply from the IDB on March 14, 1997. I would read that reply into the Hansard, in its totality:

"March 14, 1997

**RE: APPOINTMENT OF PROGRAM CO-ORDINATOR
FOR ASL PROJECT FOR TRINIDAD & TOBAGO**

We would like to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated March 10, 1997, regarding the appointment of a Programme Co-ordinator to assist the Ministry of Agriculture Land and Marine Resources in the implementation of the Agriculture Sector Reform Programme. We note also a copy of the written transcript provided with your letter as context.

Perhaps the best way to help clarify this matter would be to respond directly to each of the three specific lines of inquiry stated in your letter:

1. The role and involvement of IDB in this case is very clear given that the position of Program Co-ordinator is treated as a 'consultant' on contract for purposes of program execution and funding for this position is to be charged to the local counterpart requirement—i.e. the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—under the programme's budget. According to standard Bank procedures, the Bank reserves the right to review and approve the individual consultant selected, the final terms of reference and the agreed fees, prior to hiring the individual. In the case of ASRP, there is a parallel stipulation under the Action Plan for Public Administration Reform that the Bank must approve the final terms of reference for the Program Co-ordinator, to include lead responsibility for oversight of this action plan, and to ascertain that adequate support is provided by Government in terms of budget, staff and office space. The basic purpose here for the Bank, on both counts, is to ensure that responsibilities of the Co-ordinator are well-defined and appropriate, and that the candidate selected is capable of carrying out these responsibilities."

Mr. Speaker, I want you to pay careful attention to what I am reading in the context of what the hon. Minister told this House.

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“Although we encourage fair competition and transparency, according to our procedures, the Bank has no direct involvement in the process employed by government in selecting the individual candidates for positions financed from local counterpart funds.”

I repeat:

“Although we encourage fair competition and transparency, according to our procedures, the Bank has no direct involvement in the process employed by government in selecting the individual candidates for positions financed from local government counterpart funds. Our procedures have been strictly maintained with respect to the selection of the candidate for the Program Co-ordinator under the ASRP. We have no knowledge of the process, the list of candidates or their ranking.”

Mr. Speaker, the letter goes on to say:

“However, the Bank made no recommendation to switch rankings or even to hire this particular candidate.

3. There has been no written correspondence between the Bank and the Government on this particular matter.”

Mr. Speaker, in the face of that, the hon. Minister seeing this Motion on this Order Paper should have handed his resignation to the Prime Minister. *[Desk thumping]* We will come to that later.

The person who wrote to the Prime Minister complaining about the conduct of this hon. Minister did say that the Minister sought to have the position filled without advertisement. The person went on to say that he had a particular pair of persons for the job, whom he sought to hire.

This is corroborated by a statement made by the IDB. The statement says:

“During a luncheon meeting with the Ministers and the Acting Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, where a wide range of issues were discussed, an inquiry was made as to whether the person referred to in your letter (and attachment) was capable of carrying out the responsibilities of Programme Co-ordinator. The Bank, having ample experience with this individual in the implementation of another sector reform programme underway in Trinidad and Tobago and supported by the Bank, indicated that in its opinion the candidate could do

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a good job. However, the Bank made no recommendation to switch rankings or even to hire this particular candidate.”

Mr. Speaker, somebody inquired over a luncheon whether this particular person could do the job. We know a minister was saying that he wanted this lady. So I have to assume that the person at the luncheon had to be someone known to us.

Interestingly enough what we do know is that on February 14, 1997, the hon. Minister told this House that this person was selected and appointed. While reading the *Express* newspapers on April 2, 1997 I saw an advertisement titled:

“Trinidad and Tobago
Investment Sector Reform Programme
Investment Sector Loan
REQUEST FOR STATEMENTS OF INTEREST
SECURITIES & EXCHANGE COMMISSION
(CONSULTANCY ASSIGNMENT)’...”

This advertisement was placed for public consideration but the interesting thing is that the bottom of it said:

“Statement of interest with accompanying documents, including current audited financial statement of the firm or individual consultant, should be submitted to the person and address indicated below by 4.00 p.m.

