

*Leave of Absence**Friday, May 12, 2006***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, May 12, 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 requesting leave of absence from sittings of the House: Miss Penelope Beckles, hon. Member for Arima, for the period May 07 to May 21 and Mr. Franklin Khan, hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, for the period May 12 to May 23. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE
(APPOINTMENT OF)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. President of the Senate, by letter dated May 10, 2006 addressed to the Speaker, and it reads as follows:

“Your letter of May 5, 2006 refers.

Please be informed that at a Sitting of the Senate held on Tuesday May 09, 2006, the following Resolutions which were moved by the Honourable Minister of Public Administration and Information were approved:

1. **‘RESOLVED** that a Bill entitled ‘The Bankruptcy and Insolvency Bill, 2006’ be committed to a Joint Select Committee for consideration and report; and

That this Committee be mandated:

- to publish these bills for public comments; and
 - to consider such public comments and report back to the Parliament no later than August 31st, 2006.’
2. **RESOLVED** that the following five (5) Members of the Senate be appointed to serve with an equal number from the House of Representatives on the Joint Select Committee established to consider and report on the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Bill, 2006:

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- Mr. John Jeremie, S.C
- Ms. Christine Kangaloo
- Mrs. Christine Sahadeo
- Mr. Wade Mark
- Mrs. Mary King

Please be advised accordingly.

Yours respectfully,

Senator the Hon. Dr. Linda Baboolal"

SEMINAR FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I also wish to remind you of a seminar for Members of Parliament on the preparation of declaration of income, assets and liabilities and statements of registrable interest for the year 2005. This seminar would be held in the Parliament Chamber on Tuesday, May 16 at 10.30 a.m. to 12 noon.

Just as an aside, I see the hon. Prime Minister is here, and he is celebrating his 35th year in public life. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: What a tragedy.

PETITION

Severe Water Problems

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition on behalf of Steve Mahabir, President of the Penal Rock Road Village Council; Kuarsingh Harripersad, President of the Bunsee Trace Village Council; Sieudath Saroop, President of the 9 km Penal Rock Road Community Council; Moongiya Bellasario, President of the Moolchan Trace Village Council; Sham Dookeran, Vice-President of the Morne Diablo Village Council; Dhrupatee Mungroo of Rebeiro Trace, Secretary of the Penal Rock Road Village Council; Suresh Samaroo, President of the Katwaroo Trace Village Council; Bhagwandeem Ramkarran, Vice-President of the Clarke Rochard Village Council; Zalina Rampersadsingh, Secretary of the Lahoo's Road Village Council; Jasodra Harbukhan of Clarke Road Penal; Khairon Rahamut of Laltoo Trace, Penal; and Jason Boodram of Penal Junction, Penal.

Mr. Speaker, I now seek your leave that the Clerk be permitted to read the petition.

Petition read.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual audited financial statements of the Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited for the year ended September 30, 2004. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Annual audited financial statements of the Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited for the year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

3. Administrative Report of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation for the period October 01, 2004 to September 30, 2005. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE**(First Report)****(Presentation)**

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Mr. Speaker, I wish to lay on the Table, the First Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee for the First Session 2002—2003; the Second Session 2003—2004; and the Third Session 2004—2005 of the Eighth Parliament on energy and energy based industries.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**Biche Presbyterian School****(Re-opening of)**

- 13. Mr. Harry Partap** (*Nariva*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister advise when would the Biche Presbyterian School, which was vacated in 2002, be re-opened for use by the children of Biche?

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, we are asking for a deferral of question No. 13 for a two-week period.

Question, by leave, deferred.

**National Entrepreneurial Development Company
South Regional Centre
(Ownership of)**

- 14. Mr. Harry Partap** (*Nariva*) asked the hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development:

Would the Minister state:

- (a) Whether the building housing the new South Regional Centre of the National Entrepreneurial Development Company in Cocoyea is owned by the State?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is negative, would the Minister state from whom is the building rented, for what period of time and at what cost?

The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano): The building housing the new South Regional Centre of the National Entrepreneurial Development Company Limited in Cocoyea is not owned by the State.

The building is being rented from Intex Auto Supplies which is owned by Mr. Lakeran Ramnarine.

The building which comprises three floors with a total floor space of 7,500 square feet is being rented for a period of three years from August, 2005.

The monthly rental is \$28,000 per month; that is, \$3.73 per square foot plus value added tax.

DEFINITE URGENT MATTER

(LEAVE)

**CHIEF JUSTICE
(Allegations By)**

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of today's sitting of the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, allegations made by the Chief Justice against the Chief Magistrate, the Prime Minister and the Attorney General.

The matter is definite because it refers to allegations made by the Chief Justice against these persons.

The matter is urgent because it has been brought to the public domain in the last two days, and unless same is resolved in the shortest possible time, it would do irreparable damage to the integrity of the Judiciary and public confidence in the rule of law.

The matter is of public importance because the independence of the Judiciary and the prosecutorial arm of the State constitutes the very foundations of public trust in the administration of justice, and the present matter threatens to undermine these very pillars of our society founded upon a proper respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual and the supremacy of the rule of law. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am not satisfied, and this matter may be properly raised as a Motion for the Adjournment of the House. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: This matter qualifies.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche, you are talking constantly; please, desist from doing that.

**CHIEF JUSTICE
(INVESTIGATION OF)**

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, February 15, 2005, I made a statement in the other place concerning the procedure I intended to follow in relation to allegations made against the Honourable Chief Justice. I made a further statement to hon. Members here on April 01, 2005 outlining the circumstances which led me to write to His Excellency the President requesting the establishment of a tribunal in accordance with the constitutional demands required of me.

Mr. Speaker, it is with deep regret that I must advise this House, once again, that another controversy has developed in which accusations have been made against the Honourable Chief Justice. Mr. Speaker, in relation to these fresh allegations, I wish to inform the national community that I intend to follow a procedure similar to the one I outlined in my February 15, 2005 statement, and that I shall, as I did then, continue to act in accordance with, and in adherence to the Constitution which I am sworn to defend. It goes without saying that my every action shall be taken on the basis of sound legal advice.

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Mr. Speaker, I cannot in good conscience repeat the statement I made on February 15, 2005 but it is so important that I kindly ask that it be included in this statement I am making today, since each pertinent point of procedure has been addressed in the approach to be taken when allegations are made against the Chief Justice and brought to the attention of the Prime Minister.

On Friday, May 05, 2006 I received correspondence from the Chief Magistrate making certain allegations against the Chief Justice. On the same day, I approached His Excellency the President and informed him of the correspondence which was in my possession. On Monday, May 08, 2006 I invited the Chief Justice to a meeting in my office and I showed him the said correspondence which he read.

Mr. Speaker, ordinarily, I would not divulge the contents of a conversation with the Chief Justice which was intended to be private and confidential. However, I have noted with regret that the Honourable Chief Justice has already put in the public arena at least some of what passed between us and much has since been reported about what I allegedly said to him. As a consequence, it is incumbent upon me to give a fuller and more accurate account of what transpired then. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, having read the Chief Magistrate's statement, the Honourable Chief Justice became incoherent, and appeared to be emotionally distraught during the conversation which ensued. This gave me no pleasure and it was in fact painful to experience. The allegations made by the Chief Magistrate appeared to have rattled him. In those circumstances, I explained to him that there was already one matter yet unresolved with accusations against him and this additional accusation had now come forward. It is I who suggested that, if he so chose, he could exercise the option to demit his office voluntarily rather than be subject to any administrative or criminal proceedings which may possibly be proffered against him. The Chief Justice, who was by that time in a state of deep emotion, agreed that some time would be required for him to decide, not what he would do but, specifically, whether or not he would tender his resignation. There was agreement that he would advise me of his intention upon his return to the country after an overseas trip.

Since then, I have read the statement which the Honourable Chief Justice has made public and he has reported the Chief Magistrate to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission for having falsely and maliciously alleged that he had attempted to influence the Chief Magistrate in the Panday matter and that he now flatly denies that he had ever done so.

Mr. Speaker, given the serious nature of the allegation made against the honourable Chief Justice by another high ranking judicial officer, it is once again incumbent upon me to consider whether this is an appropriate case for the initiation of the procedure for the removal of the Chief Justice under section 137 of the Constitution. Being of that mind, on Wednesday, May 10, 2006 I telephoned the Chief Justice and informed him that I intended to consider whether the question of his removal ought to be investigated under the Constitution. In this regard, I have not made any decision, as some may have suggested—I repeat that I have not made any decision as some may have suggested—and my mind is and remains open.

Since only 13 months ago this same process had to be initiated, I was and still am aware of the constitutional requirements which proscribe how a Prime Minister must respond to these matters. Indeed, I had spoken to His Excellency on Friday, May 05, 2006 and felt then, as I do feel now, that at this state of the deliberations, such a sensitive and delicate matter ought to be discussed in a private and confidential manner.

I wish to assure this honourable House and members of the national community that the Prime Minister has been scrupulously careful to speak to neither the media nor anyone connected therewith, and that the meeting between the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice included no other persons.

When the media began to speculate, an official release was issued from my office indicating that I had met with the Chief Justice at my invitation and I was particular not to indicate the content of that meeting. The way events unfolded thereafter, and in view of my planned departure from the country, I requested a second meeting with His Excellency the President for further discussions on the matter. In yet another public release from my office, the public was informed of the cancellation of my proposed European mission, as Head of Caricom, in order to ensure that I was at home to respond to any matters which at that time appeared likely to unfold. I have since issued a third release informing the public of my conversation with the Chief Justice on Wednesday, May 10, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, there are sub judice matters involving decisions of the Chief Magistrate which are now under appeal. It is not for the Prime Minister to speculate and to get involved in any way whatever in such matters. I am not intending to discuss any question of the sale of land by anyone, nor whether there is understanding on my part of the separation of powers, nor put an interpretation on the abuse of power, or determine guilt or innocence of anyone, or comment on

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any decision given in a court of law by a judicial officer, as commentators, most of whom are uninformed, are bandying about in the media. All of these are accusations made against the Prime Minister seeking to obfuscate the main and central issue which is whether or not the allegations contained in correspondence received by the Prime Minister warrant an investigation. That is the issue which is engaging the attention of the Prime Minister as is required under the Constitution. Mr. Speaker, that is the only issue.

This afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I will say only this, that there cannot possibly be any inconsistency between the principle of judicial independence on which our entire Constitution and the rule of law are based, and the procedure provided for under that very Constitution for the investigation of serious allegations of impropriety made against judicial officers. To seek to undermine this process by characterizing any attempt to call upon a judicial officer to answer serious allegations as an attack on the independence of the Judiciary is to make judges unaccountable and above the rule of law.

I wish to assure the national community that neither the Prime Minister nor the Government has, or intends to, interfere with the independence of the Judiciary. We respect the separation of powers and adhere to same. But allegations have been raised with respect to the Chief Justice and it is incumbent upon me, in fulfilment of my constitutional responsibilities, and indeed in order to protect the independence of the Judiciary, to take the action that has been taken thus far.

The anxiety of some commentators and sections of the media to crucify the actions of the Prime Minister, which until today have been made selectively public, demonstrates that they, too, seem to forget that it is always useful and, indeed, necessary to hear the other side. It is only then that we can determine where the truth resides.

