

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 24, 2021

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon Members, I have received communication from Dr. Lackram Bodoie MP, Member the Fyzabad; Dr. Rishad Seecharan MP, Member for Caroni East; Ms. Khadijah Ameen MP, Member for St. Augustine; and Mr. Ravi Ratiram MP, Member for Couva North, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

[*Electronic device goes off*]

Madam Speaker: Could the person with the offending device, please leave the Chamber and sort it out and can return. [*Electronic device goes off*]

UPDATED COVID-19 SAFETY MEASURES

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, you are aware of the existing preventative measures that have been implemented across the Parliamentary Complex to combat the spread of the Covid-19 virus, including temperature screening, the installation of hand sanitizers and the modification of spaces to ensure physical distancing. You are also undoubtedly cognizant of the exponential increase in the spread of the virus throughout the country over the last few weeks.

In our continued efforts to ensure the sustainability of Parliament's operations and in the interest of securing the health, well-being and comfort of Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff, it has become necessary to remind of existing, and advise of additional COVID-19 safety measures and protocols. These measures are as follows:

UNREVISED

1. Members are reminded that face masks are an essential step to help prevent persons from contracting and spreading COVID-19. A face mask must fully and completely cover the nose and mouth, be secured under the chin and fit snugly against the sides of the face. If you have to continually adjust your mask, it does not fit properly, and a replacement can be made available to you.
2. Members who wish to double mask and/or wear a clear face shield in addition to their face mask will be permitted to do so. In the case of double masking outer masks must be black. Black face masks and clear face shields are available to all Members at no cost.
3. Members will be required to utilise the speaking booths for interventions which exceed five minutes. A Member may remove his/her face mask only when speaking within the enclosure of the booth and as has been the established practice, sanitization will be undertaken after every use of each speaking booth. Members are reminded that either booth may be utilized.
4. Members are further reminded that should they choose to make shorter interventions at their desk, for example, when answering a question or during proceedings of the Committee of the Whole, they will be required to keep on their face mask while doing so.
5. Hon Members, effective today the number of persons permitted in the Chamber will be reduced to the barest minimum of support staff and Clerks to allow for effective parliamentary operations. Arrangements have been made for all *Hansard* services to be conducted remotely. Members shall be confined to eight Government and six Opposition members respectively. Members are reminded that pursuant to Standing

- Order 10, the quorum of the House of Representatives is 12 Members, excluding the Speaker. It will be the responsibility of the Leader of the House and the Whip to ensure that this quorum is maintained.
6. Additionally, a very limited number of support personnel would be available to provide support services in the Parliamentary Complex. As a consequence, catering and service arrangements have also been adjusted to reduce the need for interactions with the pantry staff.
 7. Members know that suitable accommodations have been provided for Members throughout this Parliamentary Complex. However, no more than five Members should assemble or congregate in any of these spaces at one time and Members are also asked not to rearrange the furniture to ensure adherence to physical distancing requirements.
 8. These assigned areas include the offices assigned to certain Members, the Members' dining room, Opposition and Government caucus rooms and the meeting rooms on Level 2 of the Cabildo building. Television screens or computers have been placed in these spaces so that Members can monitor the proceedings in the Chamber in real time. In addition to those spaces, Members may also utilize the various lounges throughout the building.
 9. Hon. Members, you are reminded that, in the event that a division is called, Members would be allowed a period of three minutes to return to the Chamber for the conduct of the division.
 10. Members are also reminded that the Chamber and the Parliamentary Complex are routinely subjected to deep sanitization and additionally, following every sitting, the Chamber and all areas of the Parliament Complex are subject to stringent janitorial procedures. As a further precaution, several air purifiers have been installed in the Chamber.

11. Hon. Members, it is my proposal that this House adjourn by 6:30 p.m. during the period of the declaration of a public state of emergency, to protect the well-being of all, but particularly the parliamentary staff.
12. Finally, Members are reminded of the Ministry of Health's guidelines to self-isolate if experiencing flu-like symptoms, coughing, fever or headaches, and to desist from contact with other persons if you are aware that you are a primary or secondary contact of a person who has tested positive for the Covid-19 virus. Doing so protects not just your parliamentary colleagues, but the hardworking and dedicated staff of the Parliament.
13. Unless specifically varied, all other protocols which have been introduced since the emergence of the Covid-19 virus will remain applicable.

I thank all Members for your continued cooperation.

FIREARMS (AMDT.) BILL, 2021

Bill to amend the Firearms Act, Chap. 16:01, brought from the Senate [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

PAPERS LAID

1. Statement of the President pursuant to section 9(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a State of Public Emergency was based. [*Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ended September 30, 2020. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

UNREVISED

3. The Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 2 and 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
4. The Non-Contentious Business (Amendment) Rules, 2021. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi)*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

COVID-19 Variants (Details of)

Mr. Sadam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Health: Could the Minister indicate the identity of any or all “variants” of the Covid-19 virus detected at present in Trinidad and Tobago?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question. Madam Speaker, genetic variants of SARS-CoV-2 are emerging all the time and circulating around the world. It is what viruses do. Variants are classified under three main headings, variants of interest, variants of concern and variants of high consequence. In Trinidad and Tobago, we have identified two variants of concern. One, the B117 variant and the P1 variant. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, can the Minister indicate the number of each variant so far that has been detected in Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, I only got these questions around 1.05 to 1.10, so I do not have those exact details. What I do know is this, the testing of samples is coordinated between CARPHA, which collects all the samples for its Member States and then sent to the University of the West Indies for genomic sequencing. So it is a Caribbean-wide activity, coordinated by CARPHA and the University of the West Indies.

The number that I do have is that since December 2020, for Trinidad and Tobago we have tested 504 samples and out of that we did identify the two variants of the concern, the B117 variant and the P1 variant. Thank you.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much. Minister, can you indicate to this honourable House what is the process used to determine which sample is in fact tested for the variant?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. So the process as instituted by CARPHA is to test samples mainly from repatriated individuals, because they were actually bringing the variants. So you target high yield samples, repatriated individuals and then their contacts, especially their primary contacts. CARPHA and the university is also expanding to try to do some surveillance testing across the population. We have put the University of the West Indies in touch with Public Health England to boost up their capacity to do more testing for variants, whether they are variants of interest, variants of concern, or variants of high consequence. Thank you very much.

COVID-19 Vaccines (EU facilitation of)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs: Given recent statements by the European Union (EU) Health Commissioner that the EU is developing a mechanism to facilitate the sharing of surplus COVID-19 vaccines with developing countries, could the Minister state whether any action has been taken by the Government to engage the EU?

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. In response to the announcement by the President of the European Commission on Friday, 21st May, 2021, Trinidad and

Tobago is following-up with the European Commission to advocate for a portion of these vaccines. Communication will be advanced on two levels. One, via correspondence from the Prime Minister; and two, from the Ambassador of Trinidad and Tobago to the EU who is also Regional Coordinator of CARIFORUM Ambassadors in Brussels.

The, Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has been engaging with the European Union for access to their stock of vaccines even prior to Friday's announcement. The Minister has previously met with the European delegation in Port of Spain and has had discussions having specific focus on equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for Trinidad and Tobago and for Caricom. This is an extension of our consistent advocacy with Member States of the EU for access to COVID-19 vaccines. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Could the Minister state the involvement of our mission in Brussels and when they have contacted the EU Commission?

Madam Speaker: Could you please repeat the question?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Could the question please be repeated?

Mr. Charles: Could you indicate when our mission in Brussels, which is accredited to the EU, when did they contact the EU Commission on this matter?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, as I said, in response to the announcement by the President of the European Commission, on Friday, 21st May, 2021, Trinidad and Tobago is following-up with the European Commission to advocate for a portion of these vaccines.

Mr. Ram: Thank you Madam Speaker. Given the Government's policy decision on the importation of WHO-approved vaccines, can the Minister indicate whether this country has ordered and paid for any Covishield vaccines?

Madam Speaker: I would not allow that as a supplemental question under question two, having regard to the question asked and the answer.

**Oxygen Shortages at Public Health Locations
(Details of)**

Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Health: Could the Minister confirm or deny persistent reports of severe oxygen shortages at many public health locations?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I could stand and here and say categorically those reports are patently untrue, and I would give the statistics now. At the Point Fortin Hospital, we have five, 220 cubic foot cylinders that produce 220 (SCF) standard cubic feet per hour. At the Arima Hospital, we have one massive 2,220 cubic foot cylinder that produces oxygen every 90 minutes. In Tobago they are producing their own oxygen at two facilities, the Scarborough Hospital and also the Roxborough Hospital.

For the public health system again, Massy Gas normally supplies the 3 million standard cubic feet per month. For the month of April, they did do that. At that time, I indicated to the country, I had asked Massy Gas to go up to a 50 per cent reserve capacity. In May, for this month already, in three weeks, we have consumed over 25 per cent more oxygen than we did in April. We will consume by the end of May roughly TT \$4.2 million worth of oxygen. There is absolutely no oxygen shortages in any of the public, public health care facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and those are the data and those are the statistics. Thank you very much.

Mr. Ram: Could the hon. Minister indicate whether this also holds true for the viral tents at the Mount Hope facility?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, I think I answered that when I said there is no oxygen shortage in any, let me repeat, any of the public health care facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, which includes North West Regional Health Authority, just to be clear, North Central Regional Health Authority, Eastern Regional Health Authority, South West or the Tobago Regional Health Authority. There is no oxygen shortage in any part of the public health care system.

**Salary Relief Grant Applications
(Details of)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: Could the Minister state the minimum wait time for applicants to receive payment subsequent to the submission of their salary relief grant applications?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is not possible to give a precise minimum wait time because the process involves review of the documentation submitted, determination whether the person is eligible for the grant, determination as to whether the person has an active and functional bank account, because at this point in time we are doing the payments via wire transfer. If on the other hand the person does not have an active bank account, a preloaded debit card would have to be created for them, and therefore it is not possible to give a minimum time. I can say however, if a person meets all of the criteria, has an active bank account, is eligible, the payment should be made between three to four weeks after application.

**Fuel Relief Grant for Taxi/Maxi Taxi Operators
(Details of)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): To the Minister of Works and Transport: Could the Minister inform the House whether taxi and maxi taxi operators would

receive the Fuel Relief Grant during the period of extension of the Public Health Regulations 2021?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, at this time the Ministry of Works and Transport is in discussions with the Ministry of Finance on this matter. Thank you.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, this grant has been given before, why is there need for further discussion?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, through you, I do not know if a grant was given before it automatically means that it will be given again. So, I think that is my answer to that.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the question 113 has been withdrawn on written notice from the Member for Couva South. Hon. Members, I have also been advised that question 145 has also been withdrawn by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Leader of the House.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I have also been informed that question 159 has been withdrawn? I have 113, 145 and 159.

Madam Speaker: Well, as far as I know, the questions could only be withdrawn by the person in whose name it stands and the procedure is that the person would indicate to either the Clerk or the Speaker. I only know really of 113 and is 145, maybe the person—159 is also withdrawing? So, thank you very much. All three are withdrawn.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in light of that, we are answering every other question that is there for oral answer. With regard to the

questions that are there for written response, we will be answering all questions, save and except 126 to 131; so that is 126, 127, 128, 129, 130 and 131. We are asking for a deferral and we will circulate the other written responses. Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

T&T's Carbon Footprint

(Plans for Reduction)

119. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Planning and Development:

Could the Minister inform the House what plans are in place if any to reduce Trinidad and Tobago's per capita carbon footprint, which is reported to be the fourth highest in the world?

Remuneration Packages for State Positions

120. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Could the Minister list all State positions held by each of the following persons and the associated remuneration arrangements in each case:

- a) Lennox Sealy;
- b) Newton George;
- c) Kerwyn Garcia;
- d) Nicholas George; and
- e) Esther Farmer.

Recusal from Cabinet Deliberations

(Number of Times)

121. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Prime Minister:

Could the Government state the number of times over the past six years that the following have recused themselves from Cabinet deliberations:

- a) the Prime Minister;
- b) the Minister of Finance; and
- c) the Minister of Health.

Direct Foreign Investments

(2016-2020)

132. Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Could the Minister provide a comprehensive listing of Direct Foreign Investments coming into Trinidad and Tobago for each fiscal year for the period 2016 to 2020 including:

- a) name of the investor;
- b) value of the investment;
- c) purpose of the investment; and
- d) status of the investment?

Special Needs Schools and ECCE Centres

(Status of)

138. Ms. Anita Haynes (*Tabaquite*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

- A. Could the Minister provide an update on the status of all special needs schools in Trinidad and Tobago?
- B. Could the Minister provide an update on the status of all ECCE Centres in Trinidad and Tobago?

Repairs to Schools by Constituency

(March 31st 2020 to March 31st 2021)

152. Mr. David Lee (*Point-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister list the number of schools by constituency which were repaired between the period March 31st 2020 to March 31st 2021?

Funding of Sporting Groups

(March 31st 2020 to March 31st 2021)

153. Mr. David Lee (*Point-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Community Development:

As it relates to the funding of sporting groups throughout Trinidad and Tobago, could the Minister state:

- a) the names of all sporting groups which received funding for the period March 31st 2020 to March 31st 2021?
- b) the specific amounts received by each group listed in part A?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Landslips

(Commencement of Rehabilitation Works)

136. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of the Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

In light of the deteriorated road conditions and numerous landslips along St. Julien Road from the Sisters Road end to the Naparima Main Road, could the Minister indicate when will rehabilitation works begin?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in fiscal 2020, tenders were invited for the project for rehabilitation work on one of the critical landslips along the St. Julien Road. A contract was awarded but the contractor failed to commence the project, despite the Ministry's many efforts to have him do so. As a result, the Ministry had no choice but to terminate the contract.

The Ministry, through the procurement unit, is currently going through the process of the award of a contract for the project to a new contractor. Other landslips along the St. Julien Road will be prioritized and subject to the availability

of funding will be included in the next phase of the landslip repair programme. I thank you.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Follow-up to the Minister. Minister, in light of what you just stated about contract has to go back out, is there any consideration given to doing some temporary remedial works on those landslips as described in the question?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, ongoing remedial work is a part of the routine maintenance and at this point in time the road is passable because of the routine maintenance that is being done in-house by the Highways Division.

**Student Support Services Division
(Vaccines and Increased Funding)**

137. Ms. Anita Haynes (Tabaquite): Asked the hon. Minister of Education:

- A. Could the Minister indicate how many vacancies exist within the Student Support Services Division at the current time?
- B. Could the Minister indicate if further funding for the Student Support Services Division will be released or is expected to increase during this financial year?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education currently has 310 vacancies within the Student Support Services Division. The Ministry of Education request releases through the Ministry of Finance on a quarterly basis, based on the allocations for all divisions. The funding allocated is based on the structure and activities of the Student Support Services Division at this time. Should changes be made, which require additional funding, the Ministry of Finance will be approached to supply same.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for your response, Minister. Given the joint select committee that took place in March 2021, which

reported 5,400 distress calls with only a 20 per cent staffing, the Minister agree that now would be a time to seek that additional funding to bolster the student support services?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The issue of the funding and the staffing of the student support division is presently occupying the attention of PMCD and the Ministry is working closely with them to deal with the staffing and a rationalization of that and the recommendations will be brought to Cabinet with respect to how we can more adequately staff and what funding can be applied to that division at this time.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. Is there a timeline to address this 20 per cent staffing at the student support services? I appreciate that it is going to Cabinet, but can we get an established timeline, given how many people are trying to access the service at this time?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you. Madam Speaker, let me make it very clear, that the student support division is addressing all of the concerns that come through referrals of the teachers, the principals, parents at this time. However, with more staff, certainly more can be done and once we receive the report from the division that is assisting with the rationalization and the assessment of the Student Support Services Division all will be done to expeditiously bring that to the Cabinet and allow for the Cabinet to make recommendations about how further staffing and if further staffing is needed at this time.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do not believe there is a question of if there is further staffing, because the PS spoke about the need to fill the vacancies. So I think it is whether or not there is a timeline to fill these vacancies, given how many persons are trying to access the service at this time.

Madam Speaker: I believe that question was asked and answered. Do you have another question, Member for Tabaquite?

Ms. Haynes: No thank you.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Member for St. Augustine.

2.00 p.m.

**Tunapuna Regional Corporation
(Clearing of Watercourses)**

139. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Ms. Khadijah Ameen (*St. Augustine*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister indicate whether the Tunapuna Regional Corporation started the clearing of watercourses, especially as the rainy season is going to commence soon?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Local Government and Rural Development.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation works collaboratively with the Ministry of Works and Transport toward flood mitigation. The region is mapped and programmed on an ongoing three- to four-month maintenance schedule to ensure all drains and watercourses in the district are cleaned throughout the year.

As at March 2021, the corporation has cleared drains and watercourses in 31 districts under its remit. Cleaning has commenced for the next cycle and the following drains and watercourses are scheduled to be cleaned before the official commencement of the rainy season: Arouca Main River in Arouca; Ascot Ravine, Carapo; Blackman Ravine, Curepe; Churchill Roosevelt Highway; Freeman River, Valsayn; Green Street Main Drain, Tunapuna; Ninth Street Main Drain, Five

Rivers; Old Oropune Village on the highway in Oropune; Pine Ridge Main Drain, Five Rivers; Priority Bus Route; Stratham Lodge Road in St. Augustine; South Bank Road, Caroni; St Joseph River, Valsayn; Tumbasson Main Drain in Caura; Warren Munroe Road in Warrenville. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

**Vandalized Pump at Bamboo #3
(Repair or Replacement of)**

140. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Ms. Khadijah Ameen (*St. Augustine*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister inform the House when will the pump that was vandalized at Bamboo #3 be repaired or replaced especially since rainfall will increase in the upcoming weeks?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):

Madam Speaker, I will answer the question as posed. But I really do not know if that is the question that the Member wanted to ask. The answer to that question is there has been no vandalization of the pumps at Bamboo #3. However, the vandalization took place at Bamboo #1 which falls in the St. Joseph constituency and the Member for St. Joseph has already gotten the update on those pumps. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

**Spraying for Mosquitos
(St. Augustine Constituency)**

141. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Ms. Khadijah Ameen (*St. Augustine*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister inform the House whether there have been any spraying for mosquitoes in the St. Augustine constituency, especially with the spike of the yellow fever virus?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, since 1949, for a full 42 years now, there have been no cases—let me repeat, not even a single case of yellow fever in humans. As such, there is no spike or even incidents of yellow fever in humans in Trinidad and Tobago, as erroneously stated in the question. As customary, routine yellow fever vaccination is conducted each year in children 12 to 23 months and the average uptake is 95 per cent annually.

For the first quarter of 2021, 3,543 yellow fever vaccines have been administered for a quarterly target population of 3,711 or 95 per cent. During the month of February 2021, there were isolated cases as of yellow fever being reported in the counties of St. Andrew/St. David and Nariva/Mayaro in the local monkey population and not in the human population. As a result, the Insect Vector Control Division of the Ministry of Health immediately implemented several preventative and precautionary public health measures to mitigate the risks, protect the lives of animals and conduct surveillance to effectively reduce transmission by using ultra low volume spraying and thermal fogging.

Notably, while the high-risk activity is in the rural areas, there is no evidence of transmission to the urban areas. During the period January to April 2021, residual spraying and perifocal work were in fact conducted in the constituency of St. Augustine with 45 sprayings and 11,733 householders benefited respectively in the constituency of St. Augustine. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

**Violent Crimes in/around Caroni East
(Measures Implemented to Curb)**

143. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Rishad Seecheran (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state what specific measures are being implemented to curb the current high incidence of violent crimes in communities in and around the Caroni East constituency?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Many strategies have been implemented to curb the crime rate in the Caroni East constituency and the entire Central Division. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is using very proactive and scientific approaches which include hosting weekly operations meetings with the first division officers, inspectors and sergeants in charge of the respective stations and so on, Madam Speaker. And identifying from the statistics analyses and an understanding of the situation, such analyses would determine the strategic implementation of the patrols, roadblocks processes and search exercises, engaging in several ongoing projects being conducted specifically in the station districts through the Central Division Intelligence Unit where data is being collected, collated and converted into actionable intelligence. This is in keeping with the intelligence led policing initiative operated by the police service as we speak.

Exercises have been conducted specifically geared towards the reduction of organized crimes. As a result, the monthly average of 10 anti-crime exercises have been conducted in three station districts collectively—that is to say, Cunupia, Caroni and Las Lomas—hosting several public awareness exercises to bring the public on board, Madam Speaker, because this is critical in the management of crime, very social a phenomenon as it is.

When the division is affected by COVID-19 virus, assistance is forthcoming

from other resources, namely the Emergency Response Patrol, the Inter-Agency Task Force, and the Guard and Emergency Branch. Through these means, concentrated patrols have been implemented on a daily basis in areas under review. These initiatives, Madam Speaker, have yielded a significant decrease in crime around the Caroni East constituency and are highlighted as follows: in 2019, for example, in Cunupia, 76 serious crimes; in 2020, 75 serious crimes but in 2021, so far, 44. For Caroni in 2019, 22 serious crimes, six in 2020, 10 year-to-date. In Las Lomas, nine; 2020, 12. So all together, Madam Speaker, you have a total of 170 in 2019; in 2020, a total of 93, but so far, in 2021, a total of 63. A significant 63 per cent reduction in the figures when you compare 2019 to 2021.