The Director,
Restructuring Support Unit
Ministry of Planning and Development
Attention: Miss Mr. Susan Harrysingh.”

That is same person whom the hon. Minister informed us on February 2, 1997, was selected and appointed as Programme Co-ordinator in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I want to know whether Miss Harrysingh is so good and valuable that on February 2, 1997, the hon. Minister could have come to this honourable House and said that she was selected and appointed Programme Co-ordinator in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources at a cost of over \$400,000 over a three year period. She is also holding the position of Director of the Restructuring Support Unit in the Ministry

of Planning and Development. That is woman! She jumps from No. 6 to No. 1. The hon. Minister puts his career on the line by telling the House that the IDB said so. She is holding positions in both the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—two contracts.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy for Miss Harrysingh because if I can get two or three contracts and collect four or five salaries, I would be happy. However, at the end of the day what really happened? The Minister abused his authority, bullied the system, selecting favourites and imposed them as he saw fit. When he is caught and questioned, he unashamedly and unabashedly came and lied in the Parliament.
[Desk thumping]

2.45 p.m.

Well my position is, if you are so big and bad, that “I want this and I do not want that; I do not care who is selected and I want this,” when you have done that, have the *cajones* to come to the House and tell the country, “I have done that and I intend to face the consequences.” But he is playing “man” in the ministry, doing that, and playing “mouse” in the House, resorting to falsehoods.

Having done that, the whole system is now thrown into chaos. Because how do you hire two people—how could one individual hold down a contract in two separate ministries? As a result of that, we have a kind of shift system working where, some days the person is in the Ministry of Planning and Development; some days the person is in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. What I want to ask both ministers is: Is this person being paid from both ministries, or is there any intention to pay from both ministries?

If the answer is, yes, what do we have here? If the answer is, no, how could a person who is not the programme co-ordinator, properly appointed, be involved in this very important project? I am not the only one confused; you are confused also, Mr. Speaker, and the Government system is confused. The end result of it is that the entire US \$75 million programme is up in the air because the programme co-ordinator is not properly hired; the work is not being properly done; the Government is not in line to meet its conditionalities.

I understand we had one drawdown on this loan. The loan conditions are very clear. To be able to drawdown the next tranche of this loan, certain things have to be done, not the least of which is the functioning of the monetary unit, and that unit is to see that certain things are done in the Government system. None of that is being done on time.

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The end result is, the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago could end up not having access to a substantial amount of millions of US dollars because this Minister wants a particular lady. Today or tomorrow we could find ourselves in a situation of not being able to access US\$30 million or \$40 million, which would be critical for balance of payments support; for supporting our currency, at a time when the currency is moving where it is now between \$6.20—\$6.30, and this Minister is behaving like this and putting at risk significant loan drawdowns which should be available to the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is not just simply a matter of giving somebody “a work”. It is putting the Government system in a tail-spin. In last year’s budget, the Minister of Finance, to great applause, told this House that a social mitigation programme coming out of the agricultural sector loan would be available to the farming sector, which is affected by the reform programmes. To date, nothing; not last year, not this year, because the social mitigation programme is a part of the technical cooperation package in this loan and this is what the Minister is putting at risk.

Not a farmer in this country has had any support from any social mitigation programme; not a farmer; not his wife; not his child, because one woman has to hold down a job in his ministry and in another ministry, because the Minister wants a particular woman. Having done that, he comes to the House and lies to the Parliament.

The people who have been so harshly treated by the Minister are people of great skill and experience. They had prepared themselves to serve this country; they responded to an advertisement; they put their applications in; they subjected themselves to interviews. The person selected was not even short-listed by the interviewing panel. The Minister intervened and instructed that the person be put on the short list. Then, at the end of the day, regardless of what the interview panel says, this Minister says, “that is what I will do.”

