

Leave of Absence

Friday, June 09, 2006

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 09, 2006

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members for leave of absence from sittings of the House: Dr. Roodal Moonilal, Member for Oropouche, for today's sitting of the House; Mr. Franklin Khan, Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, for the period June 08 to June 22, 2006; Mr. Manohar Ramsaran, Member for Chaguanas for the period June 05 to June 21, 2006; Mrs. Camille Robinson Regis, Member for Arouca South, for the period June 04 to June 18, 2006; Dr. Fuad Khan, Member for Barataria/San Juan for the period June 09 to June 21, 2006. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PETITION

Biche Action Group

Mr. Harry Partap (*Nariva*): I wish to present a petition on behalf of the secretary of the Biche Action Group.

I now ask that the Clerk be allowed to read the petition.

Petition read.

PAPER LAID

Administrative report of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for the period October 2004 to September 2005. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]

555 ANTI-CRIME INITIATIVE

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been authorized by Cabinet to make the following statement. In my address to this honourable House last year, I outlined the challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago and indicated the intention to provide the public with effective mechanisms to have a more meaningful and direct involvement in efforts to reduce the problem of crime and violence in Trinidad and Tobago.

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I am pleased to inform Members of this House that the public participation element is now in place in the form of the 555 anti-crime initiative. This initiative was launched on May 24, 2006 and will provide the basis for a dynamic partnership between the public and law enforcement and protective services. This administration has implemented one of the most comprehensive and far-reaching programmes to modernize and transform the security system in Trinidad and Tobago. The launch of this 555 anti-crime initiative represents the public participation and mobilization component.

The Government has systematically targeted every aspect of law enforcement and the protective services. We are continuing the programme of capacity building in order to equip law enforcement agencies to deal with the unacceptable high levels of crime and violence in our country. Our response has been based on a recognition that crime is no longer confined to national borders. It is a worldwide problem influenced by a global criminal network and therefore, solutions require strategic international cooperation to support national anti-crime strategies. This reality has been the basis of our involvement in programmes of international cooperation with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) of the US, the British and Canadian intelligence agencies as well as other Caribbean and Latin American countries. These exchanges have facilitated the timely sharing of information and technology that makes our responses far more targeted.

The introduction of capacity building programmes is transforming and modernizing crime fighting at all levels. Twenty-three of the 39 British law enforcement officers recruited to provide support to the police are already in Trinidad and Tobago. The UK officers will assist in providing training and expertise to improve crime scene management and investigation as well as our forensic capabilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the introduction of modern technology has resulted in a significant enhancement of our national surveillance and border control capabilities. This includes the acquisition of a 360 degree radar system which, together with the airship and specially equipped helicopters, have considerably increased the overall surveillance capability of the country. This Government has developed a comprehensive and nationally coordinated strategy which is beginning to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

We have achieved some success in reducing kidnappings and bombings and apprehending major figures involved in the criminal networks in our country. However, the rate of homicides continues to be a serious challenge, and we have

increased our efforts to address this issue. It is in this context, that we have pursued the establishment of a strategic framework as a basis for a comprehensive response to this problem.

This strategic framework fully accords with the growing international view, that crime fighting can be best tackled on the basis of coordination and collaboration. Modern crime fighting requires that each arm of our law enforcement and protective services operates in a manner that adds value to and complements the activities of the others. Their action must therefore reflect the ethos of cooperation motivated by a shared vision of a safe and prosperous Trinidad and Tobago. It involves establishing a new synergy which in the final analysis, is what will make the critical difference in our ability to enforce law and maintain public order.

There are a number of elements comprising this framework which we have established. Heading the list is the umbrella coordinating organization, the Homicide Prevention Working Group launched late last year. It is comprised of the leadership of key units inside the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service as well as criminal justice agencies whose cooperation is needed for effective crime control. These include the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, intelligence, forensic, and prisons. The primary objective of this group is to analyze the pattern of homicides and devise effective strategies for intervening.

The second element is the Homicide Bureau of Investigation which has been created to increase the homicide detection rate. Its establishment was based on the recommendations of Prof. Mastrofski and Partners. The intention is to have a full service homicide unit that is better organized and equipped to investigate and tackle the problem of homicide.

The third element of the strategy is the Crime and Problem Analysis Unit (CAPA). This unit is comprised of a special team of crime analysts who utilize modern data analysis methods, to support better crime control decision-making. The unit develops databases on murders, shootings and woundings.

The fourth is a consolidation of the Organized Crime and Narcotics Unit and the Fire Arms Interdiction Unit into the Organized Crime and Firearms Bureau. Since the consolidation six months ago, we have begun to see positive results in the form of substantial increases in the seizure of illicit drugs and the disruption of the drug trade.

The fifth element of the strategy was the establishment of the Incident Coordination Centre which brings together representatives of the police, the

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defence force and intelligence services. The work of this centre has resulted in the substantial reduction of kidnappings for the first five months of 2006.

The sixth component is the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) established in 2004. SAUTT supports the police service in investigations and other operational and tactical activities against criminals. This includes a focus in the areas of extortion, kidnappings, gang warfare, organized crime and terrorism.

I come now to the role of the community. It has indeed become clear that the cooperation of the public is critical to the success in the fight against crime. As citizens we all have a role to play in stemming the level of violence in our communities. This fact has been underscored by the recovery over the period January 01 to June 09, of 151 guns and more than 1,620 rounds of ammunition on the basis of information provided by concerned citizens. Another example has been the pilot project in the Gonzales area of the Belmont Police Station district. This represents a first step in actively combining the efforts of the police and the public to reduce crime in the community.

The successes achieved to date in the Gonzales project through collaboration with the community with regard to guns and ammunition, have helped to confirm our confidence in the potential of the public to partner with law enforcement agencies to reduce crime, fear and disorder. The programme launched on May 20, 2006, is aimed at harnessing the strength of public participation, as part of the strategic framework for crime fighting by providing a safe, confidential, easy to access, toll-free means of giving information to the police.

I want to again emphasize that this is not a new crime plan. It is the public access component of an overall strategy, which we are now in a position to launch because the other elements to ensure success are in place. It represents a major effort to develop a partnership between the public and the police. By dialling the easy to remember toll-free number 555, citizens from anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago using any phone may provide safe, anonymous information to the police without being identified and without fear of reprisals.

We have gone to great lengths to allay any fears of the public. This system has no caller identification and no star 69. Persons can give information without identifying themselves or being identified. The information is being processed by a specially trained and vetted team. This information is then analyzed for action by the appropriate agency or combination of agencies of the police, SAUTT and the defence force. The initiative is supported by an increased level of coordination

and deployment of agencies, which ensures that this information remains strictly confidential, targeted and success driven.

Having due regard to the sensitivity of this programme, and not disclosing any other details of the workings of the 555 Anti-Crime Initiative, except to again emphasize that abundant care has been taken to ensure the strictest confidentiality. Let me remind every citizen who has knowledge of criminal activity, that sharing such information can make all the difference between success and failure in the fight against crime. The 555 Anti-Crime Initiative has drawn on the success of similar programmes in the United Kingdom and other jurisdictions, where public participation has been a constant factor in reducing the levels of crime.

The 555 programme will not replace Crime Stoppers, which will continue to make its contribution to the recovery of guns and ammunition and crime solving. However, unlike Crime Stoppers, the 555 Anti-Crime Initiative will not be driven by monetary reward. The 555 initiative appeals to the patriotism and commitment of every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, who wants to play a part in helping to reduce crime. Accordingly, a major public education and mobilization programme is being launched to encourage persons to join the partnership against crime.

It should be remembered at all times that we are fighting a war with criminals who have a negative influence on many communities. All right-thinking citizens of this country must work together with the Government to make crime and violence the central issue on which we all unite in defence of our future. Indeed, our citizens need to choose and support a better way for themselves and their loved ones. This can only be achieved when communities unite against criminals and the varied manifestations of organized crime. We all need to take a stand against crime by supporting efforts such as the 555 programme.

It should be noted that in jurisdictions where such programmes have been effective, the removal of leaders of criminal networks invariably leads to turf war among the second tier leaders that could result in some instability. However, we will remain focused and pursue these criminals relentlessly. It should also be noted that when law enforcement focuses on criminals there is displacement and movement by the criminals. This requires vigilance on the part of everyone to report the presence of strange or suspicious activities and individuals in their communities.

To date we have met with members of the business community to discuss this initiative and their support for it. In the coming weeks representatives of the Ministry, the law enforcement and protective services and I, will be meeting with

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a cross section of communities and organizations from civil society to discuss the new 555 facility, and general ways the police and the public can work together to achieve cooperation in the fight against crime.

It is also my intention to address the nation as part of a series of activities to mobilize public support for and to solidify the partnership between law enforcement and the protective services. Violent crime and anti-social behaviour constitute the most fundamental threat to the well-being and economic future of this nation. I urge everyone to think nationally and act loyally; join the fight against crime, call 555 and give information.

Thank you.

CARIBBEAN COURT OF JUSTICE TRUST FUND BILL

Bill to provide for the implementation of the revised agreement establishing the Caribbean Court of Justice Trust Fund and for related matters, [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance*]; read the first time.

ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION (LOCAL GOVERNMENT) ORDER, 2006

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [May 12, 2006].

Be it resolved:

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

Question again proposed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On the last occasion the Member for Diego Martin East and hon. Minister of Works and Transport had an extension of 30 minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understood the unease of the Member for Couva South. What a hapless bunch across the other side from us, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the brief occasions that I look at the news I see the internecine warfare. The hugs—well, “dey doh hug” at all—the stabs by night that occur among hon. Members opposite, they do not hug at all; they just stab. It is incredible what we have to see, hear and read with respect to hon. Members opposite.

On the last occasion I dealt with a number of points made by the Member for Couva South which all turned out to be ridiculous and of no merit. In his rambling irrelevant conversation, the one point that the Member for Couva South made that

was of any relevance whatsoever was that the local government system is not working and delivering the goods and services that people deserve. The Minister of Local Government laid on the Table the draft White Paper for the reform of the local system. Contained in that document you would have seen the policy framework which would have informed the reform of the system.

The matter we are about today is simply to approve the draft of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Order, which is a very routine document recommending a few changes here and there in the local government districts and adding a few districts primarily to councils that are now controlled by the other side but not for very long. There is no significant or substantial alteration to the boundaries of local government districts.

For that reason, the paranoia that was evident among hon. Members opposite for the last several months; the wild allegations that the PNM administration had kept the new arrangement secret and we had hidden them in a cupboard—I heard references to that effect—because we wanted to gain an advantage on the other side. We kept the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Report to ourselves so we could go out into the field and do the necessary fieldwork and gain some advantage on the other side. It should be obvious that that was simply the product of rampant paranoia.

2.00 p.m.

The Prime Minister has already indicated that the life of the councils will be extended for a period of one year. The Elections and Boundaries Commission, (Local Government) Order has been before this House for some time, the new boundaries are known, the new districts are known, the new configuration is known and the other side now has 12 months to organize itself to lose the next local government election. [*Desk thumping*] So this nonsense about the Government coming like a thief in the night and taking an advantage, hiding the document, concealing the new arrangements; that nonsense is now exposed for what it is; puerile rubbish.