On a purely personal note, I refute totally and emphatically the accusation that I attempted to bully and hound out from office anyone. I did no such thing. What I did was to state that I preferred to see the country spared of this turmoil on yet another occasion. It is in these circumstances and in the face of the noticeable anguish of the honourable Chief Justice that the question of demitting office arose.

It is also very true that I did tell the honourable Chief Justice that I would not personally like to see a Chief Justice being faced with possible criminal prosecution if such an occasion can be avoided.

Mr. Ramnath: You are threatening the man.

Hon. P. Manning: Let me make it clear that I made no minatory remarks to the Chief Justice as is being interpreted by some of the anxious commentators, all of whom have specific and particular agendas.

In his public statement, the honourable Chief Justice has said that he has made a report against the Chief Magistrate to the Judicial and Legal Service Commission and the Integrity Commission. Such a matter is not within the purview of the Prime Minister and I, therefore, offer no comment on this.

In view of the totality of all the circumstances, I have not yet formally written to the Chief Justice to ask for his response to the Chief Magistrate's allegations. What I have done is to ask my legal advisors to write to the Chief Magistrate seeking further particulars of his statement and otherwise to collect as much other information as may be relevant to the task I am called upon to undertake. When this process is complete, I will forward all the information in my possession for the Chief Justice's comments.

In the meantime, I have sent the document from the Chief Magistrate to the hon. Attorney General for appropriate action and have issued a public statement so advising.

Mr. Speaker, it is extremely sad, but a concomitant of democracy that the country must go through this turmoil on yet another occasion. I am optimistic nonetheless that at the end of it, we shall all benefit from the results of these actions.

I wish to assure the public, as I did on a previous occasion, that I approach this task, which is not of my choosing, mindful of the solemnity of the occasion and the consequences of the process under way. I will consider carefully and dispassionately all the material put before me, including in particular any response the Chief Justice may make. As before, I will be seeking the advice of three eminent local and foreign members of the inner bar. I will act fairly but decisively.

I will not recommend to the President that the question of removing the Chief Justice ought to be investigated unless I am fully satisfied that there is prima facie sufficient basis to warrant such an investigation. I do not and will not condemn the Chief Justice. That is not required of me. But I will carry out my constitutional duty in accordance with the rule of law and the principles of fairness, as is expected of me.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

**ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION
(LOCAL GOVERNMENT) ORDER**

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by subsection (3) of section 4 of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, that as soon as may be after the Elections and Boundaries Commission (hereinafter referred to as "the Commission") has submitted a report under paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 4 of the said Act, the Minister shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval the draft of an Order by the President for giving effect, whether with or without modifications, to the recommendations contained in the report;

And Whereas the Commission has submitted a report to the Minister in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 4;

And Whereas the draft of an Order entitled "the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Order, 2006" giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission was laid before the House of Representatives on the 10th day of February, 2006.

Be it resolved:

That the draft of "The Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Order, 2006" be approved.

Mr. Speaker, this Motion seeks the approval of the House of Representatives to the draft of an Order of the President in accordance with section 4 of the Elections and Boundaries (Local Government) Act.

Whereas under section 71 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago there is established an Elections and Boundaries Commission (hereinafter referred to as "the Commission");

And whereas under subsection (1) of section 4 of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, (hereinafter referred to as "the Act"), the Commission is charged inter alia with responsibility for defining and reviewing the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be, divided.

Mr. Speaker, section 4(1) states that:

"The Commission shall define and review the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be, divided and shall submit to the Minister reports either—

- (a) showing the constituencies into which it recommends that an electoral area should be divided in order to give effect to the Rules set out in the Second Schedule; or
- (b) stating that, in the opinion of the Commission, no alteration is required to the existing number or boundaries of electoral districts in order to give effect to the said Rules."

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with paragraph (a) of the said subsection (1) of section 4 of the Act, the Commission, on the 8th day of July, 2005, submitted to the Minister a report in which it recommends that for the purposes of local government elections, the boundaries of the electoral districts into which the electoral area mentioned in the First Schedule to the Act are divided, should be as defined in accordance with the Schedule to the Order.

The time period for submission of the report is identified under subsection (2) of section 4 and states that reports under subsection (1) shall be submitted by the Commission not less than two nor more than three years from the date of the submission of its last report.

The Second Schedule of the Elections and Boundaries Commission Act prescribes the Rules to be followed by the Commission, in its review of the number and boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be, divided.

For municipal corporations, Rule 4 of this schedule as amended provides these directions—

- "4 The number of electors in an electoral district of a municipal electoral area shall be the number obtained by dividing the number of electors in that electoral area by the number of electoral districts shown opposite the name of that electoral area in the Third Schedule, but the Commission may in consideration of topographical factors vary such number provided that in no case shall the number of electors in any one electoral district of an electoral area exceed or be less than the number of electors in any other electoral district of that electoral area by more than twenty-five per cent."

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For regional corporations, Rules 1, 2 and 3 of the same schedule provide the following directions—

- “1. The number of electors in each electoral district of a regional electoral area shall, so far as practicable, be the number obtained by the application of rule 2, but the Commission may, in consideration of rule 3, vary such number provided that in no case shall the number of electors in any one electoral district of an electoral area exceed or be less than the number of electors in any other electoral district of that electoral area by more than twenty-five per cent.”
2. (1) The number of electoral districts in a regional electoral area in Trinidad shall be determined as follows:

There shall be in every electoral area a basic number of four electoral districts. To this basic number shall be added the number obtained by dividing the electorate of the electoral area by 15,000; but where in any electoral area the electorate is—

 - (a) less than 15,000, there shall be five electoral districts; or
 - (b) more than 15,000, any residual number left after dividing the total electorate by 15,000 shall be treated as if that number were 15,000 and one electoral district shall be added in respect of such residual number.”
3. In the division of electoral districts in the regional electoral areas natural boundaries such as major highways and rivers shall be used wherever possible.”

Mr. Speaker, the last report of the Commission on its review of electoral boundaries was based on an electorate in the regional electoral areas of Trinidad of 814,251 persons as published in the Revised List of Electors dated November 30, 2001. The Commission informs us that the electorate on which this report is based is 895,409 persons as appears on the Commission’s records as at April 29, 2005; an increase of 81,158.

On the basis of this increased electorate in 2005, the Commission duly reviewed the number and boundaries of electoral districts into which each of the

14 electoral areas in Trinidad should be divided. After application of the relevant formula for regional corporations—according to rule 2 of the Second Schedule of the Second Act—the Commission concluded as follows:

- (a) Alterations are required to the existing number of electoral districts of the following five regional corporations:
 - (i) Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo electoral area was increased from 12 electoral districts to 13.
 - (ii) Penal/Debe electoral area was increased from eight electoral districts to nine.
 - (iii) Sangre Grande electoral area was increased from seven to eight.
 - (iv) Siparia Electoral Area was increased from eight electoral districts to nine.
 - (v) Tunapuna/Piarco electoral area was increased from 13 electoral districts to 14.
- (b) No alteration is required to the existing number of electoral districts for municipal corporations in Port of Spain, Arima, San Fernando, Point Fortin and Chaguanas as these are fixed by law and cannot be varied;
- (c) Changes in the electorate in nine electoral areas required alterations to be made to the boundaries of 53 electoral districts therein as indicated in columns 1 and 2 of the Draft Order; and
- (d) Changes in the electorate of 78 electoral districts in the electoral areas as indicated in columns 1 and 3 of the table at page 5 of the Schedule to the Draft Order were such that no alterations to the boundaries of such electoral districts were required.

Further particulars on the Commission's recommendations including maps delineating each of the 131 electoral districts are contained in the Appendices of the Draft Order.

Subsection (3) of section 4 of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, provides that as soon as may be after the Elections and Boundaries Commission has submitted a report under paragraph (a) of subsection (1) of section 4 of the said Act, the Minister shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval, the draft of an order by the President for giving effect, whether with or without modifications, to the recommendations contained in the report.

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The report having been deemed out of time, required validation by an Act of Parliament. The Bill of Validation having been taken through both Houses and being completed by the Senate on Tuesday, May 09, 2006, is submitted for approval by the House.

And whereas the draft of an order entitled "The Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Order, 2006" giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission was previously laid before this honourable House.

Be it resolved that the draft of "The Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Order, 2006" be approved.

Mr. Speaker, the importance of local government as a major pillar of our democratic system of government cannot be underestimated. Local government allows participation by the people as a primary level of governance. For example, unlike candidates for general elections there is a qualification requirement for local government candidates in that they have to reside or operate businesses in the particular locality. The Municipal Corporations Act, No. 21 of 1990, recognized and made far reaching provisions for deepening the local government systems in this country; hence the creation and establishment of 14 corporations in this country.

Given the changes proposed in the Order before the honourable House, Members should note that with the addition of five electoral districts there is a need for additional representation, as follows—

One—Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo	12 to 13
One—Penal/Debe	8 to 9
One—Sangre Grande	7 to 8
One—Siparia	8 to 9
One—Tunapuna/Piarco	13 to 14

Mr. Speaker, as for this Government's commitment to Vision 2020, the process of deepening our local government system continues.

I must add that not only are we deepening our local government system of Government, we are also strengthening it by providing the corporations with the relevant professional staff, new administrative complexes, a re-look at their

responsibilities and, of course, their management. Your corporation's organizational capacities and capabilities also have to be continually strengthened with the changing times.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to succeed with our vision of ensuring substantial development, empowering the communities, taking Government and services to the doorsteps of the people, then we must continue to build on the democratic institution of local government.

In this regard, the Government is fully committed to working and succeeding with the local government system. In continuance of the development of the local government system, the Government seeks the agreement of the Members of this honourable House to this Draft Order, as amended, to facilitate the further development of local government.

I beg to move.

Thank you.

Question proposed.

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are indeed living in exciting times. I am very happy to see you with a smile on your face because one of your predecessors faced house arrest some years ago, and sometimes I get worried that if you make a ruling that is not in favour of the other side, somebody can report you and a criminal charge can be brought against you, and the House would not have a chance to adjudicate with respect to your impeachment; it might be done in public and that certainly worries me.

I raise this in the context of the independence of the institutions, such as the Elections and Boundaries Commission. I congratulate my hon. friend, Sen. Dumas, on presenting a matter of fact presentation to the House today, but I am very concerned that we have in Trinidad and Tobago, institutions of the State that are either laws unto themselves or not independent and subject to interference by the political arm of the State.

I think that it is very important for us as a Parliament to begin to seriously look at changes in our Constitution to reflect the current realities of Trinidad and Tobago 40 years after independence. I know that it can be an extremely painful matter for members of the public to have politicians comment—and in some cases, in very serious ways—about the people who occupy positions that are supposed to make them independent. One such institution is the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

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I recall when the PNM was on a rampage against the Elections and Boundaries Commission, that the current chairman, Dr. Norbert Masson, resigned as a member of the Commission, and I recall when the matter was either resolved or the PNM came to office, Dr. Masson was appointed as chairman of the Commission. It can be argued that it is the President of the Republic who makes these appointments, but I think if one were to look at or to listen to the people of this country, even the appointment of the President of the Republic has its shortcomings as stated in the Constitution.