This honourable gentleman did not get his position out of the sky. Under the country’s Constitution, he took an oath of office. I want to remind you what that ministerial oath of office was. I am quoting from the First Schedule of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, entitled, The Constitution. This Minister said, at the House of the President:

“I, Reeza Mohammed, do swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Trinidad and Tobago and will uphold the Constitution and the law, that I will conscientiously, impartially and to the best of my ability discharge my duties as Minister and do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will.”

That is the oath to which this Minister swore. Had he not sworn to this oath, he could never have wielded the authority of minister. Today I am accusing him of violating the letter and the spirit of his oath of office. [*Desk thumping*] Because not only did he show favour and affection for a particular individual who was ranked sixth when the process worked, but he showed ill-will to those who, quite properly, should have been considered for the job and who, through his harsh action, were denied access to the position.

He showed ill-will to Mr. Thomasos, Mr. Ramsaran, Mr. Gosine, Mr. Neptune and Mr. Beckles. All persons who were ranked above Miss Harrysingh, he showed ill-will towards them and he showed favour. In order to cover up that improper action, he came here and spoke falsehoods to the Parliament and implicated an international agency of high repute, serving the entire region of South America. He came here and sought to implicate the IDB in his nefarious action. What would they think of us in Washington and elsewhere when they see a minister of Government come into the Parliament of this country, seeking to cover himself for his own wrongdoing by lying on the IDB? What would they think of us?

Today I have presented the facts of the matter, as clear as crystal. I am calling on the Minister to do a number of things—well, not him; the next minister, because as far as I am concerned he is finished, because in the Westminster system, it is a tradition of long-standing that any Member of Parliament, particularly a minister, who lies to the Parliament, must take his exit from the office he holds. Let us see what standards we are subscribing to in Trinidad and Tobago, because as of now we still subscribe to those principles and policies.

Before he takes his exit, I ask him firstly, to apologize to the IDB and see if he could pull back anything for Trinidad and Tobago. A formal apology to the Inter-American Development Bank is required. I call on him to apologize to all the people who have been wronged by his drastic intervention; those who were ranked number one to five in the interview. I call on him to apologize to this House which he deliberately misled by his shifting around of the names and by telling us the gross falsehood that his action was as a result of a recommendation of the IDB. I call on him to apologize to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago by simply taking his exit from the office he now holds.

This is not a small matter; it is a matter of hiring somebody to be paid in the order of \$10,000—\$12,000 per month for three years. That is the equivalent of about \$360,000. It is not peanuts. It is a well-paying job but one has to be properly well qualified for it and to fall in line after one is interviewed. Therefore, in order

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to give this benefit to a particular individual who did not qualify for it, this Minister has disgraced his office, this Parliament and this country. All I say to him is that in the face of what he has done before in the ministry, in this Parliament, in the name of God, apologize and go!

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2.55 p.m.

Seconded by Mr. Kenneth Valley.

Question proposed.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Dr. The Hon. Reeza Mohammed): Mr. Speaker, I too would read the text of the Motion. It states:

“. . . the hiring of the 6th ranked person as Program Coordinator for the US \$75.0 million, Agricultural Loan Program was based on a recommendation of the IDB which caused the interview panel to change its original ranking.

AND WHEREAS reliable information subsequently received indicates that the information presented to this honourable House by the Minister was incorrect.”

The hon. Member for Diego Martin West started off by commenting on the fact that in response to a question on February 14, 1997, the Minister tried to hoodwink this House by giving abbreviations to applicants who were ranked by the interview panel. He also imputed that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources interfered with the selection process.

I go back to *Hansard* where the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources responded to the question. It states:

“Mr. Speaker, before selection and appointment was made to the post, the Inter-American Development Bank, made a recommendation attesting to the extensive knowledge, experience and competence of the applicant, originally ranked sixth, in dealing with matters relating to the Investment Sector Loan between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the IADB, by performing the duties of Senior Project Administrator of the Ministry of Planning and Development, Restructuring Support Unit.”