With respect to the other bit of nonsense—there are so many words I would like to use but they are unparliamentary; I was going to use another word but I do not want to be ruled out of order—said on the other side, especially by the acting Leader of the Opposition, the present Leader of the Opposition, the pro tem Leader of the Opposition, the interim Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia, who will be Leader of the Opposition for a while, but not for long. The Member for Siparia, again—when the Prime Minister made the point that the life

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of the local government corporations would be extended for 12 months—rushed to have a press conference to tell the country that the PNM administration was attempting to have complete power and control over the various municipal corporations because, according to the Member for Siparia, the councillors and aldermen would be out of office and then the councils would be controlled by the Minister of Local Government. So this was all a sleight of hand, it was subterfuge, it was all a plot on the part of the PNM administration to seize control of all the municipal corporations and to take away the representational factor from the Members opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have in my possession Act 21 of 1990. In that Act, in Section 11 it says:

“(4) The term of office of Councillors shall be three years, and they shall retire together on the last day of every triennial period, the first of which shall be deemed to have begun on the day on which the Councillors were elected to office.”

Using that formula, the normal date for the expiry of the present corporations would be some time in July 2006. Do you know the exact date?

Sen. Dumas: The 24th.

Hon. C. Imbert: July 24. So that using the formula in section 11 of the Municipal Corporations Act, No. 21 of 1990, under normal circumstances, the councillors would retire on July 24, 2006. I know that the Member for Siparia was an unsuccessful candidate in the 1991 election; she lost her deposit, I believe, or maybe just scraped through, but I know that the Member for Siparia was an unsuccessful candidate in the 1991 General Election and this was a 1990 Act, so I will forgive the hon. Member for her political ignorance because in section 273 of this same piece of legislation it says:

“Notwithstanding the provisions of any written law relating to the term of office of members of the councils constituting the local authorities, the term of office of members of local authorities holding office on the 13th September, 1990, is hereby extended for a period of one year or to such date as the President may specify by order published in the *Gazette*, whichever first occurs.”

Now, if you go to the back of this piece of legislation, you will see that it was passed in the Senate on September 04, 1990 and the Senate amendments were agreed to by the House of Representatives on September 10, 1990. It was

therefore done before the expiry of the term of office of the councillors. So I will forgive the political ignorance of the Member for Siparia.

What the PNM administration intends to do is not to allow the Minister of Local Government to seize control of the municipal corporations in Trinidad. We are not going to do that. We believe in democracy; we believe in the representation of the people; we believe in the voice of the people and, therefore, what we are going to do, before the expiry of the term of office, before the three years are up, we are going to come to this Parliament and in a similar fashion to the way this legislation has been amended from time to time, we will bring an amending Bill that will extend the term of office of all councillors, all local government representatives. The life of the councillors would be extended. It will mean for the next 12 months, up to July 2007, that all incumbent councillors and councils shall remain intact and the various councils shall continue to govern their own affairs, manage their own business without the heavy hand of any Minister of Government.

Once again the Member for Siparia was giving us bad legal advice, as she gave the former President, as the hon. Member is wont to do. She is once again engaging in rumour-mongering, engaging in paranoia, engaging in rabble-rousing, simply not speaking the truth. I want to reiterate that this PNM Government, in the interest of democracy, will ensure that we make necessary amendments to the legislation to allow all incumbent local government representatives to remain in office and to exercise all their rights and responsibilities for another 12 months to July 2007. The Mayor of Chaguanas will continue to be the Mayor of Chaguanas with his councillors and so on; Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Penal/Debe, et cetera. As I have said, that is just the usual political paranoia from the hon. Member for Siparia, trying to mislead the population once again. That has settled that matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let us return now to the one sensible point made by the Member for Couva South, that the local government system is not working and this is well known. When this Act came in 1990, it was a time when there were some serious issues in the country—this would have been just a couple months after the ill-fated coup. I gather at that time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that what went on in the Parliament was really a work in progress. There was always the intention to give the local bodies the necessary level of autonomy; the necessary level of authority that they require in order to properly discharge their functions. All this is contained in the policy document; the draft White Paper.

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If you look at that draft White Paper very carefully there is a theme that runs through it, borrowing from the Tobago House of Assembly model which has proven to be successful. The level of authority is given to the Secretaries in the Tobago House of Assembly so that they are masters of their own domain, they have a level of power and responsibility; an authority that local government representatives do not have in Trinidad. This is the way we have to go and we are streamlining to do so. The whole point of the policy framework is that we are seeking to streamline the responsibilities of local government bodies, consolidate them and make them more meaningful. If you look in the document you will see that there is a recommendation that social services delivery, for example, be delegated to the local government bodies, and this makes a lot of sense.

You would have heard the Prime Minister speaking about realigning the administrative regions in the country so that the education districts, the health districts, the social welfare districts would all be realigned to become as consistent as is possible with the local government bodies, so that they would start to take over some of the executing functions; some of the delivery functions of the central government. The central government will retain responsibility for many things but several current responsibilities of the central government will be delegated to the local government bodies and the boundaries realigned so there is harmony and consistency with the other systems for creating administrative districts and administrative regions in the country. And it makes a lot of sense.

If, for example, you give the responsibility and authority for social welfare, for old age pension, for disability assistance and things of that nature over to the local government bodies, it makes a lot of sense.

Another proposal that we have is the maintenance of public buildings. Whereas the line ministries will be responsible for capital programmes, for example, the Ministry of Education would be responsible for the construction of schools, the maintenance of the schools now, again, with the realigned local government boundaries in sync with the education district boundaries—this is one of the recommendations for discussion by the public—would now have responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of schools within their particular districts; similarly, health centres, police stations, government buildings, generally.

The plan is that after we have harmonized the boundaries so that we have some sort of synchronization between the local government boundaries and the administrative districts in this country, we can then start to delegate the delivery of a number of services to the local government bodies.

One of the other reforms that we are thinking of making is the implementation of something that has been on the drawing board for a very long time, and this is the creation of a Roads Authority. I remember when I was in this Ministry before about 12 or 13 years ago, the initial decision was taken by the Cabinet at that time to create a Roads Authority. That decision was developed by the administration that came after us, the UNC, and eventually turned into a project which has been in progress, financed by the Inter-American Bank as part of the National Highways Programme.

The decision of my administration was further developed by the succeeding administration and then the implementation continued as we came back in power. I can report that project is now complete. The work has been done with respect to the framework of the Roads Authority and we are ready to roll out that programme. Within that authority the plan is—it will take some time to get this organized—that all roads in the country, whether it is a main road, a highway, a local road, a secondary road, would eventually become the responsibility of that Roads Authority. *[Interruption]* I will tell you about that in a little while, if you are not so impatient.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the issues in the country today is confusion over responsibilities with respect to government infrastructure. The question of roads is very pertinent. Few citizens are aware of the responsibilities of various agencies as they apply to roads. The Ministry of Works and Transport is responsible for main roads and highways. The various municipal corporations are responsible for secondary roads; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is responsible for agricultural access roads; the Housing Development Company is responsible for roads within housing estates. Then you have roads belonging to state enterprises, Petrotrin, for example, has responsibility for a number of roads. When Caroni was in full operation it was also responsible for a number of roads. It was really, in my opinion, a recipe for confusion.

Few citizens are aware of which agency is responsible for which road. You have duplication of effort; you have wasting of time as citizens go to different offices in order to get service; they are not sure where to go to, whom to speak to and so on. For this reason, we have decided to roll out the implementation of the creation of the Roads Authority and put all roads in the country under one agency so there will be single point responsibility—*[Interruption]* I know you would agree with that—and single point authority in terms of roads. We are looking so

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that whereas we are giving the local bodies more responsibility; we are giving them social services, for example, we are taking away some responsibilities and putting them under a national agency.

A similar proposal is being contemplated for waterways, rivers, watercourses, ravines and so on. We have not got to the stage of implementation with that proposal that we have with the Roads Authority [*Interruption*] Yes, and there are a lot of ideas about watershed management, water resources management and trying to marry the question of winning water for the drinking water supply; water for irrigation; water for agriculture and then flood mitigation; flood relief; flood management and drainage management and so on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, with respect to the Roads Authority we have now finished the work so we are now going into implementation mode. The drainage authority, we still have a bit of work to do with the waterways and some policy issues in terms of: do we marry the conservation of water, the winning of water, with the management of rivers and that sort of thing. Those are some policy issues that would have to be resolved in consultation with the various agencies that have responsibility for water at this time.

When you see the plan; when you take the time to try to understand what is going on, and when you realize the future form of local government bodies would be a corporation that has clearly defined responsibilities; it would not have more responsibilities than it could manage; it would have responsibilities that are at the ground level in terms of the delivery of social services, for example, the maintenance and responsibility for community facilities, for public buildings, within their various districts. As I said, you are moving towards a Tobago House of Assembly (THA) model to give them the necessary level of autonomy, using the collection of rates and taxes as a funding mechanism for these new reformed local government agencies.

If you take the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to take a close look at the policy document you will understand the visionary approach that has been taken to the future for the local government system. I am certain that as we move along and we get consensus—we are almost there—from the population on what they would like the local government bodies to do, and as we reach agreement and we come back to this Parliament and we reform and amend the legislation to give the local government bodies the necessary powers that they have, I am sure that only benefits can flow from this reform process.

This is why, as I close my contribution, I am in complete support of this local government Order. It is necessary; we have not reformed the system as yet and, therefore, business must continue. This is a piece of administrative work that we must do; we must pass this Order; we must enact it into law, but as we move to the consultation stage with the population over the next 12 months, I am sure that hon. Members opposite, in their quiet moments—not in their public bickering—will realize the wisdom of the decision of the Government and the Prime Minister to extend the life of the local government bodies for one year, while we sort out these issues.

If we went into an election with the old arrangements, came up with a new policy direction and then had to go back and put an end to the term of existing bodies, it would be counter-productive; it would be, indeed, foolish. So I repeat, I am sure that in their quiet moments that the hon. Members opposite understand the wisdom of the extension of the life of local government bodies for 12 months, so that we can all get together as a group. Hopefully, if it is possible—it may not be possible at all—we could all get together in some sort of non-partisan forum and discuss exactly what shape and form we want the new local bodies to assume over the next 12 months and then we can move forward after that towards local government elections.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I support the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Order, 2006 and I commend it to this House.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is clear that my good friend, the Member for Diego Martin East, really had nothing to say, and he took half an hour to say it. What is also very important is that there must be some system that this Parliament must arrive at. It is not a requirement for Members to speak for 75 minutes and say nothing. Worse than that, there is no requirement for a Minister to come and mislead the House. This Minister was totally irrelevant. In many ways he was dishonest in what he said here this afternoon. Let us reflect on what has happened for the last 45 minutes.

The Minister indicated that local government is not working. In fact, he said the Prime Minister said that local government is not working—

Mr. Imbert: No, that is not what I said.

Mr. C. Sharma: Now he is saying it is the Member for Couva South. Whoever said it, he is responsible for local government—the Government—and if local government is not working, it is the Government's responsibility. Why is local

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government not working? It is not working simply because the Government is interfering with everything in this country.

The Minister made reference to Act 21 of 1990; that is the law of the country, but you are not implementing it. So it is nice to come and say anything here; attack anybody, be discourteous with anybody and hope to score points but that is not the way this Parliament is intended to be run. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us look at what Act 21 of 1990 says—when you are in government you can command any piece of legislation, the Opposition does not have access to that. He can send his staff to get any piece of document; we do not have that privilege.