We as parliamentarians have been robbed of our powers. We as elected officials have to depend on people who are not elected to make very important decisions, over which we have no control, but we are accountable to the population. And this population always tends—because of lack of information—to blame elected politicians for the problems which surface from time to time in the country. I am not aware that there is a Minister responsible for the Elections and Boundaries Commission. It can be said, well because it is independent there is no Minister responsible for that Commission. So that my honourable friend is really in no position to defend what the Elections and Boundaries Commission has submitted to the Parliament. What the Parliament can do is to look at the report and decide whether it wishes to accept or reject the report. I know of no instance when this Parliament—and I repeat in my 20 long years here, longer than the Member for Diego Martin Central if I wish to—

Mr. Valley: I am 20 years here.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You are not here 20 years.

Mr. Valley: I am here 20 years, you cannot count.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He has a real problem, but I have done that deliberately to provoke some comments, I see he is looking very sad today. Somebody may report him to the Prime Minister and Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) will be looking for him somewhere in Diego Martin; that is how it works, but I do not want to lose focus.

There is no Minister who has any responsibility for these so-called independent bodies. So that the EBC can on its own, do a number of acrobatic things; come to the Parliament, and there is no policy in place even at the level of the Cabinet or the Parliament to do anything about what these folks are doing at the EBC. I recall the Member for Diego Martin East in another incarnation, being

one of the vociferous objectors to the EBC at the time when he was in Opposition. I do not want to get into the matters he raised because in every case the hon. Member for Diego Martin East was totally misinformed and sought to misinform the public about the performance of the EBC.

Now the question is, what transformation has taken place at the Elections and Boundaries Commission that would have corrected the ills reported by my honourable friend from Diego Martin East and those people who went before the Commission? And the answer is nothing. They went after the Chief Executive Officer—I think he is still there. They went after members of the Commission—some of them are still there. They recommended certain changes based on their own conclusion that there was corruption, and I am not aware of any major initiatives to correct what they consider to be wrongs. So that ever so often the same Commission, this so-called independent Commission, appointed by his Excellency the President, will send a report to us in anticipation of an election. In this case it is the local government elections.

I think it is very important that the Prime Minister himself—because he gets involved in so many unimportant things. If I am reported by my junior, there is a procedure, the junior could go before his employer; his employer could be the Judicial and Legal Service Commission; he can go there and say, listen, I have been intimidated by my superior, but they run to police, Attorney General, DPP and Prime Minister. Some of these people, like the Prime Minister, are so willing to accept news.

Dr. Rowley: Good news.

Mr. K. Ramnath: When the news about you goes to him, you look out, the police would be on your back. Especially when the recommendation of Justice Annetine Sealy is put into operation and the recommendation of revisiting the Larceny Act. [*Crosstalk*] Two of them are already before the courts from that side.

Dr. Rowley: My name is Panday. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon Members, I think the Member is about to come back to the order, just give him a chance to do that, please. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: My name is Panday.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not going to be perturbed by the noises coming from the other side. The point I am making, Mr. Speaker, is that instead of focus being placed on strengthening these institutions, of having greater parliamentary

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control, of putting an end to this colonial system which we inherited, which was perhaps appropriate at the time of independence, we continue to support the existence of this antediluvian models of Government. There is no attempt even in the context of 2020 to modernize the institutions that govern the country. So you can expect news carrying, you can expect character assassination, you can expect all kinds of statements coming through the media and so on, because it is the only form of expression of the public and the journalists in the country.

So here is the EBC without any transformation taking place within that institution, back to us again via the hon. Minister, to tell us that we are now ready with our boundaries for local government elections, if and when these elections are called. I want to give them the assurance that we are ready anytime you want to call elections. [*Desk thumping*] Anytime. Notwithstanding current media events, we are ready because we are confident that this population is fed up with an incompetent administration. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, Mr. Speaker, a URP worker gets \$550 a fortnight, after he pays national insurance and health surcharge. Food prices have skyrocketed by over 40 per cent. Those are not my figures, go ask the people who shop for food. I am in the habit of pushing a trolley every weekend in the supermarket, unlike many of you. I believe in equality, so I help with shopping.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Help whom?

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Member for Arouca South wants to know my business but I must congratulate her for her new look, extremely charming.

Mr. Sharma: Today is her birthday.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Today is her birthday? Oh, happy birthday. Happy birthday to the Member for Arouca South. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Let me get back. My friend, the mover of the Motion, is responsible for the URP programme, he understands the pain. He understands the fact that a lot of these people have no job security; that it is a programme designed to alleviate poverty. But in this period, we are employing tens of thousands of people in the poverty alleviation programme and they earn below the minimum wage. My understanding is that the minimum wage is \$9 an hour. My understanding is that the Government is breaking the law, by paying URP workers \$8 an hour.

Mr. Imbert: You are wrong.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am right. My understanding also, is that we have a large number of people who depend on casual labour in the corporations across the country, temporary employment, very large numbers. The corporations are having extreme difficulty in meeting the needs of the citizens of the country because a lot of the money allocated to local government is spent on labour.

Here we have a wealthy nation and I am not talking about the phenomenon of US \$70 a barrel of oil. I am talking about relatively high oil prices, which have perpetuated over the last few years. I am talking about a government, which has at its disposal a US \$6 billion budget, and at the same time, I am talking about an impoverished country, in which the majority of people are ekeing out a living, trying to find employment in make-work programmes.

I want to say, at the same time, that despite the efforts of the hon. Minister—and I know he has been making efforts, we have been speaking as well—there is need for major institutional changes in local government. That is why they do not stand a chance of winning even a local government election, because they have failed the population. [*Desk thumping*] I know he is an appointed Minister, and therefore does not take a very active political role. He is probably best fit to be the chairman of the Tobago House of Assembly, but I know that his party leader will not give him that opportunity, because he is an intellectually independent man. [*Crosstalk*] I deliberately pause because I know my friend from Diego Martin West knows that I am speaking the truth. I know that. There is no room for intelligent Tobagonians at the highest level of government in this country, once that party is in power.

Dr. Rowley: You want to expose bacchanal now, you find you do not have enough home.

Mr. K. Ramnath: So, Mr. Speaker, let me substantiate what I am saying. All of this, hundreds of pages before us, the amount of money we spent to print this and circulate must be enormous. You know what it tells us? We are going to increase the number of seats in Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite by one; Sangre Grande, one and Tunapuna/Piarco, one seat. That is what is happening. But the Minister knows that under the development programme, these corporations get between \$1 million and \$3 million a year. When you look at the absence of infrastructure, particularly in the rural areas, that \$1 million to \$3 million that they get is not sufficient to even construct a footpath of any considerable distance.

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The Minister added to that a further \$5 million last year to each corporation under various programmes to improve drainage and infrastructure. He knows that it is costing \$1 billion to build a tsunami shelter in Tarouba, what they call a stadium. You know a country with five, I think, stadiums?

Hon. Member: Stadia.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not know about the English plural or the Latin. I am trained in American; I speak English. I was trained abroad. [*Crosstalk*]

Eight hundred and fifty million dollars to build a stadium and the infrastructure is either rotting or non-existent in Trinidad.

Hon. Member: No water. [*Crosstalk*]

2.30 p.m.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Member for Siparia had to come here with a petition—a very unusual move—to highlight the plight of people in the Penal/Debe region. I have worked there; I have lived there and I know the difficulties, but we spend this inordinate sum of money to make a point. Build all the houses in San Fernando East, [*Interruption*] they built some in San Fernando West and I think they are still abandoned and so on.

Hon. Member: I thought we only built it in marginal constituencies.

Mr. K. Ramnath: In Circular Road; I pass there every morning. So build a stadium in San Fernando East; make sure that I win elections for life and leave the people in the rural and urban centres, not only in the rural centres, without basic facilities.

I know, Mr. Speaker, when you were a representative of San Fernando West the difficulties you had in providing some basic infrastructure in places like Palmiste and so on; half the boulevard was impassable. We have a problem; we have a chronic problem of rotting infrastructure and non-existent infrastructure, but we do not have the system in this country to manage the problems that we have from day to day. People have to burn tyres and block roads before the Member for Diego Martin East responds. He has not even developed a system to educate the public with respect to what kind of resources are available in the various regions of the country so that citizens can go there and have redress.

Where there are Ministry of Works sub-offices, they are in a dilapidated condition and people tell you, at those stations, that they take instructions from Port of Spain. [*Interruption*] Here is a loquacious and sometimes belligerent

Minister who wants to find out why these are people complaining; he has this genetic, colonial mentality, almost genetic— *[Laughter]*

Mr. Imbert: It is in my DNA?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, it is in your DNA—of refusing to listen to the plight of poor citizens.

Dr. Moonilal: A sort of imbecility.

Mr. K. Ramnath: So that the first thing that should have been done with local government—with the greatest deference to my honourable friend, the Minister—was to have created the institutions within the system to serve the public in a very meaningful way, and those institutions, if there are any changes, those changes are very slow in coming.

Mr. Speaker, the vast amount of money allocated to local government is really spent in keeping people employed at the managerial and supervisory level and it is not getting to the public. All of the rural roads in this country, despite the best efforts of the most successful administration this country ever had between 1995 and 2001 *[Desk thumping]* in trying to rehabilitate the rural roads in the country, no follow up has taken place. As a result, we are back to a deteriorating situation with respect to these kinds of situations.

In short, Mr. Speaker, local government has failed the population. *[Desk thumping]* And I agree with the Minister that it is very important and it needs deepening and strengthening. I agree with him totally, but nothing is happening. We are still operating local government as we did a long time ago when we referred to those politicians as standpipe and street light politicians. In fact, the focus of the local government representative is still now about standpipe and street light except they are assured that they have plenty street lights available; now let us come together and see how we can get some for our areas.

Mr. Sharma: Street lights for all.

Dr. Rowley: What areas? Everybody is getting.

Mr. Sharma: No, not everybody is getting. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: He does not understand what I am saying. I am saying that that continues to be the focus of the local government politician, because their institutions are still archaic.

Hon. Member: They need transformation.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am very happy and I will say it publicly with the street lighting programme; I am extremely happy. [*Interruption*] I believe that a lot has been done, but that was not being done by local government. That is an initiative of central government and the Prime Minister knows very well it is not because a local government corporation has approached to get that budget; that budget is not really local government. But despite that—I do not want to get involve in these matters—I am saying it is not right and fair for people in this period of our time and people who are talking about 2020 Vision to be focusing on truck-borne water supply.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Rainwater.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Rainwater. I always congratulate my friend from Caroni East for the job that he did when he was Minister to provide this country with a desalination plant that compensated—[*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Water for all. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: They have done nothing! [*Crosstalk*] All they do is to hound down people with the hope that they could find something to take them to court. [*Interruption*] They do not say, let us be thankful that we have this additional capacity, and the importance of that additional capacity was demonstrated when the plant went down and the whole of south Trinidad was without water. [*Interruption*] So why do they not do something better? They have no ideas. Their job is to continue to find fault; they have spent five years in government criticizing the UNC and had no time to do anything for the country.

Dr. Rowley: You believe that boy?

Hon. Member: It is true! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: No time to do anything for the country. There is no evidence, Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*] that the quality of life of the people of this country has improved. [*Crosstalk*] There is no evidence—they are busy cutting down land and giving contracts to their friends to build houses in order to voter pad. They are not satisfied with the role of the EBC in trying to have boundaries which are based on the existing population; they want boundaries based on their housing programme designed to pad the voters' list. But I would deal with that! I found the Prime Minister to be extremely discourteous coming to the back of my office in Couva and touring the housing and did not have the courtesy to say: "Would you like to come along? This is happening in your constituency". That is the extent to which they have degenerated.

Dr. Rowley: How many times had you invited us when you were in office?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I was not in Government.