The hon. Member found it convenient to read parts of the letter which he received in response to his letter from the IDB. The Member's letter is dated 10.03.97. He read that bit correctly. In response to the concerns expressed by the hon. Member, the IDB commented generally on its stated involvement in the selection process of the programme co-ordinator, and indicated the official channel of communication through which the alleged IDB recommendation was forwarded to the government agency, that is the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources or Ministry of Planning and Development.

In the response which he received from the IDB, he willingly or unwillingly left out the second paragraph. It states:

“During a luncheon meeting with the Minister and the Acting Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, where a wide range of issues was discussed, an inquiry was made as to whether the person referred to in your letter (and attachment) was capable of carrying out the responsibilities of Programme Co-ordinator.”

This is the bit that he left out.

“The bank, having ample experience with this individual in the implementation of another sector reform program underway in Trinidad and Tobago and supported by the bank, indicated that in its opinion the candidate could do a good job.”

[Dr. Rowley stands]

Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed: I would not give way.

Dr. Rowley: You are lying again.

Mr. Speaker: Just for the record, that is correct. Members would be wise to talk to me, but for the sake of the record that is correct.

Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the hon. Member is aware that I have a copy of the letter to which he referred. I listened attentively to the hon. Member. Probably, I missed that. The response of the bank is clear to me.

Mr. Speaker: You could take it from me. I heard because I took a note of it here. It was said.

Dr. The Hon. R. Mohammed: Mr. Speaker, I would be so guided.

My response went on to say that this resulted in the applicant being re-ranked No. 1 by the interviewing panel. In my answer to the oral question, I never said

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that the bank made a recommendation to switch the ranking. The bank confirmed that in its letter to the Member for Diego Martin West. It said that the bank made no recommendation to switch rankings or even to hire this particular candidate.

In my answer on February 14, 1997 to the question raised by the hon. Member I made it quite clear that this resulted in the applicant being re-ranked No. 1 by the interviewing panel. The acting Permanent Secretary who was present at the luncheon with the officials of the IDB was a member of the interviewing panel. I wish to assure the hon. Member that the matter was discussed with the interviewing panel, as a consequence of the opinion expressed by the IDB. I reiterate, it was not the Minister who changed the ranking.

After the discussions with the interviewing panel, as a function, it was the bank, having ample experience with this individual in the implementation of another sector reform programme underway in Trinidad and Tobago and supported by the bank, indicated that in its opinion the candidate could do a good job.

When I answered the question on February 14, 1997, I spoke about a recommendation made by the bank. The bank had expressed an opinion which was interpreted as a recommendation. In that context, on February 14, I responded to the Member for Diego Martin West. He also raised the question of the individual working in the Ministry of Planning and Development as well as being employed in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources under that programme. I said that applicant SH was selected and appointed to the post of programme co-ordinator.

3.05 p.m.

What I should have said—and if I am to apologize for anything at all, I will apologize for this—was that Cabinet approved the appointment of this person to the position of Programme Co-ordinator under the Agricultural Sector Reform Programme.

[DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

However, I would like to reiterate that the recommendation to appoint this person came from the interviewing panel. This Minister, as imputed by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, did not interfere in the employment practices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to go back to the process which was adopted for the selection of the person for Programme Co-ordinator. Applications were invited, by advertisement in the print media, for the position of Programme

Co-ordinator and Deputy Programme Co-ordinator, with a deadline date of September 16, 1996. The interview panel short-listed eight candidates from the 17 applications received for the position of Programme Co-ordinator. An evaluation was done through interviews, using a point system, which took place on October 21 and 22, 1996. This resulted in the preliminary ranking of candidates. The meeting, referred to by way of response to the queries raised by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, took place after the preliminary ranking of the candidates was done. I would like to inform the hon. Member that it was neither the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, nor the acting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, present at that meeting, who raised the question concerning the capability of that individual.

I go back to the response again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The final decision to recommend this person to be appointed to the position of Programme Co-ordinator was taken by the interviewing panel. That decision was informed by this luncheon meeting with the IDB.