Act 21 of 1990, further amended by No. 8 of 1992, the duties, and the distribution of truck-borne water. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are originally from the countryside; you know the difficulties that the rural communities suffer up to this day. Two weeks ago you saw Rio Claro, Morvant residents and elsewhere protesting, so why is the Government not funding a water truck distribution? The provision, maintenance and control of all corporation buildings—and this Minister wants to add. Who is he fooling? Why is he being so dishonest? He said that the new legislation is intended to do the upkeep and maintenance of schools, police stations, health centres. Let us hope that never happens! Can you imagine that? Local government is not functional as it should be, and this is from the Minister himself.

The maintenance and control of homes for the aged. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you cried in La Brea for the home for the aged! When we were in government you said that local government was doing nothing in La Brea. Have you stopped crying? The maintenance and care of child care centres—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, I am unable to answer you, therefore, I will appreciate if you will leave me out.

Mr. C. Sharma: I was going to suggest that you send a note to the next speaker but I know you would not do that. [*Crosstalk*] The maintenance and control of child care centres, what a shame. Sean Luke, may his soul rest in peace. Great is the PNM, it shall prevail. [*Interruption*] You are correct; go down on your knees.

Mr. Ramnath: Abu Bakr's 79-page affidavit.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is an interesting point and I am glad the Member for Couva South whispered it. The Minister said this Act 21 of

1990 came soon after the coup; look at what happened yesterday in the courts of Trinidad and Tobago, someone swore that the PNM was part of that; 79 pages of it!

Mr. Ramnath: Conspired to use violence.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Member for Caroni East has a question and I am sure he will ask it at the right time.

The promotion of development within the corporations in accordance with plans approved by the Minister with responsibility for physical planning; not a single development in the Siparia Regional Corporation; we both belong to that community. So when the Minister says that local government is not working, it is because the PNM does not want it to work and I will tell you why in a few minutes. It worked very well under the previous administration.

The maintenance of state property; the coordination of local and regional trade fairs, cultural displays and entertainment; not a single regional corporation was consulted with to send anyone to Germany; so what is the idea of promoting it? Which corporation has hosted a trade fair? The Minister will reply; he suggests every one, but we will come to that. The collection and distribution of forms issued by departments of Government. You go in any regional corporation and get a passport form; you cannot get a form to apply for pension. Why is the local government not working? Collection of rates and taxes; that is happening in some areas. The making of by-laws for good governance; naming of streets and numbering of houses, how many times people in Trinidad and Tobago drive around and cannot find the name of a street or the number of a house? Simple little things in terms of dollar value, not more than a dollar to number a street or a house. Now we know why local government is not working.

I will go further because this Minister has misled the House but you cannot fool the people at all. Let us look at the services that the local government is required to provide at this given time. I will give you a classic example because I want to qualify when the Minister said that local government is not working. I want to take you to Tunapuna Regional Corporation which is PNM controlled, I think there are seven PNM councillors and four UNC councillors, so it is a good balance. They got \$101 million, hon. Prime Minister, of that \$56 million went to wages and salaries, \$26 million went for garbage disposal which totalled \$82 million, \$19 million was left for goods and services. The Tunapuna Regional Corporation treats with 65,000 homes—*[Interruption]* You will speak at the appropriate time. Of the 65,000 homes there are 275,000 citizens; when you

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divide 65,000 into \$19 million you would get \$292 per year; that is what the PNM is paying for goods and services for 65,000 homes. But worse, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you divide 275,000 citizens in the Tunapuna Regional Corporation into \$19 million, you would get 70 ¢ per year. The Minister said local government is not working and we are seeing why. There is a calculated effort to starve the regional corporations of funds.

2.30 p.m.

Secondly, when the previous administration was in government, there were 1,900 workers at the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. Today, under the PNM, there are 1,400. So there are 1,400 workers to treat with 65,000 homes. We will come to the other areas we have to touch on. When you look at 1,400 workers having to spend \$19 million for goods and services, it comes to \$38 per day. It is impossible to provide the services.

Let us look at services that are required. We talk about garbage collection, rodent control, the removal of old vehicles and equipment, the supply of truck-borne water and the inspection of food premises. You and I have been to the Tunapuna area. There is one Public Health Inspector for the inspection of food premises.

For the processing of building plans, layout and subdivisions, there is one building inspector. Local government cannot work under the PNM. They simply have no interest. Processing of food badges is a concern all over the country. Construction of sidewalks—Mr. Deputy Speaker, this morning the Pepper Village Government School had a walk against child abuse from the Oropouche Health Centre to the Pepper Village Government School. Of course, the kids had to walk on the pavements, which are in a terrible condition—broken in many places, unable to walk, nobody with a wheelchair could go. Clearing of drains: we are into the rainy season and so many appeals have come from so many different quarters for the clearing of drains.

Installation and replacement of street lamps: we must acknowledge that a number of street lamps have been installed in the last couple months. [*Desk thumping*] My good friend, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, let me tell him how it operates. [*Interruption*] Forty-two thousand streetlights, but what happens is that there is absolutely no fairness in the distribution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the PNM tends [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please let the hon. Member speak.

Mr. C. Sharma: The defence of the PNM on every single occasion is race. It is most unfortunate that in 2006 when our sons are in Germany playing football, they are seeing everything through racial eyes.

The distribution of goods and services, according to the Members for Laventille East/Morvant and Laventille West has to be race. It is impossible. We cannot go that way. The emptying of cesspits and the construction of roadways: already local government cannot deliver. The Minister suggested that we add to the portfolio. Strengthening of roadways does not take place at all. Construction of bridges: How many times have the people from the rural community begged the Government? I almost said begging us. When you are in opposition, you are a part of the government. The Government cannot exist without the Opposition.

Mr. Manning: You are part of governance.

Mr. C. Sharma: Good! I remember, hon. Prime Minister, when I sat at 41 or 43 looking at the statue of Cipriani. I see that I will exceed his number of years. Congratulations! You have done it! Who is the other one?

Mr. Manning: Louis De Verteuil.

Mr. C. Sharma: How many years did he make by the way?

Mr. Manning: 31.

Mr. C. Sharma: He did not have Members like the Members of the PNM on that side, squeezing him.

Construction of bridges: How many times have we made requests? It is very good, in my respectful view, when an elected Member is the Speaker of the House. He has the experience of understanding the submission on both sides and you know the number of representations that have been made about bridges in this country.

Construction of drains and construction of pavilions: I want the Minister in his reply to indicate where they are being constructed. It is very relevant because if you are talking about the Elections and Boundaries Commission, it is for a purpose. It is to bring representation. If the Minister is saying it is irrelevant, then you have nothing to say here. You are not here for a courtesy call. [*Interruption*] You can speak any time, I will give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, please address me!

Mr. C. Sharma: I was on the point of construction of pavilions when the Minister interrupted and said it is not relevant. If you are talking about representation, what does the Member represent?

Construction of markets: Think of any market in this country. More than 50 per cent of the markets in this country need to be redone. What is this Government doing? One cannot argue that it is not giving moneys.

Construction of vending facilities: In the rural communities, the housewives do a little gardening. Where are they expected to sell their produce? The intention is to make sure that in the rural communities there is some roadside facility.

Maintenance of recreation grounds: I want to take a minute or two on recreation grounds. In view of our sons playing football in Germany, this is something we should be all excited about. Cricket: Look at our recreation grounds! The Government seems to have no interest in the small man and I know that it is not intentional. No Prime Minister, sitting in any country in the Caribbean, wants anything but the best for his people. I know the Prime Minister wants the best. He is from the south; south people are like that. They want the best, but what is happening, Mr. Prime Minister? Why is your Government failing? It has to be because of your lazy Ministers who have no care and no concern.

I cannot imagine why. I was a part of a government and we had to perform. I remember when Basdeo Panday was Prime Minister. When you went there, you had to answer questions. Dhanraj Singh was correct. He said that the only day I should be scared was Cabinet morning. You had to answer. You had to deliver. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have the money. They hire thousands of people. They hire consultants every day. What are they delivering? Look at local government, when you get up every morning and walk out of your house, pavement, garbage disposal, truck-borne water, O God!

Improvement and maintenance of markets and cemeteries: “One day all ah we go dead”. We have to go somewhere. Look at the cemeteries! *[Interruption]* And I suggest you come there too. Do not let them visit you after. They will poison you. Make sure they do not visit you at all.

Mr. Prime Minister, do you know why Hindus plant jhandis? It is to remind you of the little space you need in your life—two feet, three feet. Whether you have one acre, 1,000 acres or ten houses, it makes no difference; that little space to worship Mother Earth—simple little thing. In Islam, every three feet of space is a praying place. We must see humanity everywhere we go.

It pains me when I have to talk about discrimination. I will not talk about it today. I remind you that you are my Prime Minister and when you go out of this country and you have to report on this House, you must say you have 36 Members of Parliament. When I go, I cannot say John is the Prime Minister because he is not. Patrick Manning is my Prime Minister. When my kids have to write essays and they have questions on who are the Ministers, I cannot tell him I am in opposition. [*Loud music*] He is my leader. That is without question. Irrelevant! I do not want to miss the point. The problem with local government is that there is no organization. We need to work it out together. Mr. Prime Minister, you said on the last day that we could do—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the Marshal has gone out. It is not in the square. A big truck is travelling along the road. [*Members wait until truck passes*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Trini music is always good to hear. I am dealing with the Member for Diego Martin East. By the way, I am in agreement with him that local government is not working. Let me make that very clear. We all tend to agree that local government is not working. The question is what must be done.

One reason I would advance for its not working is lack of funding. I have raised this with the hon. Prime Minister on numerous occasions and today I have done that again. Mr. Prime Minister, before you came in, I indicated the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation's need for funding. Everywhere you go, no corporation gets all the money it needs. The second thing they face is labour shortage.

Mr. Manning: In the face of what the hon. Members opposite have been saying, that has been the consequence of the cessation of agricultural activities in the sugar sector and there should not be any shortage of labour. They should be able to get it from there.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Prime Minister, the shortage of labour at the corporations is that they have not been hiring. I used the example of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. They moved from 1,900 employees to 1,400. They are not allowed to bring in the workers for one reason or the other. The Minister may be able to say why. [*Interruption*] If they had 1,900 and 500 left because of death, retirement or for whatever reason, you have to fill it. One of the challenges is that it is perhaps your Government's intention that the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) or the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP)

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assist. That may or may not be happening. The Member for Diego Martin East made the point that there is triplication of duties. Why is that happening? Largely because of political interference.

Let us take the Member for San Fernando West—I am not suggesting that this happens in her constituency—she can call on a CEPEP gang to get something done that the corporation should have done but is not doing for one reason or the other. She may be able to call on the URP, so there is that kind of duplication.

When they talk about a work schedule, assuming they said they were going to do something on May 10 and for some reason they did not do it on May 10 and the MP needs to have it done, she gets the URP or CEPEP to do it. After that the regional corporation comes to do it still because it is on the programme. There is absolutely no coordination. There is a tendency by regional corporations; if you do not investigate it, it will be dismissed and no corrective measures will take place.

For instance, to use myself as an example, as the representative for Fyzabad, I am unable to get the Siparia Regional Corporation to do any work that I may recommend based on representations made by the Member of Parliament. The reason is: That is UNC man; do not worry about that. That happens all the time, so if you look at projects being done, there is a tendency that more projects are happening in what appear to be PNM-controlled areas, given that that has to be so because there is more PNM representation. One can argue that, out of the 126 local government representatives, only 43 are from UNC. Naturally more should happen, but much more is not happening.

