

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, April 28, 2006*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members seeking leave of absence: the hon. Member for Arouca North, Mr. Jarrette Narine for the period April 24 to 29, 2006; the hon. Eric Williams, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South, for the period April 24 to May 04, 2006. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**MR. BASDEO PANDAY  
(CONVICTION OF)**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, on Wednesday, April 26, 2006, I received communication from the Department of Court Administration, Chief Magistrate's Chambers, pertaining to a decision in relation to Case Numbers 12401/02, 12402/02 and 12403/02 delivered on the 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2006, involving Mr. Basdeo Panday, Member of Parliament as defendant. The correspondence indicated that the said defendant was convicted, fined and sentenced to a term of imprisonment of two years hard labour.

Hon. Members, section 49(3) of the Constitution states that-

“Where circumstances such as are referred to in paragraph (d) of subsection (2) arise because any member of the House of Representatives is under sentence of death or imprisonment, is mentally ill, declared bankrupt or convicted of an offence relating to elections, and where it is open to the member to appeal against the decision, either with the leave of a court or other authority or without such leave, he shall forthwith cease to perform his functions as a member of the House so however, that subject to the provisions of this section, he shall not vacate his seat until the expiration of a period of thirty days thereafter.”

Therefore, hon. Members, in accordance with section 49(3) where it is opened to such a Member to appeal the decision to imprison him, he must forthwith cease to perform his functions as a Member of the House, but he is not required to vacate his seat until the expiration of a period of thirty days from the date of the decision; that is May 24, 2006 in the present case. Thereafter:

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“The Speaker (of the House) may, from time to time, (on an application made to him by the Member) extend that period for further periods of thirty days (at a time) to enable the member to pursue an appeal...”

In accordance with the provisions of section 49(4) of the Constitution, where the Speaker has granted extensions of time, totalling:

“in the aggregate one hundred and fifty days (any further extensions) shall not be given without the approval, signified by resolution, of the House.”

Where the Member has exhausted his appeal and is still under a sentence of imprisonment exceeding 12 months, he must then, “vacate his seat” in accordance with section 49(5) of the Constitution.

Finally, hon. Members:

“Where at any time before the member of the House vacates his seat such circumstances as are mentioned in...(section 49 of the Constitution) cease to exist,...he may resume the performance of his functions as a member of the House.”

#### **PAPERS LAID**

1. Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2005. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]

*To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*

[*The Leader of the Opposition and some Members of the UNC entered the Chamber*] [*Desk thumping*]

#### **CONGRATULATIONS**

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, is it appropriate to pause to congratulate the new Leader of the Opposition.

Congratulations to the new Leader of the Opposition. I have noticed that the opposition leader is no longer sitting next to you.

#### **PAPERS LAID**

2. Administrative Report of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation for the period October 01, 2004 to September 30, 2005. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
3. Report of the Ministry of National Security for the years 2000 to 2004. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

4. A 3-Year Strategic Implementation Plan for the National Youth Development Policy. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
5. The National Youth Policy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

**ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION**

**Coat-of-Arms**

**(Use of)**

9. **Dr. Fuad Khan** (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister state what official vehicles are legally allowed to use the Coat-of-Arms instead of a number on the vehicle's licence plate?

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** As discussed with the Member, I ask for a further deferral of one week. It will be answered next week.

*Question, by leave, deferred.*

**CONGRATULATIONS**

**The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning):** Mr. Speaker, I rise, merely to congratulate the very distinguished Member for Siparia on her appointment to the very exalted office of Leader of the Opposition. I am not aware of any period in the country's history when we have had a female Leader of the Opposition, and so as she comes to this office she is making history in Trinidad and Tobago.

May I also say, Mr. Speaker, that I, too, have occupied that office as Leader of the Opposition before and I am in a position to say to her that there is an onerous responsibility that comes with it, and she will find out that things are not always easy as she seeks to discharge the functions as Leader of the Opposition; not just in the Parliament but also within her own political party, but such are the vicissitudes of political life and I am sure that the hon. Member is very well qualified to deal with whatever may come in her path.