Hon. Members: Ooh! [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: And I do not apologize, Mr. Speaker. I take my pressure when I get it; when I get into government I will not give anyone pressure. [*Laughter*] I will be very generous, [*Interruption*] even to you because I know you will be in the opposition when the next election is called, I have no doubt. The intelligent people in this country [*Interruption*] are observing your behaviour.

Hon. Member: They are voting for a crook?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, and internationally your behaviour is being observed, [*Interruption*] as a man who has the tendency to become a megalomaniac. [*Interruption*] You can see.

Hon. Member: Or Robert Mugabe.

Dr. Rowley: I spent six years in opposition and I never got invited to anything yet.

Mr. K. Ramnath: This is not about penalizing people. We have to be magnanimous in the interest of the country's development, and if somebody did not give you something at that time it does not mean to say that you are going to have a deliberate policy of victimization.

Mr. Valley: Not tit for tat?

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, you are right.

Mr. Valley: Turn the other cheek.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Absolutely! Let me say that the focus has not been in local government because they do not wish to give the Opposition-controlled corporations the kind of powers that will make them look as amateurs. I guarantee this country that if the appropriate budget is given to local government bodies, even PNM-controlled local government bodies will embarrass the central government. Because therein exists a number of very dedicated politicians—grass roots people—who have contact with the people.

I feel very badly when my friend goes to visit, even a PNM area, that there is so much anger, as was reported in the newspaper very recently; anger, because—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I just wish to assure the Member for Couva South, when I visited the EMBD projects recently in central Trinidad no anger was in evidence. In fact, I think he should know that we were received with very open arms.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: He was talking to your Minister.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I was really speaking to the hon. Minister of Local Government, [*Interruption*] but I will tell you something, he has not seen anything yet and I hope there is no anger, because they took away the lands from the people; they took away their jobs in a most vicious way; [*Interruption*] they promised the sugar workers that they would get a lot of land, now they are saying that they have to pay \$67,000 for it; they continually change the conditions.

Mr. Valley: No, that has always been so. [*Interruption*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: You do not know.

Mr. Valley: Of course I know! [*Crosstalk*]

[*Mr. Valley rises*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not giving way to him; he can reply to me. [*Laughter*] He just does not know.

Mr. Valley: I know! I started it. Ask the then Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You know, Mr. Speaker, I did not want to go into this, but for the edification of the Prime Minister, it was agreed to give certain people two acres of land for cultivation—lease. The conditions of the lease are onerous. [*Interruption*] They want you to plant two acres of watermelon but you must not be able to put up a single dwelling house to protect your watermelon.

Hon. Member: Oh lord! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: So you must come from Penal, go to Waterloo, plant your two acres and leave it there; before the seeds even germinate they would steal the seeds.

Dr. Rowley: Who will steal the seeds?

Mr. Imbert: Who, you will steal it? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: The people. [*Interruption*] You understand what is annoying them? What is annoying them is that it is not sufficient—

Mr. Rahael: They cannot take it.

Hon. Member: Who say we cannot take it?

Mr. K. Ramnath:—for them to have control of 77,000 acres of land, they want to make sure that you cannot even erect a board house on the land.

Hon. Member: But they cannot erect a house. *[Interruption]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: Then, Mr. Speaker, they allocate—*[Interruption]* You will have your chance. You “buss them Indian throat.” Not so? *[Laughter]* You stood up in Jenny’s Wok and you say you “buss” the Indian throat. You are a racist! That is what you are. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. K. Ramnath: I withdraw that statement.

Mr. Speaker: And strike it off the record too, please.

[By order of the Chair, remarks withdrawn]

Mr. K. Ramnath: I become very upset that you tell people, “here is your two-acre plot” and then subsequently, you say to them, “we have changed our minds”.

Hon. Member: No. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes! *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, that is the reality, and I would tell you what. Hon. Christine Sahadeo went and visited the workers and said, “alternative uses will be made of the plots that you have been given; you now must move from Phoenix Park, Esperanza and Couva and you must go down to Waterloo and Felicity”. They do not even know that. A meeting was held by the hon. Minister. I met with all those people at a subsequent meeting to make representation to the Minister, because they have changed the plan; they did not have the decency to inform the workers. They said that if you do not show up now for a new draw, an accounting firm will do it for you. *[Interruption]* These are people who are talking about the local people not being angry about what is happening, but I will return to local government, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]*

[Some of the Government Ministers got up and went to the back]

This Ministry—they are now having a Cabinet meeting there.

Mr. Sharma: They are having a caucus; give them a chance.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: They now decide they have to respond.

Mr. K. Ramnath: They have to respond, yes.

Mr. Valley: We will respond.

Mr. Sharma: They are deciding how to respond.

Mr. K. Ramnath: So that I was referring to a visit by the Prime Minister with his friend, Mr. Rao, this enigmatic Uthara Rao, this very interesting character, but I will meet with him at the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

Hon. Member: What will you do, beat him? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: He would have to report because he runs this business all by himself, and when charges are made with respect to his public conduct they pay off the people who brought the charges, so that Mr. Rao is not the victim. Do you know some people, they have threatened to remove from office? Yes.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Resign or be charged.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Resign or be charged, but in other cases they are protected. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, they are advertising a lot of Caroni land for \$375,000 in Bank Village? One lot! The lands that were taken away from people are now being sold, prepared preferentially to the lots which are supposed to be distributed free of charge as part of the VSEP package.

Mr. Imbert: Rubbish!

Mr. Speaker: I think you are just short on about 10 more minutes of your original 45 minutes and I am sure you have a lot to say on the Order, so let us get back there, please.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You know, Mr. Speaker, these housing estates are going to be intricately involved with local government. [*Interruption*] They have no permission from the Town and Country Planning Division, they have just entered upon the lands. They have submitted no plans [*Interruption*] to the local government bodies that have a responsibility—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: They are completely bypassed.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—for reviewing their projects; their drainage projects, their sanitation projects and so forth. I think the Minister had a stint in Public Utilities at one time. There is not a single sewer plant in this country that is functioning efficiently. All the sewage is going down in the rivers, and so on, across the country; no maintenance, and so on. What is going to happen in these huge housing estates that are being developed? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Each one will have its own sewerage treatment plant.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Each one will have its own sewerage treatment plant, then nobody maintains it, then , according to the law, says: “Well, we have to take it over; but we have no money to maintain these plants”, and they are left there to deteriorate and create a public nuisance.

Hon. Member: So we must do nothing?

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, what you must do is to plan properly.

Mr. Manning: How long that was so?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Years!

Mr. Manning: Years?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes. You were in Government since 1956. We had a short spell and we did better than you did in 40 years. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Rowley: So why did you lose the election?

Mr. K. Ramnath: The evidence is there and when you decide to call an election you will see the evidence. [*Laughter*] Yes. [*Interruption*] I have calculated that we will win by a minimum of 21 seats when the next election is called. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: That is experience speaking. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Job-Davis: How much of that from Tobago?

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, I am talking about the general election. Your days are numbered.

Hon. Member: That is experience. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: You would be surprised to know, Mr. Speaker, how many of the persons they think that will vote for them will cast them aside like a demon and a spirit.

Hon. Member: Benny Hinn! [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: You would be surprised! They are looking at your arrogance, and you must remember when you lost the last election, it was arrogance displayed publicly that resulted in your defeat. You are not reading the gospel.

Hon. Member: The gospel according to Luke.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I read the Bible. I am a Christian. Like the Speaker, we belong to the Presbyterian Church. *[Laughter]*

Hon. Member: Quote anything from the Bible; quote anything from it.

Mr. Imbert: “Thou shall not lie.”

Mr. K. Ramnath: I will quote him 1st Corinthians, Chap. 13, Sir: *[Laughter]* “He is nothing but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.” *[Desk thumping]* *[Laughter]*

Hon. Member: Take that! You walked into that, so take that. *[Laughter]* *[Interruption]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am happy I can bring some peace to his soul. *[Interruption]* I am happy I can do that. But I want to make the point that you are expanding, Mr. Minister, the responsibilities of local government *[Interruption]* and you are not giving them the money to perform their additional role; they do not have the technical staff to do it; the administrative staff is lacking; you have CEOs who behave as they are a law unto themselves, who have no respect for the elected representative; who control the employment programmes in such a way that it does not reflect the needs of the community.

We need a total overhaul, and that is what I am saying. As the public service, indeed, needs a total overhaul, the local government institutions need a total overhaul. And instead of coming here to increase the number of seats, what you should do is to really put this through a shredder and say to yourself, “I am giving you, the Parliament, a few months, after which I shall come and bring some major recommendations for changes in the system of local government.” I live in Couva, Mr. Speaker, and the Couva Main Road which is a secondary road today, is not under the control of the local government body. Part of one road is under local government and as you drive a little further it comes under the Ministry of Works and Transport. *[Interruption]*

We are being told that there will be a highways authority; we have not seen that. All I am saying is that no one is sure what the role and function of local government really ought to be. It is something historical; it is something traditional and we just add some money because of the high cost of running government to the bodies on an ongoing basis.

We need to get value for money, and we are not getting value for money; we are not even getting the money to do the job. If you are in contact with local representatives you will hear them at every meeting talking about some piece of

road that needs to be fixed. They have no time. I would love to see a town hall in a place like Couva. I would love to see, Mr. Speaker, a museum; I would love to see a library. There is no library. They rent a little room at a little mall there. We had a library in Couva. That has disappeared. Just put the Internet service in the library. *[Interruption]* But all of that is part of local government, to provide services to the local people.

I am also saying to you that local people cannot go to local government offices and even be treated with dignity. That service is not there. It is someone working there who feels that you should not be there. So we need a whole philosophical change in the approach to this kind of government, where people matter more. And it is time that we tell the institutions of the State that this belongs to the people; the roads belong to the people; the parks belong to the people and the government belongs to the people, rather than make people feel uncomfortable, that they cannot even go to an institution and be treated properly. I regret that year after year we come to the Parliament with these reports, simply because it is mandatory that we should come and have these boundaries adjusted and so forth.

I want to know, Mr. Speaker, what kind of Elections and Boundaries Commission will set up a corporation that starts in Talparo; that is Arima, ends in the Gulf of Paria on the outskirts of Chaguanas; proceeds south to the mouth of the Guaracara River and then goes east along the Guaracara River, and that corporation gets \$1 million in development funds per year.

Hon. Member: Why are you so ignorant?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Look at the land mass, 350,000 people, seven times the population of Tobago. We now have to call for equity with Tobago.

Mrs. Job-Davis: How Tobago come in your story?

Mr. K. Ramnath: There is now discrimination against Trinidad by their Government, where—I am happy for the Tobagonians. Do not misunderstand me.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Thank you very much. *[Inaudible]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: Now you see, the PNM has to give them what they want because those two Members would defect. *[Crosstalk]*

Miss Seukeran: Back to Tobago.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Although you know, of course, who calls the shots in Tobago. But the point I am making is, I am happy for Tobago. That model should

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be used in Trinidad, without, of course, the additional powers given to the Assembly to represent the national government. I am talking about the infrastructural arrangements and so on.

Mr. Valley: That model should be used in Trinidad.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes. We do not have to give the Trinidad organization the same powers over, say, schools and so on that they now handle, but I am talking about in terms of infrastructural development.