If you look at the PNM areas, street lighting, for example, no Member on this side can say: I want street lights installed in Ackbal Trace. [*Interruption*] You are not treated with.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Fyzabad for giving way. All hon. Members are aware that the Government has embarked on a programme to install 82,000 new street lights all over the country and to upgrade 36,000 more at a cost of \$626 million. In that programme, the Government is not interfering and the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission is doing it systematically. If any Member of Parliament makes representations to T&TEC, T&TEC responds. That is the experience of so many others, including some hon. Members on your side.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Prime Minister, I respect your sincerity. I guess, from your heart, that is what you mean, but that is not what is taking place and the way to address that is to request from T&TEC or the Minister responsible, all the

Members of Parliament who made requests that were attended to and you will see those that came from Fyzabad. If I requested 25 areas and 10 were done, then you will see that 10 were done and 15 were not done and you will ask why. It is not happening. It is intended to be that way and that is a good place to start. The point is that it needs to be looked into.

The other area of local government is the whole question of workers' motivation. Workers are not made to feel part of a corporation. They are not being seen as team players, so they go there to do something, oftentimes they do not have materials, there is lack of supervision, so there is no excitement about going to work. Many of them are involved in other activities to supplement their income—nothing is wrong with that—but they must be excited about going to work. They must understand that this is our country.

In fact, each citizen matters and they matter equally. That must be communicated to them. It does not matter who they are. This is a beautiful country. Today, tomorrow and the next few days, the entire world will know about Trinidad and Tobago and they will want to come and we must encourage them to come. However, we must show them the love that this country has, the beauty, the care. They must not go into any area to be told or given any signals whatever that that area is represented by the PNM and another by the UNC. That must never be.

One of the other concerns, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to find ways where partners in the local communities are involved—NGOs and CBOs. One of the things we have to fear in doing that is not to bring party groups—UNC or PNM—but bring the religious bodies. [*Interruption*] We have a few. Let us excite everybody. In any case, the party group members will belong to a village council, a mandir or a masjid. Let them become partners.

A good example, one we can perhaps look at, is that all of us have been abroad somewhere. When you go downtown Miami or Toronto, it is clean, the streets are well done; there are lots of flowers and greenery. What is different in the United States or Canada? Even in Tobago you see some of it happening so that you need to make people feel part owner of the community in which they live. Make flowering plants and manure available. Do whatever is required. Let us develop the place together. The present reality is that governance arrangements do not provide for the voices of citizens to be heard. That is one of the challenges we have had for a number of years. How do we get the community to be part of this? In the early days the panchait system seemed to have worked for a number of things. In the African communities, that is what was engaged for a long time.

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The other area I wanted to touch on was the question of developing some concept. We know that Act 21 of 1990 governs all regional corporations and ministers here. What are some of the provisions in terms of what the corporations should have based on Act 21 of 1990? In each of the corporations, they should have an engineer—not present in many corporations. They should have a medical officer of health—not available in many of the corporations. They should have more access to purchase equipment. In fact, the Ministry of Local Government should operate as an agency to interface between local government bodies and central government. A key function would be to coordinate the activities of all the agencies in the community. The intention is to make it work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Minister through his office is able to administer value in excess of \$100 million. Why not give that money to the regional corporations? We make representation for roads to be paved or bridges to be fixed and the corporation's stereotype answer is that it does not have funds, but the Minister can sit in Port of Spain and say he wants the bridge at Timital Junction repaired and fund it from Port of Spain. That has been happening—ministerial projects; ministerial approvals. Why is that allowed to continue? They are taking away the powers of the regional corporation.

The other thing is that when the local government bodies become legal entities, they would be able to borrow moneys. Not a single corporation has obtained your permission to borrow any moneys to fund any projects in the community. [*Interruption*] The administrative complexes, for instance, have not been happening and the reason they are not happening is that the regional corporations cannot borrow the money to build.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, how, in the face of appropriations to the Revenue Stabilization Fund, could the Member for Fyzabad make such an assertion? If moneys are not available to the local government bodies for that purpose, it is because the Government's strategy for development is different from the way it is conceived by the Member for Fyzabad. Indeed, the Urban Development Corporation is embarking on the construction of a number of these administrative complexes in the next fiscal year. In fact, I think it is starting in this financial year. He is just not correct.

Mr. C. Sharma: The point is that the local government bodies became legal entities and one of the powers they got was to be able to raise funds. Okay, you are giving these 13 companies to build the administrative complex, let the regional corporations take the responsibility. They will build for less; they will build it within budget and within a time frame.

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Let us try it. You are giving them power and you are taking away with the same hand.

Mr. Manning: It is under the existing management arrangements. It just has not worked and that is why there is a proposal on the table for a reorganization of the discharge of the local government function where new functions and new responsibilities are being given to local government. It is in that context that one could put a greater level of confidence in the ability to discharge responsibilities in their care. As it now stands, it means restructuring. To give now the local government bodies authority to borrow money is to play fast and loose with the country's finances. The Ministry of Finance will have great reservations about that.

Mr. C. Sharma: Then, Mr. Prime Minister, you are really making the local bodies useless. They would not be able to do a single thing. If they have to buy a vehicle, they would have to go into Port of Spain for approval. The point I am making is to start them at some point where they can start doing things for themselves. [*Interruption*] While they are reorganizing, they are starving. While they are reorganizing, they cannot build a single pavement.

What is intended for local government? Local government has been with us for hundreds of years. We learned from the experiences of countries outside Trinidad and Tobago, from places like Africa, India and China. Local government worked in those communities. Local government was responsible for the areas there.

Mr. Manning: I wonder if the Member would be kind enough to quote the document from which he is reading.

Mr. C. Sharma: I was not quoting at this time, but one of the reference documents I have is the draft policy and the White Paper.

Sen. Dumas: You are saying our statement of intent?

Mr. C. Sharma: I am not saying your statement; I am saying what must happen. This has nothing to do with your intent. It is what is best for the country. If you were doing it right, we would not be having this debate. Your Member for Diego Martin East said that local government is not working and we all agreed. The Member for Couva South also said it.

We have a starting point. Local government is not working. The reason for the debate is to obtain our ideas as well. If every idea we advance is struck down,

then we have absolutely nothing to say. [*Interruption*] If all of them are not good, then something is wrong with the recipient. Let us be fair.

Mr. Manning: We examine your ideas critically.

Mr. C. Sharma: It appears—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, please speak to me.

Mr. C. Sharma: It appears that in this debate nothing that the Opposition advances is considered because the Minister oftentimes has a prepared reply; not on this particular occasion because I see him taking some notes. So he comes with something for 20 minutes and “I move”—end of story. This is the practice.

Mr. Manning: I really thank the Member for Fyzabad for giving way. I would like him to know that the Government has had a Green Paper out for two years, a draft White Paper on Local Government Reform is now out, a statement has been made by the Prime Minister in this honourable House on this matter and it is a matter that is engaging the active attention of the Government at this time. What the Opposition has to say on this matter is of tremendous interest to us and that is why we are taking such careful note. The hon. Member for Fyzabad could be assured that whatever is said by them will be the subject of very careful scrutiny as we seek to move into an arrangement involving local government on which we are all agreed if it is possible at all.

Mr. C. Sharma: I thank you very much and I believe what you said but I would like to suggest that on this side I am the spokesperson, the shadow minister [*Interruption*] Let me finish for—[*Interruption*] Allow me to finish! I speak and the political leader and every Member here will speak. I am the spokesperson for works and transport and local government. I share local government with the political leader. I go further. I am prepared to meet with the hon. Minister once a month to have constructive dialogue. At the end of the day I have to live here. I intend to live here.

Mr. Valley: What about your green card?

Mr. C. Sharma: I do not have a green card. I do not need one to be quite honest. I am not leaving this country under any condition and I hope that my children never have to leave. They can leave to study and so, but never to leave this country. I want to contribute and whenever it happens that we are in government, we will make sure that the same obtains. It is not to obtain points to say that we will never be in government or it might be 2050. That is irrelevant. It

is policy. Let us agree constructively. Minister, I will make myself available to come to your office in Port of Spain. [*Interruption*]

3.00 p.m.

One of the points the Member for Diego Martin East made was that citizens are not aware of the role of local government. It is your Government that spent close to \$600 million on public advertisements and it is still not reaching the people. What I am saying is that the systems are not reaching out to the people. You need to engage Members opposite as well. We have a role to play. If every day in the newspaper we are seeing advertisements then it is adding nothing to the stock of the country and nobody is motivated by it.

I want to suggest that with respect to local government there must be a distribution of resources across the communities they represent. We must look at what local government is empowered to do. Social services are important. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, I want to tell the Prime Minister that we have to make sure that we are not encouraging our people to remain poor. What do I mean by that?

Every year the Government would put out a big advertisement in the newspaper about the number of persons who have benefited from the Social Help And Rehabilitation Efforts (SHARE) programme; and the number of free meals that were given out. If you keep increasing the SHARE programme you are establishing a poor market out there, and you are making people poor in order to benefit from this programme. You have to move away from the handouts. Let us encourage them to plant little gardens. Do you remember when we were kids every school had a school garden? Why are we increasing the SHARE distribution? You cannot have single digit unemployment—whether it is 7, 8 or 9 per cent—and 30 per cent of our citizens are living below the poverty line. So, local government has a very important role to play.

Under these social programmes there must be a register of all the NGOs, CBOs and sport groups in the corporation. There must be wide consultation. Prime Minister, I think you made the point when you said on another occasion that mayors and chairmen would be invited at another place to talk. That is a good idea. Let each regional corporation invite Members of Parliament from their respective areas. [*Crosstalk*] You must not invite them for cosmetic purposes.

Local government must get involved in family development. We need to create stronger families; we need to lend support to the churches in our communities. Local government must be able to provide—you indicated that in

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the Green Paper—simple things like a passport form, a pension form and information on how to obtain a birth certificate. If you go to the office in San Fernando you would see a very long line. That should not be in 2006. You should not have 200 persons lining up to collect a birth paper. We have to do better than that. We could provide this at MPs' offices. Every Member of Parliament's office should be computerized so that we could deliver these services. There is a central data system in Port of Spain, so it could be linked up to MP offices, so that persons would be able to get their birth paper there. They could also collect passport forms and have them examined there.

Access to public services: What is local government doing to add value to people's life? They are doing absolutely nothing at this time. Is there a register for disabled persons who are living in the community? Do they know how many disabled persons are living in the community?

There is a young lady by the name of Arlene Alexander—I want the Prime Minister to listen to this—who was in a wheelchair for four years. She started writing O'levels and she got 5 O'levels—strong mind power; beautiful human being. She is walking with a stick now. She has moved out of the wheelchair because of her will power to get things done. She has applied for an NHA house. Every time she comes to my office it hurts my heart because from the time she enters she starts crying. She lives in Pepper Village, Fyzabad. Local government needs to find out who are these persons and reach out to them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know you know about that case because you saw the ramp I built at her home in order for her to get on the pavement with her wheelchair.

Mr. Ramnath: I find you are collaborating too much with the Deputy Speaker. [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Sharma: The country has never seen a better MP for La Brea than Mr. Bereaux. [*Laughter*] He has broken many records. He works long hours. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, please get back to the Order.