May I also say, Mr. Speaker, that the reconfiguration of the Parliament this evening constitutes history; only once before have I seen it; I saw it in 1978 when the ULF—when there were differences between the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Basdeo Panday, and Mr. Rafique Shah; I think it was Oropouche at the time.

**Hon. Member:** Siparia.

*Congratulations*

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**Hon. P. Manning:** Siparia. The Member for Siparia—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Siparia is an exciting place. [*Laughter*]

**Hon. P. Manning:**—and, of course, Mr. Speaker, during that period we saw the leadership of the Opposition changing between one and the next; and it was an interesting period in the country's history.

As we take note this afternoon of what is taking place on the Opposition; I take an academic view of it because—

**Mr. Singh:** You do not like academics.

**Hon. P. Manning:**—I have passed that way, Mr. Speaker. And it would be very interesting to see how the business in the Parliament is conducted in the future.

May I once again take the opportunity on behalf of all my colleagues to congratulate the Member for Siparia and to wish her well and to wish her a very successful term of office as Leader of the Opposition. Congratulations. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Hamza Rafeeq** (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, myself would like to join with the hon. Prime Minister and to speak on behalf of— [*Interruption*] I have been given permission by the Speaker. I would like to speak on behalf of all Members on this side in congratulating the Member for Siparia on her elevation to the position of Leader of the Opposition.

We know, Mr. Speaker, also that the job will indeed be a very challenging one, but we know that she is indeed very capable. And on behalf of all of us on this side we want to wish her the best.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

[*Mr. Dookeran rises*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Now before you go I am taking it that we have the wish of the House. Please. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Members:** Yes.

**Mr. Winston Dookeran** (*St. Augustine*): Thank you. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Member for Siparia on assuming the very important position as Leader of the Opposition in this Parliament.

*Congratulations*

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I believe that we are creating history at the parliamentary level all in the interest of changes in our parliamentary system in Trinidad and Tobago, and that the assumption of office of the Member for Siparia in the context in which it is taking place is perhaps evidence of the need to put, once more on our agenda, the very issue of parliamentary reform and parliamentary democracy.

I take this opportunity to also indicate that my decision to sit in this place in the Parliament does not in any way diminish my commitment and my position to lead the United National Congress [*Desk thumping*] but merely to reflect—

**Hon. Member:** Which one of them the front or the back?

**Mr. W. Dookeran:**—my own sense of personal dignity in light of developments within recent times.

Congratulations to the Member for Siparia.

**NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY  
(IMPLEMENTATION)**

**The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Roger Boynes):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This entire situation that obtains here reminds me of an old saying, “The King is dead, long live the King.” [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the Government wishes to announce to this honourable House that the National Youth Policy of Trinidad and Tobago has been approved, and is being implemented. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this Government recognizes that the youth embodies the energy, creativity and dynamism that will drive our society forward and, as such, this policy has as its vision:

“Empowered young people who are able to make informed choices so that they can lead meaningful, enjoyable lives and contribute to the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago”.

This National Youth Policy is the product of extensive consultations [*Interruption*] as my friend from Chaguanas should no doubt appreciate. More than 82 consultations were held throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The methodology involved the use of Participatory Learning Action (PLA), drama, storytelling, music, theatre for development; some of which were conducted in the streets and communities, rural and urban, throughout Trinidad and Tobago. A draft policy was developed and presented to stakeholders at three separate workshops in San Fernando, Port of Spain and Tobago.