These measures, Madam Speaker, are the approaches we take to dealing with crime in that particular area and across Trinidad and Tobago, hence the general reduction in serious crimes reported by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Thank you. [*Desk Thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister state whether the data regarding the serious reduction in crime, did it come from an independent source?

Hon. F. Hinds: Of course. The very professional CAPA, the crime analysis unit of the police service, hosted and staffed by professionals—qualified professionals, conducted this analysis and it is from there that the source has come. And there is no other authority to significantly or seriously gain say that, Madam Speaker, unless if my friend from Naparima can offer one.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Major Landslips in Caparo (Repair of)

144. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Rishad Seecheran (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister inform the House when would the major landslips along Fletcher's Road, off Todd's Road, Caparo be repaired to facilitate dual lane vehicular traffic?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Fletcher Road, off Todd's Road, Caparo falls under the purview of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation and as such, the Ministry of Works and Transport would not have any work scheduled for that location. However, the Ministry of Works and Transport stands ready to provide any technical assistance that the corporation may need. I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Bid Offers for Patriotic Energies
(Consideration or Reviewing of)**

146. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Given the Government's recent rejection of Patriotic Energies' bid offer for the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery, could the Minister state why Government is not considering or reviewing the offers of the other parties who submitted bids and were shortlisted in the 2019 bidding process?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Government is not considering or reviewing the offers of the other parties that were unsuccessful in their bids for the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery as they did not meet the requirements for the purchase or lease of the refinery at the first go.

Following the end of the discussions between the Government and Patriotic,

Government decided to return to the open market to explore all options which may exist for the utilization of the assets of the Guaracara Refinery. Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited is currently preparing for the consideration of Cabinet a marketing strategy and the request for proposal, an RFP, for the return in short order to the full open market for the refinery.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Trinidad and Tobago Upstream Downstream
Energy Operations Company Limited
(Details of Other Clients)**

147. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Given the public admission that natural gas is being sold to NiQuan by the Trinidad and Tobago Upstream Downstream Energy Operations Company Limited, could the Minister state the other clients this state-owned entity sells natural gas to?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago Upstream Downstream Energy Operations Company Limited has a contract for the supply of natural gas to NiQuan Energy Trinidad Limited for the gas to liquids plant in Pointe-a-Pierre. There are currently no other clients that Trinidad and Tobago Upstream Downstream Energy Operations Company Limited sells natural gas to.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

**Structural Safety at Red House Site
(Measures Taken to Assess)**

154. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Rishad Seecheran (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Prime Minister:

Could the Prime Minister state what measures are being taken to assess the structural safety of all the work done by UDeCOTT at the Red House site?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Prime Minister, the Red House Restoration Project was conducted utilizing a team of consultants and contractors, inclusive of CEP Limited, which undertook the civil and structural design. The following structural codes were adhered to in the execution of the structural works:

1. The American Society for Testing and Materials
2. The American Concrete Institute
3. The American Institute of Steel Construction
4. The American Welding Society
5. The Steel Deck Institute
6. The Society for Protective Coatings
7. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

Further to the designs executed by the structural engineer on record, UDeCOTT engaged a consultant to conduct an independent peer review. The review was conducted to confirm that the design satisfied the seismic performance requirements based on the American Society of Civil Engineers, Standard 41. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Payments of Funeral Grants (Details of)

155. Ms. Vandana Mohit (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services:

- A. Could the Minister state whether payments to funeral agencies providing services to those qualifying for the funeral grants are being made on time?
- B. If not, could the Minister provide reasons?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, the Ministry is in the practice of expediting payments related to funeral grant applications when such applications are received. As at 30 April, 2021, there were no new burial assistance applications awaiting processing by the. At present, there are 53 approved applications in the sum of \$363,279.24. This represents outstanding payments to 15 funeral agencies. These payments, Madam Speaker, will be made within the next two to three weeks. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Speaker, through you, to the Minister, can you state whether any of these payments go as far back as 2019?

Madam Speaker: Minister?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

**NALIS/WIPO Memorandum of Understanding
(Details of)**

156. Ms. Vandana Mohit (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs:

Could the Attorney General state whether consideration is being given to the execution of a memorandum of understanding between his Ministry; NALIS; the World Intellectual Property Organization, WIPO, and the

Accessible Books Consortium, ABC, so that persons who are blind and disabled could have over 700,000 books in an accessible format?

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform that NALIS and the Accessible Books Consortium have in fact arrived at a draft document which is being considered by the Solicitor General's Department right now. This, of course, comes as a consequence of last year having passed the law—this Government having passed the law to adopt the Marrakesh Treaty to improve the situation and circumstance of our visually impaired population. We are pleased as a Government, therefore, to continue to serve this very needy and important cause so that we can bring relief to all concerned. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

**Moruga/Tableland Households Without Pipe Borne Water
(Number of)**

157. Ms. Michelle Benjamin (*Moruga/Tableland*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Could the Minister indicate the number of households that do not have pipe borne water in the constituency of Moruga/Tableland?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Public Utilities is being asked to provide information in the number of households that do not have pipe borne water in the constituency of Moruga/Tableland. Madam Speaker, the information requested is not available. In this regard, it is to be noted, Madam Speaker, that the report of the Cabinet Sub-Committee appointed to review the operations of WASA and to determine the strategy for enabling the authority to deliver on its mandate was tabled in this Chamber on Friday, March 05, 2021, and

it noted inter alia and I quote:

“The Authority is operating blindly. There is an absence of credible information in key areas relating to the Authority’s operations e.g. customer data base, liabilities, staffing levels, payables, location of transmission and distribution mains, extent of non-revenue water.”

It is against this backdrop, Madam Speaker, and mindful of the need for up to date, reliable and accurate information to facilitate better informed project planning, optimizing the use of scarce financial resources and the development of targeted projects for expanding the water supply system infrastructure to vulnerable communities, that I sought the assistance of all Members of the Parliament on both sides of this House by letter dated March 12, 2021, to identify communities in their respective constituencies which are not provided with a supply of pipe borne water, not on the grid, or receive a scheduled supply 24 hours a day, less, or three days a week.

Madam Speaker, I therefore find it quite ironical and I am bemused that the Member for Moruga/Tableland should pose this question to me in Parliament given her non-response to my letter for assistance in obtaining information which is critical in developing such a database.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank those MPs who responded positively to my request. [*Desk thumping*] And I respectfully encourage the hon. Member to provide the information in response to my letter of March 12, 2021.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, question time is now spent.

Question time having expired, the following question was not dealt with:

**Landslips in Moruga/Tableland
(Measures Taken to Repair)**

161. Could the hon. Minister of Local Government and Rural Development state the measures that will be taken to repair the landslips along Loney Road, Pooran Street and Sahadath Road in the constituency of Moruga/Tableland? [*Ms. Michelle Benjamin*]

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

**STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT DECLARING PUBLIC STATE OF
EMERGENCY**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

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

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

And whereas it is enacted by section 9(1) of the Constitution that within three days of making the Proclamation, the President shall deliver to the Speaker for presentation to the House of Representatives a statement setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a state of public emergency was based, and a date shall be fixed for a debate on this statement as soon as practicable but in any event not later than fifteen days from the date of the Proclamation;

Now, therefore, be it resolved That the House take note of the Statement by the President under section 9(1) of the Constitution setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a public

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emergency was based.

Madam Speaker, I do not know if there is any person in Trinidad and Tobago today who does not know that there is a matter of national interest with respect to a virus which is threatening human beings here in Trinidad and Tobago, and the threat being one that could make persons very sick or bring about their demise through death.

Madam Speaker, in recent years, scientists have been working very hard and warning that given the huge improvement of interaction between human beings on this planet, that viruses and bacteria, particularly viruses, pose a real threat to the human population as the population grows around the world and as travel times have been reduced between one population and another.

We recently, Madam Speaker, had the experience with SARS which was an infection that was very threatening. We had also MERS which was also very threatening—small microbes threatening human populations and, of course, Madam Speaker, we have had, fairly thankfully, infrequent outbreaks of Ebola which was confined to certain areas in Africa. But whenever there is an outbreak like SARS, or MERS, or Ebola, the world's population gets very nervous and is very exposed. So when we were informed in—towards the end of 2019, that there was an outbreak of a virus in China and that outbreak was deemed to be an epidemic in one part of China, the world did take notice.

But what was interesting, Madam Speaker, was that the virus which caused this outbreak in late 2019 was a new virus, meaning that it was a virus that had never been known or seen to exist in the human population anywhere in the world, and therefore, it was particularly threatening because it being new, the human population did not have in-built mechanisms to, firstly, recognize it and to react to

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it in a defensive way. That sort of thing, Madam Speaker, biologically around in animals and humans usually requires some time for the life forms to recognize the threat and to respond.

I would not, Madam Speaker, pretend to be an expert in human biology or in medicine but this has been described so frequently in the last year that I am sure that many people or most people have an idea of what is involved, that the virus gets into your body and your body responds to it, and if you do not respond, it could have the effect of damaging your organs and once your organs fail, it could result in death. And sometimes, Madam Speaker, this could take place in a very short period of time.

So here we were approaching 2020 and by January 30, 2020, the WHO declared this outbreak of the coronavirus as a public health emergency of international concern. And, Madam Speaker, because we were paying attention to it here in Trinidad and Tobago, the following day, a proclamation declaring the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) as a dangerous, infectious disease. That was done, Madam Speaker, on the 31st of January. And, Madam Speaker, particularly those of us who are responsible for our local populations, were paying attention to what the WHO was doing and was saying, and hoping that it remained in that part of the world. But we were quickly abused, Madam Speaker, of any expectation that it would remain in Asia because very quickly, it was picked up in Europe and we were almost certain to be exposed to it because of our connection to Europe by way of international, particularly, airline travel.

On February 11, Madam Speaker, in 2020, the virus was given a specific name, “COVID-19” and one month later, the virus was then known to be threatening every country in the world and was therefore declared a pandemic. Madam

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Speaker, since then, all our lives have changed because, Madam Speaker, it was not something that we knew enough about. We were required to be responding to it while learning about it and while experiencing its dreadful outcome.

I may remind you, Madam Speaker, that we here in Trinidad and Tobago, like the rest of the world, looked on in absolute horror when in Bergamo in Italy, one of the most modern locations in the world with about the most modern health system in the world, in Europe, in the European Union, all the resources were available, all the technical information available, the most experienced people in the world were all in panic station because this virus was in fact bringing about a level of mortality where, if it was not controlled, could have had record-breaking deaths among the human population. And in this particular Italian city, Madam Speaker, while the rest of the world was looking on and wondering what would happen to us when it gets to us, there were situations developing in that city that were so horrible that the people there could not bury their dead. They had to get outside help.

And before you knew it, Madam Speaker, the virus was in every western country, it was in North American and we here, at the beginning of 2020, literally were waiting to determine when we would be exposed to it. And as anticipated, Madam Speaker, very early in 2020, we did have to report that we had our first case of the infection in our country. And seeing what it had done elsewhere, Madam Speaker, we had to take action here in Trinidad and Tobago to protect ourselves from that potential for devastation that other people were in fact experiencing, even as we here in Trinidad and Tobago were having low numbers.

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In a very short space of time, Madam Speaker, by March, we were in a situation to have to close our border, because, knowing that the virus was going to come into our population from somewhere, and that we could not protect ourselves in any physical way by putting up barriers and screens and whatever, or telling people not to come and so, what we had to do, Madam Speaker, was to close our border so as to reduce—if not eliminate—but reduce the rate at which, or the incidents at which the virus would enter our population if international traffic was not curbed and managed. And that is what, Madam Speaker, brought about the border closure where we were managing the entry into our population of persons who were on the outside at the time when we took that decision.

Madam Speaker, I want to remind this country that our census would have shown to us at some time that we have approximately 1.3 million people inside Trinidad and Tobago. But outside, we have approximately 330,000 people, all of whom can claim access to Trinidad and Tobago by law, are citizens or residents, and of course, Madam Speaker, many of them come to us on a regular basis, especially at times like Christmas and Carnival, or for family events, and so on. So, we do know that, but the danger that was facing us with respect to the devastation of coronavirus 19—COVID-19—was such that we literally had to close the door so that those who were in would enjoy a level of protection while those who are out would have enjoyed—I should not say “enjoy” but—experienced a certain amount of inconvenience, as we, over time, managed their return in a safe way, including quarantine in Trinidad and Tobago, where the Government played a major role in carefully repatriating people; and that process is still going on.

Madam Speaker, in a jiffy, we too were reporting fairly rapid increase, rapid numbers growing among the population because up to then, Madam Speaker, the

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experts were not sure how this virus was being spread. Initially, our reaction was that all we knew it was being spread from person to person without a vector. And of course, soon after we discovered that it could be spread by individuals infecting themselves by coming into contact with the virus, which may be on surfaces. So, our first reaction was to be particularly careful about surfaces, touching surfaces, and using our appendages, our fingers, whatever it is, and touching our noses and mouths, because that is where the virus will pass to enter each individual body. So we started out with health protocols, which are still in place, Madam Speaker, wash your hands, do not touch your face, do not touch your eyes, and so on, Madam Speaker, super sensitivity, super sensitization and super use of the products that can kill a virus.

So, Madam Speaker, soon after that, the experts will tell us that the virus is in fact able to be transmitted by aerosols, droplets coming from persons speaking to persons. Initially, Madam Speaker, we did not know that. So, I distinctly recall when we had our first press conference or one of the early press conferences on this virus, there was one member of the media who was wearing a mask, and it was literally joked at as though he was being very overly frightened by the idea. And that one person wore that mask to a few press conferences, because at that time, we did not know how effective masks were in preventing the virus from going from person to person. But soon after, Madam Speaker, the tests around the world in the various universities and hospitals would have shown that because of the virus being able to be transmitted in small droplets, which can get from one person to another by simply being close enough as they speak, that the wearing of a mask is useful in preventing that. And then soon after it was confirmed that the virus can be in aerosol form, not just droplets, but literally as aerosols blowing in the wind

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around and of course, Madam Speaker, by then it was confirmed that the wearing of a mask is in fact our best defence and we initially, as a population, took the position that we will accept under the Public Health Ordinance that certain protocols could be established so as to encourage the population to understand that the response to this very dangerous virus is personal, it is individual responsibility, and that you should wear a mask to protect yourself. And very many people in this country did that, Madam Speaker, but then eventually, it became an imperative that all of us must do it and we eventually had to make it mandatory by law.

So, as you see, Madam Speaker, we were learning about this threat along the way. And of course, in the meantime, Madam Speaker, we had the unpleasant announcement to be made, that we had our first death; the national population had to join the rest of the world where one person had died in Trinidad and Tobago from COVID-19. And we knew then that we were in fact on record as being a country that was infected by COVID-19. But the Government had taken a number of steps, not hesitating to take those steps, to reduce the rate at which the population was infected, and also to deny the virus a free run in the population. How long that would have been, Madam Speaker, nobody knew but what we did know in the scientific community was that if the population was vaccinated, where vaccines are items of microbial nature, very small, introduced into the body, having the same kind of gene structure as the virus, or in some instances, the inert virus introduced into the body deliberately to cause the body to respond by developing antibodies so that in the event that you get infected, you are in a better position than we were in January in the whole world where it was the novel coronavirus affecting a human population to which the virus was completely unknown and for which the body was defenseless.

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So, Madam Speaker, the international scientific community started to produce or to determine what had to be produced by experiments and by tests and so, and later in 2020 we were getting the news from the particular locations that viruses—that vaccines were possible to be had and eventually, of coming out of the UK, from Oxford, the first vaccine was confirmed and approved and today, Madam Speaker, there are about four or five, four or so vaccines, four or five vaccines that are approved and are in widespread use around the world. But the bottom line, Madam Speaker, is that during that period of 2020, all over the world, I cannot think of a single country which has been reported confidently or at all, that we are without or have not been touched by coronavirus. It had in fact been a true pandemic in our time, in our time, Madam Speaker, and for many of us, it is the first time that we have had to deal or to be exposed in this way.

Madam Speaker, before there was a virus, the most that we could have hoped to do was to protect ourselves from being infected at all, and that is like drawing water with a sieve, because it is very difficult, it is very difficult in today's world, to isolate yourself completely. As long as you were in contact in any way with the rest of the world, within your community and on your border and international transportation, you were exposed. And, Madam Speaker, every country in the world has been affected and different countries were affected in different ways, and different countries responded in different ways. There is no singular response except the tested and tried protocols which many of us are following, but we do not have responses to say well, turn this switch on it turns it off, turn this other switch and it turns it on. Every country has had to respond to the challenge. Some countries took the position initially that leave it alone and it will inoculate itself. The population will inoculate itself by—it would pass through, and

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the common phrase now is herd immunity. But in the meantime, in attempting to get herd immunity, Madam Speaker, the accompanying outcome of that was massive deaths and one or two countries who took that position, after facing the reality of going that road, drastically changed and eventually started taking disruptive rectification, completely different, some may intend the course and counted the dead—their dead people in humongous numbers. In Trinidad and Tobago, we decided that we will encourage the population to be informed, to be involved, and to do what we could do at the personal level, in partnership with the state at the state level, and together we maintain some level of response that will not see us being overwhelmed by the virus, but also that for those who unfortunately are infected by the virus and require healthcare, we put in place, Madam Speaker, certain arrangements to have that health care, while we also encourage the population to avoid being infected.

Madam Speaker, we have gone to a state of emergency because after a year, and with the coming of vaccines, we as a population, we found that we relaxed a bit, we were not as diligent as we could have been, but even so, even in the most diligent areas in the world, we are seeing tremendous outbreaks requiring firmer and newer responses. But it came to pass, Madam Speaker, that after a year of relatively low numbers of infection and low numbers of deaths, where each one was mourned and concerned about, but we did have, for example, by the time we got to February of 2021, Madam Speaker, having had a spike during August of last year, August into September, where we had the general election and there was a bit more mixing than we could have done without, we did have a spike there but we very quickly suppressed that and by September into October that was down to relatively low numbers, and we cancelled Carnival because all of these, we

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understood that the danger we were facing is a mixing of the population and movement of people around in a population where the virus existed, if we did have that kind of thing going on, you would have greater numbers of people infected, and by extension, greater number of deaths.

So we cancelled Carnival and interestingly enough, February, we had the lowest levels of infection and we had the best compliance. I think it probably must have been the missing of Carnival or people trying deliberately to cooperate with the no Carnival source in February having the best response to the virus. And soon after that, Madam Speaker, it plateaued into March, and there were activities around March and the next thing we saw, Madam Speaker, we had to respond while we were alert to a slow rise on the curve, by the time we got, Madam Speaker, to the requirements for a state of emergency, our curves and our projections were such that had we not intervened, or if we do not intervene, we would certainly have the kinds of traumatic results of large numbers of dead people, larger numbers of sick people, and none of which would be to the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago. Yes, Madam Speaker, the responses to this virus have been very disruptive to our social life, to our economic life, but what we have been doing, Madam Speaker, is encouraging defence to a virus.

We are now with the rest of the world participating in the vaccination programme. Unfortunately, we are not the kinds of economy or scientific communities that have developed virus and can make it here in Trinidad and Tobago. We had no such experience, we had no such equipment and very few scientists working on that and the end result is, Madam Speaker, we have to rely on the supply of vaccines in the international community and in the meantime, Madam Speaker, we are required, as we seek to vaccinate our population to a level

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where the virus becomes something that can be managed, given the level of inoculation that would have taken place, the experts tell us 65 to 70 per cent of the population being inoculated would result in movement of the virus that would be not sufficiently concerning, because at that level it will be difficult for the virus to spread with any amount of, I think, vigour. But we are not there yet and currently, Madam Speaker, we are holding the line on infection while we also work towards a higher level of vaccination.

Unfortunately, vaccines are not as easily available as we would have liked because the discovery and approval of a vaccine meant that all of us in the world were starting from zero, because once it is approved, then it starts to be produced, because nobody was going to go and produce a warehouse full of vaccines before it was approved to be used. The production came after the approval and as soon as the approval was had, well of course, Madam Speaker, those who had more authority, those who are richer, those who had control over the production systems, actually took control of the outputs of the factories and it was horrible to observe, Madam Speaker, where the vast majority of people in the world who live in lower income or poorer countries, as I speak to you now, Madam Speaker, they have had access, either largely by small purchases, or by gifts to less than 1 per cent of the vaccines that have been made available and a handful of the rich countries have claimed and retain ownership for their population of over 83 per cent of the vaccines that have been available.

Madam Speaker, that is the reality we face, but in the meantime, while we fight this vaccine availability issue, we have to make sure that our population suppresses the rate at which we are infected. Because to not do that, Madam Speaker, will undermine the vaccine programme when we do get involved in it and

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it will also result in significant hurt to our families, to our economy, and to ourselves at the individual level.

Madam Speaker, this is not something that we have an option. We have committed ourselves and our financial resources to do what has to be done to fight this fight. We have committed ourselves to defend every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, young, old or medium, male or female, boy or girl. We have committed ourselves to defend each and every one of us from this coronavirus and, Madam Speaker, we have been doing that, holding the line until we are able to vaccinate our country to a level where this virus becomes, as it has the potential to be, a normal part of our human existence but not threatening us on a daily basis with death and destruction.