Mr. Manning: I just want to let the hon. Member for Fyzabad know that it is very unlikely that in the next general election any two members of the same family would be PNM candidates. Be so advised. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Sharma: I am going to buy you a drink this evening. There is a happy hour in a place two minutes away from here. Culture has a critical role to play. There is a tendency that some cultures do not have a place on the national stage

and we have to move away from that. A Creole dance or an Indian dance is beautiful to look at. Creole food and Indian food are good to eat. We have to develop that concept. The policies which are obtained in one community may be a little different in another community. For instance, in some regional corporations, there may be a leaning to agriculture so the funding for projects must reflect that. It may be fishing in another community. So you should not say that there is only funding for access roads and so forth. There should be wide consultation and persons in the communities should become partners—they should feel part of it and they should be excited. I think people want to do that.

There is a lack of assistance. Oftentimes a group may apply for some kind of assistance—I want to make an appeal for an increase in the Chairman's Fund. I do not know how much it is now. I think it is about \$3,000 for a tent for a sport day or a stage for a Divali celebration. The hon. Minister needs to ensure that local government does not practise what appears to be discrimination. I want to give you a good example.

Two weeks ago, we celebrated Indian Arrival Day and not a single regional corporation assisted in the hosting of Indian Arrival Day celebrations. *[Interruption]* When you are replying you could tell us why. I know that six or seven groups have applied from the constituency of Fyzabad and they did not get any assistance. That might be an isolated case. It is not only Indian Arrival Day but we also have the Baptist holiday, Eid ul Fitr or whatever is being celebrated. What we really want to do is to make local government the “big brother” in the community so that we all would be excited to be part of it. There should be a contest for the best corporation which assists in doing X or Y.

Mr. Ramnath: The civil servants run the thing.

Mr. C. Sharma: With respect to the question of the right of local government to collect taxes and so forth, you need to declare a policy on this. Nobody seems to know what the policy is and who are the persons empowered to make these assessments. Where are they training? They must be aware of all the homes in the community and not only those homes with electricity or the homes that are paying taxes.

Two weeks ago, in the constituency of Fyzabad, a number of homes were broken down. Now, we would always have squatters in this country. The question is that they must be treated fairly and equally. *[Interruption]* When a women cries on you, your hair would drop out. Do not let that happen to you. There is a 75-year-old lady whose house was broken down and she had nowhere to turn. There

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was no assistance from the Siparia Regional Corporation up to this day. Minister, you do not want to preside over a ministry like that. They should not have to contact you. I want to thank Mr. Anthony Roberts, the Member for St. Ann's East. When the homes were broken down I called his office and he returned my call. [*Crosstalk*] I am simply saying that local government is the "big brother" in the community. It was intended to provide services and to add value to people's lives. The document says that local government may be the coordinator—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Sharma: I was making the point that based on the documentation provided, it indicates that local government would add value to the people for whom it is responsible, but it must not discriminate in life services. That is critical. We could list many of these services. The beaches in our area like Vessigny, Guapo, Point Fortin, Cedros, Quinam and Erin do not have lifeguards. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ramnath: And also Beach Camp.

Mr. C. Sharma: We want to apply for that facility for a retreat, but to whom do we apply? [*Laughter*] The point is that when our children go to these beaches there must be a place where they could shower and so forth. That is a simple thing to put into the system. Since these things relate to policies they impact on the people in the community, and they must be made available to them. They should not be caught off guard.

If you have to reach the cremation site for one o'clock—traffic does not allow it all the time and you cannot start the funeral at nine o'clock in the morning—and you are coming from Cedros to do a cremation at Mosquito Creek. The policy must be reflective. On weekends you cannot find the person to get the cemetery plot. These are simple things. You do not need to engage a consultant at the cost of \$100,000 to tell you to correct that small matter. I cannot help but lay emphasis on the question of funding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if a councillor raises a project, he must not be told that this is beyond the councillor's budget. If a bridge needs to be repaired or a sidewalk needs to be done, you should not say that you have only \$15,000 and you have to find a project within \$15,000, because there is a bridge which needs

to be repaired. Hon. Minister, do you agree with me? These are very simple things. [*Crosstalk*]

With respect to the question of housing, the Ministry of Local Government needs to say what its policy is, in terms of the coordinating agency for housing, so that housing would be available in the local government areas. There must be some process. There could be a recommendation from a Member of Parliament or a recommendation from the church for persons to be considered. It may be outstanding citizens in the area like a sport hero or somebody who is physically challenged. The key to this is adding value.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what excites you when you go to a foreign city? It appears that everything is working but, certainly, everything is not working. If the bus is going to be at a certain spot at 6.10 a.m., at 6.10 a.m. the bus would be there. If you are told that at 5.10 a.m. the garbage would be picked up, at 5.10 a.m. the garbage would be picked up. If you are told that water is going to be locked off between the hours of 6.00 a.m. and 8.00 a.m. the water would come back at 8.00 a.m. You need to put systems in place and to ensure that they are working.

Local government needs to declare its position on how it is going to treat with schools in the area, because school children's lives are very important. We have to make sure that they are not denied anything in their formative years of development. If a school is having a sports day, there must be a relationship; if there is a tree in a compound to be cut no one knows where to go. If there is a problem in the school yard, local government would say that is the Ministry of Education responsibility, but the corporation could do something temporarily and then coordinate with the ministry. This is what local government is about. They could then refer the matter to the ministry's local office which might be about a five or ten minutes drive away. They should also be able to communicate formally with the Ministry. If and when I become a minister, these are some of the things that I would implement. What I would be concerned about is whether or not I am doing the best that I could.

Mr. Ramnath: That would not be very long.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Prime Minister, I am a worker; I like to deliver. I must always be seen as a person with good news. That is how Members of Parliament should be.

Mr. Ramnath: You are talking like Benny Hinn there. [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Sharma: We are messengers of good news. When a person comes to our office he or she may not get the answer he or she may want, but that person

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must know that there is sincerity in listening to the problem. [*Interruption*] I want to congratulate my good friend, the Member for St. Joseph, the new chairman—

Mr. Manning: Of the DNA.

Mr. C. Sharma: So things are happening. At the end of the day, it does not matter whether it is PNA or DNA, because we all have a single focus. Mr. Prime Minister, there should be a competition for the best MP in terms of delivery of services. Let us do something so that people would know how many projects were done with the National Commission for Self help, et cetera. I think the formula is there, but it is the will power to make it happen. We did not come here to make up time. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you are aware, there are a number of select committees, but I am going to deal with that matter at another time. The Human Resource Department should encourage employees at the local government level to advance. You do not only need persons with O levels now. There are hundreds of other disciplines that you could think of. The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) is a good idea, so let them go there and qualify themselves and come back with an associate degree or bachelors degree or whatever it is. Let them know that you would assist them by giving them the money to do it.

Mr. Ramnath: UTT is a disaster.

Mr. C. Sharma: The more intelligent practitioners there are, at the end of the day, they could only add value. For too long now we have been hearing about the computerization of these corporations. The intention is really to make the delivery of services better. There are sufficient persons within these corporations. You see, what happens in these corporations is that everyone wants to get consultancy work. Nothing is wrong with that.

There are many persons looking to get consultancy work, and they are telling you that they cannot do things at the local government level. That is not true, because I was there. There are many educated and resourceful persons who are willing to do these things, so give them a try. You should ask any regional corporation if it could do its own computerization. We did this at MPs' offices with much less resources. We have been talking about this matter for the longest while. On the last occasion, the hon. Prime Minister mentioned linkages and networking. What is this intended to do? I subscribe to what he said, but I want to go further.

There are citizens in about 150 countries from Trinidad and Tobago, and they want to make a contribution to their country. Once you are from Trinidad and

Tobago, you must be able to go on a website. I met a guy from Australia who is involved in the local government body there. He should be able to go on our website there and shoot some ideas.

One of the best bone marrow surgeons in the world is a guy from Princes Town. He wants to give back some ideas, so he should be able to go on the Ministry of Health website or the Ministry of Local Government website and shoot some ideas. So you would want to develop that linkage and networking. At some point in time, local government should be able to bring in the best 10 persons in the area and pay them for two weeks and let them add value. That is what UNC would do. I want the PNM to do it, and we would continue it whenever that time comes. So, networking, at this level, is not only about technology and information, but it is about getting the best persons, wherever they are, to participate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, Mr. Minister, in every regional corporation there is something that is outstanding, for example, an old building, an old mandir, or the first Baptist church or whatever it might be, and every regional corporation should have a project once per year to restore these buildings. They could create a little yard around it or an information centre. Again, this would develop the community and people would be able to identify with these things.

In many of these local government bodies, the question of a police department seems to be lacking for one reason or the other. Recently, I saw where some officers who were not trained were sent to a regional corporation. They were unable to perform in the corporation. The CEO did the right thing and they were sent home. We need to make sure that they are involved, not just in terms of getting their uniforms, but by becoming very conversant with the community which they are responsible for. Local government should ensure that they have the necessary resources like motor vehicles, et cetera.

Now, one of the challenges of local government practitioners is their inability to address community problems. In most cases, the problem is the lack of funding or knowing where to access the funding. This is embarrassing for local government practitioners. There should be a networking with the political arm as it exists, and whether it is a UNC corporation or a PNM corporation, members of the opposite side must not be seen as enemies. So whether it is the Princes Town, Tunapuna or Siparia regional corporation, they must all be incorporated. If they are elected representatives and they were nominated they have a purpose and you should make it easy for them.

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The third point in this context is partnership with corporate citizens. For instance, BP Amoco is giving assistance in the Guayaguayare area—I want to congratulate them—but there is no coordination. They do not walk through the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation. My understanding is that they do not do it because that corporation is controlled by the UNC. I think that is foolish. I hope that is not the reason. If you are a PNM MP, Petrotrin would give you a little more assistance, and if you are a UNC MP you would get the next week.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the challenges I encountered in doing my research was the question of geopolitical discrimination. What do I mean by that? The Prime Minister is correct. The intention of street lighting is not to put street lighting in PNM or UNC areas, but to light up Trinidad and Tobago. If there is evidence that the Street Lighting Programme seems to be favouring PNM areas—give and take, let us say 10 per cent more, that is all right; 20 per cent more, that is okay; but 25 per cent is too much.

With respect to the question of coordination for National Self Help projects, there is the same situation. Local government bodies should be part of our National Social Development Programmes because you would have the widest spread.

How do we treat with employees in local government who want to go abroad and study? Could we have a policy so that every year there could be 1 per cent or 2 per cent of employees going abroad to study? All of them cannot go at the same time. You should say okay, we need persons in 10 areas and persons who are applying for those 10 areas would be considered. At this time, what kind of training is there in local government? My understanding is that there is very little. There must be training at all levels. They should be excited about dressing in uniforms. There should be a one day training in X or Y. You should bring all the Public Health Inspectors in the country together for a training session.

I want to raise the issue with respect to the authority of local government to employ persons. There seem to be mixed signals. In some corporations they could employ persons and in other corporations they cannot. We need to make sure that is established. With respect to the system, how do people obtain employment?

I talked earlier on Act No. 21 of 1990, and until this proposal of the Government comes into being, Act No. 21 of 1990 should be implemented. It is the law and it is something that could work. In fact, when we arrived at Act No. 21 of 1990, we had the input of all the political organizations—the NAR, UNC, PNM and others. It may not be the best document, but that is the law. We need to

make sure that at the local government level these structures are organized. The structures are there, but they are simply disorganized.