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A further public consultation spearheaded by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in conjunction with the Trinidad Youth Council was held at City Hall, Port of Spain in August 2002. Youth stakeholders meetings were held in Tobago in July 2003 to further examine the Draft Youth Policy and plan the way forward with youth-led and youth-serving groups in Trinidad and Tobago like: the Trinidad Youth Council, the Tobago Youth Council, the Girl Guides Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the Scout Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the Youth Arm of several faith-based organizations, the UWI Guild of Undergraduates, the Tobago House of Assembly, the Office of the Prime Minister, Vision 2020 team from the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs which produced the recommendations as to the way forward, and some of these recommendations were:

1. To ensure that building consensus was achieved among ministry staff and key stakeholders on the strategic direction for the Youth Division within the context of Vision 2020.
2. A review of the number of programmes being offered by the Government and its stakeholders for youth in Trinidad and Tobago and consensus on the need for a coordinated approach to make the most efficient use of resources available to the nation's youth.
3. A prioritized list of programmes and projects.
4. A shared action plan for youth development based on the prioritized list of programmes and projects.

Mr. Speaker, the Government facilitated further consultations in August 2003 which resulted in a redrafted youth policy being presented to the Social Sector Coordinating Committee, chaired by the hon. Prime Minister in September 2003. The said committee recommended the development of a Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP) outlining courses of action, through which the policy's goals and objectives would be realized.

Mr. Speaker, the Government again facilitated final consultations with all youth stakeholders and the Tobago House of Assembly to develop the three-year Strategic Implementation Plan for the National Youth Policy. Both the Redraft National Youth Policy and the Strategic Implementation Plan were again presented to the Social Sector Coordinating Committee where youth stakeholders such as the Trinidad Youth Council and the Tobago Youth Council were invited to take part in the deliberations; which was history in the making, Sir.

The committee recommended the policy and the Strategic Implementation Plan to the Cabinet, and the Cabinet approved the National Youth Policy of Trinidad and Tobago together with an accompanying three-year Strategic Implementation Plan with a budget of \$36 million.

This National Youth Policy provides a broad framework within which Government's youth policy initiatives will be executed. The policy speaks to a flexible and dynamic process of interaction between Government and civil society from which programmed activities and projects would emerge. It is a social developmental process which advocates a culturally relevant participatory approach which places youth at the forefront of policy development and implementation. The policy as its goals places emphasis on:

1. Youths as individuals, that is to say, youth as an empowered young person with positive values who can use acquired knowledge and skills to make informed choices while meaningfully participating in problem solving and decision making at family, community and national levels.
2. The creation of an enabling environment by the Government that would facilitate youth development.
3. Support for institutions and systems such as the family, the community, the school, religions and other organizations which strengthen and sustain youth development.

The Government, in recognizing the need for decisive action, has approved a Project Implementation Unit in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs to implement the youth policy and to execute all 15 courses of action contained in the Strategic Implementation Plan with its budget of \$36 million. Some of these include:

1. The creation of a new or restructured youth service delivery system. The purpose is to ensure that youth development is better organized and youth is better served, and that there is research, monitoring and evaluation of youth initiatives to keep youth and youth issues under continuous review, to develop a network of collaboration among all youth organizations and to utilize a more effective approach to youth work that speaks to the creation of a cadre of both voluntary and paid youth workers who can target young people wherever they are. The design is driven by the need to provide high quality, impacting services to a target population of over 400,000 youths in

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Trinidad and Tobago as well as scores of youth serving organizations and programmes.