On February 14, 1997 when the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources completed his answer to this House, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, by way of supplementary question asked, and I quote:

“Am I to understand, Mr. Speaker that the Member is telling the honourable House that the selection of applicant ranked No. 6 was done by the IADB? Am I to understand from your statement that you are telling us that the selection of the sixth ranked persons in the interview was done by the IADB?”

I responded there and then to the effect that the panel selected the candidate for that position, after a recommendation was made by the Inter-American Development Bank on the quality and negotiating skills of the person. This is confirmed in what is said in this letter to the hon. Member, the bank having ample experience with this individual in the implementation of another sector reform programme under way in Trinidad and Tobago. The Bank indicated that, in its opinion, the candidate could do a good job.

I do not see what new information this hon. Member has brought to this House. I would say that this Motion is flawed because no new information has been presented, whereas reliable information subsequently received indicates that the information presented to this honourable House by the Minister was correct. As a consequence, I do not think there is further need for us to continue this debate. As far as this Minister is concerned, I have made my case clear. I have used the reply to the letter written by the hon. Member to the IDB. He accuses me

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of going to the IDB. This Minister did not go to the IDB, he did. He wrote to them and he compromised wherever there was compromise. As far as this Minister is concerned, nothing was compromised. There is, therefore, no need for this Minister to write any apology to the Inter-American Development Bank. The Member for Diego Martin West needed information, he got the information, came to this House with it and attempted to create further mischief. Here, I am reading from a response to this matter sent to the hon. Member by the Bank, and it is in total conformity with the answer I gave to this honourable House on February 14, 1997 I do not see what the problem is.

With these few words, I wish to submit humbly that bringing this Motion to this House, having the information that the hon. Member had, and furthermore when the hon. Member made his contribution to the Protection of Plant Species Bill, he made a statement to the effect that he did not like what he was hearing from the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

I have no problem, in my capacity as Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, to the hon. Member getting information from the ministry. The only problem is that the persons who are providing him with that information are giving him incorrect information. It is clear to me that he is being misinformed and that he is using that to continue to accuse this Minister of corruption. That is mischief, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a waste of this Parliament's time.

He referred to a letter which was written to the Minister. Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know that the letter the hon. Member referred to is not even signed. I have a copy of it. It speaks to "we", and it is very clear to this Minister that the "we" is within the folds of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, and that they are misinforming the hon. Member. That is being done to frustrate the efforts of this Government.

I find it ironical that when the hon. Member for Diego Martin West was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, he was practically begging his then Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, to be Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. Now that he is sitting on the Opposition Benches, it seems that he wants to be Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I would like to let this honourable House know, very clearly, that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is not prepared to allow the Member for Diego Martin West to make any attempts to run the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources while he is sitting in Opposition. That will not happen under

this Government. When he was sitting there, he was begging to be Minister of Energy and Energy Industries; now that he is in opposition, he wants to be the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Where are we going?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with these few words, I deem this Motion frivolous, vexatious and a total waste of this Parliament's time.

I thank you.

3.15 p.m.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we have just witnessed in the last half an hour, surely must go down as one of the most disgraceful presentations ever given anywhere in the Commonwealth. [*Desk thumping*] It is clear that the Minister is suffering from paramnesia, which is a distortion of memory in which fact and fantasy are confused.

The item before the House says that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources lied to the Parliament. He lied to the Parliament by way of telling it that the action taken was as a result of a recommendation done by the IDB, and I read what the IDB had to say about that. We had the spectacle of the Minister saying that I conveniently did not read certain things which I, in fact, had read and he even had a fight with the Speaker who heard what I said, and that was the demonstration of the level of veracity one can attach to his statements. In our very presence, he is saying that I did not say what I had just said in *Hansard*. He did not believe me, and he would not believe the Speaker.