Mr. Manning: You know what you are saying?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, I know what I am saying. I am a practising engineer, you know. I am not like you. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Manning: Please, do not be so insensitive.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not unkind. You are a practising politician. [*Laughter*] I am talking here about someone who is intimately connected with people. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Who am I connected with?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Do not let me have the cause to tell you that. You need some spiritual cleansing. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Manning: That is the classic of the year; I need spiritual cleansing. [*Interruption*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: Your deeds will tell, not words that cometh out of your mouth.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying, here is Tobago with 50,000 people—and I am not saying that is the only measurement and criterion; I am saying, the model has worked very well and that model was developed under the leadership of the former President, ANR Robinson—

Hon. Member: What model are you talking about?

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Tobago House of Assembly. I was in the Parliament when this Parliament approved the Tobago House of Assembly Bill.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Yes, he is correct.

Mr. K. Ramnath: And it was a Motion moved by Mr. ANR Robinson to grant Tobago internal self-government and the Member—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Couva South has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. P. Manning*]

Question put and agreed to.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I get disturbed from time to time.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: No, he likes the advice of spiritual cleansing.

Mr. K. Ramnath: But I am also saying that the major changes which occurred in local government, occurred under a UNC government. Now—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Which year was that?

Mr. K. Ramnath:—and under the former NAR government. I was there for a short while. When I was in the government, it was a time when the country had an energy minister. [*Laughter*] Let me return to the subject, Mr. Speaker. We cannot have a meaningful local government body from Arima with boundaries stretching from Arima to Marabella and from Chaguanas to Tabaquite.

Mr. Manning: What are you saying?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Three hundred and fifty thousand people with a very large number of roads.

Hon. Member: Bad roads.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Bad roads. The road network through the central range is horrible. They do not have the money to fix these roads, so that in today's modern world we are still using oil sand and pitch from the Pitch Lake to fix potholes in some of those areas. In many cases those roads are inaccessible. When I drive from Couva to Tabaquite, it is one of the most scenic drives that you can have through Gran Couva, La Vega, Brasso, Tabaquite up to Rio Claro, something that we should treasure; the vegetation, the coffee houses, the estates and so on. We are not going to keep any of those estates. People are buying out those estates, cutting up in five-acre plots and selling them for people to own houses, because there are no agricultural access roads maintenance programmes that are working in these corporations. So what we are saying, if you go to San Juan/Laventille and

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you go to Diego Martin and you go to—in San Fernando, the Mayor, His Honour—I think they call him—Mayor Artherly said he was a ceremonial idiot.
[Laughter]

You know, Mr. Speaker, from the response on the other side, they are confirming that view. But I am not saying that he is right, I am saying what he is saying, “I have no control, I go to functions”.

Mr. Manning: He did not say that.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He said that publicly, ask him. All he does is go to public functions in his capacity as mayor, but he does not have the resources, so that the burgesses of San Fernando—

Mr. Manning: Citizens.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—can benefit from them. Because these people in central government, want to control everything from Port of Spain. Share the money and hold people accountable. Set up— [Interruption]

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Is the hon. Member for Couva South suggesting that there should be a decentralization of functions from central government to local government? Is that what he is saying?

Mr. K. Ramnath: That has been the story of devolution or decentralization. Yes, I am saying both.

Mr. Manning: Both?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, you need to have a bit of both. Mr. Speaker, for example, as I have said there are some functions currently performed by central government which were historical and need not be. I do not want the Minister of highways to be responsible for fixing some back road or a bridge or something like that. That is the function of the local government; it can be done.

Mr. Manning: On whose authority?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Well, in the absence of any authority, let us talk about what exists today. You will talk about a road’s authority today and it would take you another 20 years and you would not be there. You see, that is your tragedy. So if even you have ambitions, you would not be there. So I am saying yes, you must have decentralization. I am saying you ought to have an administrative complex in Couva, one in Rio Claro and one as you have probably in Tunapuna and all over, people can go there and can be properly served. Yes, I am saying

that as well. But I am also saying that you are giving enormous responsibilities to these bodies and you are not giving them the technical support or the financial support. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, am I correct in saying therefore that the hon. Member for Couva South is also saying that local government bodies must have a new administrative structure? Is that correct?

Mr. K. Ramnath: In order to prevent him from rising so often, I think you should shut it down and restructure it. Well, that may not be possible. Yes, I agree, you should have a completely different administrative structure; it must be based on some new philosophy and the philosophy of serving people. How best can we serve the needs of people and what are the needs of people? Let us identify through a process. The Minister is an expert in these matters, he is an MBA graduate and consultant and so forth, he knows what I am talking about. But this ad hoc arrangement of adding bits and pieces is not working and I am saying no matter—You know what amazes me is that there is a big debate whether they should build wooden bridges in Penal/Debe. In this modern age, wooden bridges is a big debate between concrete and steel bridges and they have to build the wooden bridges because for them it is cheaper to do so and repair the existing bridges, in modern Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the wonders of this country is the Godineau Swamp, the lagoon area; it is beautiful country. If you drive through Woodland and La Fortune, up to Timital and so on; I go there because pipelines are running there, we have operations and so on. It has to be preserved. It is a very important ecological—

Mr. Manning: San Francique.

Mr. K. Ramnath: San Francique, yes. You know San Francique?

Mr. Manning: Yes. I know Timital, too.

Mr. K. Ramnath: And if you go through some of those areas, you would understand the difficulty MPs have with respect to accessibility. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Especially behind the rural areas.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not want to talk about La Brea, Mr. Speaker. I think the Member for La Brea wants me to say a few words for him. I will come to that. And similarly in La Brea, the Pitch Lake is a place where a lot of people go, and when you go there, you ask yourself sometimes, how come there is not a service

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for the public? There is no service. One of the wonders of the world and so on and so forth, a place where my friend from La Brea goes to rejuvenate himself by taking a swim in the sulphur ponds; I understand that there are certain aphrodisiac [*Laughter*] benefits—

Mr. Manning: No longer necessary.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Prime Minister is saying it is no longer necessary for the Member for La Brea [*Laughter*] —anyway, but you understand what I am saying—

Mr. Manning: The strength but not the design.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—that aspect of tourism should lie with local government. That can be a form of decentralization, where that aspect of the Ministry of Tourism can go to local government. So let me say that I have said enough and made enough recommendations with respect to what I think ought to be done. But it is a sad day for this country when the Government is talking about a vision for developed country status and we still have in this country dilapidated roads and public buildings; facilities non-existent for the public; social services.

Mr. Speaker, I do not understand for example, why social services could not be a local government function in the rural areas. It is very important. Somebody gets their house burned down and so on, you go through one tedious process to have to get somebody from the Prime Minister's office. The Prime Minister's office gives out hampers: sardine, onion and these things, when it could be done by your local government ministry.

Mr. Manning: It is done there too.

Mr. K. Ramnath: And it is not done. It is not done and I am not saying that they are not spending money trying to create opportunities for the poor and indigent and dispossessed, I am saying that it can be more efficient if you put more of these things under the authority of the local people. That is all I am saying. Leave energy policy and highways and education and defence and these things for Port of Spain. Let the Prime Minister and his Cabinet focus on a lot of these larger issues, but the issues that affect people on a daily basis must form part of the administration of local government. I do not think I can say anymore.

As I have said, Members of this Parliament who have been here for a long time would tell you that this is nothing new. This debate has taken place since Independence, except that we are not seeing any manifestation of statements made in the past.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I really thank the hon. Member for Couva South for giving way again. I do not know if, perhaps, this question is more appropriately put to the Member for Siparia. Would the Members of the Opposition be prepared to sit with the Members of the Government to discuss local government policy? Would you be prepared to do that?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Well, as you know I am junior and I cannot speak on behalf of the Opposition, but I can tell you, I am prepared to sit because I think it is worth it. But then I do not trust the Prime Minister.

Dr. Moonilal: Who can?

Mr. K. Ramnath: You know he has been inviting me to be part of an energy committee which he has not even yet—

Hon. Member: Formed.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not know how long, 20 years?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Kelvin, he invited the Chief Justice and then he said resign or be charged.

Mr. K. Ramnath: So you know, it is no point you say, let us have a discussion on policy. He has invited me several times to become a member of a committee on energy and I said I am prepared to condescend to serving with you on that committee, but nothing has happened.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: You know a man of my humility, I am surprised that you would say that. So Mr. Speaker, I want to wind up at this stage. I agree with the Minister that there must be deepening and strengthening of the institution. I want the Minister today, to say to this Parliament one or two things if it is possible that can bring hope to people, rather than saying, let us approve this Order, we would have elections. It is difficult for even you on the other side and— [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: You are afraid of elections.

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, I am not afraid.

Mr. Imbert: Ooooh!

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am calling for it because in the absence of anything that is happening in the country it is better we have elections, and let us put control in the hands of those people who can run a country.

Dr. Moonilal: Those on this side.

Mr. K. Ramnath: But what I am saying—

Mr. Manning: If you all ask for it, you might get it.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am always prepared. I have been through—

Mr. Manning: Thick and thin.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, I have been through everything.

Mr. Manning: Thick and thin.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Both on that side and on this side. So the Minister should at least tell the Parliament—I am constantly being disturbed by—they should put him as the Minister of Local Government, that Member for Diego Martin East.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: He is going to speak now.

Dr. Moonilal: He has failed in several ministries.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: He used to be there but he could not make it.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes, but I am in a charitable mood this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath: Let me say, give the country some hope that before an election—because the calling of an election is in your hands—that they can expect that after a local government election, if it is called, because I know that you are afraid to call an election. I have no doubt with your performance today, that you are going to postpone that election and hope to have a general election beforehand because a defeat for you in local election would signal to the country you would not win the general election and that has been the tradition.

But in the event that you intend to call a local election before, tell the country, give them some hope that we can see some major changes in the policy and attitude of Government, so that the poor people—it is only the poor people that go to local government, only the poor. The rich people do not have to go through these processes. The rich people have ways. They dine with the Prime Minister; they walk with him in Palmiste and so on, or wherever he walks.

Mr. Manning: Oh, you are changing. For the record, Mr. Speaker, I have never walked in Palmiste; just for the record.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Well, then his friends in Palmiste have been misinforming me. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: But he is at the Petrotrin compound.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Is poor people. I am saying to you that it is the poor people who go to local government. They go for work; they go to have their drains cleaned. Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker, people having to line up for cesspit cleaning of their outhouses and so on in modern day Trinidad and Tobago and there is a backlog even for a service like that? There are too many ills that have to be corrected and I am saying to you, that although I do not have much faith that anything will happen, at least I feel that if you make a special effort, you can do a lot more in the next budget for people who need these services.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having listened to the Member for Couva South, difficult as it was, little, if anything, that he said was true and this appears to be a strategy nowadays, that you just say the most outrageous things. [*Interruption*] You say the most outrageous, ridiculous, untrue things and just hope that people would not find out what the truth is. In fact, the only thing the Member for Couva South said that was true is that he is junior and that is true.

Hon. Member: Very true.

Hon. C. Imbert: He is extremely junior and that is why he cannot be the Chief Whip; that is why he cannot be the Leader of the Opposition and so on. He is extremely junior. But the thing is—Mr. Speaker, I heard sotto voce that he is not aspiring. Every time there is a vacancy on the other side, you open the papers “Ramnath is going to be the new Chief Whip”, then the next day he “gone” through. “Ramnath is the favourite for the Opposition Leader”, next day he “gone” through.