2. The creation of a Youth Development Fund and that is to assist youth organizations with funds to implement their programmes and projects.
3. The creation of a Youth Empowerment Unit, and that will support initiatives to empower the youth of Trinidad and Tobago, especially those which address the specific needs of youth at risk.
4. Institutional strengthening of the National Youth Council, and that will ensure greater administrative and management skills among youth organizations to allow for improved capacity to deliver services to the youth; and that is taking place now, Mr. Speaker. We have capacity building programmes throughout Trinidad and Tobago and we are utilizing that by helping every youth organization. [*Interruption*]
5. Another course of action, speaks to the development of youth employment and employability policy: to provide for the development of opportunities for youth employment and to facilitate incentives that would encourage the private sector organizations to increase their levels of youth employment. Critical!
6. The implementation of the project Block Leadership Initiative for the New Generation utilizing sport and music to mobilize the youth in their natural setting simultaneously providing them with psychosocial and economic support.
7. The implementation of the project expression called “Voice of the Youth” which speaks to the utilization of young people to promote and highlight the positive aspects of youth via town meetings, the print media, electronic media, radio, television and the Internet. In other words, we are utilizing young people to have programmes that speak to the media so that they would be able to encourage the thinking and the attitudes—change the attitudes of young people in Trinidad and Tobago. These young people will disseminate information on critical issues such as HIV/AIDS, CSME, FTAA and Vision 2020, and ensure that their peers understand the critical role that they have to play in driving the youths to thinking along these lines.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago wishes, as part of the National Youth Policy, to ensure that there is consistency among all youth programmes in Trinidad and Tobago. Some of these programmes speak to the National Youth



Service. All of these programmes must be youth friendly; they must come under the youth policy; the youth policy must guide them, and the National Youth Service, this programme is administered by the Ministry of National Security. It is intended to inculcate in young nationals of Trinidad and Tobago between the ages of 18 to 30 years, a culture of selfless service to our society and community through voluntary services which are committed, responsible and developmental in nature.

MiLAT, the Military-led Academic Training Programme: That is a programme of the Ministry of National Security and is conducted in an academic environment and is designed for young persons between the ages of 16 to 20 years to fulfil the CXC examinations. It also bridges the gap for those young adults who may wish to pursue academic disciplines as well as socially transform their behaviour in a highly structured and regulated environment.

MYPART, the Military-led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship and Reorientation Training: Another programme of the Ministry of National Security, and this is designed to expose, train, develop and certify young people between the ages of 14 to 25 years in technical or vocational disciplines in a highly structured and regulated academic and/or skilled-based training environment, whilst inculcating in them the values of acceptance of personal responsibility and social respect for authority.

The Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture, (YAPA): This programme falls under the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. It is a programme which exposes young people between the ages of 17 and 25 years to a range of activities on successful public and private farms throughout the country. The programme provides intensive training in specialized areas of agriculture as well as assisting trainees in becoming agri-business entrepreneurs.

The Helping You Prepare for Employment programme, (HYPE): This development programme is an initiative of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. It is geared towards young people who have left the education system prior to graduation or who are unable to find employment because of a lack of the necessary academic qualifications or technical skills. The programme seeks to create workmen and workwomen with advanced skills who are capable of working autonomously and prepares them for the roles of supervision and foreman.

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The Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme, (GAPP): This programme is being administered by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. This programme targets nationals aged 17 to 25 years and trains them in geriatric nursing. The programme serves a dual purpose in ensuring efficient geriatric care to the elderly as well as providing employment prospects to young persons through training in the field.

The Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme, (YTEPP): They deal with the provision of Technical and Vocational Training Programmes in centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago and this is the responsibility of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. This programme targets the most recent school leavers and unemployed youths between the ages of 15 to 25 years. Young people are provided with training in career enhancement and attitudinal training using well trained and highly motivated staff.

**2.00 p.m.**

On-the-Job Training (OJT) programme is another programme of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. This is a pre-employment training programme that offers young people between the ages of 16 and 30 years, an introduction to the world of work. The programme focuses on the acquisition of work-based training and experience as well as the development of life skills.

Youth Window. This is a project of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources which is designed to expose young people to the merits of agriculture as a career path and offers low interest rates to encourage participants to enter into agri-business activity.

National Skills Development Programme. This programme which is administered by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education offers high level technical and vocational training to young people between the ages of 17 and 20 years at specialized training centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The training offered is specially geared towards skills requirements for the energy sector and petroleum industry.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the training programmes that this Government has put on the agenda for the nation's youth.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs will utilize all youth NGOs, youth officers, youth workers (voluntary and paid) and all youth facilities and community centres and the most up-to-date technology to have young people exposed to all of Government's programmes.