I have found that there is a large political divide in local government. There seems to be a lack of team spirit within the corporations and that results in poor customer service. There are no incentives at the corporations; no motivation to add value and to give that extra effort.

In many corporations you would have different areas of strength. I made the point earlier about agricultural communities, the fishing communities and the art and craft communities. We need to develop these communities so that when we look in the near future we could say, okay, the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation is a strong agricultural community, and you could send people there for training. The Toco/Manzanilla and Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporations they are strong fishing communities; and in Moruga and Fyzabad there are strong skills for community development and these skills should be developed.

I do not want to leave out local tourism. I think this is critical for these corporations. For instance, the Ministry of Tourism went to the Pitch Lake at Lake Asphalt and did something, but that is not enough. The corporation should be there on a daily basis adding value and showing how to do different things. You cannot have people just providing guide services. People should also come and see how art and craft is made. There should be a workshop or a demonstration centre to show people how these things are done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, recreational and cultural facilities are lacking in these corporations. In the previous budget, the hon. Prime Minister indicated that 10 per cent of all goods and services obtained by the Government would be available to small business people but, to date, that has not been done. Local government is a good body to start with. You should not have to buy goods and services. Let the corporations be given that opportunity.

I have raised the question of unemployment, but I want to suggest that there should be a public policy followed by advertisements saying how employment takes place and who could apply for employment. If your name is registered—they would tell you to come and sign a book every week, so you do not need to do that—your name would be there in the register and it should be updated every three months, 180 days as the case might be, so people would not have to go every Tuesday morning. If John is looking for employment, he would have to go to the Siparia Regional Corporation on Tuesday morning and sign the register, and the next week he would have to go back and sign the same register. He has to

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do that for 100 Tuesdays, so on Tuesdays he cannot work anywhere else so he would have to get a little part-time job.

Local government has a critical role to play with respect to flooding and garbage disposal. More than that, they should get involved with the communities. They could plant flowers and so forth, and some assistance should be given for that. Many times on the radio you would hear an announcement being made or a public address system would go around informing people to put out heavy equipment. Some people would put out their old refrigerators, stoves, et cetera and the trucks do not come. Sometimes when the trucks do come the workers would say that the refrigerator is too heavy and they cannot put it up on the truck. So the refrigerator would end up in the drain sooner or later.

One of the concerns in certain areas is deforestation. While that would come under the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, the Ministry of Local Government must also play a role. Trees should not be planted for planting sake. Trees that would add value down the road like cedar, mahogany or fruit trees or whatever it may be should be planted in the mangroves to conserve the soil and so forth. That would be the intelligence in it.

I see nothing is happening in local government to ease up traffic jams. There are simple things around the school to be done. If you have side roads, they could be used as alternative routes. If it is properly done, it would mean that you could divert easily. With the development of houses in communities, local government seems powerless. With these additional houses in communities there are no plan for garbage disposal; there are no plans for maintenance and other services which local government usually provides.

With respect to the question of pollution and waste as it relates to local government, we are seeing very little on it. I think I would have to give the Minister this document. Imagine an Opposition MP, with little resources, could produce this type of information and that is because there is the will power. That is all it means. It means that I am able to bring thinkers together and say this is for Trinidad and Tobago, but you would go and pay a consultant \$100,000 to do this and then you would give another consultant \$200,000 to see what the first consultant did, and I would do it for just \$2,000. [*Crosstalk*] You know my talents. I have not reached your level, but I am aiming to get there. I have to stretch a little more but I would get there. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know that in another manifestation you shared this with me and that is the question of financial management in these corporations. We are

not getting value for money. What is lacking is the question of customer delivery service. How should a citizen living in any one of these corporations feel when he or she goes to any of these corporations? He or she is not seen as a customer or someone who adds value or someone who is responsible for that person being there. He or she is treated very badly.

I come now to the question of human resource management within these corporations. The system must be improved and there must be checks and balances. There must be more manpower planning and, of course, training goes with it. When I went to some of the corporations, I saw a number of projects that were not completed for one reason or the other, for example, a simple thing like a box drain. If the cement comes today, there would be no sand. When the sand comes, there would be no shovel. If there is sand, cement and the shovel then there would be no water. Is it a community show? Seriously, in 2006 we do not need to go there. When you are driving around, if you see a drain that is not cleaned you should stop and look at it.

I remember a former Prime Minister, Mr. George Chambers, went on a URP project. He had a straw hat that he used to wear. He asked them what was going on there and one of the guys said that a fool with a straw hat came asking what is going on, and what is wrong with him, if he did not see that they were taking a break. You need to be out there.

One of the ways to add value is when Members of Parliament from the Opposition visit a project in his or her constituency, but they are treated with discourtesy. Do you know why they treat us like that? You have condoned it; not intentionally. When a Member of Parliament goes on a project, even if he goes as a citizen, he must be told what the status of the project is, but instead he is insulted because they are PNM projects. That is not the intention of the Government and you need to communicate this to persons under you.

I want to suggest that all regional corporations should declare their positions in treating with people across the board. Each constituent or elector should know that they could access these services, and any failure to receive these services, a complaint should be made and it should be treated within the regional corporations. I do not want the Minister telling me that I could go to the Ombudsman or I could go to court. Let us not go there. If you have \$10 million to provide goods and services we should know up front what the recreational grounds are.

What is happening is that in many areas the same areas are being worked over and over. So you would find that work is being done year after year on a pavilion

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in what appears to be a PNM area. Let us finish the job. If it is in a PNM area, there is no problem with that. It should be finished and then they should move on to another one. You should say that you would be doing 10 pavilions this year, and this is the amount of money that would be available for that project, and the communities would know that there is work to be carried out on 10 pavilions, and Los Iros would get the facility for people to change their clothes, et cetera.

Mr. Achong: Do not mention my constituency.

Mr. C. Sharma: Larry, are you awake? [*Laughter*] We must find ways of improving productivity at all levels. What I mean by that is that you should tell the employees of these corporations that if they are assigned to do a project and there is no material for some reason—that is no problem because there must be failures from time to time—they could move on to another project. Those of us who have Government buildings for MP offices get very little service, for example, a simple thing like cleaning the yard. One has to appreciate that people would be coming to your office for service and you must be able to treat with them.

We need to find ways to improve the feeling of pride, participation and belonging in these corporations; not just by employees but also with stakeholders. If you look at a register to see who has visited a corporation, you would see very few persons from the community go there. You see, they are there to help us, and you want to remove that. We need to make sure that at all levels managers are accountable, because we are not seeing that. We also need to establish time frames. That is one of the challenges that I have seen. Nobody knows how long a box drain would take; nobody knows when the cemeteries are going to be cutlashed and cleaned. In fact, in many cemeteries there used to be a shed so when the funeral reached there, you could have done the final rights, but that does not exist today. Cemeteries are not even fenced.

These corporations should indicate to the electorate what funding they have received. So if they have received funding to do 20 projects valued at \$5 million, you do not expect the 20 projects to be valued at \$6 million. They would not know that, and in the absence of that information they would be frustrated, and they would feel that they are not being treated equally.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, each corporation must establish a meaningful complainant's desk. If you go and make a report, it should be acknowledged within 10 days and corrective measures should be taken. There must be some measure of compliance. Presently, there is nothing like that. If you call a corporation and inform them that

there is a tree hanging over Pepper Village Government School and if they could cut it, they would say that they do not know. If they could cut the tree, they would not know when. So, no schedule is being given. If you call the corporation and inform them that a pavement has an open manhole and children are falling in, and if they could come and correct it, you would not get a proper answer. Initially, you should be able to cut some plants and secure it until you could put down the concrete slabs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not want to be seen as if I am attacking the corporations. I am very satisfied that the corporations are doing their best in the given situations. I have raised a number of challenges with the Government that these corporations faced. We have to ensure that the staff obtains promotion based on their ability, performance and training. This should be for all employees. There should be communication whether through a newsletter or advertisements in the daily newspaper saying what is happening in these corporations. All the corporations should be upgraded in terms of the appropriate number of staff that is required. There should be programmes to add value. They should set targets and deadlines and they should be achieved with the necessary resources, manpower and budget. There should be meetings with stakeholders across the communities so that everyone would become a partner.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I indicated, we on this side want to see improvement. We are representatives of the people and we are partners in the development of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are committed to that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Harry Partap (Nariva): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you. I take this opportunity to make a few comments on the Motion before this House which was presented by the hon. Minister of Local Government. The Motion is asking this House to approve the draft of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Order, 2006. If I understand the draft Order correctly, it is seeking to increase the number of electoral districts in five regional corporations by adjusting and modifying boundaries in electoral districts, and by extension polling divisions.

There is a clear link between this draft Order and an election—whether it is local or general elections; whether elections are called this year, next year or the year after. The draft Order came to this House four months after the Minister brought a Bill seeking to validate the late submission of the Fifth Report of the Elections

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and Boundaries Commission under the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, Chap. 25:50, for the purpose of local government election.

In fact, this draft Order for which the Minister is seeking approval by the House, was circulated with the same Validation Bill in February this year. The debate on this draft Order commenced about four weeks ago, but the Government was in no hurry to have it concluded. As it turned out, intervening events explained why the Minister has been tardy in fulfilling his legal responsibilities in relation to the report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

There is always a sinister motive behind the PNM's incompetence and tardiness and, in this case, it is no different. The most obvious motive for the PNM to have kept the EBC report a secret for seven months before bringing it to Parliament—they are now dilly-dallying on the draft Order—would have been to have an unfair advantage over the Opposition in the event of an election but, as the good Lord would have it—God moves in mysterious ways, and with all the wild spending, the “wine a jam”, handouts, CEPEP and URP side shows, the environment did not favour an election. So using the Good Friday “bobolee” of local government reform, the hon. Member for San Fernando East came as a thief in the night and postponed the local government elections, because he has the power to do it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our concern on this side is that in one month's time, the life of local government bodies would expire, and unless the Minister of Local Government brings an amendment to the Municipal Corporations Act, these regional and municipal corporations would be transformed by a Cabinet decision into an advisory role. This would be most unacceptable and an affront to the Prime Minister's statement alluding to local government reform which was made in this House on May 26 this year. It would also undermine the basic thread that ties the Government to its vision of a new model of local government inherent in the Prime Minister's statement of May 26, 2006.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin East gave an undertaking this evening that the Act would be amended but, you know, we do not often believe the hon. Minister, and there are several reasons why we do not believe him. We do hope that he is right and that the Act would be amended. The Prime Minister cannot expect local government to be partners in governance and driving the developmental process as an advisory body.

Local government corporations must have the power to make decisions which must be supported by adequate and available funding. These elected representatives

and nominated members in municipal and regional corporations must be clothed with the power and authority envisaged in the Municipal Corporations Act, if they are to be partners in government. Anything less would just be a sham and “ol’ talk”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that the Prime Minister’s decision to postpone the local government election was not a ploy to give the Minister of Local Government direct control over the affairs of the corporations in a year leading up to elections; whether it is local government election or general elections.