Mr. Speaker, do not worry with him, he is always going to be jilted at the altar. Always jilted at the altar!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Personal attacks.

Hon. C. Imbert: What is wrong with personal attacks? The man talked about my DNA. So let us move on, Mr. Speaker. [*Laughter*] You know, Mr. Speaker, what amazes me in this country, is one rule for them and another rule for us. They could talk all the rubbish they want on that side, a tissue of untruths and stupidity

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and we must stand up here and say they are right. Well, Mr. Speaker, I have no intention of allowing that to occur.

Mr. Valley: He talked about your DNA?

Hon. C. Imbert: The man talked about my DNA and now telling me I cannot make personal attacks. I very well will, too.

I listened very, very carefully to what the Member for Couva South said, I took notes, difficult as it was and I think it is necessary to deal with the issues one by one. Because what we had today was just a plethora of wild, unconnected, disjointed allegations without any substance whatsoever, and let us go through them one by one.

He complains that the Prime Minister is listening to news carriers. I mean somewhere inside of this local government thing he “chook” that in, that the Prime Minister is listening to news carriers and that juniors must go to seniors and they must not go to the Prime Minister; you just throw that inside there as if all of us stupid. As the Prime Minister said earlier, the hon. Prime Minister, he made a statement last year and he outlined the process and the Member for Couva South knows what the law is. He knows what the procedure is with respect to certain matters. He knows in a particular case of a particular individual holding a particular office in this country, there is a constitutional procedure that must be followed and there is no other procedure. It is not what the Member for Couva South makes up; what he would like the country to believe; what the Member for Siparia would like the country to believe, that if a junior person feels aggrieved, he could go to his senior. Absolute rubbish! There is a process in the country, it is in the Constitution and it is being followed. So that is the first piece of rubbish that he uttered.

Mr. Ramnath: What you are talking about, I do not recall—

Hon. C. Imbert: Well, I know what I am talking about, that is the first piece of rubbish that he uttered. The other piece of nonsense is that the Government is breaking the law by paying URP workers below the minimum wage, knowing full well that URP workers do not work a full eight-hour day. When we have done the calculations, URP workers are in fact getting above the minimum wage, and the whole country knows that; the whole country, except the Member for Couva South, of course. You just decide to do a daily wage. The people working five and six hours, but you decide to calculate it on the basis of eight hours and all of us on this side stupid and we must listen to you with your nonsense.

Let us go on to the next thing. The Member for Couva South complained that persons in Trinidad and Tobago in order to get their roads fixed have to burn tyres in order to get the attention—

Mr. Ramnath: I said before you—

Hon. C. Imbert: I am reading what you said, that persons in this country in order to get their roads fixed have to burn tyres to catch the attention of the Minister of Works and Transport.

Mr. Ramnath: Yes, that is right.

Hon. C. Imbert: You agreed that is what you have said.

Mr. Ramnath: Yes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Fine. And I watched television this week and I saw persons in the constituency of Couva North, complaining about road conditions in that constituency, protesting, burning tyres, et cetera. I saw it on the television and I listened very carefully to what they said and by no stretch of the imagination when I looked at the people and I heard what they said, could these people be considered to be PNM activists. By no stretch of the imagination could they be considered to be PNM activists.

Mr. Ramnath: How you know that?

Hon. C. Imbert: I looked at them. I looked at them carefully, and it is clear to me these are bona fide residents of the Couva North constituency, villagers who have been living there for years, people from the community. That is obvious to me, whether it is the office of the hon. Member Couva South or not. And you know what they said, not the rubbish that the Member for Couva South has put on the *Hansard* record, they said, “We in Couva North, we have no Member of Parliament”—

Dr. Rowley: He is in jail.

Hon. C. Imbert: “—we have no MP; we have no representation and the regional corporation which happens to be the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation which is controlled by the UNC, is a waste of time.”

Dr. Rowley: That is what they said.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is what they said and I want to repeat it, the persons who are protesting about the poor road conditions in Couva North; the villagers who have lived there all their lives, and if we go statistically would unbalance the

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supporters of the UNC, say, “We have no MP; we have no representation and the regional corporation, the UNC corporation is a waste of time.”

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I have heard it.

Hon. C. Imbert: And having said that, they said because, “We have no MP”, which happens to be the Member for Couva North; “because we have no representation”, which happen to be the Members opposite; “because the regional corporation is a waste of time”, which happens to be a UNC corporation, “we are calling on the Minister of Works to intervene and give us proper representation and deal with our issues”. [*Desk thumping*] That is what he said and we have already started to fix the roads. We have already begun to fix the roads.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I heard it.

Mr. Ramnath: You wait for—

Hon. C. Imbert: You know, what beats me, a pattern is developing in this country where people feel they could tell the most outrageous lies and somehow these lies would do damage and they would stick somehow and nobody would go behind and determine what the reality is.

I listened to the Member for Couva South in his familiar mantra, and he is truly a dinosaur. I do not know how long he has been in this Parliament; 20 years, I cannot remember.

Mr. Valley: 20 years.

Hon. C. Imbert: Well, he missed a period there, so he had to start back. But whatever, when you add it up, whatever it is.

Dr. Rowley: He must have been pregnant.

Hon. C. Imbert: He missed a period there. He was thrown out. But, Mr. Speaker, this man, this hon. gentleman, hon. representative for Couva South is a dinosaur because when I listened to this rubbish, nothing is being done in rural areas, absolute garbage, garbage. The Member for Tabaquite, who is certainly not in the dinosauric tradition of the Member of Couva South, asked me as Minister of Works and Transport to accompany him into his constituency, a rural constituency, and we drove throughout Tabaquite, through Mayo all the way, throughout and so on, and showed me a number of land slips and so on. I had all my technical staff with me driving through this rural area with the Member for Tabaquite, this was a couple months ago. I was very pleased and gratified when the Member himself came to me, shortly thereafter, a month afterwards, and thanked

the Ministry of Works and Transport for promptly responding to his request and doing work in the constituency of Tabaquite.

Dr. Rowley: Representation you call that.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is what you call representation. Do not mind he would lose his seat on the next occasion because he is a member of UNC. I am just making a point, Mr. Speaker, that I have to sit here and hear this rubbish. You have the Member for Nariva—right now the Ministry of Works and Transport is paving the entire Cunapo Southern Road from the town of Sangre Grande to the town of Biche, spending over \$8 million, rehabilitating and reconstructing that rural road. I do not know if the Member for Couva South has ever gone there because he likes to stay in the Couva area and linger around the industrial estate and so on and malingering there and look out for people from Laventille to make sure he could block them in the road when they are coming down.

But in the constituency of Nariva, the Ministry of Works and Transport is paving the entire Cunapo Southern Road. As I said, \$8 million complete rehabilitation and when that is finished—the Ministry has already done the road from Biche to Rio Claro. It is already in good condition so that when within the next month or so we finish the Cunapo Southern Road, you will be able to drive on a proper rehabilitated modern road from Sangre Grande straight to Rio Claro through the town of Biche. That is taking place right now as we speak. But I had to come into this Parliament and hear this nonsense about how the Government is not doing anything for the rural areas. Tomfoolery, the Member for Oropouche always making a set of noise; he would never admit that as we speak, we are repairing the La Fortune-Pluck Road in the constituency of Oropouche. Mr. Speaker, as we speak. The Member for Siparia came and quarrelled about areas in her constituency, the Member's constituency, and we are organizing, as we speak, to do a number of roads in the constituency of Siparia.

Mr. Ramnath: You come here to talk about yourself.

Hon. C. Imbert: I have to deal with it—

Dr. Rowley: We want the lies to stop.

Hon. C. Imbert:—because, Mr. Speaker, the lies must stop.

Hon. Member: What about Bon Air Road?

Hon. C. Imbert: That is next. We are doing Cumuto Road, Bon Air Road, Cunapo Junction Road, we “doing” all of them.

Hon. Dumas: It has nothing to do with him.

Dr. Rowley: It is with the Government, it has nothing to do with him.

Hon. C. Imbert: We are doing all of them, in spite of the hon. Member for Nariva. And we are going to do the Couva Main Road, we are going to do the Brasso Road; we are going all the way to Rio Claro and back. You stay there, because Mr. Speaker, I am tired of hearing this nonsense.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Nonsense.

Hon. C. Imbert: Absolutely nonsense! Right now in the constituency of Caroni East for example, Caroni East, the same mantra over and over; but you see the people who live in these areas know what is going on—

Hon. Member: They find out.

Hon. C. Imbert:—and that is why when an election is called, your cut tail booked. Your cut tail booked when an election is called because the people of Caroni East for example—

Dr. Rowley: Enjoy your last days.

Hon. C. Imbert:—are very well aware that as we speak today, we are doing major repair works on the Ravine Sable Road; we are doing major repair works on the Las Lomas No. 1 Road; we are doing major works on the Caroni Road and, as I have said, we are coming to the Caparo Valley Brasso Road later and a number of other roads, Drake Trace, Savary Road, Squires, Peyton Place, all of these things in the Caroni area. I mean, I could talk for hours about the road work that we are doing in the rural areas because we are not a party that has narrow vision; that has blinkers on and can only focus on its own constituencies.

I remember being in this Parliament when the former Minister of Local Government, Dhanraj Singh, came in here and gave a report on money spent on, I think it was under the Road Improvement Fund, 27 roads. Twenty seven out of 27 roads in constituencies represented by the hon. Members opposite. All 27 and laughing ha, ha, ha, ha. You see, Mr. Speaker, when—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Zero.

Hon. C. Imbert:—And zero allocation. Big joke, zero allocation for all PNM corporations.

Dr. Rowley: Diego Martin Corporation, the most hard-working corporation.

Hon. C. Imbert: Zero for Diego Martin; zero for Port of Spain and laughing about it.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you see, that is the kind of partisan and narrow-minded behaviour that caused us to be here and them to be there. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is all about. Does the Member for Couva South understand what he is saying? He stands in this Parliament and laments that there are no community facilities in Couva; there is no library in Couva; and they do not have a town centre in Couva. The UNC was in government for six years! Couva is the heartland of the constituency represented by the then prime minister, but there are no library facilities and there is no town centre. Six years of UNC government! That is why they lost the last election.

Mr. Speaker, people were willing to give the hon. Members opposite a chance. They got in after years of trying. The PNM was there for many years and then the population decided to make a change. After years of trying, whether by honest means or not, they got into office. The people decided to give them a chance. Are you telling me that after six years the UNC government—there was money coming out of their noses like water—could not build a library in Couva and they could not build a town centre in Couva? They spent \$3 billion on a shed in Piarcó. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, did you hear what the Member said across the floor? He said that he is proud that they squandered \$300 million on the airport, and did not build a library and a town centre in the Couva area. That is why the PNM is going to do it. The PNM is going to develop Couva; the PNM is going to develop Chaguanas; the PNM is going to develop Princes Town; the PNM is going to take over Nariva; the PNM would continue to develop Diego Martin, Arima, Scarborough, Palo Seco, Point Fortin, Moruga and the whole of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, there is a pattern in this country where certain persons believe that they could just tell the most outrageous lies without a shred of evidence to back them up—the most monstrous falsehoods that would eventually be demonstrated to be absolute lies—and just publish them and throw them in the system.

The hon. Member complains bitterly about the Elections and Boundaries Commission setting up a corporation from Talparo to Couva. He said what kind of EBC is setting up this corporation that stretches from Talparo to Couva. The Member is a senior Member, and he was in this Parliament in 1990. In fact, I think he walked out with amnesty.