Mr. Speaker, this National Youth Policy is seen as the flagship that gives the expression to the vision which this Government has for the nation's youth. It is a landmark initiative decision which gives hope to over 500,000 youths. It recognizes the leadership role of our youth and the role that they play in sport, music and technology. It provides a structure designed to give support to the youth today and tomorrow who will play a key role in ensuring that sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago is achieved and the attainment of its vision of developed nation status on or before 2020.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**SOCIAL SERVICES DELIVERY  
(DECENTRALIZATION)**

**The Minister of Social Development and Minister in the Ministry of Housing (Hon. Anthony Roberts):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank you and indeed all the Members of this honourable House for the opportunity to report on the progress of an important milestone in our continuing effort to develop a framework for the design of a new operating system for the decentralization of the delivery of social services to communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is dedicated to efficient service delivery, by making essential social services more accessible and available at the local level and by providing greater opportunities for citizen participation which is consistent with this Government's objective of developed nation status by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is committed to transforming our society into one that provides an enhanced quality of life for all citizens. It is therefore within this perspective that this Government has embarked upon an initiative to decentralize social services delivery. This restructuring exercise is a response to the deficiencies identified in the existing system of the delivery of social services, which includes:

- Ineffective targeting of clients;
- Inordinate delays and difficulty in accessing services;
- General customer dissatisfaction and lack of confidence in the system;
- The perception of a level of insensitivity on the part of service providers towards clients;
- Duplication and overlap;

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- Leakages and system abuse;
- Emphasis on income transfers and grants, rather than rehabilitative assistance; and
- Inadequate management systems.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has decided that decentralization of the delivery of social services is a feasible option intended to reach all individuals and families and so decentralization in this case takes the form of the transfer of authority on a geographic basis by de-concentrating administrative authority to field units and by empowering NGOs to manage some essential areas of social programming.

Mr. Speaker, the proposal to decentralize the delivery of social services is all in keeping with long term sustainability in achieving Government's development goals. As a result, this initiative would be an expansion to the European-sponsored poverty Reduction Programme falling under the Second Financial Protocol of the Lomé IV Convention between the African, Caribbean and Pacific States and the Commission for the European Communities (ACP-EC).

The objective of the Poverty Reduction Programme is to support Government in the implementation of its poverty reduction strategies by using a decentralized mechanism for implementing a collaborative approach for social services delivery. This can be achieved through the already established 15 Regional, Social and Human Development Councils (RSHDCs) which would provide a decentralized mechanism for implementing a collaborative approach to the delivery of poverty reduction programmes. These RSHDCs are the forerunner to this wider decentralization of the delivery of social services to the communities.

Mr. Speaker, decentralization will therefore be guided by the following principles:

- Equality and equity to ensure that all citizens have adequate access to social services.
- Efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public revenue in the delivery of social services.
- Transparency and accountability to ensure that there is adequate reach of services and all citizens know what is delivered in an open way.
- Public participation in determining needs.

- Monitoring and evaluating services to ensure that needs are adequately met and standards maintained.
- Development of methods and procedures appropriate to service delivery without promoting rigidity and inefficiency.
- Involvement of the civil society organizations in delivering quality service.

There would be four major components to the decentralization of the delivery of social services and they are as follows:

- Institution of appropriate supervisory mechanisms;
- Diagnosis of needs of individuals, households and communities;
- Delivery of services within communities; and
- Strategy for effective collaboration.

This system, Mr. Speaker, will therefore focus on needs identification and prescription, the delivery of appropriate interventions to treat with problems identified and the establishment of an administrative system to facilitate the effective delivery of social services to our citizens. In this connection, a National Agency will be established which will be responsible for coordinating the administration and operations of the system.