If the Act is not amended by July 13, the regional municipal corporations would lapse into an advisory body where all funding of projects would be subjected to the Minister’s approval. That is what is going to take place. They did it in 1992 and they want to do it again in 2006. This is why we are very cautious of the undertaking given by the Member for Diego Martin East. *[Interruption]* I am now hearing mumblings by the Minister of Local Government, but we have to take this with a grain of salt.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is the possibility that this draft Order has been the catalyst for some serious soul searching on the question of local government by the PNM administration. I am led to believe this because coming on the heels of the draft Order, the Prime Minister made a statement in Parliament on the issue of local government reform and, subsequently, laid on the Table a draft White Paper on Local Government Reform 2006. One is never sure whether or not the PNM is using the White Paper on local government to ease the public pressure on them by shifting the focus from the unprecedented crime rate and the apparent collapse of civil society for the placing of mayors and chairmen of corporations in the Senate without voting rights. It may be desirable.

In reading today’s *Express* newspaper, on page 6 I see that the Mayors of Port of Spain and San Fernando and their wives are benefiting further from the generosity of TSTT. Their packages include airfare, accommodation and passes to three matches for the 2006 World Cup tournament. I believe that TSTT may have forgotten that there are mayors in Chaguanas, Arima and Point Fortin. *[Interruption]* That is the only point that I am making. *[Interruption]* I am sure that there must have been more. There are five mayors. There are so many things that could be done to make local government effective, even without a formal declaration of reform. For example, why is there no system of capacity building within the regional and municipal corporations?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, career officers in the public service are sometimes promoted to the office of CEO, but without managerial skills. They perform a

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purely civil service role with hardly the boardroom demands for performance, benchmark and delivery of services. What is disturbing is that there are no incentives to steer these officers into human relations skill-training which is necessary for effective leadership. There is no demand from the authorities for effective customer service, even though local government is close to the people, and it is sometimes the first port of call for citizens of this country.

Even the physical environment of the regional corporations cannot inspire pride in these corporations; they cannot inspire the pride of these workers. The Government should ensure that each corporation has a City Hall as a place of pride. You do not need local government reform to achieve this, but what you need is the political will and less interference by the Minister with responsibility for local government.

The Chaguanas Borough Council, through its Mayor Alderman Surujrattan Rambachan, took the initiative to prepare a plan for a new City Hall in Chaguanas. *[Interruption]* I hope you are going to give me some answers. My understanding is that the drawings have been approved, but work cannot start because the Minister of Local Government has stopped the tendering process for the project. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister must now tell us why the Chaguanas City Hall—

Sen. Dumas: If there is any suggestion that this Minister would interfere with the tendering process of the Central Tenders Board (CTB) or any other agency of the State, I want to categorically deny that.

Mr. H. Partap: Well, you had your say, but my information is that the Minister has stopped the process.

Sen. Dumas: That is nonsense.

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister must also explain to us why the ministry recruited and assigned police officers to the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. *[Interruption]*

Sen. Dumas: You said it.

Mr. H. Partap: I am not giving way. After I complete this I would give way. What I am saying is that these police officers are not trained and precepted. What you have done is put these officers into the Chaguanas Borough Corporation and they cannot do anything. They cannot perform any function, and they are being paid. That is the point I am making. I am now going to give you a chance to respond.

Sen. Dumas: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the functions of the Public Service Commission are clearly set out. The function of the Minister is not to hire any public servants, and these officers are public officers. I want to suggest that you do not keep repeating that paper that was written for you, because you do not know one word that is being said on it.

Mr. H. Partap: I do not think that I am going to give you a chance to respond again. This paper was not written by anyone, but me. [*Interruption*] Why is the Ministry not providing the resources to the Chaguanas Borough Corporation to have these policemen trained? Why did they send policemen to the corporation who are not trained and precepted?

At present, most of the municipal and regional corporations do not have the technical staff to which they are entitled. In fact, some corporations have already prepared their offices to accommodate their staff, but the offices are empty because the Ministry is dragging its feet on this matter. I am asking the Minister now to put things in place so that these persons could be appointed, so that they could do the work for these regional corporations and municipal corporations. This is what we are asking for on this side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if there is a change of heart on local government by the Patrick Manning administration, as was signalled by the Prime Minister's statement on May 26, 2006 and the subsequent laying of the reform documents, then we must proceed post-haste to have the reform. We must move swiftly to put it in operation if we are to make local government relevant to the needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ironically, it was the PNM that totally subverted and emasculated local government. You have done that! It was the PNM that created a number of parallel organizations presumably to undermine the effectiveness of local government—URP, CEPEP, the National Social Development Programmes, the Road Development Company and a multitude of newly formed state enterprises have been used to undermine the regional and municipal corporations.

It is interesting that the hon. Minister of Local Government should make the declaration that URP is here to stay. [*Interruption*] You are right, because with Abu Bakr and the Jamaat out of the way, the PNM would now have to depend on the URP and CEPEP for the muscle-power to continue its thuggery and intimidation to steal the next election.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, if you had a chance to read today's *Express* or *Newsday* you would understand what I am saying. The Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) are conduits for sharing free money to PNM party supporters and recruiting this "mongoose gang" to intimidate Opposition supporters when an election is called. We have no doubt about that. We have no doubt about the role that these two groupings would play in an election. In fact, the giveaway has started and the hon. Minister would understand. He has established two sub-offices of URP in the new Cumuto/Manzanilla constituency; one in Cumuto and the other in Biche.

Sen. Dumas: Basically neglected before.

Mr. H. Partap: I see. Is that so? You have already done that, and there were two separate fetes to open these offices complete with the rum, roti, bake and shark and food galore. We know about it. The hon. Minister is spending the URP money, all \$700 million of it in the most obscene way. I hope that the Minister would tell the country how much rent URP had to pay a PNM activist in Biche for the rental of his building before they were kicked out because they did not pay. Shortly after this URP fiasco in Biche, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, the Hon. Minister was replaced as a PNM coordinator for the newly formed Cumuto/Manzanilla district. I understand that you are no longer there as the coordinator. And you have handed the responsibility to the CL Financial bigwig, Andre Monteil, but that is your business.

Sen. Dumas: It is no longer neglected.

Mr. H. Partap: It is no longer neglected? You should come and pay a visit and see.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker: Hon. Members, at the rate at which you are going, we are not going to finish. Would you please address me and more importantly, stick as far as possible to the programme. We know the URP is famous and popular, but stick to the Elections and Boundaries matter, please.

Mr. H. Partap: Thank you for your advice, Mr. Deputy-Speaker, and I will address my remarks to you. But, I want to correct the hon. Minister. If Biche is receiving anything, it is because of the hard work of Councillor Glen Ram who is the local Government representative, and the Member of Parliament for Nariva who has been quiet in seeking—[*Interruption*] I am easily distracted by a nice voice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the bulk of the Cumuto/Manzanilla constituency falls directly into the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation area and according to the Draft Order that is before us, an additional electoral district has been added to the existing seven electoral districts.

I hope that this will improve the relationship between the regional corporations and the people because the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation had not been reaching out to the burgesses, to the people who reside in the area. Since they assumed office in the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation three years ago, it is the first time that the regional corporation distributed truck-borne water to those who were in need of water. For three years the people of the Sangre Grande region did not benefit from truck-borne water. I am saying if you have put an additional district in the Sangre Grande region, I hope that it will work to the benefit of the people of that region.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has been an uphill task to get improvements to the infrastructure in the Nariva constituency generally. On Friday—and thanks to the hon. Minister—the hon. Minister turned the sod to start work on a water treatment plant in Cumuto and that is going to significantly assist the people of that region. I thank her. *[Interruption]* Because for the past eight years I have been making representation for water in that area. *[Interruption]* I am hearing a grumbling in the back there but I do not want to look. For the past eight years we have worked with WASA. WASA was supposed to start the pipe-laying project in the Guatepajero/Caratal, St. Marie Emmanuel area in 2000 and they did not. Now, because elections are drawing near—and I am hearing some grumbings there—they have been providing some water to the people; they have laid the lines.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will get an opportunity and a full 75 minutes of it.

Mr. H. Partap: The hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment is a decent person and she would know that what the Member for Arouca North is saying is simply not true. She has the information that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Since you are not hearing him, unless he gets up and use his 75 minutes—

Mr. H. Partap: Now I am asking the hon. Minister and she has promised that the water on the Cumuto Main Road—it had stopped at Whiskey Trace for a number of years and it would go into Four Roads, Tamana, and it will service all these areas in the Tamana district. I am sure that she is going to do that. I am also hoping that the water is going into Plum Mitan as well.

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The point I am making is that the people of Nariva have been suffering because this Government had failed to hear their pleas and cries for the past three to four years. They have been neglected. Now that an election is drawing near, and they have intentions of grabbing the Cumuto/Manmzanilla seat—and I am sure they will have a difficult time because we have already told the people in those areas to take what they get, including URP. In fact, I am sure, the offices are flooded with people. We told them to take it but you do not have to vote because of the URP jobs.

While this Draft Order deals with putting the EBC recommendations for any future elections in place, the hon. Minister must take on board the plight of the people in rural communities. And I intend to send to him a list of the roads in the Cumuto/Manzanilla constituencies which are under his jurisdiction and also the jurisdiction of the Minister of Works and Transport so that there can be some urgent repaving and rehabilitation. Work has started in some areas. I am not going to deny that, but there are other areas where they would need to expand the programme and I will let you know. For example, the Section Two Road, Martin Road, Four Roads, Tamana Road, all these roads that you made promises to all those people, we want these to be done and they must be done urgently. The burgesses are not getting assistance from the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at page 4 of the draft Order, the EBC spells out the rationale under the law for creating nine electoral districts in the five regional corporations. It is quite clear that the law provides the guidelines for increasing electoral districts but offers no guidelines at all for mapping out polling divisions, and there is a difference between your electoral districts and your polling divisions, as you would know, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The law speaks of electoral districts but completely ignores the fact that electoral districts are made up of polling divisions. I am not a legal person but it would seem to me that there is an anomaly in the legislation.

It may very well have been an anomaly with a motive because it would appear to me that the demarcation of polling divisions had been left to the discretion of the Commissioners of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. If that is so, then the Commissioners have not been exercising this discretion in a rational manner. There seems to be no justification for the assigning of electors to polling divisions. To me, it appears to be without order and without reasoning. In other words, the EBC Rules control the number of electors in an electoral district but

exercise no control at all over the number of electors in a polling division. Let me read from page 3 of the draft Order that is before us:

- “4. The Second Schedule of the second Act prescribes the Rules to be followed by the Commission, in its review of the number and boundaries of electoral districts into which an electoral area is or is to be divided in order to give effect to the Rules in the said Schedule.
5. 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 [of the first Act], 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.”

I quote the section in the Order to point out that there is a formula for arriving at the number of electoral districts in an electoral area, and the number of electors in that electoral district. There is a formula by law. The point I am making is, there is no formula for arriving at the number of polling divisions that make up an electoral district nor the number of electors in a polling division and this is creating a lot of problems for us politicians on the ground on election day. Let me demonstrate the effect of this anomaly using the situation in the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation as my point of reference. [*Interruption*]

I do not know why we have people grumbling, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yes, he is building a lot of roads but there were roads that the Member of Parliament for Nariva had requested some time ago, they are now doing them. They have the money. The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment does not like us to say that you are swimming in money. She feels that is not right. But we will see what we will see.

The formula provides for an increase of one electoral district in the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation bringing that total to eight. The electorate in these eight electoral districts range from a high of 6,574 voters to a low of 5,353 voters. And those electoral districts I am referring to are Sangre Grande, Cumuto/Tamana,

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Manzanilla, Sangre Grande Northeast, Sangre Grande Northwest, Sangre Grande South, Toco Fishing Pond, Valencia and Vega de Oropouche.