And, Madam Speaker, that being so, the Government supports what has been put here by the President in the very clear way it has been put and we believe that the population understands why it is being done. We understand that certain amount of disruption is taking place, but it is more important Madam Speaker, to be inconvenienced for a short while toward a permanent solution than not to do what has to be done now, so that we can get to that place of better defence as soon as possible. And therefore, Madam Speaker, I ask all my colleagues in the House to support the proclamation as put by the President and let us move on from here as quickly as we could and begin the fight that we have to fight for all the days and weeks and months ahead, so that our population can be protected.

Madam Speaker, I heard your advice as to how much debate time we have and I as leader—I have asked the Leader of Government Business to minimize our involvement on this aspect of today's proceedings so we can spend a bit more time on the other aspects and the other Motion which is there, which is the one about

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extending the period of time for which the state of emergency would apply, but in terms of the need for a proclamation, Madam Speaker, I see it as clear as day and we need not waste too much time on whether it should have been done.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join the debate today. And after I listened to the honorable Prime Minister, I have heard nothing new, nothing different, no plans to go forward. It has been a repetition of the roadshow that goes on, on a weekly basis, the various press conferences—I think the only thing was missing today is that the Prime Minister did not launch off into attack the population, blame the population, blame Kamla, blame the Opposition. That is the only difference. So, nothing new as we face a further lockdown in the country and what we are gathered for today is to:

“...note the Statement of the President made on the 17th of May 2021, made under section 9(1) of the Constitution setting out the specific grounds for the decision to declare a state of...emergency...”

But I did not hear the Prime Minister give the justification, I did not hear the Prime Minister go into details about what was the basis to declare a state of emergency and those things are contained in the Statement.

I want us to appreciate and understand that by section 80 of our Constitution—8-0—the President in the context of making a statement on the section 9(1) of the Constitution, which is what happened here, is in effect, a statement of the Cabinet. That statement that we are being asked for, asked to

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debate to take note of, is a statement of the Government, of the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Now this SOE is novel in itself, Madam, just as the novel coronavirus, because it seeks to address, for the first time in our country—I think we had about five other states of emergency—this is a first one that deals with a health crisis, and therefore, it would differ from others that have gone before. What the Government did then in its statement through the President was to cite the threat of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, which thus far has caused the untimely and tragic deaths of about 375 persons in our country, fathers, sons, daughters, mothers, grandparents, really loved and cherished human beings, about 375 persons up to yesterday's count. And the Government predicated the decision as contained in the statement on a number of things. One was a surge in the number of persons infected, secondly, an increasing number of deaths, thirdly, an overwhelming of the parallel health care system to the point of where it is really on the brink of collapse. Those things, those reasons are set out in paragraph 9 of the President's Statement.

Now, as a Government, as a nation, this is not a desirable place to be at all. I do not think any government, I do not think any leader anywhere would want to strip people of their rights, take away their fundamental rights and freedoms, resort to a last resort option under the Constitution. I do not even want to do that lightly, that it will be given further thought as to what we should do, and I felt that the honourable Prime Minister in piloting this Motion would have spent some more time in saying why it has become necessary to strip citizens of their rights.

Before I go further, Madam, I want to offer condolences to all sons and daughters of our soil who lost their lives. To their families, to their loved ones,

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condolences to them. I empathize with those who are going through the pain and suffering with the disease, with the COVID disease. And there are those others who we have to empathize with who do not have the money to provide for their families because they have lost their jobs in this lockdown. But at the same time, we have so much to be grateful for, and to give thanks for, the frontline medical workers, the frontline members of the TTPS, prison and other essential workers. To all other workers, good Samaritans, all these persons out there, their daily efforts are invaluable to the well-being and survival of our country. We say thank you to them. [*Desk thumping*] And let me state at the outset so there is no misunderstanding, the Opposition has no objection to the state of emergency [*Desk thumping*] given the grim and dire circumstances that the Government has placed the country in. This is where we are now because of the mismanagement and incompetence of the Government. [*Desk thumping*] So whilst we support it because of where they brought us to, at the same time, we reserve the right to raise concerns, we reserve the right to hold the Government to account and we will continue to do that.

In fact, from the very outset of the pandemic, since January 2020, when we alerted others, Government, and the population, through various channels about the impending danger of the pandemic, we made it very clear that we were willing to meet and adopt a bipartisan approach to battle the pandemic's worst effects. [*Desk thumping*] But what happened? I remember writing to the Prime Minister asking for a meeting to be held. We did hold a meeting and we did not just talk, we presented a document, we presented a memo setting out certain suggestions; some would be considered, some may not be considered, we did that from very early o'clock in the game. We practically begged the Government from time and time to

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take the threat seriously. And what happened? We were met with arrogance. Undoubtedly, I think that is the mask of the most hapless and hopeless incompetent Government.

So here we are in the Opposition, not objecting to SOE because that is where they have brought us, but we do object, Madam Speaker, to other things. We do not object to the SOE but we object to the Government led by the honourable Prime Minister, presenting to date absolutely no coherent, realistic, social, economic or health plan to take us out of the pandemic, from before, from during, which is now, and even thereafter.

So we get a repeat of these press briefings and yes, with the whole world is suffering, all of it. You see all that is great. Who does not know that? Everybody knows it. So that is fine, but what do you intend to do? What are your plans? [*Desk thumping*] Tell us what you will do apart from locking down the country. And whilst it is you do that, we object as well to this dangerous regime. Now is like throwing up your hands in the air, last resort, Constitution, lock the country down. Under this PNM, Trinidad and Tobago is a nation gasping for breath as we slip into a deadly coma based on their policies and its management. And so, Madam, whilst the reduced time that we all have because not only are people's movements restricted in the Parliament, we have reduced time, I will just deal with a few of the issues arising out of that statement and my colleagues will carry through on it.

So the first question is: What has been the effectiveness of lockdowns? This is not the first one we have had in our country, what is the effectiveness? The Prime Minister comes today, no data is presented, no science is presented, no academic research is presented as to how and why a lockdown will be effective, a lockdown is essential. The Prime Minister does not tell us what his friends at the

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WHO have to say about lockdowns. These lockdowns are called non-pharmaceutical interventions, NPIs. And you know what the WHO says, yes, they say:

“Large scale physical distancing measures and movement restrictions, often referred to as ‘lockdowns’, can slow COVID-19 transmission”

Yes. WHO says that. But then the WHO also said:

“Such measures disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups...people”—are—“in poverty, migrants,...displaced persons”—the ones who “live in”—the most—“overcrowded and under resourced”—environments.

It affects people differently and the most vulnerable are the ones that are most hard hit when this happens.

And then the WHO said, well yes, look, maybe you have no choice, and that is what I think has happened, that is where it has reached because you have not managed this thing properly. So, take the extra time, take the extra time, the WHO recognizes that yes, stay home, lockdown, restrictions, but that you must recognize as well, that those lockdowns are an effective way to buy time, that is what the WHO says, buy time. And what governments must do during that time that they bought that extra time, is to do all they can to build capacities, to detect, to isolate, to test, to care, to trace, to quarantine, engage, empower, and enable populations. Has our Government done that? Has any of that happened? Is there any plan today that we were told that is what we are going to do? We are going to use this lockdown time which we are buying, it is time for the distancing and we are going to do one, two, three, four, five. Nothing, nothing. We keep going back every time they speak, we are going back; the whole world. What happened in Italy? What happened in Europe? Well, what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk*

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thumping] What is happening here? And what do you intend to do about it? What are your plans?

3.00 p.m.

So let us turn to the presidential statement itself. Paragraph 5 of that statement talks about the announcement of a public health emergency situation. The Prime Minister mentioned it; January 30, 2020, there was an announcement of this PHEIC. And you know what the statement says, and again this is not the President, this is the Cabinet; this is what it says in paragraph 5 of the statement:

“From the announcement of the PHEIC, the nation’s public health machinery has been in overdrive, led by the Minister of Health...doctors and health care workers.”

Madam, that is totally untrue because the date of the announcement with the PHEIC was January 30, 2020. That is when they were in this Parliament denying us the right to debate the matters urgent. [*Desk thumping*]

That is when the Minister of Health told this Parliament, “Look, that thing not going to explode in Trinidad”. That is when the CMOH, in answer to Dr. Bodoë in a JSC, he said, “No, no, no, that is not coming here”. So January 30th, when we were raising this matter to the Government it was not important; to the Parliament here it was not important. So to say that from the announcement of this—

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—which was 30 January, 2020—

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker—Madam Speaker, I—

Hon. Member: Mask.

Hon. Member: Your mask.

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Hon. Member: Put on your mask.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister does not have on his mask.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you.

Dr. Rowley: Are you finished?

Mr. Indarsingh: I have a right to say—

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Yes, Member.

Dr. Rowley:—I rise on 48(1), the Government has never denied the Opposition its right or ability to speak in this Parliament.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Motion did not qualify under the then Standing Orders. In this Parliament here in this House, in the Senate likewise was held that it did not qualify, so it was never debated. To say that on the 30th of January—wow—Government was busy; they were in overdrive, is the furthest from the truth, Madam Speaker.

We continue, the presidential statement, paragraphs 6 and 10 speak about a public information programme. The President's Statement talked about:

“A public information programme was instituted, particularly by means of regular media briefings.”

—paragraph 6. And then paragraph 10 talks about, while some follow the urgings of the guidelines and protocols about the spread of the virus, this is what the President's Statement says:

“It is either...they have not received the messaging or are unable or unwilling to abide by it.”

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So here it is the statement from the Government is telling us, “Hey, we had a great public education programme”. And, yes, they are always telling us, “and people did not want to hear it, boy”. “They did not listen. They are not following it.” But then, you see, you cannot carry out a public information programme by “buffing” people. [*Desk thumping*] It does not work. You cannot do that.

Your track record, the public does not trust anything you say. From the start you gave mixed messages about the seriousness of this virus. From the very start Government downplayed the threat of the virus. Yes, they did have daily briefings at first, now I think it is like three times per week, but this has evolved in a kind of political platform where officials resort to blaming everybody and everything except themselves. [*Desk thumping*] We saw that up to Saturday; we saw that.

So, on a public education programme the PAHO, Pan American Health Organization guidelines for communicating about the virus talks about the importance of trust—trust is stressed. PAHO notes that to maintain trust you must do certain things. One international Crisis Communication Specialist, Dr. Rebecca Rice, has said in an interview with *Guardian Media* recently:

“...respect is an important aspect of crisis communication.

‘One thing I would say about asking the public to take action through a crisis situation is...’—to show—“...empathy...”

“Don’t shame public into obeying COVID protocols”, article in the *Trinidad Guardian* of Wednesday, May 19th.

In an editorial published May 16, 2021, about the “SoE and curfew misstep” in the *Express* said:

“One constant in government’s management of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the utter lack of communication in a crisis...”

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Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise respectively on Standing Orders 48(1), 48(3), and very importantly, 48(8), Madam Speaker. If you wish me to elucidate, I would be very happy to.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So as far as 48(1), 48(3) and 48(8), I will take them in the converse order. I just want to caution the Member for Siparia, while I have heard what you initially said with respect to what “President” means, we have to be guided by Standing Order 48(8). This is still an instrument under the hand of Her Excellency and therefore we are guided by that and whose conduct we cannot question. As far as Standing Order 48(1), I overrule the Attorney General. And as far as 48(3), I also overrule the Attorney General. So I uphold 48(8).

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am guided, Madam. And maybe the AG has not read the Statement of the President but these matters deal squarely with paragraphs 6 and 10 of it. I am guided by your ruling, Madam, and perhaps next time the hon. Attorney General might pick up the whole Standing Order book and pelt it at us. But we will not stop speaking, you know, and I will take the ruling from the Speaker; [*Desk thumping*] we will not stop speaking.

So, your public information exercise again has been one that is not to engender trust, one that people are not receiving. They are not taking the message. This was said in the statement itself. People are not receiving the message and—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam President, the reason why I am rising on 48(8) is that I can assure you that this is not a statement of the Cabinet, this is a statement of Her Excellency the President solely—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Statement of whom? Sorry, Ma'am.

Mr. Al-Rawi:—and therefore the criticisms that are coming are entirely in relation to the parameters of 48(8). Perhaps the hon. Member in her experience can address

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the submission in a different way, but I do not want to offend the Standing Orders.

Madam Speaker: And I uphold the submission.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You know, Madam Speaker, I am guided. You know, recently I started looking at a football match and I was thinking, look, whilst we are locking down Trinidad and Tobago, in England 21,000 people were attending a football match, 21,000—over 21,000 people attending a football match, and here we are—the Attorney General has a different interpretation but I am referring to section 80 of the Constitution which clearly says the President acts on the advice of the Cabinet, [*Desk thumping*] except where otherwise provided. And there are provisions in the law, Madam. [*Crosstalk*] The time is short; I am looking at injury time.

Madam Speaker: Yes, but the point about it is what we are here debating is a statement made under the hand of Her Excellency. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam Speaker, I was talking about football and I hope we will get some injury time for these matters that are arising in such a short 30 minutes that we have which is speeding fast.

In the President's Statement, again paragraph 8 in the President's Statement which we are to take note of today, it speaks about in fact, one of the reasons is, look, we have had this Brazilian variant and that is one of the reasons matters have spiked, the cases have risen, deaths and so on. But, Madam, this is just, you know, looking at one side of it, why did that happen? Why did this variant come into Trinidad and Tobago? How did it come? What are we doing to prevent it from happening? And basically it is because of the porous borders that illegal immigrants are coming. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Health admitted it was a Venezuelan migrant. Persons are coming in, borders are wide open. The

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coastguard has told us, over 81 places of entry into our country and so they are coming in unchecked.

Now, I am now told that Brazil is now starting to battle in addition to the Brazilian variant, they are now battling something called the Indian variant. So, it will not be too long unless we close those borders down when that Indian variant is also going to be found in Trinidad and Tobago. So again, where does it come from? How does it happen? What has the Government done and what is the Government planning to do about these porous borders?

I look at paragraph 8 where the President's Statement talks about:

“Our circumstances have taken a sudden and distressing turn...”

Paragraph 8 also speaks to other matters:

“...sudden and distressing turn...a surge...”

—and so on. Why did these things happen? Why? What has been done by Government? What do they intend to do? So, yes, state of emergency; I want to say clearly, it is a result of the incompetence and mismanagement of the Government. [*Desk thumping*] We are here today because of their inability to deal with this virus.

At every step of the way we have bungled in this matter, sudden. This administration spent the past year playing politics, I think, with the COVID-19. As I said before from the very beginning, we tried to get this matter raised. So, how did we go from Oxford number one last year 2020, to now a lockdown and a state of emergency? How did we go from, “#WeBeatCOVID”, we beat COVID last year, to state of emergency? Again, I say one of the major reasons has to do with the lack of vaccines for the population and paragraph 11 of the President's Statement speaks to vaccinations. It speaks about the fact that we know, it says,

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internationally it is known that vaccination is the answer to dealing with the COVID.

The Prime Minister repeatedly tells us that, you know, we cannot get vaccines and every country—how come Barbados got? How come they have vaccinated more of their population than we have, a higher percentage of their population? [*Desk thumping*] How come all these small islands around us—they do not have our per capita income. They do not have our GDP. You know what they also do not have, Madam Speaker? You know what they also do not have? They do not have the PNM as a Government. [*Desk thumping*] So they managed better with the testing. They managed better with the vaccinations. They managed better with the number of deaths, the number of infections.

And so at Easter we saw a surge, the Prime Minister said, “You know, things were low down in February but you know when we came to Easter”—did not use the word “Easter”—“down in March and so”, but when you look at the numbers that they put out, it is clear that there was a spike after Easter. And who was the one telling everybody, “Come to Tobago”? “Come to Tobago, Tobago is open for business.” [*Desk thumping*] And when Minister Rohan Sinanan said 50,000 people travelling, you know, I was amazed. I was watching the TV one night and I saw the Prime Minister said, “Nobody said that”. Rohan Sinanan, the Minister’s voice is there [*Desk thumping*] for everyone to hear and his face to see, 50,000.

Then when the CMOH said, he gave a warning, he gave advice—he gave advice in March, “Look, we are looking like we are spiking, we have to do something”, who did he give this warning to? Whom was it given to and who ignored it? Was it the Minister of Health? Was it the hon. Prime Minister? Whom did the CMOH warn that, “Look, the spike is coming”? [*Desk thumping*] And that

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is why I find it hard to believe, you know, that we could say that this is all around the world and it is not just us and, “Oh my, poor us, all of us”, but what have we been doing and what do we plan to do? It is not sufficient to come back and hark back to what happened last year and what happened in January and February. What are we going to do apart from locking down the country? What? [*Desk thumping*] What?

And the vaccine fiasco, Prime Minister, you missed a golden opportunity when there was an offer from the private sector through ANSA McAL where they said they were willing to offer to pay for vaccines and so on, and erroneously it was reported that they wanted a tax break. That is not what they asked for. They said, “I would have to pay X amount of dollars in taxes so I will take the money and buy the vaccines for the country”. There was an offer from Pfizer, “We can buy those”. “We will buy them and then what you do is you give us a tax write-off. In other words, we will be paying our taxes upfront and you credit those taxes, rather we pay it at the end of the fiscal or whenever they are due to pay.”

They did not ask for a tax break. They did not ask for a tax write-off. They asked for a tax credit of the amount that they would be using to pay for it. That is what it was. That is what that was. And then, “oh”, I raised it one night in a meeting and thereafter, busy, busy, Minister meeting with them and they said they will work with the private sector to do business, all that happening; you know, up to now, not a word coming out of that. And, you know, that Pfizer is so much more important now, Madam. That is the only vaccine now that can be used on children. All our schools closed down; that is the only one. You know, and up to January this year the Minister of Health is reported saying he did not know, “We does not know which one Trinidad will take, which vaccine”. “There are three or four, we

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doh know which one.” From January, so no real adherence to seriously aggressively pursuing procurement of vaccines.

So the ANSA McAL, a golden opportunity missed. I am respectfully suggesting we should aggressively work with the private sector to pursue getting vaccines. This is the real answer, the only answer. Until we get those, this lockdown and every lockdown is not going to make a difference. In fact, in the Caribbean they are laughing at us—they are laughing at us, they are saying, “Look Trinidad lockdown”. “But they have more cases than us, they have more deaths than us. We are wide open. Our borders are open.” There we are, and it does not end with the Pfizer issue, you know. I want to ask a question today. We got 100,000 Sinopharm, we thanked the Government of China; we thank all those governments who have donated to Trinidad and Tobago but I want to ask: What is the status and is there any contract or proposed contract with Sinopharm for the Government to buy vaccines from Sinopharm?

It is alleged that there is a contract that is about to be signed, has not been signed with Sinopharm to buy many more doses. Is that there? And if it is not Sinopharm, then who? Whom are we going to get vaccines from? What is our plan because if we do not have a plan to procure vaccines and we just put up the hands and cry and say, “Oh God, nobody giving us”, what are we doing? Whom have we approached? The Government told us they were approaching Sinopharm. They told us that. They got the free vaccines. Do you intend to buy any from Sinopharm? Bring in more vaccines, we need them. So those are the issues on vaccines arising out of that statement from the presidential statement.

Madam, in the limited time we do have some suggestions. I will leave it up to my colleagues given the shortness of time for us in this debate, but I want to

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reaffirm and say that if I were Prime Minister today, the children would have had laptops, primary school/secondary schools. [*Desk thumping*] Based on the work done by the Government of 2010 to 2015, we retrofitted the San Fernando General Hospital. Work was done to commission the Couva Hospital which you are using. [*Desk thumping*] It took a pandemic to open that. So many other facilities that are being used were done by the Government at that time; not me, by the Government between 2010 and 2015. What have you done? Arima and Point Fortin were already on the books to be built, those are also being used for COVID. [*Desk thumping*] So what are your plans I ask again?

We do have some suggestions, as I say, we will share with you. And you know, Prime Minister—our Prime Minister regularly quotes the late Cuban leader, Fidel Castro. He quotes him to say, you know, “History will absolve me”. The Prime Minister quotes that all the time, history will absolve you. But, Madam, Prime Minister, your incompetence and mismanagement of yourself and your Government with this COVID, I want to tell you, with due respect, for your unprecedented incompetent reign, I want to let you know that far from absolving you, history will condemn you to eternity for this virus [*Desk thumping*] and the effects on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because now we have people out there crying, the business people want to meet you; the people who are collecting their pay, “It is okay, they do not have to go to work”, what about all those people, businesses that have been shut down? What is the balance? How do we find a way? Because whilst you save lives you are losing lives through people not being able to earn livelihoods. Madam Speaker, I thank you very much for your time. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

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Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate this afternoon. Firstly, let me congratulate my Opposition Leader, the Member for Siparia, for her contribution here this afternoon, really trying to bring some sanity into this debate. Madam Speaker, firstly, let me just state the reason—

Madam Speaker: One minute. Members, we have to remember even though we are masked we still have to maintain the physical distancing. All right? And also, I know it might be difficult for us to remember, but before we leave the speaking booth we have to put on our mask. All right?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, if I may just ask, I know that you had indicated we can speak from either booth but we cannot see the Member who is speaking opposite us.

Madam Speaker: Well, what I will ask is if Members could slightly adjust their seats because in the interest of time we may need to double up, in the interest of time. Member, please proceed.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I said, I joined this debate after the Member for Siparia and just to go through Motion No. 1, it says:

“Be it resolved that the House take note of the Statement by the President under section 9(1) of the Constitution setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a state of public emergency was based.”

Madam Speaker, I have to ask through you to the Government, how did we get in this crisis and how do we recover? And I will just, in my short time here I would just try to go through some of my views on my topics that I would have researched for this Motion No. 1. And really and truly it is about time for saving lives and

accountability and honesty, Madam Speaker.