The National Agency will be governed by a board which will report on the activities of the agency to the Minister of Social Development. To aid the process at the agency, the country will be sub-divided into 14 regions in Trinidad and one in Tobago, as the fifteenth. Each region, Mr. Speaker, will be further sub-divided into grids—a grid can be defined as a combination of several neighbouring communities. The criteria for determining the size of a grid will be developed based on the need to achieve the widest geographical spread of social services at the level of the regions. Generic social workers will conduct diagnostic testing of individuals within families in the respective communities, identifying needs as well as which of the services are specifically required through governmental, private agencies, contracted professionals or non-governmental organizations offering the requisite services. This will ensure that citizens located in communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago would have access to services that would meet the requirement of their age, gender, disabilities and socio-economic circumstances.

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Mr. Speaker, the delivery element of the system will be categorized by four groupings as identified hereunder:

- Preventative
- Remedial
- Supportive
- Developmental

We expect that civil society organizations in particular would play a major role in provision of services at the community level. This would require partnering, as well as the strengthening of these organizations. Accordingly, the National Agency will have responsibility for the establishment of a unit which will coordinate matters pertaining to the contracting of organizations to undertake delivery of social services and programmes at the community level. The NGO unit will recommend suitable organizations to undertake the delivery of social programmes and projects as well as to ensure that there is compliance with established procedures and guidelines in the delivery of programmes and projects. It would also ensure that standards for effective delivery are maintained, and that the contractual arrangements with NGOs/CBOs/FBOs are in accordance with established criteria to be set.

Mr. Speaker, mechanisms for measuring the effectiveness of this decentralization will ultimately give an overall indication of whether the system developed is effective and whether there is need for modification. Administrative indicators will be developed together with an implementation plan to roll out the new system. Measures to evaluate the success of strategies adopted to establish the decentralized system and trace changes in these levels over time will also be undertaken.

We believe, Mr. Speaker, that this Government is fulfilling a critical obligation to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by developing a framework that would allow for a service-driven environment by providing cost-effective and efficient public sector delivery systems. As part of this Government's framework for nurturing a caring society, decentralization will form part of the national strategy to treat with the issues of poverty alleviation, regional development and sustainable communities, as highlighted in the Draft National Strategic Plan.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is determined and therefore has commenced work on developing a new operating system for the decentralization of the delivery of social services to all communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**NATIONAL CARNIVAL BANDS ASSOCIATION OF TRINIDAD  
AND TOBAGO (INC'N) BILL**

*Question put and agreed to*, That a Bill to incorporate the National Carnival Bands Association of Trinidad and Tobago and for matters incidental thereto, be now read a second time.

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Bill referred to a special select committee of the House appointed by the Speaker as follows:* Mrs. E. Job-Davis, Mr. E. Hart, Mr. F. Hinds, Mr. G. Singh and Dr. A. Nanan.

**VERNON PAUL  
(ALLEGATIONS)**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [April 07, 2006]:*

*Be it resolved* that this House:

- (i) affirm its adherence to the rule of law;
- (ii) call on the Government for the appointment of an independent commission of enquiry;
- (iii) condemn the Government for its failure to act in a manner consistent with the national and public interest.

*Question again proposed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member for Caroni East.

*[Mr. Singh and Mrs. Persad-Bissessar on their feet]*

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, the Member cannot wind up the debate as there are other Members in the House who wish to speak. The Standing Orders are very clear that the right of the Members to speak remains. Members should be allowed to speak before the debate is wound up.

**Mr. Speaker:** I recognize the Mover of the Motion, the Member for Caroni East. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Ganga Singh (Caroni East):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to correct the record on this matter. This Motion came into the parliamentary record because of the failure of the hon. Member for Siparia and the hon. Member for Caroni Central to bring a motion on Private Members' Day to deal with the Scarborough

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Hospital cost overruns and as a matter of course, as the Chief Whip, I was forced to bring this Motion in dealing with this matter. Mr. Speaker, therefore, as I seek to wind up this debate, it is only appropriate, as Mover of the Motion I do so.