Do you know what he has done now? Whereas he has gotten himself in that position by trying to implicate the IDB to cover his actions, he now seeks to implicate the Cabinet by saying it is the Cabinet. Well, certain Members on the other side wisely kept their seats, none of them got up to defend the indefensible: not one. He would have misled the Cabinet the same way in which he misled this House if he had said to the Cabinet that this lady, whose appointment the Cabinet is now being asked to approve, is the one who was recommended for the position by the IDB. If I were in the Cabinet, I would have taken the Minister's word and gone along with it, so I do not blame anyone in the Cabinet for that, because he told the House that that action was taken on the recommendation of the IDB.

Let me read for him what the IDB said, because he seems to have read it, and not understood it. The issue is, he said that the IDB made the recommendation and that was instrumental in having the rankings changed by the interview panel.

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[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, a letter written by Mr. Frank J. Maresca of the IDB dated March 14, 1997 says:

"Our procedures have been strictly maintained with respect to the selection of the candidate for Program Coordinator under the ASRP. We have no knowledge of the process, the list of candidates or their ranking."

That is the IDB's written response to me. The Minister seems to have some problem with my writing and the IDB's. But all I wanted to get was the information, because I suspected that he was not speaking the truth and it has been borne out that my suspicion had foundation.

Whereas, the Minister said that the IDB made a recommendation, the IDB says the bank made no recommendation. It says:

"However, the Bank made no recommendation to switch rankings or even to hire this particular candidate."

So what is the Minister telling this House? Of course he could say that the Motion was frivolous and whatever he wants, but the facts are there for all to see. The question is whether this country accepts this kind of conduct from the Minister.

How could a Government Minister of Trinidad and Tobago come to the Parliament and lie and implicate the IDB, which responds by saying it had no involvement in the matter? After I raised the Motion, the Minister gets up and rather than apologize and hang his head in shame, he just compounds the issue by trying to treat this matter as frivolous and vexatious.

Mr. Speaker, this Minister made heavy weather that at some luncheon, when a request was made in respect of this particular person that clearly she is a special person, because how could the Minister and his team at a luncheon be so insistent of inquiring about a particular candidate when a process of public advertisement, interview and short listing was in place to find someone for the job? What story is he then speaking of going to a luncheon and asking the IDB about a particular lady? A process had been in place. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, his conduct is not to be desired, but I am going to ignore him because I want to draw his attention to what the Prime Minister said in a statement to this House on September 20, 1996. These were his words:

"The Government has made it clear from its inception that our human resource is our greatest asset; that our failure to advance as a nation economically,

politically and socially has been due largely to our failure to mobilize that human resource; and that our failure to mobilize our people as one nation with one purpose and one direction has been due to the obnoxious practice of discrimination and consequently, alienation, on the basis of racial and other differences."

Mr. Speaker, it is an abuse of human resource of which I speak here. When Mr. Thomasos came first in the interview, and was thrown out completely and Miss Harrysingh was selected, that was an abuse of human resource. When the Prime Minister said, "that our failure to mobilize our people as one nation with one purpose and one direction has been due to the obnoxious practice of discrimination...", it was obnoxious discrimination which caused this Minister to by-pass Mr. Thomasos who ranked first; Mr. Ramsaran who ranked second; Mr. Gosine who ranked third; Mr. Neptune and Mr. Beckles who were all by-passed in favour of Miss Harrysingh. That is obnoxious discrimination, and that was what the Prime Minister was speaking of. When the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine resources misled the Cabinet, here was his Prime Minister with his kind of thinking and that was his Minister who has now ended his term.

The Prime Minister said this Government wants to make it abundantly clear that it will not sit idly by and allow the society to disintegrate on the basis of discrimination and otherwise. If that is not discrimination, then tell me what is.

3.25 p.m.

Put yourself in the position of the person who came first, second, third, fourth or fifth, in a properly conducted interview, for a job that pays over \$10,000 per month, and the Minister intervenes and chooses his friend who was at position No. 6. If that is not discrimination, tell me what is. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: I fear that is what they will do with the Common Entrance Examination. Someone made 81 marks and they chose someone with 74—

Dr. K. Rowley: There is an article in the *Daily Express* dated March 24, 1997 in which the Prime Minister states:

"I will continue to do my duty. I have to fight against lies, innuendoes and half truths."