So, as I rise this evening to speak on this matter which affects the life of every single citizen, I would first like to offer my condolences to those who lost loved ones and offer my sincere thanks to our frontline medical workers who continue to keep the health of our nation going and offer regards to all those affected by the pandemic. Most times, Madam Speaker, we come to this Parliament to debate but today I feel we are here to save lives, to save our country. Today we have come to discuss, as elected MPs, how we can use the measures in the Motion to save lives and livelihoods. As the Member for Siparia would be stated, we in the Opposition support the SOE, the SOE here this evening, Madam Speaker, but we must ask the question, how did we arrive at this crisis and how can we recover?

Madam Speaker, I just want to go back and not bring in the President—she made a powerful statement in her New Year’s message earlier this year, and I would just like, through you, Madam Speaker, just to quote that message because it is a powerful statement by the President, and I quote:

“Public officials have to stop being so secretive (except in the interest of national security), paranoid, and dismissive of the anxieties of our citizens. They make decisions and take action under our authority and on our behalf, and we are therefore entitled to be kept in the loop about relevant developments.”

Madam Speaker, I found when I listened to that statement, it is really reflective of us as legislators and the Government being accountable and really reporting to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, we take note of Her Excellency the President’s Statement here this afternoon and commit to actions which are aimed at

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saving lives and we must do so with transparency and honesty, Madam Speaker.

In Her Excellency's Statement there were three major points that I looked at and I want to quote in paragraph 1 in her statement:

"...being satisfied that a public emergency had arisen as the result of an outbreak of infectious disease..."

In paragraph 9:

"Unfortunately, the virus mutated introducing new and more virulent strains which inevitably reached our country, including importantly, the 'Brazilian Variant'."

And part of that paragraph 9:

"Our circumstances have taken a sudden and distressing turn for the worse."

So, Madam Speaker, all these three statements in my view are correct and true in the President's Statement. And as the Member for Siparia would have said, in 2020, we were considered Oxford number one and we boasted about that and we as a nation now, today we are discussing a state of emergency. How do we go from then in that good place last year to now, Madam Speaker? And these are the concerns that the population wants some answers to, inclusive of the Opposition and even my constituents of Pointe-a-Pierre.

So, Madam Speaker, after 15 months we should be, in my view, easing out of what we had gone through for the last 12 to 13 months because this country, the people or the population, has made great sacrifices over that period from March 2020, to present. And the kind of sacrifices that the population has put out, and I know even the Government has put out sacrifices because, you know, just trying to meet some of those financial reliefs, Madam Speaker, but as a population when we felt that we should be coming out and going back to some semblance of normalcy,

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we are now looking at a state of emergency. And students and teachers over the past 14 months, Madam Speaker, have made great sacrifice in this country; our health care workers, Madam Speaker, and true patriots over the last 14 months, and it is a bit disheartening for all that we are now in this predicament.

So, I ask the Prime Minister when he is winding up if he could give some feedback, some clarity why we have reached this point. You see, and I do not believe it is only about blaming the population that sometimes when I listen to the press conference and the Prime Minister comes across, he comes across as if he is blaming the population for the state that we are in here today. And if I am to be corrected, please correct me, Prime Minister. In my view, Madam Speaker, this Government played politics with COVID-19, and I will clarify that, because if you go back to Her Excellency's statement in paragraph 8:

“After efforts from many quarters, the nation appeared to have flattened the curve, and while new infections continued, recovery was steady and the number of deaths...”—were—“...low.”

That is the President's Statement, Madam Speaker. And again, I come back about the sacrifices that the country would have made. We would have heard about flattening the curve over the period of time, Madam Speaker. And now today we have seen an escalation, a crisis that is happening and that is why, you know, the Government of the day felt no other alternative but to call a state of emergency to help bring back some normalcy and flatten the curve.

3.30 p.m.

And I ask, what happens after the state of emergency? How do we come out of this crisis, Madam Speaker? Are we going to get back that flattened curve, you know? And it is not only up to the population alone, Madam Speaker. So I come

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back and I am asking if the Government played politics with the COVID-19? Because I want to read in the PNM Manifesto, the Prime Minister's message in the PNM 2020 Manifesto, Madam Speaker, and I quote:

“Crises truly brings out the best in us, as is the case as the present time, as we show the world how our little country with just 1.3 million people can perform beyond expectations in dealing with a global pandemic and be ranked first in the world in terms of the systems we have put in place to prevent the spread of the coronavirus...”

Madam Speaker, that was around August 2020. He talked about the good systems that his Government had put in place. So I ask through you, Madam Speaker, what happened to those systems that the Prime Minister talked about back in August 2020 that ranked us first, in his view, in the world for handling coronavirus or the spread, Madam Speaker? So again, through you, Madam Speaker, I ask the Prime Minister, could you tell us, this country, what happened to that system that was in place back in August 2020?

Madam Speaker, again when you look at where we are today and you listen to the Minister of Health boasting over the last few months, not of recent times, Madam Speaker, and I mean, he gave, he boasted and I am asking the question, through you again, how they reached here? Because in April 29th Oxford University ranked, 2020 that is, Madam Speaker, TT second in COVID fight. And on the 4th of May, 2021, in the *Trinidad Express*:

“T&T's COVID surge among the worst in the world”

That is reported in the media, Madam Speaker. And I am asking, how again, through you, because the population wants to know. You see, when we listen to these press conferences the population is not getting the answers that they deserve,

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Madam Speaker, and they are asking just like me and everyone else, how did we arrive at this place here today after sacrificing for the last 12 or 13 months?

Madam Speaker, again the President in her statement, and I quote, being:

“...satisfied that a public emergency has arisen as a result of the outbreak of an infectious disease...”

Now, Madam Speaker, we want the best for our people.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Really?

Mr. D. Lee: Of course, we want the best for our people not because I am debating that, that does not mean that we want the best for the country, Attorney General, through you, Madam Speaker, but we have to ask certain questions and again, I ask, how did we reach here? Now, some people might not like this what I am going to say but maybe there is some sort of enquiry in the handling of COVID-19 that needs to take place because maybe there is a time, there is a need to have a public enquiry of where we are today because you see in the President's statement and I quote:

It is accepted internationally that COVID-19 will only be brought under control...

This is her statement—

...if and when a sufficient number of members of a population have been effectively vaccinated.

And that I agree with the President. I agree that she talks about vaccination for the population, Madam Speaker. And when we go back into the vaccination aspect, I want to go back to a media article that I read, I think it was May the 11th, Madam Speaker, where the Minister of Finance in a press conference would have talked about a loan from China, that a facility loan was being given to this country and

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part of that loan facility, an order was placed for approximately 1.5 million vaccines for the population, and that would have been paid out of that loan facility from the China Government, Madam Speaker.

And I ask the Prime Minister today, what is status of the balance or that order of those Sinopharm vaccines that was stated in the press conference held by the Minister of Finance I think around May 11th, just a few days ago, Madam Speaker. Because again I agree with the President that vaccination is the only thing that will help us come back and bring back this country to some normalcy, because coming out of the state of emergency, what happens next? And if we do not have that strong vaccination programme, we will go back to square one, Madam Speaker. So I ask the Prime Minister in his wind up to tell this country about that order of approximately 1.5 million vaccines from Sinopharm through the Chinese Government, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn to something that is troubling and I think in the Prime Minister—the President’s statement she talked about—the President that is, sorry, the Public Health Regulations were implemented and responsive to changes, Madam Speaker. And the President mentioned—talked about Public Health Regulations and there is an article in the *Express*, Madam Speaker, the 18th of May, 2021, and the title of that article is “Life in limbo. Am I a COVID case?” And it is about a veteran *Express* journalist Donstan Bonn who in his, in that article had been 14 days in quarantine and facing and I precis “...facing a criminal action—a fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment, if I breach...”—the COVID protocols, Madam Speaker. Because he was tested for COVID—and I would not take up much of my time on this article. He was tested for COVID, Madam Speaker, and he waiting his time out under quarantine and he was not getting,

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firstly his test results on a timely basis and he was not being communicated to by the frontline health care workers. And I want to stick a pin here because I do not think I am blaming—I am not blaming the frontline health care workers, but there has been a breakdown and the Minister of Health has a responsibility, in my view, to ensure that the management and the communication aspect of these Regulations that are coming out of his Government, their Government is properly entrenched and the proper systems and the personnel and the staffing is given to ensure that that people who have concerns can be really be not as stressed as they are during what they are going through at this point in time, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, Donstan Bonn is not an isolated case because I have heard many other stories where systems are breaking down, even the parallel system in the hospital that the Minister of Health boasted about and maybe at that point in time last year it was so. And I ask the question, why that parallel system is not in the same working or the same effective manner that it was boasted about last year, Madam Speaker, and I am not—I mean, these are real-life issues, Madam Speaker.

So again, I ask the Prime Minister to give this country some comfort about the communication aspects, the parallel system in the hospital system and the personnel are properly—they have enough personnel to assist the frontline workers, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the President in her statement in paragraph 10 talked about our parallel health care system is being stretched to its limit in terms of both human and material resources.

And I ask the question, I remember reading an article back in May 02, 2020, and I think it was on Loop TT where 12 Cuban nurses arrived in Trinidad and

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Tobago to assist and train our nurses locally in the area of ICU training. That was back in May 02, 2020, 12 Cuban nurses. And I ask through you, Madam Speaker, that the Minister of Health, what has happened with that training of our ICU staffing locally, Madam Speaker? Because we really have not heard anything about that training aspect from the Cuban nurses, Madam Speaker. Are they still here in Trinidad and Tobago training our ICU staff, Madam Speaker? Because, Madam Speaker, on the *Trinidad Express* Wednesday 19, 2021, there is an article called “Nurses under stress” where nurses are mentally and physically drained, Madam Speaker. And I really hope that some—that that article and it is real life where nurses are now stressed out. They are mentally and physically overworked that something is put in place through the Minister of Health to ensure that their safety—thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I join to discuss the statement by the Her Excellency the President dated 17th May, but before I do so I would like to congratulate the political leader of the United National Congress [*Desk thumping*] who has holistically examined the question of: Why are we here? What are the reasons leading to this state of emergency, and what are the plans—of asking questions, fundamental questions about what are the plans for the Government to take us out of this situation which is bedeviling our economy, et cetera?

Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate our health care workers who are giving of their very selves sacrificially to ensure that the rest of us are, our medical needs are taken care of. I think they deserve a tremendous congratulation and acknowledgement of the sacrifices they make.

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I would also like to thank our citizens who by and large are doing what they can to help this country come out of this crisis. They are reading, they are sharing information, they are practising social distancing by and large, and I think they need to be—those who are carrying out those functions ought to be congratulated.

Madam Speaker, the fundamental question why I am here today is to ask the question: When this state of emergency is put in place for whatever period, for 90 days, et cetera, what will happen to our country if as our citizens sacrifice, as they take the psychological burden of isolation, et cetera, as they cannot congregate and engage in religious, social and cultural activities, what will happen after all that sacrifice if our borders remain open? We will—the question will be asked, it is like you are putting up protection against crime and bandits—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 5(1)(b) please; third speaker in a row to ask this.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So I want to say two things: I uphold the Attorney General, in that we have spoken about a number of things already, and as you quite rightly said in your opening, we have painted a picture of things being holistically dealt with by the Leader of the Opposition. So we have spoken about borders, we have spoken about vaccines and so on, so I rule that all those things are highly repetitive and tedious repetition. But also to remind you that what we are debating now is Her Excellency's statement. Okay? There is nothing here about 90 days that I have seen. Okay?

Mr. R. Charles: I will be guided, Madam Speaker. Specifically, the President's Statement indicates that the COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency of international concern in February 2020. The Government's response was led almost significantly or solely by the Ministry of Health. Now, while that is a

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correct statement, and we note it, we note it, but what that implies is that a deficiency in the Government's approach was that it did not take an all-of-government approach to COVID which includes the input from the Ministry of National Security and our borders.

The second statement where the President indicated and it is correct, the virus mutated introducing new and more violent strains which inevitably reached our country including the Brazilian variant. We note the statement. But what again—it leads us to a deficiency in the Government's approach because it begs the question, how did it come to Trinidad and Tobago, and again—

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise again on Standing Order 55 (1)(b).

Madam Speaker: I uphold. I also want to say that I am seeing a pattern of agreeing with Her Excellency and implicit in that is that one could disagree and therefore we take Her Excellency's Statement as it is. As it is. Okay?

Mr. R. Charles: I will be guided. I will be guided. So the question arises that we are today discussing a state of emergency and it will affect the economy, it will shut it down, et cetera, and what is the game plan, what is the end plan.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise again on Standing Order 55(1)(b).

Madam Speaker: Okay. So again, I uphold the objection.

Mr. R. Charles: Madam Speaker, we look at—we have, for example, our other countries looking at Trinidad and Tobago and saying: what exactly is going on in Trinidad? The Vice-President of Guyana yesterday, Vice-President Bharrat Jagdeo, he has chided this PNM administration when he said that:

Trinidad and Tobago has been in a perpetual state of lockdown for the past year and it did not help really.

We had to have—and they are saying in Guyana, we had to have a nuanced

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approach unlike other countries which have totally shut down.

So what the countries and other persons are looking at Trinidad and Tobago and seeing that what is happening here in terms of the results, we have had tremendous number of lockdowns and yet we are in this state that we are, and we have to ask the fundamental question about that situation.

Madam Speaker, in terms of my political leader had spoken about the WHO and yes, on May 22, 2020, the WHO declared South America as the world's new COVID epicentre. And earlier this year Brazil took over this mantel due to their highly contagious new variant and was blamed by many other South Americans countries for their respective increases. And it begs the question even though it is not—my colleagues opposite do not want to hear it. It begs the question that the WHO is telling Latin American and South American countries to take steps to contain the Brazilian variant.

Last week we were told that the Indian variant has been introduced into Brazil. And, Madam Speaker, I will not detain you, I will leave right after making the statement and it is fundamental, unless we protect our borders, unless we stop the variants and the strains from coming into Trinidad and Tobago, then “crapaud smoke our pipe”. I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to join this particular debate which happens to be one of the most important debates that this Parliament has been assembled in order to reflect upon and Members to contribute.

Madam Speaker, we are at a very critical juncture in our nation's history in terms of this will be the fifth time in our nation's history that a government since

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Independence has declared a state of emergency in Trinidad and Tobago. At the time, Madam Speaker, we are seeing an invisible, deadly, infectious, highly-transmittable disease called COVID-19 that has ravaged through the world. And the last time I checked, Madam Speaker, it took with it 3.4 million lives, and right here in our twin-island Republic as of the last update we had from the Ministry of Health, it took 375 of our citizens, our brothers and sisters. And I express my deepest condolences to the families of all of those persons who have lost their loved ones due to this deadly virus.

And we have seen, Madam Speaker, that this month of May has been one of the deadliest months of this virus which prompted the Government in order to summon or declare a state of emergency as Her Excellency has done via proclamation and now we are in this Parliament by virtue of the Constitution to really contemplate and assess the statements and the grounds and to take note of Her Excellency's statement regarding the reason for the proclamation of a state of emergency.

Madam Speaker, since March last year our country has been ravaged by the virus after the first detected case of COVID-19. And no matter your race, your religion, gender or political affiliation, this virus does not discriminate, Madam Speaker. It takes with it lives and livelihoods. It stunned the operation of the country and forced the closure of businesses, schools and now it even makes it illegal to gather at places of worship.

Madam Speaker, this Motion in particular that we are debating stems and gets its constitutional grounding from section 9 of the Constitution. And by section 9 of the Constitution, Madam Speaker, we see Her Excellency would have outlined in her statement that was delivered to you, various matters in which she would

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have made the Proclamation. And, Madam Speaker, that Proclamation is before this honourable House and I wish not to go into that particular Proclamation.

Suffice it to say, Madam Speaker, that we must inform the population because we are discussing a state of emergency and I think public education is one that must be very critical at this juncture. Now, I listened to the entire contribution of the Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister in particular did not really go too much into the idea that we are debating which is the state of emergency, but rather focused on the virus only. And, Madam Speaker, we have to understand the powers that the Executive now has in its hands based on the declaration of a state of emergency.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1). It is the reason why we begged for the two Motions to be done together. My friend is skirting deep into the other Motion.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan, I agree with the Attorney General. Remember this is just the purpose, what is before us, is just to take note, okay? Of Her Excellency's Statement. So I agree with the Attorney General that what you are dealing with here is not for this debate.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I am taking note of Her Excellency's Statement when I raised these matters, and in particular, Madam Speaker, Her Excellency and I would like if you would allow me, Madam Speaker, I have a copy of the Statement before me. In that Her Excellency, and if I quote at the paragraph, it said that:

Public health regulations were implemented and responsive to changes in circumstances.

So Her Excellency did in fact point out to this honourable Parliament,

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Madam Speaker, which we are taking note of is that the emergency Regulations that are promulgated under the particular provisions of the Constitution. And, Madam Speaker, when you look at the Regulations, the emergency Regulations that are promulgated under this particular state of emergency—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on 48(1) and also on 55(1)(b).

Madam Speaker: Please, so again as far as, again, I would support 48(1). While you could refer to whatever it is here in Her Excellency's Statement, I do not believe that you have the opportunity to go into the regs.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, if I may seek your guidance on this matter. It is that [*Interruption*] the understanding—I am just seeking your clarity, please, if you can guide me. Is it that in the second debate which deals with the extension of the state of emergency for a period of three months, we would be able to go into these matters?

Hon. Member: Of course. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. S. Hosein: I did not ask the Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker: Members. Okay. So one, Member, as much as I would like to assist, I am constrained in my ability to assist in the way that you asked. But what I say to you again, the Resolution before us is just to take note of Her Excellency's Statement. There is another Motion that comes that we are all aware of on the Order Paper which, to me, is a different type of debate to this—okay?—where you may want to widen on other things. This is just to take note of Her Excellency's Statement which contains her reasons.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, if that is the ruling of the Chair—Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, may I continue please? Madam Speaker, I am guided by your ruling and—

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Madam Speaker: I am not really ruling. I have said to you have asked me a question seeking guidance. I cannot give you the guidance that you wish. All I am saying is that you look at what you are being asked to do in this debate. All right? I ruled on the Attorney General's objection. I upheld it. So please go along in accordance with where I have ruled.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for your ruling. And, Madam Speaker, based on that particular ruling I just want to make these few points. The point that I wish to make is that the lockdowns alone will not solve the problem. And I want to rebut a point that the Prime Minister would have raised. In the Prime Minister's contribution he would have indicated that we must inoculate, at least, 60 to 65 per cent of the population before we could see some level of the virus not spreading as vigorously as it should. Madam Speaker, we have no indication—

Madam Speaker: That is—is the debate today?

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes, please, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I have no recollection. Maybe you can check *Hansard*, but I do not recollect that in the debate today. Okay?

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I made a note of what the Prime Minister would have said, but we got no targets or deadlines, Madam Speaker, for when the country will be 60 per cent inoculated. Madam Speaker, all we have before us is public statements made by the Minister of Health where he indicated that by August, 10 per cent of the population would in fact be inoculated. Madam Speaker, that is totally unacceptable. The Government cannot—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 48(1) and skirting as well 55(1)(b). It is not in the President's Statement.

Madam Speaker: So, as I have said before, we have dealt with vaccines. I am

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going to give you a little leeway to find your way, because since you have stood up, we have interrupted, but please, be guided by what is before us to debate—

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes, please.

Madam Speaker:—and what the Resolution has asked us to do.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes, please. And, Madam Speaker, as I take note of Her Excellency statement, I would leave with the statements that the lockdown is not the solution. The Government must have an aggressive plan to procure vaccines. Madam Speaker, we cannot continue to risk the lives—

Madam Speaker: And that is tedious repetition.

Hon. Member: Exactly.

Madam Speaker: Everybody who has spoken before you has said that, so please go on to another point.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, we cannot continue to risk the lives of the citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, I hope that I am recognized to join the second debate on the Extension of the State of Emergency. I thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: I believe the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla caught my eye, but he is waiting for the booth to be cleaned.

Dr. Rai Ragbir (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good afternoon, Members of the House. It would be remiss of me to not compliment our frontline health care workers for their hard work, their selfless service and their resilience, their personal sacrifice, what they do on a daily basis. As a physician I know what it is about. I want to pay condolences to those who are on the frontline who have passed, condolences to their families who have lost a loved ones. It is not

nice, Madam Speaker, what is happening out there. Trinidad and Tobago and the world at large is not a nice place now with COVID-19.

I am certain that each one of us here and out in the public know someone who is COVID positive, and it has reached to a point that we also know someone who may have passed among your family, your community, or your church, or your mosque, or your temple. So people of Trinidad and Tobago, do not be complacent, obey your public health guidelines. And I am there—I am so happy for this SOE, the state of emergency. I wish it was here earlier so that we can protect our lives. I have seen so many times people without mask, mask under their chins, and these are the people that keep flouting the rules and regulation, and they are actually making this pandemic worse in Trinidad and Tobago. I dare say the work of our public health officials must not go unrecognized. They work tirelessly 24/7, Madam Speaker, such as the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Hinds, Dr. Trotman, Dr. Richards, and the country thanks these people for working like that.