Mr. Speaker, this Motion speaks of criminal involvement in the political process, of an abuse of power in the political process; it speaks of the realm whereby those who are engaged in the political process abuse their powers. This is what this Motion speaks of in its core principles.

There is no better way than dealing with this issue in the context to recognize that the abuse of power and the abuse of process is a national issue and that therefore it cuts across ethnic, regional and partisan boundaries.

You will recall at the 20th Sitting of this honourable House on February 10, 2006, when I made, inter alia, a plea for the emergence of politics of principle, for the engagement of the society in the virtues of ethics, truth, honesty, morality, character, respect, discipline, divinity and non-criminality, refusing as I still maintain “to sleep with the Devil” in any circumstance. You may also recall that outside of the Parliament, it was said that “those comments would be my last in the capacity of Chief Whip.” There was no room for dissent on conscience on a matter of deep personal conviction. It is either you sleep with the devil or you take the highway.

Mr. Speaker, fortunately for all of us, the rule of law and the duty to adhere to the provisions and principles of our Constitution prevailed. It is now accepted and widely established that the political leader is the sole arbiter of when the holder of the office of Chief Whip will face his or her demise. [*Desk thumping*]

Of course, it is always open to the Chief Whip to decide for himself that it is no longer desirable to continue to serve in such capacity.

I want to congratulate you and the other officers of this Parliament for preserving the rule of law and our constitutional supremacy, which I feared at times, were under severe attack.

In this regard, I take this opportunity to remind this honourable House of the words of Voltaire (which I myself have had cause to recall on more than one occasion over the past few months) and he says: “I may disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” Sadly, the reality for many is that speaking freely incurs the wrath of the party hierarchy.



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But those of us who feel compelled to speak up and oppose discernible wrongs, must take solace in the fact that our courage is contagious. You see, when a brave man or woman takes a stand, the spines of others are stiffened. You see, Mr. Speaker, while caged birds accept and find comfort in each other, it is flight and the ability to sing freely that they really long for.

Mr. Speaker, the attempts and threats to remove me from the office of Chief Whip, culminating in the delegation to you at the last sitting of this Parliament, are flagrantly unjust, without basis and I will add, wholly underserved.

Mr. Speaker, the naked hunger with which some moved to abuse the power vested in them was left unsatiated. That this Parliament has to become embroiled in this debacle, in which I am a central figure, is to say the least, distasteful to me, particularly at a time when the attention of this House must be focused on the critical matters affecting our citizenry.

Over the last four and a half years, Mr. Speaker, it has been a distinct privilege and honour for me to serve this House as Chief Whip, duties which my colleagues would agree I undertook fairly and fearlessly. That I have played a pivotal role in every major matter brought to this House by the Opposition also cannot be denied.

In executing my duties, I have always been guided by the principles of democracy, fairness, the rights and obligations of individuals and institutions and the fundamental duty to adhere to the rule of law and the Constitution.

In all of this, I executed all my actions in the best interest of my party and ensured that such actions were always consistent with the country's interests.

The continuing abuse of power by some, who are not even elected parliamentarians, manifested itself recently in the cabal-style conspiracy to avert the scrutiny, opinion and consultation with the parliamentary caucus of this Opposition on a critical matter of national concern.

Mr. Speaker, under no circumstances, must we accept that the tyranny of a few should prevail over free will—even as they suggest, that they did it in the interest of “political expediency” and in obedience to an instruction received. Such actions can never be justified.

Mr. Speaker, as Chief Whip and Chairman of the parliamentary caucus from the Opposition party, it is clear that too much unproductive effort is being expended to consistently undermine me as I seek to carry out my duties. These energies should really be otherwise engaged. In all of this, my greatest concern is

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that the resulting environment of paranoia, deception and mistrust is bound to eventually affect the fluency and efficiency with which I undertake my duties as Chief Whip—an efficiency and fluency which I have defined and of which I remain proud, notwithstanding the presence of enormous challenges and obstacles.