If the Prime Minister wants to give credence to this statement, he must fight against lies, innuendoes and half truths inside the Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*] I have demonstrated this afternoon, without a shadow of a doubt, that the Minister of

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Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is a stranger to the truth and he is unfit to hold public office. Now that he has been exposed in the full glare of Parliament for his misconduct, he is not even remotely apologetic. *Bravé Danger!* He gets up to dismiss this Motion as frivolous. Has he noticed that nobody on the other side got up to speak in his defence? He finds the Motion frivolous, then he comes to the House, misrepresents the names, tells the House that the recommendation for position No. 1 was V.T.R. There was no V.T.R! The person who came first in the interview was Vaughn Thomasos. There is no V.T.R. The person who came third was not N.G.; it was a Mr. Gosine.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has set out from day one to mislead the House and when he is exposed here, he gets up, fumbles and mumbles and seeks to tell the House: "It is not me, it is the interview panel." The interview panel had nothing to do with it after the original recommendation was made. He is saying that he was at lunch with a member of the interview panel, Mr. Gibson. What he is trying to tell the House now is that since a member of the interview panel was present when an opinion was expressed about this lady, that caused a change in the panel's decision. A member of the panel—according to his logic—was able to change the panel's recommendation, unbeknown to the panel. That is what he wants us to understand. The panel was very clear in its recommendation when it said: "If either, Mr. Thomasos or Ramsaran was not available, then the third-ranked person, Mr. Gosine, should be selected."

What then is the basis for this? He has now exposed the Government to legal action. I would want to see if this Government, in defence of this individual, will surrender its moral position with respect to talking to school children and near-dowells in this country, by allowing a Minister to behave in this way in public glare, to defend him and then want to tell school children how to behave. How could the Government surrender the moral high ground in his defence? The Minister has deliberately misled the Parliament by the issuing of false statements and he has nothing to do but to offer the Government his resignation and save his colleagues the embarrassment, and save this Parliament the humiliation of having to sit here and swallow the fact that one of our colleagues is driven to this in his own defence.
[Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I will say no more on this. All those who have a position of what is right and wrong in this country—whether one holds a ministerial position or otherwise—would see that what is before you this afternoon is misconduct in public office by a minister of Government, implicating an international agency

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which has thrown it back in his face. I will now sit and put it to the vote and let everybody on that side say exactly how they feel, whether it is right and proper for our exemplars to behave in this way. If that is the vote we are going to get this afternoon, then God help the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Question put

The House divided: Ayes 11 Noes 18

AYES

Valley, K.

Rowley, Dr. K.

Draper, G.

Robinson-Regis, Mrs. C.

Hart, E.

James, Mrs. E.

Joseph, M.

Sinanan, B.

Boynes, R.

Hinds, F.

Williams, E.

NOES

Maharaj, Hon. R. L.

Persad-Bissessar, Hon. K.

Lasse, Dr. The Hon. V.

Humphrey, Hon. J.

Maraj, Hon. R.

Nicholson, Hon. P

Rafeeq, Dr. The Hon. H.

Assam, Hon. M.

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Job, Dr. The Hon. M.

Khan, Dr. F.

Singh, Hon. G.

Nanan, Dr. The Hon. A.

Partap, Hon. H.

Mohammed, Dr. The Hon. R.

Singh, Hon. D.

Ramsaran, Hon. M.

Sharma, C.

Ali, R.

Motion negatived.

COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I had indicated that I would have dealt with the question which was raised, before the House rose. I am afraid that I have not had sufficient time to look at it. I shall deal with it on the next occasion.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh L. Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the adjournment of the House to Friday, July 11, 1997. I had indicated to the Opposition Chief Whip on the last occasion that we were going to adjourn on that date.

May I announce that on that date we will resume the debate on the Community Service Orders Bill and we will take item No. 8 on the Order Paper: An Act to amend the Animals (Diseases and Importation) Act, Chap. 67:02.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.34 p.m.