And hon. Minister of Health, I say I know it is a difficult job, but together I say let us put partisan politics aside and let the country see that the Government Bench and the Opposition Bench work together for the betterment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we need to do, and devote our energies to fight this war. Yes, we are in a war and we need to win this war. And I say today it is a day we are here after a little lull in Parliament, we are practising COVID guidelines here and some of us will go home, and I will tell you what we do: We have members of our family, our friends, our community, people who we pray with, they will come to your house, and because we love them and so much, you do not realize that one in three, Madam Speaker, who are COVID positive, have no symptoms. I will repeat: One in three persons who are COVID positive have no symptoms. That

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means no sore throat—

Madam Speaker: Member. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Member. Member, while I really cannot stand on 55(1). For your contribution, I want to again remind you what we are debating here is the statement to take note, so maybe you could tie your contribution to the statement. Thank you.

Dr. R. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I am so guided. So, just to say, to add to that, that our people outside there I will say they are suffering. Now the state of emergency is timely and I actually applaud the President for her timely response to actually having this state of emergency. There is no more middle class. The middle class has become like the lower class, as you would say in a society. Because now, COVID-19, the game changer, is termed the great equalizer. What that means? You look at a COVID hospital now that is all over the country, so here is a man with modest means, he gets COVID, he lays in a hospital bed. There is another man with all the amenities money can buy, he gets COVID and he is right next to the man. The poor man drinking bush medicine, the neem, the tulsi, the saffron, the ginger and the fever grass. Guess what? The rich man drinking the same thing as well. And they may die, so there is no—

Madam Speaker: Member, again, I just want to caution you as before. I think what you are saying is very valuable but we have to be guided by Standing Order 48(1). All right. So, I will ask you again to be mindful of what is before us. It is not just COVID-19 in an open context. Okay.

Dr. R. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I am so guided. I will continue.

We are not prepared for this pandemic. No country in the world is prepared for this pandemic. So, how do we move forward? We move forward as a people to continue practising our guidelines, we continue practising what we do from our

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home, our families. They have so much of mental stress in the homes. You know what is sad? I am seeing now that even with the state of emergency, during the days, I am seeing so many people crowding around the supermarkets. You are seeing so many people going to the regular markets, and people realize that the curfew is 9.00 to 5.00, 9.00 p.m. to 5.00 a.m. so they can do whatever. But I understand the Commissioner of Police decides to pick up the slack where people have fallen short. Our Caribbean neighbours have actually gone ahead and procured the vaccine earlier. Now, our source of a vaccine it must be WHO approved. So, we had the AstraZeneca, we have Sinopharm—

Madam Speaker: As again, as I said, I have to caution you, and this is the last attempt I can make to ask you to become relevant to the exercise that we are in. Okay. So you have a few more minutes left and I would ask you to please be relevant to the nature of the debate and what the resolution has asked. All right. And I really would not like to have to intervene on another occasion.

Dr. R. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I am guided. And with that, actually I conclude. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this very important debate here today, on the statement of Her Excellency the President.

Madam Speaker, I am dealing specifically with paragraph 9 of the statement, in which Madam President identified two critical factors which impacted her decision to call a state of emergency. Specifically and just for the record, two matters are of particular concern. The first is that the demographic of the infected appears to be widening; and the second, our parallel health care system seems to be stretched to its limits in terms of both human and material resources. Madam

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Speaker, I would tighten my debate just to deal with the last of those two items. Our parallel health care system is being stretched to its limits.

Madam Speaker, why is it that we are being stretched to our limits? The Minister of Health in October 2020 boasted that he had 1,551 beds to support the parallel health care system. At present, in fact at that time he said 520 of those beds were for COVID sick patients who were in hospital, 652 mild and asymptomatic patients, and 379 for quarantine patients. Today we have roughly 365 persons in hospital and 362 persons in state quarantine facilities. Why then are we stretched to our limits if today what we have is 727 beds occupied? Why should we be stretched to our limits, Madam Speaker? The Minister of Health has also boasted of adding additional resources.

Madam Speaker: Again, remember this is the statement of Her Excellency. All right. So that when you ask that question you are questioning this. Okay.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Duly guided, Madam Speaker. I am trying to explain, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, that we are in the situation we are in now because of the actions of the Government in particular, and I will show why it is we should not be in this situation. So, I am in full agreement with Madam President that we are stretched to our limits, and I am trying to query, why? The Minister of Health is here, maybe he can identify the reasoning why it is we are forced to be in the situation that we are in today.

Madam Speaker, sorry, Her Excellency the President spoke about us being stretched for resources, material and human resources. Madam Speaker, why should we be stressed—stretched, when the Minister of Finance has just recently boasted of having in excess of 94 million US dollars, that is 611 million TT dollars sitting in his hands still? The Minister of Health recently advised that we still have 50 million

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US dollars from CARPH, 20 million US dollars from the World Bank, 24 million US dollars—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, I have never said that. He said the Minister of Health.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health, if you stand you have to stand either on a Standing Order or ask your friend an opportunity to interject.

Mr. Deyalsingh: I never said that!

Madam Speaker: So, Minister of Health, if you wish you will get an opportunity to respond, but that is not the way it is done. Please continue.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Just to clarify for the hon. Minister, the Minister of Finance said that we still have, we still have in our hands, the Government still has unspent in its hands 94 million US dollars. Why is it that we are still in a situation where we are stretched for resources? Why is the health care system collapsing if the Minister already has this information? The Minister said that in a press conference this weekend gone here, 611 million TT dollars not yet disbursed, and that does not include the 1.3 billion TT dollars from the Chinese loan. Madam Speaker, we are stretched because the Government has not used the resources that it has had at its disposal, and therefore I agree with Madam President, we are stretched for their—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Standing Order 48(1) and 55(1)(b), Madam Speaker, most respectfully.

Madam Speaker: Okay, so Member for Oropouche West I will give you a lil leeway to see where you are going with this. All right. So, please proceed.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Madam Speaker, if I may help my colleagues opposite. As I conclude, I wish to reemphasize that the Members of the Government are the reason why we are where we are in the crisis that we are in, because they have not made

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sufficient use of the funding or the other resources that they have at their disposal to date. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I know that you should not be brought into the debate, but I appeal to my colleagues all who are present here today, that if as leader of a team in this Parliament you ever see me in the position as my colleague on the other side is today, having misled so many people, please take me to Sharon Rowley and pension me off. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I am keeping my eyes on the clock because I know we really want to finish early, but I really must not allow one or two points that were made to remain unchallenged on the *Hansard*, and that is all I propose to do in the few minutes I have here.

The Opposition Leader, my colleague from Siparia, brought the Monday night presentation to the House in the usual way, mismanagement and incompetence. But, Madam Speaker, it appears as though my colleagues were quite uncomfortable with Trinidad and Tobago in 2020 being viewed as a country that has properly managed the response to the virus. But, Madam Speaker, they did point out that when we were ranked highly for a country that was handling the challenge of the virus, it was done by Oxford University and not by the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] It was others who were looking on at all who were handling and they said that Trinidad and Tobago was doing a good job. So, that was not by happenstance. It is easy for my colleagues on the other side, expectedly, to say that there is no plan, and there is no this, and there is no that. But everything that you do not agree with does not mean that it is a plan that you do not have. We have been

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following a plan, a plan that you have been objecting to from day one. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it was in this very Chamber—you know, recently I saw one of my colleagues, I cannot remember which one it was, he called a press conference to say that the Opposition Leader wrote to the Prime Minister for a meeting of the minds, a meeting of all sides of the House to discuss COVID. And today I hear it being mentioned again, that they were willing to meet, and they want to meet and so on. And the colleague who called that press conference, I think was last week, he went on to say that one year later the Prime Minister has not responded to the Opposition Leader's letter. When, Madam Speaker, what were the facts? On March 20th the very day that the request was made, I as Prime Minister met here in my office, and I carried with me the Member for Arouca/Maloney and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and I met with the Member for Caroni East, the Opposition Leader and the Member for Fyzabad. And we met on that letter. I cannot believe how one of my colleagues could call a press conference to say, one year later there is no response. But that is the gist of what is being presented here today.

The Opposition is taking the position to create doubt, create a new reality, and give the impression that there is something else happening in Trinidad and Tobago where the Government is to be held accountable. If that is how you want to conduct your business, conduct it so, but do not review it and revise it in a way that is far from the fact. In that fateful meeting on March 20th when the Government and the Opposition met here on COVID management and ideas, you know what was the singular matter that came out of that, Madam Speaker? The singular outcome was that the Opposition insisted that the Government buy a stock of some chemical

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called hydroxychloroquine which was a treatment for COVID. At that time the whole world led by WHO was saying, COVID-19, there was no cure and hydroxychloroquine was dangerous to be used in that process. We had that. In a debate in this House when we came here, and we announced that we are going to do certain things, and we took certain actions, a simple action like closing bars which was optional. People were congregating to have a drink and giving the virus the opportunity to spread. As we all know, Madam Speaker, is a congregation of infected human beings that gives the virus an ability to spread. And, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Charles: I rise on 28(1). I do not know what that has to do with taking note of the President's statement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, I understand that we are doing a sort of rotation, but maybe, and maybe you were outside of the Chamber when certain points were made that are being answered. All right.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I will try to make your assignment as easy as possible by only referring to what has been said in this debate. I am simply responding to what has been said, and what was said, that they were willing to meet, and I was speaking with respect to having met and having extracted. Also, Madam Speaker, I very pleased today to hear so many Members of my colleagues on the other side speak, and even speak in praise of the parallel health system. [*Desk thumping*] Because up until now, and from the very beginning, they were the same ones who were saying, what parallel health system? There was no parallel health system. That was Government old talk, propaganda.

But today, a year and a half later they are putting on *Hansard* their admiration for the parallel health care system. I would like to ask, Madam Speaker,

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if any of my colleagues could point me to a single country where any government is pointing to a parallel health care system to fight COVID. We are probably the only country in the world that was able to do that. And the fact is, we did that because we had certain infrastructural arrangements in place by pure happenstance, and we used it. We used all of it in that brilliant idea of having a parallel health care service available where persons who needed care from COVID, the infectious disease COVID, they got it outside of the normal health system, and we preserve the normal health system to carry on our health care delivery and all COVID matters.

Madam Speaker, we were lucky. Is pure luck that we had a brand new hospital coming into being in Couva. We completed one, built one and completed it in Point Fortin. We built one in Arima and we built one in Tobago. So we had four, and then a fifth one became available arising out of the restructuring of Petrotrin, five. Madam Speaker, five hospitals were available to allow that parallel health care system to be operated, and we supported it with a number of step down facilities. And then my colleagues come here and talk about no plan. It was the plan that kept us safe as far as we were able to for all of 2020. So when you come and say now, what happen in 2021? 2020, we did reasonably well, and our parallel health system—and I too would like to join all the voices here today that said that our health care personnel have done yeoman service, rising to the occasion. [*Desk thumping*]

And they want to know what happened? Because my colleagues have to keep the narrative, lack of reality going to create doubt and to bad mouth the Government. The Opposition Leader today, could not understand that she raised it, why the Minister of Works and Transport could have said 50,000 people and Tobago. Madam Speaker, for the last time I am going to explain that to the senior

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counsel and others in Trinidad and Tobago. What the Minister of Works and Transport said, for Easter, the two weekends, the end of which was Easter, the first was the Baptist Liberation on the Tuesday, so weekend into holiday, week into a weekend of holidays, the Minister of Works and Transport said, for that period 50,000 people travelled between Trinidad and Tobago. He never said 50,000 travelled to Tobago. Twenty five thousand people travelling one way and then 25,000 coming the other way, is 50,000 travelling between. And they would not accept that that is what he said, because they want to say that the problem that we are in now is because 50,000 people travelled to Tobago.

Madam Speaker, that is not so, and I want to put that on *Hansard*, because it was brought in here today. [*Desk thumping*] But you know, Madam Speaker, you heard so many times, they got into trouble trying to ask how we got here? How we got here? And they are asking for an investigation as to how we got here. Be careful what you ask for because you will get it. The only country that I know of in the Caribbean where in the middle of the pandemic the Opposition organized gatherings of people called “vigils”, thousands of people for a month, trying to exploit the death of Andrea Bharatt, and you are asking me how we got here? What other gatherings took place in Trinidad during that period after we came out of February and—

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(1). Nobody mentioned that, and that does not relate to the President’s note. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: You have a point of order?

Hon. Member: 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Well, 48(1), overruled. The question was, where is the plan? How did we get here? Overruled!

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Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Let me repeat it because they seem to want to run far from that. What other Caribbean country you know who are fighting COVID alongside Trinidad and Tobago that the Opposition paid for, organized night after night thousands of people to do exactly what the virus wanted, which was to bring people together during a pandemic? And who organized that, Madam Speaker? It was organized by the UNC. They organized transport to bring people to venue. In one particular structure—

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, 48(6). These are the families of the victims—

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Object! Get up and object to that.

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr. Hosein: These are the families of the victims who were mourning, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is imputing improper motives.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: You could shout as much as you like, that happened in this country. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] And talking about taking the threat seriously. You advised the Government to take the threat seriously and we did not.

Madam Speaker, another piece of misinformation in that narrative is that the Opposition raised the matter here and were not allowed. We, Madam Speaker, as you know, we operate under Standing Orders in this House, and every Member, especially the Opposition, have opportunities to raise Motions. If you file your Motion under the wrong Standing Order, Urgent Matter of Public Importance, and the Speaker rules that the matter does not qualify under that Standing Order, what prevented you from raising it under any other Standing Order with notice? Nothing. [*Desk thumping*] But you want to go and say that the Speaker and the Government prevented you from speaking in the Parliament because it is all part of the misinformation that is peddled to the country. [*Desk thumping*]

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4.30 p.m.

I spent three terms in Opposition and I know that if I move a motion under Urgent Matter and it does not qualify, I can file it immediately under another Standing Order and nothing could prevent you. And what is peculiar about Urgent Matter of Public Importance is because you want to stop the day's proceedings to handle that matter. And if the Speaker rules, that is the ruling. But you could bring it the other day and the other day and the other day, they never did that because they want to accuse the Speaker and the Government. We reject that out of hand.
[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we know that there is a football match in England with 25,000 people. But, Madam Speaker, if the English kept all the vaccines made in their country for themselves and did not share it with Caricom and they vaccinate their people, they could go and play as much football as they want. That does not help us. Pointing out to me that the English are playing football, what you should be pointing out is joining with the Government to say to the English that they should not be doing that, we should be sharing the vaccines worldwide. But instead of working with the Government, you choose, you choose to do otherwise.

Porous borders, Madam Speaker. The last person in this country who should be talking about porous borders is the Member for Siparia and her crowd. [*Desk thumping*] And it is not 60 places for people to land in this country, it is 200 plus. Any person entering here illegally in a small boat could try to enter into any bay, whether it is in Blanchisseuse, in Chaguaramas, in Tobago, that is what we are saying. And if your position is that you will build a fence with galvanise or with a mesh or so to protect the country everybody know you would be laughed at. Madam Speaker, our coast guard, our defence force and our police, we have been

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relentlessly treating with illegal immigrants in this country.

But interestingly enough, you know, Madam Speaker, as we pick them up and carry them to court to return them, who, Madam Speaker, are their biggest defence in Trinidad and Tobago? Who runs to the court to argue—[*Crosstalk*—my friend from Naparima, he has distinguished himself here, he is “Mr. Change the law to create refugees in Trinidad and Tobago”, talking from all sides of their mouth, from the back of their neck, all around on these matters, Madam Speaker, and then say we have no plan. It is because we had a plan where we were able to suppress the virus while a vaccine was being developed. And during that period, Madam Speaker, without any acknowledgement from the other side, Trinidad and Tobago did very well.

And, Madam Speaker, much has been said about vaccines not being available. It is a reality of the international commerce, community, we cannot buy vaccines and of course, Madam Speaker, this story about vaccines from Pfizer being available and we did not buy it, Madam Speaker, that is not true, it is not true. And up till today I defy any member of the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago to tell us where they were going to get vaccines from. Vaccines are not available at this point in time to anybody who is not a sovereign. All the vaccine sales and discussions today are discussed between sovereigns and producers so people like us, you cannot order and buy vaccines today. And that is what the companies up to this week are confirming, and until that situation change you could say as much as you want, vaccines, vaccines, vaccines, we do not have the ability or the opportunity to buy vaccines.

So to make it sound as if you have another option, after a year of undermining the Government's effort, a big plan yesterday by the Opposition Leader is saying—

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Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, 48(6), nobody undermined the Government's efforts, Madam Speaker. 48(6), that is a narrative that the Prime Minister has been using. Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] it is imputing improper motives. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Today they know—you know the subliminal messaging. I have seen it written and I have heard it here today from the Opposition Leader, she wants to know what advice the Government did not take for taking action in March to either have a state of emergency or lockdown the country as such. I can say here today, Madam Speaker, without fear of contradiction that nobody is advising the Government, from the Ministry of Health or anywhere else for that matter who is authorized so to do, have given the Government any advice about any action to be taken in March which the Government did not take. [*Desk thumping*] None! And I say that without fear of contradiction. So those of you who are hoping that you will find that out, Madam Speaker, it is not there to be had. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member, you stood up on a Standing Order, I ruled. Please continue.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I also heard today, it is being said that Cuban nurses, 12 nurses turned up here. And I simply want to say, Madam Speaker, that 12 nurses in Cuba did not just decide to go to Trinidad and Tobago and to come here to train ICU nurses. They must have been part of a plan, a government plan to prepare to treat with an increase in the number of people who would require intensive care in a hospital. That is all part of the plan. So when you say there is no plan, what you just mentioned there is a part of the plan.

Madam Speaker, with respect to a comment being made by one of our

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colleagues in Caricom, that Trinidad and Tobago has been in a perpetual state of lockdown, they could say what they want you know, and I would not join that conversation. What I could say, that even at our deepest hour of withdrawal in Trinidad and Tobago, our energy sector was untouched, we went and suppressed the virus with a period of lockdown, one period, not perpetual, we then opened back our manufacturing sector, we suppress the virus with our plan until we got to the point of bringing children out to school after Christmas. And in fact, we would have brought children out to school in April had this outbreak not taken place. And all of you who want to know what happened, go and examine what happened in March. Understand that, that is where the plan was derailed. And in any case we looked at what happened elsewhere in the world to understand what might happen to us. Where was Taiwan? Taiwan was there being regarded as the best handling of COVID in the world. Where are they now?—fighting a major outbreak, a major outbreak.

And of course, Madam Speaker, as I said earlier on, different countries have had different experiences. We have had an experience in Trinidad and Tobago for almost a year and—close to a year and a half and we have done very well. We are now fighting a widespread, community spread, and with the action that we have taken to encourage people to stay at home, to encourage people not to congregate, to withdraw a bit more inwards and allow the virus not to propagate, we are confident that if we get the cooperation, especially from persons who we anticipate it from, that we expect that our numbers would fall, the number of deaths would fall. It is disruptive, it is costly, it is painful but as we do it, Madam Speaker, we expect a healing after. Madam Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

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Resolved:

That the House take note of the Statement by the President under section 9(1) of the Constitution, setting out the specific grounds on which the decision to declare the existence of a state of public emergency was based.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Madam Speaker: Motion No. 2. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Am I on record, Madam Speaker, concluding that Motion, right? So—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I do not believe anything was read, Member for Oropouche East. [*Crosstalk*]

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

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Moving on to the second Motion, now, right? Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

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

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

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

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

And whereas it is necessary and expedient that the Proclamation made by the President on the 15th day of May, 2021 declaring that a state of public emergency exists in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, should be extended for a further period, not exceeding three months:

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

Madam Speaker, given what we are dealing with, given what we anticipate, given what we know, it is very unlikely that in the next week, which is the rest of the 15-day period, in the next week we will come to a position where the provisions of this emergency would not be required, and therefore, Madam Speaker, it flows automatically that the Government would require to get the permission of this Parliament and the authority of law to maintain the conditions of the state of emergency for a further period. We say in this Motion, Madam Speaker, that we ask the House to accept that we do it for 90 days, which is the three-month period as required by the law.

Madam Speaker, I did in fact have the opportunity yesterday to read an article by a columnist, a helpful columnist, in one of the papers which indicated that the reason why we are having to go after 15 days for an extension is as a result of us making changes as recommended by the Wooding Commission, because

before that, a state of emergency could have been declared and remain enforced for a month before you could ask for an extension. But then it was deemed that a month was too long for the Parliament not to take note of it and it was shortened in our Republican Constitution in 1976. So now we are living that where after 14 days or within that 14-day period the Parliament must take note and be involved in the process.

But given this public health emergency, which we have been fighting for a year and half and we do not know how much longer we will be fighting it, because as much of you would like to be in a position to say we have come out of it, Madam Speaker, we are not and are not likely to say so within the next month or two. What we do know is that we are required to respond in the way that we are responding now for a while longer.

I want to give the country the assurance that at the first opportunity that our circumstances allow us to look at our numbers, the level of activity with respect to persons in the hospitals and so on, as soon as that returns to a condition that the Cabinet is of the view that we can manage without these regulations, Madam Speaker, we will terminate it as law provides for. So, it is not to say that today that we are going for 90 days, it may be and we are hoping that we will be able to terminate this inside the 90-day period.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to caution that heaven forbid if we find ourselves as some other countries have found themselves when they were fighting widespread community spread that if by the 90-day period we are in a difficult position we will have to take a decision then as to what do we do. It was raised here today as to whether the measures have been working and whether they have worked at all. I would like to say to the population, yes, the measures that we have taken, the measures that we have initiated have worked, by and large worked well.