Mr. Speaker, it was in October 2005 that a separation was created in the role of Political and Opposition Leader. On the one hand, I believed that the approach was fundamentally flawed having regard to our constitutional and parliamentary traditions and that it would be fraught with inherent challenges.

On the other hand, I accepted the challenge and tried to make this work, believing that the resulting deformed political creature was merely a temporary and interim measure, conceived as it were out of petulance on a bed of deceit, betrayal and selfishness. I believed then, that in the fullness of time, good sense and the wisdom of experience would have prevailed.

Sadly, when recently, the opportunity presented itself to heal this deformity, we see instead that the deformed political creature continues to be perpetuated, the result of party politics gone mad!

Mr. Speaker, the malady in the body politic runs deep and the desperate cry for the panacea of unity rings hollow. Even with the best political will, after seven months of nurturing this political creature, I am now compelled to admit that it is simply unworkable, impractical, and above all, it is not in the best interest of the party I serve and the interest of the country we love.

Mr. Speaker, it is in these circumstances, after frank discussions with the Political Leader and members of the Caroni East constituency executive, and with their collective support, that I now inform this honourable House of my resignation from the position of Chief Whip with immediate effect. [*Desk thumping*]

I remain committed to and will adhere to the principles, values and ideals of the party to which I belong, accepting always its credo that “men and institutions remain free only when such freedom is founded upon moral and spiritual values and the rule of law”. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as I depart from this parliamentary position and join my colleagues on the Back Bench, I wish to personally thank you, Mr. Speaker, the Clerk of the House, members of staff and the hon. Leader of Government

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Business, the Member for Diego Martin Central, for the cooperation and professionalism extended to me throughout my tenure.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and may God bless us all. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 28(2), I propose to have the questions as—let me read Standing Order 28(2):

“If a Motion embodies two or more separate propositions, the propositions may be proposed by the Speaker as separate questions.”

I would be acting therefore in accordance with Standing Order 28(2) in putting the questions.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That this House affirm its adherence to the rule of law.

*Question put.*

That this House call on the Government for the appointment of an independent commission of enquiry;

*Question negatived.*

*Question put.*

That this House condemn the Government for its failure to act in a manner consistent with the national and public interest.

*Question negatived.*

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, May 05, 2006 at 1.30 p.m. and to inform—well there is no Chief Whip, so I have nobody to inform Mr. Speaker—[*Crosstalk*] I inform hon. Members opposite that the Government plans to debate Bill No. 4 on today’s Order Paper and given sufficient time, Mr. Speaker, we would do next the Motion that is on the Order Paper.

Mr. Speaker, if you would permit me, I just want to record my thanks for the work of the Chief Whip during the period that he acted in that post. Mr. Speaker, behind the Speaker’s chair we were able to organize the business of this Parliament. We have been able to compromise where necessary and, of course, at

*Adjournment*  
[HON. K. VALLEY]

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times we both had to stand firm. I want the Chief Whip to know that it was a pleasure working with him in that capacity and I do wish him well in his continued political interest. If at any time he needs political help, I shall be all too willing to speak with him. I wish him well.

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning):**  
Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to rise briefly to thank the hon. Member for Caroni East for serving this Parliament and the national community in his capacity as Chief Whip. We know that that is not the easiest responsibility to discharge in this honourable House and I would just like to record that he has discharged his responsibilities in this regard with distinction.

Mr. Speaker, the timing of his departure from the office as Chief Whip coincides with the development of other momentous events in this Parliament today and I am sure that for years into the future, historians, as they review the history of Trinidad and Tobago, would remember today as a turning point in the life of the people of this country.

I would just like to thank him once again for his services to the Parliament and the country. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 2.33 p.m.*