Dr. Rowley: They threw him out.

Hon. C. Imbert: No, he walked out with amnesty. I know he was here in 1990 when a piece of legislation was passed in this Parliament called the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, which was brought by a government of which he was a part. He fought for it in this Parliament. In that legislation, the external boundaries of the corporations in Trinidad were cast in stone. The EBC was constrained and limited in its powers to regulate local government boundaries. The Member voted for the Bill that told the EBC that this is the configuration; these are the fixed external boundaries of local government corporations; and that the EBC could only now rearrange districts within these boundaries. The hon. Member knows that when they were in government they established the fixed boundaries of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. He voted for a law which prevents the EBC from adjusting the external boundaries of these corporations, but he wants to throw mud at the EBC. He is so obsessed with undermining the creditability of the system that he just threw these things out—the EBC does not know what it is doing; it is not changing the external boundaries; and it is a waste of time, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, listen to what the Member said about Caroni (1975) Limited lands. This is such nonsense. He said that the PNM Government is wicked because it only gave two acres of agricultural land to former Caroni (1975) Limited workers, and they cannot build a house on it. The Member knows fully well that the standard terms of an agricultural lease—based on a cabinet decision under the UNC—is the only structure that is allowed on a plot of agricultural land is a shed for the storage of chemicals, materials or tools. Those are the standard terms of an agricultural lease for all State lands in Trinidad and Tobago. This was approved by a UNC cabinet. The Member knows that. [*Interruption*]

When the UNC was in power, it was okay for agricultural leases to be restricted to a shed or a structure for the storage of chemicals, materials and tools and, of course, it made sense. If you do not restrict the buildings that could be erected on a plot of agricultural land to a building that is associated with agriculture—as I said, a shed for the storage of chemicals, materials and tools—then the agricultural land would be rapidly converted into residential land, and the entire purpose of the agricultural programme would be defeated. All you would be doing is alienating lands from production and turning them into slums. That is what they want. They think we are stupid.

We have a development plan for this country. We have given, as promised, agricultural lands to former Caroni (1975) Limited workers on standard terms and

conditions. The Member knows that and he would not say it. This is what I mean by throwing out things and hoping that nobody would follow them to determine what the truth is. In addition to the two-acre parcel of agricultural land, they also got a parcel of residential land at 50 per cent of the market value. The Member would never admit that to the country. They would just shout as loud as possible and spread their mischief and propaganda on and on. They feel that everybody in this country is stupid.

Again, I am putting on the record that what Caroni (1975) Limited workers have received is a two-acre parcel of agricultural land on standard terms and conditions a building lot at 50 per cent of the market value.

Mr. Ramnath: That is not true.

Hon. C. Imbert: The Minister of Local Government has reminded me that it was the market value some time ago, and not the present market value. In fact, the only prohibition in those parcels of residential land is that they must keep the land for five years and after that they could trade in the property. They have received a tremendous gift for which I am certain they are grateful. [*Desk thumping*] The Members opposite could say what they want, but the Caroni (1975) Limited workers are grateful. I am certain they are grateful as can be seen.

Mr. Valley: He would never see.

Hon. C. Imbert: One of the reasons for the problems that are occurring in that party—you know, I heard the Member saying that if we call an election now they would win. Who is “we”? Is it the Front Bench, the Back Bench or the side bench? Who is “we”?

Dr. Rowley: Or the bench in the courthouse.

Hon. C. Imbert: Who is “we”? Is it the people who are in front here, the Member for St. Joseph, who is an independent Member; the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre; the Member for Barataria/San Juan who is a kind of quasi-independent; or the Members who are in some kind of silent protest over there—the Member for St. Augustine and the Member for Caroni East, et cetera. Who is “we”? [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Do not worry about that.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, we must worry about their mental state. The entire party is mashed up. Every day this one is calling that one all kinds of names—this one is a liar; this one is a snake; this one does not deserve to be in the

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party; this one must be thrown out; we have to expel the Member for Chaguanas because of the horrible things he has been saying about us; we have to fire the Member for Caroni East, we cannot leave him there; we have to get rid of the Member for St. Joseph, we cannot have that one; and the political leader cannot go—[*laughter*—I mean, this is the most incredible thing.

Mr. Speaker, the political leader of a political party arrives at a party meeting and the fellow with the rice—the rice man who won under suspicious circumstances—said that he cannot come here and talk and he should leave and the political leader left. I must mind their business.

Mr. Speaker: I hope this is the last matter you would be responding to.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I must mind their business because it makes entertaining living. After I saw that amazing spectacle—the political leader said that they would not let him talk and he left. He then went to the Back Bench and he said that he would lead from the back. [*Laughter*] You know, if they write a book about this nobody would believe them. He is still the leader, but he is in the back. He is protesting.

Mr. Valley: And Kamla is laughing all the way.

Hon. C. Imbert: The Member for Couva South fools himself into believing that we would listen to this nonsense that if an election is called tomorrow, we are—he has mice in his pocket or something. He is only talking about “we”.

Mr. Speaker, I would come to some aspects of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the Municipal Corporations Act. I have listened to the Member for Couva South. He just threw out figures and numbers. It is obvious that they do not want any election. With all the “ol’ talk”, he is begging. [*Laughter*] What Opposition in its right mind would tell a government, I think you better fundamentally restructure the system and put that report aside? In fact, I think the words he used were to “shred it and let us radically restructure and start the whole thing over”. What Opposition in its right mind would say that, unless it is mortally afraid of an election? If I were them, I would be afraid too.

The hon. Member just threw figures out. The Member said that there is a corporation stretching from Arima to Chaguanas that has 350,000 persons, and I listened to this thing. The hon. Member told us that he is a professional engineer—

Dr. Rowley: He does not work.

Hon. C. Imbert:—and engineers are taught in logic and arithmetic. When I

heard this foolishness about 350,000 persons—this is one-third of the population of Trinidad and Tobago—in one corporation obviously, this cannot be true.

I went into the document that we are debating and it demonstrates that he has read nothing. The dinosaur has read nothing. The Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation has an electorate, as I expected, of 150,000. In fact, there are 141,633 persons. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I know that lawyers are not trained in numbers. Let me deal with the matter. The size of the electorate in Trinidad and Tobago is 900,000. There are approximately 900,000 electors in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is out of a population of 1.3 million people. This is simple arithmetic. If you divide 13 by 9, you would get the ratio in terms of the electorate to the population.

Mr. Speaker, if you have an electorate of 141,000 then the non-voting population in that area may be another 30,000, so you would have a total population in that area of maybe 170,000 persons. Every primary school child in Trinidad and Tobago knows that, but the Member told us that there are 350,000 persons in Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation; 350,000 persons in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation; 350,000 persons in the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation; and 350,000 persons in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. The Member already crossed one million and there are 10 other corporations. Mr. Speaker, I have to listen to this nonsense. This forms the basis for his argument that the corporation is too big and one-third of the population is contained in that area so we should shred it and throw it away. It is very difficult when you hear these arguments.

The Member made the astonishing statement that the Minister responsible for highways should not have any responsibility or authority for back roads. That is a profound statement. Mr. Speaker, since when did the Minister responsible for highways have the authority or responsibility for back roads? It just demonstrates the classic ignorance of Members opposite. [*Interruption*] The Member knows very well that under the said Municipal Corporations Act of 1990—this is a point we need to understand because the hon. Members opposite are prone to political mischief—that the Minister of Works and Transport, whoever he may be, has a schedule of main roads and highways published in the *Gazette*. Every single main highway and thoroughfare in this country is duly noted, registered and published. Every single local government corporation—whether it is a regional corporation, a borough or a city—has the same thing.

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Mr. Speaker, for example, the street outside the Red House, Abercromby Street, is on the schedule of roads of the Port of Spain City Corporation. Every road within San Fernando, barring through exceptions, is under the responsibility of the San Fernando City Corporation. In fact, when you look at the road network, the number of roads under the responsibility of local government corporations is more than the number of roads under the responsibility of the Minister of Works and Transport. The Minister of Works and Transport has no responsibility for back roads, and the Member for Couva South knows that very well. That is by law. The Member knows that very well. I see this coming from hon. Members opposite all the time. We would get a letter saying to fix this trace and that dead end, and when we do the investigation the road is under the responsibility of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation or the Chaguanas Borough Corporation and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, the thing is that when—notwithstanding the fact that all these roads that they keep talking to us about—the few of them that do—you do not get anything from the Member for Couva South; you do not get anything from the Member for Couva North; the Member for Nariva is politically dead, but you would get a letter from the Member for Tabaquite; the Member for Chaguanas would send a correspondence and so forth and, I must say, the Member for Siparia, before she became Leader of the Opposition, she would write a letter now and then—the ministry looked at the roads we realized that the UNC corporations have collapsed. Essentially, that is what it is. That is what those protesting persons in Couva North were saying. They said that the local government corporation in their area—the one that they voted for and the one represented by their people—has collapsed.

Since we are aware of that, the Ministry of Works and Transport has been doing work all over Trinidad in rural areas, urban areas and suburban areas dealing primarily with local roads.

When I communicated with Members of Parliament, I asked Members—ministers of works and transport have done this before—to give me a list of roads in order of priority. Some of them gave me a list and, in most cases, 10 roads from the list would be local roads. What is interesting is that the ones who are making the most noises over there are the ones who are the worst representatives. Even the Member for Oropouche, Dr. Roodal Moonilal, with all his bad behaviour and so forth, when you call upon him to give you a list of roads in his constituency in order of priority, I could report today that he has done that.

Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that the hon. Members opposite who are making the most noises are the worst representatives. They are absentee representatives. They remind me of a former MP for St. Augustine, Mr. John Humphrey, who used to say that he has no time for that; representation is not his business; and boasting that he had not been to his constituency office in five years. Imagine that! He said that publicly and it was published in the newspapers. He boasted that he has not been in his constituency office for five years and he does not have time for that and that is the business of the local government representatives. You could see that arrogance coming from the Member for Couva South and the Member for Nariva. It is different for the Member for Siparia, the Member for Tabaquite, the Member for Oropouche, the Member for Caroni East and the Member for Chaguanas. They could say what they want. I know the Members on that side who are trying to do their work, and I know the ones who are taking a free ride. They could say what they want. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Ramnath: Ask the people in Point Fortin! Ask Mr. Larry Achong why he staged a demonstration against you!

Hon. C. Imbert: We fixed the road. That is representation. All the talk that they are talking, the Member for Couva South called all kinds of strange names in the country. He said that they want a road in the Godineau Swamp. This is what I have to hear in this Parliament. He said that we must develop the Godineau Swamp so that we could get access to it. I have to listen to this nonsense!

The Member mentioned Timital. He also talked about San Francique. You have to ask the question: Has the Member ever been to San Francique? *[Interruption]* The Member does not go to work. He draws a salary but he does not go to work. He is like a URP worker.

Mr. Speaker, recently when there was the Point Fortin Borough Day celebrations—all the talk that they are talking—I was told that is the second largest celebration of that nature in Trinidad. That is my understanding. I am not the representative for that area, but it is my understanding that the Point Fortin Borough Day celebrations are the second largest of the Carnival arts and so forth in Trinidad. In fact, it is a very significant event.