Because when we very early closed our border to people coming from China it was because we understood that that was the source of the infection at that time and the thing to do was to close the border.

We were one of the first countries in the world to have taken that action. In fact, it did not find favour with a lot of people but the bottom line is when we did that, it was an action with a purpose and for that purpose we said that persons coming from China you must have left China more than 14 days ago before you can be allowed to come to Trinidad and Tobago. And that was done because the science then was saying to us that the incubation period for a person who was exposed to the virus was somewhere within 14 days. If you had not picked up an infection after 14 days having been exposed then it may be that you had not been infected. But during that 14-day period unless you had observed it closely you are to view yourself as being a threat and we close our border from people of China and then later on we had to close the border and manage it tightly for persons coming into the country from everywhere and we are in that state, Madam Speaker.

However, Madam Speaker, as we vaccinate now, we expect to be able to manage that a bit better and I want to mention one other point. Madam Speaker, it was said here today that the Government said that we are dealing with 100,000 people and that cannot be enough. Certainly it cannot be enough, but that figure that is mentioned by the Minister of Health is in the context of vaccines that are available to us now. But we expect that during the period going forward as more vaccines become available that figure would increase and our target figure of 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the population, the adult population, that is taken from the science where it is said that if you do have that amount of people in the population vaccinated and producing a response to the vaccine, then we are in a relatively good biological position, it is called herd immunity, where the

population is deemed to be sufficiently responsive to the virus, that the virus does not pose this existential threat that it poses.

So, Madam Speaker, we are being guided and I could point to a number of instances of what we have done according to the plan, coming—locking the country down as we did, closing the bars, that were objected to, disregarding the objections of some people, it was all part of a plan and the plan worked because we did move to a state where as I mentioned by February of this year Trinidad and Tobago was in a good position in a pandemic. We have been a bit derailed. We are going to continue with the plan and the plan remains: wash your hands, wear your mask, do not congregate and get vaccinated by the vaccines that are available to you and if we do those things, Madam Speaker, that plan will work to improve our condition, both at the social and economic level. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

[*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on this second Motion of the day, an extremely critical Motion in the name of the Prime Minister:

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

Madam Speaker, today, of course, is a signal day in our history. It is not often that the Parliament meets to discuss a state of public emergency to extend the period of a public emergency. It is very rare. Our understanding is this has happened in our independent history on more or less five occasions. Madam Speaker, it is not something to be taken lightly since this matter involves the

suspension of fundamental rights of citizens in the context of a disaster of fear of risk.

Madam Speaker, what makes this debate today even more significant and a signal moment in our history for Members of this House today is that it is we believe the very first state of public emergency that we have encountered in our history that has arisen due to an infectious disease, a virus. Over the past, the states of emergency that would have arisen dealt with public order, with crime, with one blatant and obscene attempt to overthrow a democratically-elected government, but this is the very first state of public emergency that has arisen over a disease. And therefore, it makes this debate today somewhat similar but somewhat different from debates of the past.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister came in piloting this Motion. I personally listened to the Prime Minister's opening statement and notwithstanding the constraints of time, the Prime Minister outlined that he is of course supporting the Motion for the further extension of three months but in the context of what may happen in the next few weeks or months as the case may be, it may not be necessary for three months to have this suspension of the rights of citizens. And that is something that we need to take note of.

The Prime Minister indicated that whatever measures the Government adopted, they have worked and they have worked well. He made reference to the parallel health care system and of course touched on the issue of vaccines, herd immunity, the importance of locking down the country with their plan. And I would like to comment briefly on the matters raised by the Prime Minister. But suffice it to say that in the context of a public emergency on health, infectious disease, contagious disease, airborne as the case may be, circumstances are

different for today than obtained in 1990 or 2011, for example. In that, I will give just one example. For example, the issue of detention. The Attorney General is on record as touching the issue of detention in the context of this state of public emergency.

Now, this is an interesting debate for another reason, normally when the Parliament meets we debate a Bill before us that is going to be effected, that we are going to give effect to next week, next month, next year, as the case may be. We do not have the benefit of hindsight; we could always say we expect that if this Bill is passed A and B will happen. But today given the constitutional operation that we are proceeding in we can say that a state of public emergency has been declared May 15th, we are today at the 24th of May, so we have had some days. We have been in this situation for some days and the constitutional requirement is to debate this matter when it is declared within 15 days. So we have had the experience, so this is an unusual debate in that sense.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister regrettably did not outline in detail or sufficient detail what is the new plan for the 90 days that the Government has asked the citizens to surrender their rights. The Prime Minister said the objective of surrendering your rights is that we will deal with an infectious disease, but never told us what are your steps, what are you going to do beyond wearing mask, washing hands and socially distancing ourselves, which are international guidelines all over the world. What specific steps do we take in 90 days to deal with this matter?

You see, since this—the May and it is in the Motion, I look at the second recital, since the Proclamation made on the 15th of May, 2021, we have had no signal at all from the daily data emerging that infection rate is going down. Regrettably before I came to this podium, I was informed that there were 15 souls

lost today, in 24 hours, 15 souls have gone. For the month of May as today, the 24th I believe in excess of 150 lives have been lost. We have had thousands of cases in the month of May after the 15th as well.

So the question begs itself, with a state of emergency this way, is it helping at all or were you doing something else that may be helpful? The state of emergency given the operation of the law the state of emergency give rise to a curfew. You could operate a curfew under a state of emergency. I took note in the Sunday newspaper that one senior counsel, a former Independent Senator, as well in our Chamber, indicated that over the years we should have taken a step to separate a state of emergency from a curfew, so that you can embark upon a curfew without declaring a state of public emergency which removes fundamental and constitutional rights. And that is something, of course, that one would like to look at for the future.

But what would the state of emergency and what would the curfew do in 90 days that did not happen in the last 10 days or so. What would happen? We have a curfew in place from 9.00 p.m. to 5.00 a.m. There is no data to suggest that 50 per cent of the population comes out in the night after the 9.00 p.m., 20 per cent, 10 per cent, that the contagious part of this contagion, the touching, the mingling happens after 9.00 p.m. necessarily as opposed to 12.00 midday, one o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock. We do not have that type of data. It appears that the Government has embarked upon this because it appears to be a good thing to do. Before this we were hearing from several sectors of the national community, we need curfew, we need curfew, we need state of emergency. It appears to be something that the Government feel we can do it.

But without data, without some type of empirical evidence as what we have faced and what we are likely to face in the coming days, we do not know whether

that this will help or not, because over the last 10 days or so I do not think anyone can tell us that because of a state of emergency, because of this curfew, instead of 700 cases we would have had 1,200 cases; instead of the 500 cases on the weekend we would have had 1,000. The cases have gone down today notably, I believe on weekends there is less testing by some institutions, I do not know, but the cases have decreased, but the death rate is still high and climbing even.

So, the Government has a duty today to indicate to us what are the steps, what will you achieve by this that under the Public Health Regulations you could not achieve. Because every week we get Public Health Regulations pursuant to a colonial Ordinance in which Members of the Government told us that there are laws that the police can go and the police can enter private property and warn and so on, they told us that. What do you hope to achieve? For example, rights are suspended. There is a tribunal established for detention but there are no—in the process here, Mr. Attorney General, there are no processes being outlined for detention during a state of public emergency.

5.00 p.m.

I believe in the state of public emergency before, 2011 or thereabout, there were actually outlined processes for detention. There is no specific process for detention in the emergency regulations today, but there is a tribunal established to deal with that. Now, that is an interesting question that they can probably look at, and I think other colleagues on my side will speak to that issue as well. But when the Prime Minister says in his opening address the plan has worked, it has worked well, what is the Prime Minister talking about? What? What plan exactly? The plan to tell persons wash their hands, wear mask, social distancing? It cannot be a plan of vaccination. And I have heard the Prime Minister speak about this matter and maybe it is that some of us are obsessed with this matter of vaccination, because

when we look around we see places in the world that are opening up. The Prime Minister may have taken note, as he is fond to do, that yesterday in South Carolina 10,000 persons went without masks on a golf course to support Phil Mickelson as, I think, the oldest person to win a PGA open—a PGA tournament. But in South Carolina yesterday when we look at the television live we were amazed—I thought it was a tournament from two years ago—to see persons go out there. When I checked the record, their second dose—in South Carolina over 40 per cent have been given a second dose.

So you cannot put a state of emergency in place, have a so-called lockdown, and do not have a plan for vaccination which we all recognize would be the one major approach to deal with this crisis. You cannot do that. And it is not enough for the Prime Minister to say as he stated today—I do not think it is enough for a head of Government to say we are giving out what we have. We do not have a sense of where we are going in terms of when will this great moment— The Prime Minister introduced the term in his opening statement and—in fact, when the Prime Minister speaks now, I actually put the time he says things—made mention of herd immunity at 4.47 during his speech. So as a head of Government you cannot be mentioning herd immunity when you cannot tell a population when will that occur.

Now, the Minister of Health should sit on a table in his kitchen, get out a lead pencil and borrow a calculator from a grandchild and work out how much vaccines we have, how much we will get, where we will get it from in the coming weeks, and tell the country when will herd immunity arrive. [*Desk thumping*] Surely you must be in a position to do that. It cannot be the on 24th of May this Government, through the head of Government, or the Minister of Health, cannot tell us. The vaccination double dose, two doses of this population now, is 0.08 per

cent, less than 1 per cent—less. I think for single dose it might be 4 per cent or so, but less. So if 65 per cent to 70 per cent, which the Prime Minister stated in his opening address, the Prime Minister said 65/70 per cent is what we are aiming at, herd immunity, when will Trinidad and Tobago arrive at that point? Is it at the end of the year; is it by mid next year, the following year? You cannot manage the affairs of this country and you do not have a clue as to when will we arrive at herd immunity, and therefore, you cannot be setting out an agenda with a state of emergency coming to the House asking for three months and you do not have a clue. Because after the three months we may have another three months, and another three months, and during this time the rights of individuals are suspended, important constitutional rights, important fundamental rights.

The police today, and the defence force, have enormous powers over citizens, over their homes, over their conduct. This is not a matter to sneeze at. It is not a matter to take lightly, the suspension of rights. So, societies across the globe have fought, have spilled blood, have died. Look at the developments in the Middle East, Israel, Palestine. These are matters over fundamental rights. People are shedding blood every day over fundamental rights. We removed it without a clear blueprint of when will we end, when will herd immunity come, and that to me is critical.

The Prime Minister also touched the issue of the parallel health system and so on. Now again, it is not in my interest, I do not want to be a prophet of gloom and doom and so on. There is in this country hospitals. We have hospitals, we have other institutions being used, I do not believe that things have collapsed completely but certainly strained under serious pressure. Can this parallel health system survive? Can it survive during this 90 days that we propose? I am not here again to take, you know, responsibility or credit or so on, because I do not think it is

necessary at this stage to say credit who build the Couva Hospital, Arima, Point Fortin, Debe campus, tennis centre and so on. I think the population knows who built that. I think they know who did that. That is not the issue. The issue is can this parallel health system survive. And we talk about a parallel health care system and the Prime Minister introduced the issue of vaccines in his opening address, but we may also have to deal with a parallel vaccine system. Should the Government now allow nationals in this country to travel to the United States or anywhere where they can obtain vaccines and return to Trinidad and Tobago? It will take the pressure off the system. It will take the pressure off the Ministry of Health and its institutions.

So citizens should be allowed to travel, get vaccinated, and be assured that they will be returning to their country because the Chief Medical Officer is on record as saying vaccinated citizens returning pose zero risk. So today the Ministry of National Security is issuing exemptions for citizens to leave the country, but they are saying that if you leave the country there is no guarantee that you will get an exemption when you require to return. Something is unfair about that and citizens must have a right to return. Once they are fully vaccinated, they pose zero risk according to the very head, the technical head of the Ministry of Health, and that is an important point I wanted to raise as well because you have to have a parallel vaccine system.

Today, the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago should be vaccinating all over the country. I was shocked to see a notice on the train station in New York where if you take vaccines they give you a free ride on the subway system. In Walmart—you could land in America and go the same time in Walmart and get your vaccines. Maybe the Government should consider as well as part of their strategy incentivizing the taking of vaccines. They accused all of us sometimes of

promoting vaccine hesitancy, “we promoting” people not to take vaccine. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we support that. We have said—the Opposition Leader has said—we support the vaccination programme, but persons should consult their doctors where they choose to because it is a very private matter. It is also people have different medical conditions and concerns, they can consult their doctor, but we support the vaccination programme. Maybe the Government should introduce incentives to incentivize persons to take their vaccines because there are places in the country where—I know in my own area sometimes we speak to people and they tell us they do not want to take the vaccine, they do not want to do this, they do not want to do that and so on.

So incentivizing for vaccination is a strategy that the Government can look at. But the Prime Minister needs to focus on these details and plans to get to herd immunity rather than coming carte blanche and saying give us 90 days of a state of emergency. Give us 90 days. Because in a state of emergency a lot of rights are suspended, and I want to quote from the Prime Minister himself. You know, the Member for Diego Martin West replied as Opposition Leader in 2011 to a state of emergency declaration in a debate, and the Member for Diego Martin West raised an important issue on that day. I sat opposite and I remember well. He raised the issue of political rights, the issue that political operations and political rights could be undermined and sabotaged during a state of emergency. And we did not laugh at the Opposition Leader then, we thought it was an interesting point.

Today, under regulations, we are not sure if the offices of political parties can operate, we are not sure if the office of a Member of Parliament that way can operate, we are not sure of political action. You see, in a state of emergency you cannot assemble. There is absolute authority for the protective services to deal with you, and to deal with you in a harsh and brutal manner in a state of emergency. So

there can be no placard bearing and candle lighting crowds coming out now. You cannot come out now so anybody with placard stay home. Everybody who has candles, do not light candles and come outside. That does not obtain in a state of emergency. You congregate with that, that is trouble. You can be “cart off”. You can be “cart off” and taken away by defence force, by police, through a brutal process that the state of emergency gives rise to. So it is the suppression of political views, is the suppression of political rights and suppression of fundamental rights to assemble. We are doing all of that to prevent a disease, clearly, the spreading of a disease which is ravishing this country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you remind me of my timing and what time do I finish?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: 5.20.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister ought and the Government ought to give us some clear blueprint as to where we are going in terms of herd immunity that we believe that this state of emergency can stop. We can withdraw, as the Prime Minister said, this Motion and bring it to an end and return to our full constitutional rights, because otherwise no attempt to suppress rights over a period of time will meet with success. And the Prime Minister in his opening statement, we close borders, we lockdown. Lockdown what border?

Everyone south of the Caroni River, anybody from the south west peninsula would tell you boat loads of people jump off the boat, they jump in the water, make a run and you are on Trinidad and Tobago soil. There is nobody waiting with a thermometer; nobody waiting with a bottle of hand sanitizer; nobody waiting to meet you, to greet you, to tell you could you test, we want to see your temperature, could you take a swab? It will not obtain, and therefore, the Government confirmed in one of their press conferences that this Brazilian variant came from an illegal

immigrant—that was confirmed—but we do not have any other information on the incidents of those variants but we hear about closed borders. But closed borders are not the Piarco International Airport. A closed border is not the Piarco International Airport. Today, for example, the Prime Minister could have told us that in the state of emergency, this country, our rights have been curtailed, our movements have been restricted. Are the illegal migrants coming into this country, are they also restricted in the south west peninsula, or can they just flow in as usual without restrictions? And for years we have been raising this issue because we recognized the security issue, when we recognized the health issue associated with this. We recognized the health issue associated with this matter.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a related problem in the planning of the Government during this period of state of emergency, vaccination of course, and I just want to remind the Attorney General that this matter of detention is a serious matter. Because again during a health emergency why would you want to detain persons? Now, if you are facing a crisis where a group of people have risen up against the State, they are against the State and taking action against the State and a state of emergency, detaining people has to do with intelligence gathering, has to do with preventing serious offences against the State. But when you detain persons in a state of emergency in a context of an infectious disease you could be creating more problems by throwing people in a cell, throwing them in Remand Yard where they could spread the disease more. So detention is not the same as detention under another state of emergency. In fact, you do not want to detain people now.

Look at the figures for the police. I was appalled by the State with 200 police officers I believe as of last week infected by the COVID. There are certain areas where police are understandably cautious. There was an incident in St. Helena recently where a foreign migrant was attempting to break into a house—

this is on the record in the police station—and when the police went to nab the person—they caught him in the act actually trying to break into a house—the police had to standby, ensure that they had all their protective equipment and so on because the person was not wearing a mask, was not speaking English, and they had not a clue as to who the person was and unprotected this way. So that the police also face serious challenges.

So, our issue clearly today is that we are not here to necessarily knock the state of emergency or to protest violently against the period of time, but to have a clear idea on what is going to happen in terms of dealing with this crisis.

There is another area of this crisis, and I will make this my concluding point, is vaccines. Now, I am again—do not misinterpret me again, I am not condemning any vaccine. If the vaccine has been accepted by the World Health Organization, if that is the standard well, we go, regardless of the efficacy rate. There is something called the effectiveness rate to use a word that you could understand, and vaccines carry different effectiveness rate. In fact, there is a vaccine not approved by the World Health Organization yet that has a higher efficacy rate than even the ones we are using and that is the Russian vaccine incidentally. So it has to do with the different rates and if the World Health Organization approve, well you take that because that is your international standard and so on, but you know the world is being divided now. The world is being divided by vaccine passports where in the United States if you have vaccines from one country you cannot come there, in the European Union if you are not vaccinated by what they consider to be the vaccines of choice, you cannot go Europe. So, we are creating a world where if you are in Trinidad you cannot go to America, you cannot go to Europe, and the Chinese have said you cannot come to China unless you are vaccinated by a Chinese made vaccine. So, you see what is happening in the world today and that is a serious

crisis that we will face in the coming days, and it is a matter that foreign affairs, a Government has to look at, because our business community, apart from tourism and so on, the business community is very concerned about travel. It is a fundamental element of business and the world is being divided up almost like a pizza between vaccines and who can go here, who can go there, who will welcome this, who will not welcome that and so on.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the point I make is that we have arrived at one of the most serious and deadly moments in our history. I make no excuses, none, when I say that today this country is on its knees because of the inaction of this Government. The country is on its knees. [*Desk thumping*] We could have been saved this. I personally cannot understand how a Prime Minister could have find himself—he found himself in a boardroom in Houston to negotiate gas prices, in a shipyard in Australia to buy boat, but—

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

Dr. R. Moonilal:—could not leverage diplomatic and political power to get vaccines for the population. [*Desk thumping*] Could not leverage that. [*Desk thumping*] Could not leverage that.

This is a country where the very Prime Minister boasted once we punch above our weight. We are so powerful in the Caribbean, we punch above our weight. It is a boxing analogy. So what, we could not punch above our weight to get vaccine? We could not use some type of leverage that we share and we hold? This country that boasts about being a commercial and energy, the merchant capital of the Caribbean, had to be taking gifts from Bermuda, St. Vincent, belatedly from India, Barbados and could not purchase. And if today the Government tells us that no private sector offered to purchase 351,000 vaccines, high quality vaccines of Pfizer, then tell us what was that interaction on February

17th about?—where a top conglomerate put out a public ad to say that they were prepared to use their own money to purchase 351,000 high quality vaccines and that entire deal collapsed, that entire arrangement collapsed. And where is that 351,000?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I end by saying that this Government can find itself criminally negligent on two grounds: one, the failure to work with the private sector to procure 351,000 vaccines; and secondly, when the entire Caribbean were getting huge gifts of vaccines at that time from the Government of India, we said we are not begging for vaccines. We could have received 200,000/300,000 vaccines at that time. If you put 200,000 vaccines with the 351,000 we would have had more than a half million doses available to the people, and your failure to do that was criminally negligent and has caused lives, and the blood of those people who have died—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member.

Dr. R. Moonilal—rests on your hands.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, thank you. [*Desk thumping*] I recognize the Attorney General.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Interruption*] Oh I see we have changed. The 20 minutes is not permitted at the platform?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Your Leader is correct. So if you are less than five minutes you can remain.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I apologize, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And your speaking time is actually 20 minutes.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I now start the clock having come to the correct point. Mr. Deputy Speaker, to put it quite plainly it would be

nice to live in the land of the UNC where you could say and do anything with no consequences, where logic just defies reality, where you can complain in a situation of gross inconsistency and there is no political fallout.

Let me explain why I have started off that way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are under a state of emergency. It was open to us to debate two Motions together. That was not the case by the choice of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, and the choice of the Member for Siparia. So we are in two debates today on one subject. We are in a debate where the Member for Oropouche East just spoke and asked for data, and in that data the Member speaks about there being no material to speak about what happens after nine o'clock with the virus and what happens after the situation of going to work during the daylight hours happens. The Member went on to say that we were not told by the hon. Prime Minister where the data is taking us to, et cetera.

I would like to put on record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Member should do more than just pay lip service as they did earlier today to the members of the health care professional sector involvement. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Dr. Avery Hinds, who is the chief epidemiologist, has spoken with graphic information, literally with graphs, to demonstrate exactly what the measures of circulation in non-curfew hours and curfew hours look like. Dr. Hinds said to the nation very plainly that we are one week into the epidemiological cycle. Dr. Hinds pointed out the trajectory of the mapping, showed us exactly where we would be if we did not take measures. He went into great detail to show with the closure of bars and with restaurants exactly how the numbers reduced from the trajectory point. Yet today we are regaled by the Members of the Opposition telling us they have no data. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just respectfully cannot accept that. So let us deal with state of emergency, the Resolution before the House, let us deal with the law and let us

touch on some of the points raised by Oropouche East.

One, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in January 2020 first came to understand that there was a SARS type virus, later called the COVID-19 virus. Trinidad and Tobago took steps in January 2020 to stop the unlimited movement from China. We took later steps in February and in March to limit the number of jurisdictions that came into our country freely without quarantine or cool off period. In March 2020, three options were available to the Government. One, call a state of emergency under the provisions of section 8 of the Constitution for the fact that we have a dangerous infectious disease. Two, use the Disaster Measures Act and declare Trinidad and Tobago in parts, if you could, as under a state of disaster because again health reasons fall there. Three, use the Public Health Regulations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a matter of law we looked at the state of emergency and the hon. Prime Minister and the Cabinet decided that the suspension of rights enshrined under the Constitution, in particular section 4 and 5, the free movement, et cetera, the right to private life, that those should not be interrupted by a state of emergency. We looked at the Disaster Measures Act and there is a limitation in that law where you cannot declare Trinidad and Tobago as a whole as an area of disaster, and furthermore any disaster declared there, even if you could, would be subject to the payment of damages which is something that a State does not consider under a state of emergency or under the Public Health Regulations. So we elected the Public Health Regulations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the proclamation of a state of emergency for health reasons in seeking to cause an extension today for 30 days as we are allowed to under section 10 of the Constitution, we have in existence Regulations issued by the President for the state of emergency. These Regulations are not uncommon. They are not a feature that we are unaccustomed to because they resemble in large

part the Public Health Regulations except that they allow for an enlargement of certain aspects. What are they? The State of Emergency Regulations issued under section 7 of the Constitution allow for the utilization of a curfew period, they allow for the entry into private property by the law enforcement agencies including the Trinidad and Tobago defence service and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are built upon a formula which is very different from other states of emergency. Permit to answer Oropouche East. One, they do not provide a mechanism for breaches of Regulations other than by way of summary offences. If you breach a regulation under the state of emergency you are subjected to an offence which is a summary offence, you go to the Magistrates' Court. Two, they do not include preventive detention as every other state of emergency had in 1970. In all of the years going forward in the states of emergency that we have had, 2008, 2011, 1990, 1970, they were preventative detention mechanisms. These Regulations do not have that.

Question is: Why did we use the provisions of section 11 of the Constitution to establish a tribunal? Because the Constitution says that you ought to have a tribunal. We took the opportunity to create that tribunal, and if you look to Regulation 4 of that establishment of tribunal, we say that in the event that there is a circumstance under Regulations, including Regulations yet to be proclaimed or issued, that this is the tribunal. The simple position is, certainly from my point of view as Attorney General, that there is no reason to attend before the tribunal for any summary offence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind that the state of emergency and the Regulations issued under the state of emergency operate alongside the Public Health Regulations. The Public Health Regulations still provide for quarantine provisions, and they still provide for mask wearing and penalties, et cetera.

5.30 p.m.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we allow with these Regulations is an ability for a harder form of compliance, more strict form of compliance with our citizens. So, to answer the data point, by next Saturday, we ought to have data as to the effect of the state of emergency as the Member for Oropouche East well knows or ought to know.

Secondly, the measures do not include provisions for detention. Thirdly, it is beyond intellectually ridiculous for any Member of this House opposite to say that political organizations cannot operate. One need only look at the histrionics, protestations of the Member for Barataria/San Juan who made “ah song and ah dance, ah cry and ah plea” for hampers in his constituency office. It is a fact that all constituency offices are in operation because we provide for the assistance to the impoverished and our community offices in Social Development, et cetera, all of that is at work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is also absolutely plain for anybody to see that the Regulations do not include the prohibitions against political gatherings, or the prohibitions against publications or the use of loud speakers, and again, the Regulations do not prohibit the dissemination of dangerous information and therefore, it is, again, an intellectual ridiculousness for someone to suggest that there is a suppression of political parties in the manner that Oropouche East suggested.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is very important for us to note that it is not true, it is patently untrue to say that if you have vaccinations, for instance, the Pfizer vaccine, the AstraZeneca vaccine, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, any vaccine, it is untrue to say that there is no risk of transmission. The World Health Organization has made that pellucidly clear in saying that there is always a risk of transmission. For example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Brazilian variant is now in

India and one needs to ask the question, if the Brazilian variant has now been discovered in India, did Venezuelans crossing the water into Trinidad and Tobago take that variant there? You see, my friends opposite raised the submission about borders and I join the Prime Minister in condemning the Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia and any Member opposite complaining about borders. Because the fact is that our borders were left unprotected in 2010 when we did not take the delivery of the offshore patrol vessels.

Relative to the cry for a plan, again, I find it an insult to the intellect of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to look at the creation of a parallel health care system with the specific number of beds, ventilators, independent officers to look at the rapid expansion of testing for COVID-19 patients. To look at the rollout of a dedicated vaccination programme which includes now the WHO approved Sinopharm, AstraZeneca as well, to look at the fact that we have a Heritage and Stabilisation Fund full of United States dollars and that we are in direct conversation with all manufacturers of vaccines and we have indicative orders in from several entities including the COVAX facility. It is also ridiculous to look at the fact that we have border management improvement coming with the arrival of the Austal vessels which are on the sea and heading to Trinidad and Tobago.

And it is also ridiculous to ignore the economic relief that the Minister of Health, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Social Development and the hon. Prime Minister have all provided full particulars of and then to say that there is no plan. To say that there is no plan is just a propagation of an untruth. And I genuinely think that the Opposition would do well to stop panicking the citizens of this country, to stop frightening the citizens of this country by alleging that this is a situation that does not have a clear trajectory and a clear workout arrangement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we hear the Members of the Opposition talk about criminal liability. The Member for Oropouche East said that the Government could be alleged in his view to be guilty of criminal negligence and the hon. Member put that in the context of vaccinations and the gift from India. Mr. Deputy Speaker, why I started off by saying that it would be good to live in the La La Land of the UNC is also because the inconsistency of approach has to be factored in the litigation that has come via the supporters and attorneys-at-law including past Members of Parliament of the United National Congress in attacking the Regulations and the measures designed to protect COVID.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, permit me to remind the population that Gerald Ramdeen, Anand Ramlogan and Nafeesa Mohammed are not members of the People's National Movement. Gerald Ramdeen, Anand Ramlogan are frontline members of the United National Congress. They, together with other attorneys, have brought in claims, seven matters concluded in the courts, all victories for the Government and the Office of the Attorney General and all losses for the Opposition leaders. My friend, the Member for Chaguanas West, Mr. Rambally, is also an attorney-at-law who will be familiar with many of these matters. [*Crosstalk*] Lost a few himself, that is right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look to the fact that the litigation brought by the UNC includes, number one, the case of "free Ian Alleyne". That was a case brought against the Attorney General's Office, the Caura Medical Director, et cetera. In that case, this was a writ of habeas corpus to ensure that a COVID-positive patient Ian Alleyne was let out of quarantine. We saw the "open the borders" case led by Anand Ramlogan. We saw that *Clairmont v the Minister of Health and the Attorney General* judicial review to challenge the closure of borders. We saw the case of the repatriation of flights, the repatriation of citizens.

This is the case of Sasha Singh versus the Minister of National Security. In that judicial review claim, the allegation was that there was a discrimination in the repatriation of citizens.

We saw the challenge to the Public Health Regulations in a matter of Dominic Suraj where the attempt to strikeout the very ground on which the Public Health Regulations stands to say that they are not saved law was brought by none other than Anand Ramlogan. We saw the case of Devant Maharaj in the allegation of discrimination again by attorney Anand Ramlogan saying as to who is a journalist and who is not. We saw the “open liquor marts” litigation again brought by Members of the UNC. And then we have today on offer the allegation that we are not protecting the borders and not causing positions of control.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had hundreds of habeas corpus applications, that is “bring the body” applications, brought by leading members of the United National Congress to ensure that migrants who enter this country illegally, stay in this country or have the benefit of uncontrolled management of our borders just simply sidestepping the Regulations of Trinidad and Tobago. So, in that world of the United National Congress, you get to say, “We are all serious about COVID but open bars, open borders, do not repatriate illegal immigrants”. In the La La Land of the UNC logic, you get to say, “Strike out the COVID pandemic rules and regulations, destroy the Public Health Regulations”. You get to see all of the inconsistencies in that luxury of just making it up as you go along.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that every measure required to be implemented will be applied. These Public Health Regulations issued under section 7 of the Constitution which will be in existence by virtue of an extension of the arrangements under the State of Emergency by this resolution today, these can easily be removed by a further proclamation. We can

return to the Public Health Regulations but that is entirely dependent upon curbing the attitude of our citizens and corralling them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to say this.

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

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: It is conspicuous that the only leader in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago who is not calling upon citizens of the Republic to simply comply with the laws in a plain and straightforward fashion, respectfully in my view, is the Member for Siparia. That is the voice that is most silent to the point where the Editor of the *Express* on the Eid celebration called upon the Prime Minister to hold the Leader of the Opposition's hand to tell her to talk to her people. Any leader worth his salt or her salt ought to understand that it is plain and obvious that everybody must do their part.

Whilst we are all fatigued, there is COVID fatigue, we need to hold on. The extension by way of resolution today of the state of emergency is a necessary and a proportionate mechanism which I wholeheartedly support. I wish to offer condolences to persons who have lost loved ones in this time of difficulty and I wish to offer hope to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that there will be better and brighter days as we will get through this pandemic. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dinesh Rambally (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to join in this debate. I have listened to my friend, the hon. Attorney General, and he started off by saying it must be great to live a life in UNC La La Land. Well, I want to tell him that will be and it has been great to live a life in UNC land.

Hon. Member: UNC La La Land.

Mr. D. Rambally: No, no, no, "we not talking about UNC La La Land, we talking

about UNC land”. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to say that UNC has never ruled this country as though it was UNC land. UNC has ruled this country as it was the citizenry of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] But if he wants to coin that phrase “UNC La La Land”, I want to say that, not La La Land, life in UNC land is a life where children have laptops, where citizens do not have to depend on hampers, handouts because they do not have bank accounts to which moneys will go, they will not be denied because they lack bank accounts, where citizens would not be locked out of their home country for 14 months and literally dying to come home, where debates in Parliament are not avoided via any sleight of hand legislation. So, I want to put it on the record that life would be great in UNC land because we would make sure and look after the citizenry of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago first and foremost.

And it is coincidental that my friend has sought to go down that road because 11 years ago from today, today is the anniversary of May 24, 2010, when the UNC would have come into a position of moving forward under the leadership of the Member for Siparia. [*Desk thumping*] So I want to put this squarely to my friend that it is not about UNC La La Land, it is about the land of Trinidad and Tobago, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and we as the Opposition will do our constitutional duty and whatever is within our remit, we will make sure to look after the Republic and the citizenry.

Now, I want to go quickly that my learned friend, the hon. Attorney General, he made some references which I really did not want to get into but I want to deal with these court cases he has referred to and I want to make it clear that it continues to be the right of a citizen to retain an attorney-at-law, it continues to be your entrenched common law and your constitutional right to be able to challenge any piece of law before the courts of Trinidad and Tobago. And if you do not

succeed, you can go to the Court of Appeal and if you do not succeed at the Court of Appeal, you can go to the Privy Council.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

And maybe I should start with the particular case. The hon. Attorney General called out a lot of cases and seven cases, supporters of the UNC, lawyers who support the UNC, frontline members lost but what he did not do, he did not deal with the most contemporaneous case and that case is Privy Council Appeal 0112 of 2019, the citation is [2021] UKPC 13. The name of that case is *Commissioner of Prisons and another v Seepersad and another*. The Privy Council delivered this decision, Madam Speaker, only this morning and in that matter, I have to say, Attorney General, it was the State, the Government had lost that case. And why I raised that case is because you have cited others.

Hon. Member: Tell them why.

Mr. D. Rambally: And why it was lost, it was very clear. The case is a right to the protection of the law and here it is, Madam Speaker, this is the fundamental misconception of Members on that side, particularly the Attorney General. The problem is you do not understand that there is a rule of law, you have fundamental rights and therefore, people can challenge if they so choose. It is a matter of the rule of law, the right to the protection of the law. So you may disagree—*[Interruption]* And I hear some mumbling on the other side. It is the right to the protection of the law. The reason why the case went to the Privy Council was because people felt that they had rights which they wanted to channel. And the case, just for the *Hansard* purposes, Madam Speaker, this was a case where the court ruled that the unlawful remand violated their rights. This is a litigant in this matter, the court ruled that the unlawful remand of these persons:

“...violated their right to the protection of the law”—as—“guaranteed by

section 4(b) of the Constitution.”

[*Crosstalk*] So I know my friend wants to say that, you could have dealt with it when you were dealing those other seven cases but this is a loss to you, Attorney General. The case was won before the High Court, it went to the Court of Appeal and reached the Privy Council and at the Privy Council, the ultimate arbiter, the case was lost by the Government.

Hon. Member: Would you give way, Member?

Mr. D. Rambally: No, I am not giving way, I barely have time. Madam Speaker, I am not giving way. [*Crosstalk*] No, no, no, no, I think, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: The crosstalk please.

Mr. D. Rambally: So, Madam Speaker, I start with that because I hear my friends going into cases and—people, if they feel that their rights are in some way infringed, they are entitled to go to the courts. And I do not know, again, this is the fundamental misconception that my friends have on that side that if people choose to exercise their rights, that is somehow they are doing something wrong, they are doing something sinister. It is not like that, Madam Speaker, and we on this side will continue to fight for those citizens who want to exercise their rights before the courts of law. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Madam Speaker, I do not like the reference that we on this side only pay lip service to health workers. In fact, every press conference or every meeting or every public statement uttered from this side, we always make it clear that we congratulate and we applaud the frontline workers in health. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, we have even extended that group to the educators of this country, that they themselves have somehow become frontline workers as well having to change in terms of the normal classroom of teaching children and moving on to a virtual classroom which is taking a toll obviously on the population when they cannot

have proper connectivity and devices. So, Madam Speaker, I want to say that I reject that statement outright.

And one of the things is that, and I am not sure, is it that the Attorney General is saying that the state of emergency when it is now, according to him, being aligned to operate alongside the Public Health Regulations, is it that he is conceding that whatever they wanted to achieve was not being achieved under the Public Health Regulations? Because there were many debates which we had in the public domain as to whether or not the Public Health Regulations were effective. Some people, they felt that it was outright unlawful and therefore they took those matters to court. But is it that he is now conceding that it has not been effective and therefore you need the state of emergency to operate alongside?

And one of the most contentious matters which came up, Madam Speaker, was whether or not police officers, law enforcement could have entered certain private spaces for the purposes of what they in their view will deem breaches of the Public Health Regulations. And that debate is not something we conjured up on this side, that was a debate in the public domain. So, I want to hear clearly from the other side: Is it that they are conceding that law enforcement could not have done it and now they are seeking to do it under the State of Emergency Regulations?

Madam Speaker, having dealt with some of those things, I think my time will run out if I go to deal with all of what I heard my friend try to confuse the population with. But before getting too far ahead, I want to echo what has been said before and by those speakers who have spoken before me today and that we really have a position in the country which is really untenable at this time and in saying this, I am not seeking to cast blame at this point.

Let me first make it clear that we on this side, we encourage everyone in Trinidad and Tobago to get vaccinated. We have said that before, the speaker

before myself, Member for Oropouche East has also said that. And we must appreciate, and this is through you, Madam Speaker, by extension to the rest of the population, each of us has to be responsible for ourselves, our families, our neighbours and even the strangers around us so we should behave accordingly. We have always exercised that responsibility in spreading that message. Let me say condolences as have been echoed before.

Now, Madam Speaker, it is not a good place to be in right now and I want to say that, as echoed before by speakers before myself on this side, we will support all good measures to curb the spread of this dreaded virus, so that that is why we are here today. We are entitled to raise the questions as we have been doing and we do support any good measures.

Now, Madam Speaker, the Attorney General in his contribution, he was speaking to certain things in terms of alignment of the SOE and with respect to the Public Health Ordinance. And I want to say that, hon. Attorney General, in terms of the emergency regulations which have now come into force, I would like to look at some of the things because you see, we must be clear. The population must know what they can and cannot do and this is the certainty which is required by the rule of law.

I hear Port of Spain North/St Ann's East.

Hon. Member: St. Ann's West.

Mr. D. Rambally: St. Ann's West. I know that tends to annoy him a little bit but Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. So, I know I heard him grumbling a little bit but you see, when you look at the Regulations, let us just use one example, Madam Speaker, and I took note of the specific treatment given to what is referred to as a "vulnerable person". Now, the word "vulnerable" has been used throughout the debates today in this House and that is because it has tremendous significance

today. Anyone who understands that a virus can literally take your breath away, snuff your life out, will understand what it means to be vulnerable.

By virtue of the definition which has been encompassed in the SOE emergency regulations:

“‘vulnerable person’ includes—

- (a) any person sixty years or older;
- (b) any person under sixty years of age who requires medical care or who has an underlying health condition...but”—it is—“not limited to...”—certain—“conditions listed in subregulation (4).”

It refers to somebody:

“(c) ...who is pregnant”

A—“...person”—who is otherwise—“identified by the Minister.”

So, Madam Speaker, when we look at it and we go now to subregulation (3), the conditions referred to at paragraph (b) of the definition of “vulnerable persons” and this is where it says are persons who have:

- “(a) chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases such as asthma...
- (b) chronic heart disease...
- (c) ...kidney disease;
- (e) ...neurological conditions...
- (f) diabetes;
- (g) problems with...spleen...
- (h) a weakened immune system...
- (i) ...seriously overweight...”

And it goes on, Madam Speaker:

“(j) such other conditions as the Minister may...prescribe.”

Madam Speaker, with the attention to such detail in the definition section to

who is a vulnerable person, one would have expected you are being invited to some grandeur, some position that, you know, there is a helping hand, somebody is reaching out to these vulnerable persons. So I was, you know, excited about seeing these medically vulnerable persons somehow being singled out for possible curfew passes or for having access to special emergency medical hotline or possibly somehow being assisted in terms of a grant, you know, getting medication that they may need.

But, Madam Speaker, being heartened at the definition, it soon faded once you got further on into the Regulations and the sad reality is that that group of vulnerable persons represents a very huge proportion of our population. So, I want to ask and this is the question that we go to. Having defined vulnerable persons in that great detail, what about them? What is the purpose of this distinct category in the beginning of the emergency regulations? And disappointedly, Madam Speaker, I have to say it is like the teacher telling you, you know, “once yuh hear yuh name, stand up and you hear yuh name and yuh stand up but yuh waiting after that and the teacher get up and walk out, class finish and gone about dey business and you still waiting”. No specific provision has been made anywhere in the Regulations for a vulnerable person. So it begs the question, what is the clarity, what is the intent, what is the purpose of this being in the regulation?

So, I want to put that to the Attorney General that even though there is a following section which makes reference and it is regulation 3(10)(n) which says:

“social workers...”

And there is reference to:

“...socially disadvantaged and vulnerable;”

Madam Speaker, there is no connection whatsoever. So why do you include some of these things in the Regulations at the very beginning in the definition section

when it has no purpose in the Regulations? And so this is something that we have to look at.

So, Madam Speaker, when we talk about the aligning of the State of Emergency Regulations, emergency regulations with the Public Health Ordinance, one wonders, it is ripe, it is setting a fertile soil for people to challenge things because they are not sure what they can and cannot do.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there is some noise that is really prohibiting me from hearing properly the contribution. Member—

Mr. D. Rambally: So, Madam Speaker, I was referring to the Regulations itself, the emergency regulations.

Now, Madam Speaker, very quickly, other problems that surfaced in the Regulations, you have, for example, where it is stated, and one senior counsel—and it was referred to before, has indicated that you are talking about powers of arrest but you have really not spoken about whether you can have powers of arrest—sorry, power to enter without warrant so it is not clear. I mean, my friends think that we are nitpicking but it is not so. We have to look at it from the point of view because it presents real-life scenarios where people do not know what to do and what can happen is that you can have law enforcement now being put in a bind.

Now, Madam Speaker, I go to detention because that is an area which I think it really escapes the Government. Here it is you have passed the Regulations, and that is Legal Notice No. 144 which says now you make provisions for powers of arrest, one, in Legal Notice No. 144 and for a detainee to apply to the tribunal which has now been established for legal aid or for review and what happens is that the Regulations are completely silent on exactly what basis someone is likely to be detained. So, you should set out the parameters for detention, you should also

set out, you know, give likely at least when you have put forward the Regulations, up to now, we have not heard of any likely situation where someone can be likely detained. And you know, my colleagues on the other side talking about cases brought, these are why cases are brought in the first place because there is lack of clarity and there is inconsistency in the Regulations.

So, Madam Speaker, getting back to this particular point on the detention, even if we identify the basis for detaining someone, Madam Speaker, there are other unanswered questions. For instance, how long can the person be detained? Is there a first instance of 24 hours? Is there a second instance of a couple of days? We do not know.

6.00 p.m.

And also, Madam Speaker, usually when we look at detention, we then ask the question: If you are detained for an initial period, who is to now take the responsibility? Who has authority to now extend that detention period? So, we do not know which rank of police officer, if that at all is contemplated under these regulations. So I am saying that it does not say anything which can give us some clarity and it is going to pose problems, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I think—is it that I have two minutes again?