Let us examine the allocation of polling divisions in these electoral districts. There are 12 polling divisions in the electoral district of Cumuto/Tamana which has an electorate of 6,574. The number of electors in the 12 polling divisions range from a high of 996 to a low of 211. If there were a formula, the average number of electors in the 12 polling divisions would not have exceeded 548, but the highest, as I mentioned, is 996 and the lowest is 211. If there were a formula, none of the 12 polling divisions would have exceeded 584. However, as it stands, the distribution of electors in the polling divisions in Cumuto/Tamana is not that bad even though I use it as a reference point. We could live with it but a polling division with an average of 548 voters would have been more manageable.

Now let us look at the electoral district of Manzanilla which has an electorate of 5,353 electors. They are 13 polling divisions. Cumuto/Tamana with 6,5574, has 12 but Manzanilla with 5,353, has 13. What is the EBC's rationale? I do not know. Again, in Manzanilla with the 13 polling divisions there is a high of 785 voters and a low of 212. Again, I do not understand the rationale.

Take the electoral district of Sangre Grande Northeast with an electorate of 5,874 voters, they were allotted nine polling divisions. They have a high of 1,717 and a low of 217. Using the nine polling divisions, the average could have been 652 voters and not 1,717 that had been assigned to one of the polling divisions which is 2180. But what is difficult to explain is that Manzanilla, with 5,353 voters, gets 13 polling divisions while Sangre Grande Northeast, with 5,874 voters or 521 more voters than Manzanilla has been assigned nine polling divisions. Sangre Grande Northwest electoral district has 5,630 voters and they have 12 polling divisions. The polling divisions there have a high of 614 voters and a low of 376 voters. These polling divisions are manageable. I have no problem with them.

Next we have Sangre Grande South electoral district, with an electorate of 5,765 voters and only nine polling divisions. The highest voter accumulation is 1,441 voters and the lowest is 134 voters. Another polling division in that same electoral district has 1,254 voters. What is the rationale? What is the EBC's rationale? I really wonder whether the EBC has an explanation for this irrational arrangement. The EBC must also explain how it can create 14 polling divisions in Toco Fishing Pond out of an electorate of 5,744 when areas with a larger electorate get fewer polling divisions.

In the Toco/Fishing Pond electoral district the polling division with the highest number of electors is 775, while the lowest is 92. My feeling is that the EBC must have lost all its rationality when it gave consideration to another electoral district called Valencia. Hear what happens in Valencia.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, my feelings are that the fellows at the Elections and Boundaries Commission were tired, hungry or they were frustrated and they wanted to call it a day so this is what they did. They simply bundled 5,426 voters in four polling divisions oblivious to the administrative, political and logistic problems that such a move would create.

The EBC placed 1,587 voters in the Valencia electoral district, 1,239 voters, in another polling division, and as if throwing caution to the wind they placed 2,527 voters in another polling division. You could imagine dealing with 2,527 voters in one polling division? And then as if to cause further aggravation and pain, the EBC placed 73 voters in one polling division. What is the rationale for 2,000 voters? None! Put more polling divisions. They put only four there. In some areas they put 13 and 14. I cannot understand the rationale. I am saying this not for the Prime Minister—[*Crosstalk*] I am saying this so that if the Elections and Boundaries Commission—they could take the *Hansard* and read it, they would understand the foolishness they are doing in those areas. This, to me, is a vicious and wicked assault on the electoral process committed by the EBC on the voters of the electoral district of Valencia.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me look at the newly created electoral district of Vega de Oropouche. This electoral district has an electorate of 5,761 and they were assigned nine polling divisions. The highest number of voters in one district is 1,315 while the lowest is 314, and I come back to the same question: What is the rationale? It is clear to me that the EBC does not have a formula to deal with the polling divisions and, therefore, it is an ad hoc arrangement which is neither logical nor fair. But, as I said earlier, there is a hidden motive in the approach by the EBC and that hidden motive is always there to facilitate the PNM.

I know that the EBC will say that for election purposes the large polling divisions will be subdivided for taking the polls as has been done previously. The subdivision for the purposes of an election is chaotic on election day. It creates confusion in the minds of voters and it is used by partisan election day officials to frustrate voters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member for Nariva has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I state categorically that the subdivision of polling divisions for an election benefits the PNM and no one else. The EBC knows this and, therefore, takes delight in subdividing polling divisions in furtherance of its own partisan objectives. And I will explain that to you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the EBC has subdivided large polling divisions calling them either A, B, C or D as the case may be, and they arbitrarily assign surnames to these subdivisions. For example, they will say that in sub-division A—let us take one, in 219 A, you will use people with names A to L, in polling division 219, B from M and you will go on to Z as the case may be. This is how they will arbitrarily assign the electors by surname to the polling subdivisions.

In some cases if these subdivisions are in the same buildings it is all right. It may not be as difficult, but if these subdivisions are scattered and you have A in this building, B in another one half mile away and C in another one a mile away, then it creates confusion in the minds of the voters. This is evident in Plum Mitan and Biche. And they have done this in strongholds of the Opposition. They always do that in the strongholds of the Opposition because they want to confuse the voters. Yes, they have confused the voters. When you go to A, and they say your name is not here go to B. So you travel a half mile and go down to B; when you go to B they say no, it is not B, it is in C. Do you know what happens? They frustrate the voters and when they get turned away at B, they go home. Who loses in that case? It is the Opposition who loses their voters and they are happy.

This is the point I am making, that I am not in favour of the subdivision of polling divisions. I feel that the polling divisions should be expanded, they should be increased so that it would be fair, the system would be fair and it would be of equal status as it were; there would be some equality of treatment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of this House is suspended and will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5:00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we broke for tea, I was dealing with the problems of subdivision of polling divisions. In previous elections, when

voters turned up in areas where there was a subdivision, sometimes they were sent to wrong polling stations and had to make journeys back and forth, in search of their names. The voters became frustrated and gave up exercising their franchise.

We have noticed in the Plum Mitan, Biche and Coalmine areas, the system of splitting the polling stations has a serious effect on our support. In all cases, the Elections and Boundaries Commission officials there were not very helpful. The EBC must do better and they must make the election process as simple and straightforward as possible. Splitting of polling divisions complicates the elections process and frustrates voters.

The other point I would like to make is that the Elections and Boundaries Commission continues to place the electorate of Ridge Road in the San Pedro area, near Rio Claro in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. The Ridge Road area would be better suited in the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation or the Princes Town Regional Corporation. I would tell you why. If a resident of Ridge Road—I know that the Government cannot change anything that the Elections and Boundaries Commission does but I hope that the Elections and Boundaries Commission gets the message—has to get his cesspit cleaned, he has to make a personal visit to the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation to make the necessary arrangements. He has to go to Rio Claro to get a taxi, go to San Fernando and then take another taxi to Couva before he can reach the regional headquarters. He has to make the same journey back. It would be better if the Ridge Road area is nearer to Rio Claro or Princes Town, rather than being placed in Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to emphasize once more that the Elections and Boundaries Commission must take a serious look at the polling divisions in the electoral districts and they must do this with some equity and system, so that the management of the polling divisions will be much better for both sides for an election.

Thank you.

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say thanks for the welcome I received in this House and, of course, to remind us that the purpose of the Motion treated with the administrative responsibility, as it were, of receiving the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Order, 2006. It is clear that the draft we are seeking to have approved is to facilitate the possibility of elections.

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There are a number of things said about local government. I want to suggest that the critical issue that requires an answer is the one that says that there is an agreement that there are a number of things that we should reconsider in rebuilding the local government system that we want. That was not before us today and we can take time to do what the other speakers on the other side tried to do.

There are three things I need to take into account. One was from the Member for Fyzabad who laid out a thesis that seems to suggest that the Ministry should take responsibility for ordering every act and task that is to be performed. I want to suggest that his thesis was a bit cloudy, in terms of that. The thesis really is that we have to deal with policies and programmes from the centre and we have to ensure that the capacity is there in the municipal corporations to treat with the responsibilities that they have. Yes, that is the thesis that he is writing. I would gladly take it, but if I take it I would have to mark it, and if I mark it I would have to fail him. That, I am sure, he would not like. I would like to suggest to him that even the open-book exam that he was doing—I noticed he had the past manifesto of the UNC. He had the Green Paper and the White Paper from this administration. I want to suggest to him, therefore, that what he needs to do is to take another look at it. We need to have the mobilization that is required for coming up with the new programme for local government reform. He promised to mobilize the Opposition Members of Parliament and local government representatives. We trust that he can in fact so deliver.

The second point I want to respond to is the one that says that the Elections and Boundaries Commission needs to look at its work again. We can take no responsibility for that. I want to suggest to him that we are clear; we do not take responsibility for what the Elections and Boundaries Commission does. In this case, it is a clear message from the Elections and Boundaries Commission what the requirement is and that as a procedural matter, we treat with this Order. That is what we are doing.

The third matter that is of interest is the clear fear of loss by the Member for Nariva. The Member for Nariva said all sorts of things. The long and short of it is best displayed when we take into account that the Member for Nariva spent almost his full hour, except for those times when he went into nostalgia over holding this Ministry, when he was in charge of what was then Economics Transformation Programme (ETP). I want to remind him of a few things. When he was in charge of ETP, he left this Government with \$56 million unaccounted for works that they did in conjunction with the local government bodies that they

managed, without regard to due practice and procedure. The advocacy that they have for giving the local government bodies the money without adequate procedures led us into trouble. We are still paying that debt.

Mr. Sharma: Report it to the Deputy Commissioner and the Fraud Squad.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: The advice is useful. The Member for Nariva is talking about the amount and size of expenditure in Biche and Cumuto. He was responsible for ETP and he did not put one gang in Biche or Cumuto. Today, when the people of Cumuto and Biche come to the URP and find satisfaction and relief in their unemployed situation, he then falls and scream. I want to suggest to him to stay away from that.

There are other issues. All the services that we delivered in Nariva; whether it was in Cumuto, Biche or Manzanilla, constitute the Government of Trinidad and Tobago playing its part in delivering on its contract to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the only motivation which this Government has; it is not because of any election. It is about a clear situation of treating with the mandate.

In the context, the Motion asked that the draft of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Order 2006 be approved. I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to move the adjournment of the House.

Best Wishes to Soca Warriors

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance) Hon. Kenneth Valley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it is fitting that, on behalf of the Government and the Parliament, we extend best wishes to our Soca Warriors team as they go into battle tomorrow. [*Desk thumping*] Trinidad and Tobago comes up against Sweden and I am sure all of us would be glued to our televisions tomorrow. I feel certain that we will come out victorious. [*Desk thumping*] All we need is to offer a good word of prayer to the Almighty tonight.

Best Wishes to Soca Warriors
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Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday, June 23, 2006 at 1.30 p.m. I wish to inform Members that we will be following the Order Paper on that day.

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, before you put the question, I would like to join with the Government and speak today for the Members on this side, the Members on that side and, indeed, all of Trinidad and Tobago in wishing the Soca Warriors well. This is a day that we have waited for a very, very, long time. Tomorrow is indeed an historic day, when our boys go out, for the first time in the history of football, on the world stage. We hope and we would definitely be praying that they do very well and they do us proud in Germany.

Thank you very much.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.17 p.m.