One of the things that came back to me was the fact that as people travelled to Point Fortin, they were amazed at the level of work that this Government had done on the road. *[Desk thumping]* *[Interruption]* We rehabilitated 18 kilometres of the Southern Main Road from Roussillac to Dunlop Roundabout. In addition, we did road strengthening and road construction in the La Brea area. We used a

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geo-textile fabric, which is an experimental technique, to see what kind of performance we would get in that area because there is a tendency of shifting sand, and there are veins of pitch coming from the Pitch Lake and so forth. We have rehabilitated 18 kilometres of roadway to international standard. *[Interruption]* I do not need to do that.

Mr. Ramnath: You are a monumental failure.

Hon. C. Imbert: We have marked the road; we have painted the road; and we have put reflectors and so forth on that road. What I found most interesting is that apart from the compliments that the Government has been receiving—this is a Government initiative. Ministers come and Ministers go. This is the PNM Government at work—people are talking about the reduction in travel time, apart from the fact that it is a much more pleasurable ride now to go to Point Fortin from San Fernando. They have told me that they have cut between 15 to 25 minutes of travel time between San Fernando to Point Fortin. *[Desk thumping]* People have actually timed it. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I have gone there myself. I drove from the Cross-Crossing Interchange, then along the South Trunk Road and went down to Mosquito Creek. I passed the Godineau River. I do know where these places are. I then went over the bridge and over the Godineau River. I also passed the Shore of Peace. I went into Roussillac and then I entered La Brea and so forth. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I did not get an extension so I still have more than 30 minutes to go. I am not making up any time. I am now warming up.

Mr. Speaker, as we went down to La Brea, Vessigny and then all the way down to Point Fortin, it took us 37 minutes. *[Interruption]* The Prime Minister is now telling me that it took him 35 minutes. He drives a little faster sometimes. He has a little escort and so forth.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Members opposite believe that they are going to set the agenda in this country with lies, that they are going to dictate the pace, that they are going to run our lives for us, they have another think coming. Every lie that is put on the record, we will rebut it.

Mr. Speaker: I will prefer you use the word "untruth".

Hon. C. Imbert: I am so sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Rowley: It is the same thing.

Hon. C. Imbert: Every untruth, every fabrication, every falsehood, every misrepresentation, every inaccuracy, everything that is wrong, we will refute on this side. Every single thing they say that is inaccurate, we on this side would correct the record—[*Desk thumping*]*—*as we saw the hon. Prime Minister doing a little earlier. [*Interruption*] Aggressive, not defensive.

Mr. Ramnath: Making excuses.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite said one thing, after all the nonsense he spoke and all the inaccuracy and gross misrepresentations, which was that the Government system was not working. That was the only sensible thing he said.

Dr. Rowley: He said a sensible thing?

Mr. Ramnath: That was the conclusion.

Hon. C. Imbert: He rambled on about that for more than five minutes; I timed him. It was the only sensible thing he said in his lengthy discourse.

Dr. Rowley: Diatribe. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin East is expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I think this is an appropriate time to take the adjournment.

Thirty-Five Year Celebration (Prime Minister Patrick Manning)

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): As you mentioned earlier, one among us is celebrating some 35 years in this House, which is a long time. I think this House has other business to do in that regard. Mr. Speaker, before moving the adjournment, the youngest Member of this House has some work to do.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Who is that? You have a young Member there? [*Crosstalk*]

The Minister of Social Development and Minister in the Ministry of Housing (Hon. Anthony Roberts): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I am a parliamentary infant. It is my pleasure and, in fact, I consider it to be an honour, to pay tribute on behalf of my colleagues on this side of the House to the hon. Prime Minister, for having reached a milestone of 35 years in his distinguished career of serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It is indeed a milestone because I am advised that the hon. Prime Minister is now the longest serving parliamentarian in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: What about the Commonwealth?

Hon. A. Roberts: Thirty-five years is a very, very long time and I am certain that throughout that journey, while there must have been some memorable moments, there must have been many hills to climb.

Mr. Ramnath: San Fernando Hill. [*Laughter*]

Hon. A. Roberts: In addition to the San Fernando Hill, there must have been many, many hills to climb and there must have been many lessons learnt as a result of that experience. I am certain that throughout the journey he must have had to go into his reserves and as I know him, he must have had to call on his Maker, from time to time, to provide him with the strength and guidance to continue; but he has endured.

He has endured, because he has demonstrated the kind of strength, courage and commitment as well as being motivated by his love for the people he serves, not only in his constituency, but all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] He has endured many challenges and, as we know, the race is not for the swiftest, but for those who can endure.

Mr. Partap: "Yuh" will make him cry.

Hon. A. Roberts: He is a strong man.

Mr. Ramnath: Williams would have never tolerated that. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: They are signalling that they want to get rid of you.

Hon. A. Roberts: He has served for 35 long years, but what is more important is that he has served the 35 years with his integrity being intact. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] As representatives ourselves, we all can appreciate the kind of sacrifice that our families have to go through, from time to time, being in the service of the people.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: You are getting back the seat; you are a good man.

As a result, I congratulate the family of the hon. Prime Minister, his wife and children, for giving him the kind of support, because that is necessary in this job.

Mr. Ramnath: These hard times.

Hon. A. Roberts: What is amazing, even after these 35 years of service, is that if you look at the hon. Prime Minister you can still see and feel the energy, dedication, commitment and passion for serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ramnath: Portia Simpson-Miller brought it out.

Hon. Members: Oh oh! [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Hon. A. Roberts: On behalf of my colleagues, I sincerely congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and thank him for the contribution that he has made in terms of the development of Trinidad and Tobago. I wish him many more years of service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This country can only benefit from his wealth of experience.

Mr. Partap: "What Ministry you dealing with?"

Hon. A. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, I ask the good Lord to continue to shower his blessing on the hon. Prime Minister and to wish him long life.

Thank you.

Mr. Ramnath: Valley, you have to wait a while.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, I join with our colleagues on the other side in congratulating the hon. Prime Minister for having served for 35 years as a parliamentarian. I am sure that he is well aware of the tenets of parliamentary democracy, having served for so long; for so long. Our colleague very much emphasized the length of that service.

I am sure he would remember that parliamentary democracy is based on the taking away of the rights of the despot King John with the Magna Carta; that is where our foundations are in parliamentary democracy. Thereafter, it was the taking away of authoritarianism and dictatorship and moving into the will and rights of the people of the country. I am sure he is very much aware of that and, perhaps, that is why he has endured for so long.

As I congratulate him for his service in this Parliament and in this House, I want him to see at this point in time and I know he would be reflecting that it is

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also a time for reflection. I would ask him to seriously consider some of the things that are happening and that need further thought and action.

The nation today is, in the view of many, in a national crisis. I know the hon. Prime Minister would be concerned about that, because he has served for long and hard.

Dr. Rowley: Can you not just be gracious?

Mr. Imbert: Just congratulate and sit down.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I ask him to look again, Sir, as he reflects now, at the things people are hurting about and suffering for. We could go into those on another occasion, but I am sure that you would understand, as you reflect on the good things and on the hills that you have climbed and the rivers you have crossed, that there are many, many more rivers to cross.

Therefore, keep always in your heart, the interests of the parliamentary democracy, the separation of powers and the supremacy of the rule of law. Remember always, Sir, as you celebrate, that the voice of people is the voice of God. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Before the Prime Minister replies, I too, would like to recognize the 35 years of his parliamentary service.

I had, perhaps, the good fortune of knowing the Prime Minister long before most of you. I remember when the Prime Minister lived on Pointe-a-Pierre Road, I lived not too far from there, and we did have some sort of connection way back then. I must say in those days the Prime Minister was a serious young man. He is not so serious now as he was then.

Mr. Ramnath: He was under manners.

Mr. Speaker: I followed his political career and got to know him more intimately in the period from 1991. As you know, I fought the San Fernando West seat and together with him, he was the Member for San Fernando East.

The Prime Minister has been the longest serving Member for San Fernando East, for the past 35 years. I am not sure if he is the longest serving Member in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] He is; I thought, perhaps, that Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed was close. It is, indeed, a milestone for any parliamentarian to serve this long. He must be doing something good to be re-elected for all these 35 years. Something he is doing right; I am sure many things he is doing right to be re-elected for 35 years.

Hon. Members: Sometimes nothing at all.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps, he may tell you his secret.

Hon. Prime Minister, I wish to congratulate you for your service, not only to your constituency, but to Trinidad and Tobago. May you have many more years of youthful life ahead. I know you are a religious person and all I can tell you is to trust in the Lord.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. Member for St. Ann's East and the hon. Member for Siparia who were so gracious in their comments on this occasion.

I would like to place on the record that had I known that there would have been this segment of the sitting this afternoon, I would not have allowed it, if I were in a position to stop it. Let it be known that it took place without my knowledge and/or consent. Even so, I am very pleased, indeed, for the consideration that was evident as a consequence of the contributions of the two hon. Members.

Thirty-five years ago on May, 10, 1971, I was elected to Parliament as a result of a no-vote campaign. I was elected unopposed on nomination day. The election in that year actually took place on May 24, 1971. I have been a Member of this Parliament ever since.

In the case of my colleague, Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed, he has set a record in this country that I doubt anybody would equal for a very long time to come. He served for 30 years as a member of the Executive Council/Cabinet. He has been a member of the Executive Council ever since he came in, in 1956, and when Cabinet government came to Trinidad and Tobago, he continued as a member of the Cabinet. That record of 30 years of Cabinet service is one that I do not think anybody in this country would equal for a very long time to come.

Mr. Speaker, I have seen different Parliaments. This is my ninth Parliament; I was elected nine times. I ought to place on the record also the fact that when I became a Member of Parliament, the Deputy Clerk of the House was not yet born. *[Laughter]* *[Interruption]* No; close, very close.

Of all the Parliaments of which I have been privileged to be a Member, this one is not yet over, but it is going to stand out for a lot of the excitement that we are experiencing today; even if much of that excitement is not generated by the Government, but it is excitement nonetheless. As the history of country is being

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written, this is a very interesting time. Whatever your political persuasion might be; whatever your views might be, it is, indeed, a very interesting time in the development of the democracy in Trinidad and Tobago.

I would like to reiterate for the benefit of hon. Members that, certainly, I understand the question of the rule of law; that is how we govern, in accordance with the rule of law. We understand very clearly the separation of powers and we understand, as a consequence, the independence of the Judiciary and the fact that it must conduct its business free of any governmental interference. That is something to which we adhere.

We understand that democracy on the whole demands that the views of the people must be very much in evidence in the policy positions adopted by any government and decisions that government makes. We understand that well. In fact, we believe that is a very significant part of the reason the PNM has been re-elected for so many occasions in Trinidad and Tobago.

For my part, I wish to give hon. Members and the national community the assurance that our adherence to the rule of law and our commitment to democracy are two commitments from which we will never swerve. I thank hon. Members for the very kind sentiments expressed.

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

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, in moving the adjournment of this House to Friday, May 26, 2006 at 1.30 p.m., which is Private Members' Day, the Chief Whip, of course, would inform us of the business he plans to conduct on that day.

At the same time, I want to inform the hon. Prime Minister that we are not finished as yet. We invite the Prime Minister and Members of the House to repair to the lounge so that we can properly toast the hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Mr. Harry Partap (Nariva): Mr. Speaker, I inform Members of the House that there is a Motion submitted by the Member for Tabaquite on the aluminium smelter. That is what we will be doing on May 26, 2006.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.18 p.m.