Madam Speaker: Your time stops at 6.02.

Mr. D. Rambally: Yes please. Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, this is something that I think I have pointed out. You have a definition section which contains a provision which has no place, no direction in the regulations. I am also talking about the lack of clarity in terms of the regulations, in terms of detention. And, Madam Speaker, I think it sends the clear signal. It answers a lot of what the Attorney General is saying, that when you say you are now aligning the SOE Regulations with the Public Health Ordinance, it brings me back to the

question which I asked at the beginning: Is it that they have now seen that there were certain gaps in the Public Health Ordinance? And I am saying that even if they have, we are moving forward, even these regulations pose a lot of gaps.

Madam Speaker, I want to say that if it is we are talking about, you know, moving forward, it has been very painful to witness the grief of persons who lost a breadwinner or a child who would have lost a beloved family member. I see one of my colleagues getting geared up to respond to me, but if I am not mistaken, I understand that he as well also lost a very close relative and so I say condolences so him and his family and condolences to all of those who have lost loved ones. It is very painful, Madam Speaker, that I want to point out, in equal vein that it is painful for all those families who have people who are unable to return to Trinidad, whether to bury their dead or those who are here unable to fly out as well. Because we are not only talking about luxury flying. We are talking about flying out, leaving the jurisdiction because there are ailing family members abroad as well. So, we are not raising this just for raising sake. We are not saying this pernickety critique. It is something that exists and it brings pain.

Madam Speaker, I join all my colleagues before and I endorse them. We will support good law, once it is lawful and it is appropriately—

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for entertaining me to make my contribution in this debate on the Motion to extend the period of the state of emergency as proposed by its mover, in accordance with the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the last contributor from the other side found himself in a bit of an exchange with the Attorney General in respect of the matter of the Commissioner of Prisons and another, Sasha Seepersad and others, which was a

judgment from the Privy Council, our highest court, was delivered, I think, only today. And it really demonstrated how a human being could be so bereft of the concept of shamefulness. Because the Member who just spoke, for those who did not know and listened to him would have come away with the impression that this Government acted in a manner that the Privy Council in this judgment found to be abhorrent and to condemn.

Madam Speaker, that case arose back in 2015, before we came to Government. The individual, Sasha Seepersad, was committed to what should have been a community residence, in accordance with the children's law and the action flowed from that. The judicial review proceedings which went through the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Privy Council, which gave its judgment today in this matter, began before we came to Government, before. So the facts and the action began before.

Madam Speaker, would you believe the Member for Chaguanas told us a while ago that this Government, this PNM Government had a major judgment against it by the Privy Council today. That is the essence, Madam Speaker, of shamelessness. So I want the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to reflect upon this and to understand why they appear the way they do, why we cannot trust them, why they do not deserve public trust.

Madam Speaker, very, very quickly. As I said, the facts began in 2014. On May the 18th, 2015, the Children Act came into operation. On the 30th of June and the 29th of July, the Chief Magistrate made the order of Sasha and others to the community residences. And you would have heard the Attorney General speak many times about the abhorrent behaviour of our colleagues on the other side, led by two former Members of Parliament, a former Attorney General, Anand Ramlogan, who acted in this matter, Madam Speaker, and brought an action

against the Government, when we were in power, for the Government's failure to put these community residences for the youngsters in place before the law was proclaimed. So, they went ahead and made the law and proclaimed the law without the administrative, without the residences in place, and that is what gave rise to this action.

And as I conclude on that, hear what the Privy Council had to say, very quickly:

The question raised by this ground is whether there has been a violation of the appellants' rights to the protection of the law guaranteed by section 4(b) of the Constitution.

I am quoting the Privy Council.

The appellants' case on this issue is based on both act and omission on the part of the Executive.

Meaning the Kamla Persad-Bissessar and Anand Ramlogan executive. I am quoting again.

In short, the Executive brought into operation the legislative protections for children in sections 54(1) and 60(1) and (5) of the Children Act without having first made provision for the community residences as required by these legislative provisions.

It was contended that the Executive had acted arbitrarily and the court therefore went on to condemn it.

The Member for Chaguanas East comes here to tell the public shamelessly, that that was, if you like and permit me a metaphor, an indictment against this Government. How shameless could they be? But Madam Speaker, we are here today to talk about the extension of the state of emergency.

A Member from the other side told us, correctly, that we are in a war and I

think we all know that. And the Prime Minister and the team of professionals from the health sector has from day one communicated with the people of Trinidad and Tobago as to all of the developments in relation to this war, this threat that they say has taken so far about three million human lives around the globe, pandemic as it is. But, Madam Speaker, I heard a report only 24 hours ago on the BBC that they are estimating, the World Health Organization is perhaps contemplating that that figure could be 50 per cent of the reality in terms of human deaths in the world. But from day one, with the support of the Government, the health team had been at work communicating with the people.

And as Her Excellency pointed out in her contribution to the National Day of Prayer yesterday, another very good idea on the part of the Prime Minister, and the citizens are reporting widely that they thoroughly enjoyed it and were refreshed by the communication with our respective God, for those who see life and have a life view that is different. And as Archbishop Gordon of the Roman Catholic Church tells us, a lot that we are experiencing today has to do with the conduct of some of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It is that conduct that has contributed no doubt to the very severe and widespread continuation, burgeoning challenge of this virus.

I had heard recently the business community, the religious community and ordinary grassroot people being interviewed by the media and on social media and some from my own constituency who took the trouble to call me as Member of Parliament, and it is the people who were calling for stricter measures to deal with the behaviour referred to. That is what led to the imposition of the state of emergency which, in my disagreement with the Member for Oropouche East, he said that this one is different, because this is not about public order. I in fact disagree with him. This is about public order. The measures of a state of

emergency are designed to suppress public gatherings and to suppress public movement. It is all about public order, not finding roots in any insurgency or political threat, but the threat of the virus, insidious, silent and deadly as it is; like the UNC.

And, Madam Speaker, when I heard the Member for Siparia earlier today, in another debate, on another Motion, which we could have done both together you know, but so insidious they are, they insisted we must do them separately. When I heard the Member for Siparia say, the Member cannot understand why a state of emergency, every three-year-old in this country—and one of my constituents, a close friend called me after she made that statement and said: But what is the Member for Siparia speaking about? And I answered her because she is a citizen and entitled to some elucidation, I told her she is the head of La La Land. She leads it. And that is a shortened version of Krishna Lalla.

Madam Speaker, so we are here today to extend this. Only yesterday, 573 new cases, 10 deaths. We heard today 15 deaths, a very serious state of affairs, the highest we have had so far, 21 deaths, a total of about 300 and I would think now, 90 deaths, if the 15 figure I heard in this House today from the last 24 hours, is correct. So, Madam Speaker, we are not—this is a serious situation and this is a serious Government and we are using a serious Constitution to respond to that serious situation and problem.

The Member for Oropouche East raised the question of border security, and I am happy that the Attorney General alluded to aspects of it. Mention was made of the first identification in Trinidad and Tobago of the Brazilian strain, which they say is more virulent than the regular COVID-19 strain, so to speak. And yes, I said publicly that it was identified in an illegal immigrant, only because it is the truth. But that does not mean that his was the first or only case in Trinidad and Tobago.

And, therefore, it does not and could not mean that he would have brought it in illegally through our border. He may have contracted it from a Trinidadian who did not go anywhere, who may contracted it from someone else. It is in India now, as a matter of fact, to meet with the Indian strain. So, Madam Speaker, I do not know where they get their logic but I trust that is it the way of La La Land. I trust so.

The Member for Oropouche East as well spoke about the question of detention, and told us, and the Attorney General dealt with it so I would not waste time talking about what the Member for Chaguanas East had to say on the subject. Because he has gone to court several times, he and another Member of Parliament in the Senate in this Parliament, challenging the COVID Regulations, challenging the Public Health Ordinance and its authenticity and its applicability, its constitutionality and they have lost and lost and lost and lost again. The only thing left for him to do is to come and say: "We lost", as he did earlier today in the matter with Sasha Seepersad, Madam Speaker.

But the Member for Oropouche East mentioned this thing about detention and said, since this state of emergency is generated from the COVID-19 disease or virus, we really should not be detaining anyone and this is the worse time to detain anyone. In fact, you do not want to detain anyone, so he said. You must leave them, let them run around. So you find a vessel coming in, as he said no sanitizer, no nothing, no regulation from the health authority, no protocols, they show up on a beach somewhere in Icacos, or anywhere else for that matter, and you do not detain them, you just let them run rampant in the society. That is the recommendation of the UNC.

And when we met in a day of prayer yesterday, their leader, the leader of La La Land tells us that prayer do not help with COVID, at a time when we call on our nurses, our doctors, the Prime Minister who leads this fight, the ambulance

drivers, all of the people involved, even members of the defence force. Today as we speak, they have a doctor, four nurses, 15 medics inside of the Couva field hospital, two of which we brought here, one at Couva, one at Jean Pierre Complex, in this fight. People have to go deep within themselves to call on our Gods, some people say it is only prayer to help us, the Member for Siparia tells us, right behind the fact that sunlight good for COVID, and keep the bars open and she will build a dome, tells that we must not have faith in God, we must have faith in rum, because prayers cannot help us. But that is the way the truth works and God works. It reveals who are the real fighters and soldiers and who are the real devils in the society.

Madam Speaker, all we do is motivate and encourage and support our law enforcement personnel, because with the state of emergency, with the army assuming emergency powers, we have been asking them, and the way we see it in the Ministry of National Security, Madam Speaker, is that this national security service that we offer is our contribution to the fight against COVID, by enforcing the law to suppress public gathering and public movement. Because, as the Prime Minister made plain today, and it is quite obvious, the virus needs us being close to each other to leap from one human being through the eyes, the mouth of another, the nose of another. So our contribution, the municipal police, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, every one of them have become frontline in this fight against COVID-19 in this state of emergency environment, equipped with PPE, as they must, where necessary, in order to suppress public gatherings and public movement; some of the rights under the Constitution that are of necessity to be infringed in this fight, hence the reason for the state of emergency.

And I heard the Member for Oropouche East shamelessly, second in

command of La La Land, waiting to take over, in fact the de facto leader of La La Land, telling us a while ago in this debate that he "doh have tuh come here today to condemn no vaccine". But he stands on record as having already so done. He told this country and it is on the public record and he questioned the efficacy of the Sinopharm vaccine, already on record, now telling us shamelessly today he "doh have tuh do it. Yuh do it already."

And similarly, the Member for Siparia told us recently that we should join with the UNC, come together to fight this virus. First of all, I Fitzgerald Hinds, I am not talking for anybody else, I "doh trust dem at all because I know dem for a long time". I know their record, Madam Speaker. They are not worthy of the "T" in the word "trust". And the only T that is relevant for me is the one at the end of the word "cannot", cannot trust them.

But I want the Member for Siparia to know the business community who called for the state of emergency, the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, the religious communities, the ordinary man in the street, the members of the protective services, the members of the medical services led by Dr. Parasram and Dr. Hinds and Dr., that very powerful lady who joins them—

Hon. Members: Dr. Trotman.

Hon. F. Hinds: Dr. Trotman. She speaks with authority and knowledge of her business and guides us to good sense, day by day, week by week. We are all already united, Member for Siparia. The only people on the outside of this is the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] They have gone to court on this matter to block the Public Health Ordinance and to block the regulations, including that one from Chaguanas East who spoke here earlier. I am sorry, Madam Speaker. They have done that.

Madam Speaker: The Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. F. Hinds: The hon. Member. It is hard to say, Madam Speaker, but I will be guided.

Madam Speaker: Do not go there. Do not go there.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am obliged, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: All right? So just retract that and press on.

Hon. F. Hinds: All right, I press on, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The Member for Chaguanas West.

Hon. F. Hinds: But Madam Speaker, when I recall what happened today with this case that was decided by the Privy Council, I am troubled in my spirit.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East also told this country, through this Parliament, that what is missing is proof that the rates will go down. And, Madam Speaker, as was pointed out, and let me reiterate, it will take a little while before we see the effect of it. I just want to praise, as I conclude, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the municipal police—

Madam Speaker: Member, your time is now spent.

Hon. F. Hinds:—all of them for their contribution in this state of emergency.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to make a contribution on this debate, and it is incumbent upon me—

Madam Speaker: Member, if you are going to speak in the debate, you have to speak from the speaking booth.

Member, I am sorry, I have to recognize the Member for Tabaquite who was in the booth.

Ms. Anita Haynes (Tabaquite): Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I

thank you for the opportunity to contribute in this very important debate, a situation that many Parliaments before us and many Parliaments after us, hopefully, will never find themselves in; debating a state of emergency and the extension of such.

Now, Madam Speaker, I became a Member of Parliament during a pandemic, unusual circumstances for the globe. All of us are trying to find our footing. Before the first year of being a Member of Parliament has been up, I am now here debating a state of emergency and that is the most important takeaway for anybody looking on at our debate today, that our nation is in a state of emergency, we are fighting for control and fighting for our lives.

And so, Madam Speaker, I approach the debate with the level of seriousness that it deserves. But it is very difficult coming after the comedy hour that just preceded me. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, and I will get into my contribution shortly, but to use the words from the President's statement that we took note of earlier today, our circumstances have taken a sudden and distressing turn for the worse. That is very important as we go about our business here as representatives of the people of this country, as leaders in our country and as citizens of our country. It has taken a distressing and sudden turn for the worse. And you had, speaking right before me, Madam Speaker, a very senior Member of this Parliament; I believe the Member himself referenced how long he has been here. It is that Member's first contribution here now, I believe, as the Minister of National Security in a state of emergency. I would think he had a number of very important, very sensible things to tell us. He spent the majority of his debate talking about La La Land. That is disappointing in the highest order, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

I came here, because it is not my intention to delay our Parliament. I have

the utmost concern for the members of staff here, for the people who come out here for us to do our business. So, I stood in the booth and I brought my pen because I was waiting to hear at what point in his very short 20-minute contribution, he would remember he is the Minister of National Security and mention law enforcement, the defence force, the— It was 6.18 p.m. that was more than half of his contribution, it took him to remember that in a state of emergency, he is in charge of our national security apparatus, disappointing in the highest order, Madam Speaker.

Anybody looking on here today, you would not know what he has been charged with. You would not think that the Minister of National Security would come in a debate on a state of emergency, albeit because of a virus, but the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service have a very serious job to do at this point in time in maintaining public order. The members of the defence force, the members of the coast guard, all under his charge. They would have been listening, waiting to hear something sensible from the Minister. They would have been left sorely disappointed.

6.30 p.m.

I listened carefully, and I waited for the Minister of National Security to extend his condolences, as I am about to do now, to the members of the TTPS who have lost a number of their brothers and sisters in this fight. I waited, I stood here, I had my pen, I said, “Right, he will get to it eventually.” But no, because it became very clear to me that the seriousness with which we approach this debate was not echoed on the other side. I do not know; I do not know if the Minister feels that it is after six o’clock so nobody is looking on. I do not know if he believes that the curfew extends to TV so they took off their TVs when they saw him coming. But there was something serious to be said here today and he missed the opportunity.

[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, as we debate the state of emergency, and more importantly as we debate the extension for three months, the Minister ought to have something important to say about what that meant in terms of the strain on our personnel in the security apparatus that we have as a country. That should have taken up the beginning to the end of his 20 minutes. And that would have sufficed, because people are looking on today very afraid, very afraid. They are looking on today very accepting of a state of emergency, not because we enjoy having our rights curtailed, not because we enjoy being told “stay inside”; no, because we are very afraid.

We do not know if the curfew is the right thing. We do not know, but we are willing to say we have to do whatever it takes, because as the numbers keep rising, as each individual home gets touched, because as I stand here today, last year at this time I believed no one in my age group, we were telling everybody, be safe, look out for your grandparents, look out for your parents, you have to do the right thing for your parents and your grandparents. A person within my circle in my age group was buried this morning, this morning from COVID-19.

And so, therefore, when we stand here today and talk about the regulations, we talk about accountability, we are speaking from the perspective that all of us as citizens have entered into a social contract with this Government. We have all said at this point it is important to do what we can to protect our citizens, and we understand that existing in a state of emergency for a time may be what we need to do. That is not to say that you will not be held to account when the time is right. That is not to say that each measure will not be clinically evaluated. That is not to say that transparency and accountability are still not things that we must hold true. But it is to say that as we stand here today, we understand that as a people we must

do what is necessary to keep each other safe. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, perhaps it is because I have said it here, said it in the other place, because I am from a policing family, members of the TTPS in my immediate family, my immediate circles, that I was so very, very disappointed in the contribution of the Minister of National Security because he forgot about them from beginning to end and they are as frontline in this fight as everyone else. And to just come towards the end and throw in PPE and throw in that they are taking part in public order. I mean, Madam Speaker, they all absolutely deserve better than that presentation we heard here today. [*Desk thumping*]

As we examine and others have done it, and others will do it, and the public conversation will continue in and out of the Parliament, how we ended up here, where we ought to go, where we would like to see ourselves at the expiration, well, I am sure we all hope that the Government can bring an end to the state of emergency before the three-month period. But as we take one day at a time and as we think about it, there are a number of things I just want to draw to the attention in particular in this instance to the Minister of Health.

In the President's statement, the President noted the public information campaign that was instituted since last year. Now, over the past year in the midst of a pandemic we had a number of other things taking place in Trinidad and Tobago, not the least of which was the election. And as we went through the daily briefings and we went through the conversations around the COVID-19 pandemic, I noted something that occurred last year and occurs somewhat this year as well, and perhaps it is that no one has brought it to their attention before, but I feel that it is my duty, not just as a Member of Parliament, but as a communications person, to bring it to the attention of the Minister of Health.

What we saw in the early stages of the pandemic and the public record will

show because we can all find the videos of the press briefings and what not, the early stages of the pandemic if you may recall there was a lot of talk about imported cases, right. So, we had a number of tests and if they were positive, it was an imported case—imported cases right. And around that there was a lot of conversation about who had COVID, who brought COVID-19 to our shores. So, there was a space where if you are the listener and I have seen it in the responses from a lot of people, that persons who would have contracted the COVID-19 disease are the villains in this story by their negligence, by whatever they are now, they have put all of us in danger. And “yuh” hearing it still.

And I want to as we are in a state of emergency and we are discussing COVID-19 going forward, urge the Minister of Health to be much more empathetic in the conversation around COVID-19 victims, because there will be analysis of this situation in the future, and you do not want to be accused of victim shaming in that regard. And I say that because that would also lead to something else that I would have noticed. Now, I am not privy to the same data that the Government is, and I am not going to suggest that I am, but I will say what I have noticed is that, based on the narrative around persons who would have contracted COVID-19, however it happened, there is a certain level of hesitancy to subject yourself to a test. So, I found a lot of people, you know you are saying if you have flu like symptoms, stay home. All of a sudden everybody is a diagnostician. They are saying one after the other, is the flu, Sahara dust, is this, is the other, and it is—

Madam Speaker: So, Member, I am giving you some leeway eh, but remember we finished that other debate, and this is about extending the state of emergency. It is not just about COVID in general. So, if you could quickly tie what you are dealing with what is being debated here, about extending the state of emergency for three months. Okay.

Ms. A. Haynes: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. And the connection I am making is, I hope the suggestion about a more empathetic narrative would lead to us not ever needing the three months of the SOE that we could put an end to it before, because we would be encouraging more testing, we will be encouraging people to get the vaccine so that we will have the data that we need to put an end to this pandemic as soon as possible, because that is the goal. Like I said while we are debating the state of emergency, I know everyone in this room would like for it to end before the three months.

And so, I just wanted to use the opportunity before the Minister's next press conference that it may be something that he can think about in terms of how we script what goes on next. And so, the main nexus of my contribution here, Madam Speaker, is that we have a number of persons, Members of Parliament included, who are at the frontline of this fight, whether it is distributing aid and hampers from your offices, whether it is allowing persons to use your office spaces to fill out these grants, there is a lot of work to be done.

And as we go forward, I want to urge the Government and remind the Government, that while we exist in this space now and we are all—I am not in a particularly confrontational or adversarial mood today even though that is how our system exists because we need to figure out a way to bring an end to this pandemic. But I will say at the height of it, transparency and accountability is key. And I will say as you go through this SOE do not take public sympathy for the state of emergency to mean that executive authority will run rampant in here. That is not how it will work because persons are afraid today, but they will not always be afraid and you will be held to account and so therefore, tailor your actions knowing that the day to account for every action will come. And I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I begin my contribution first of all as we always do, and I join with the Opposition in this by sincerely thanking and recognizing every single of the 17,000 health care workers across the public health system [*Desk thumping*] of Trinidad and Tobago. And I want to tell each of them that we draw our strength from you, from your dedication to duty, your dedication to your patients, and we all mourn with you when you lose a patient. And to all those families who have lost loved ones, we condole with you. It hits us hard every time we lose a patient.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition's narrative by talking about the fact that 21,000 persons went to a football match in England and other good things where countries are opening up does not paint the whole picture. The Opposition will have you believe that the world has gone back to normal, and it is my job here not to denounce a country but to put things in the proper perspective because if you listen to them especially the MP, the hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal, you will believe that the entire world has gone back to normal. But he would not tell you what is happening in Osaka, in Tokyo, in parts of the United Kingdom where my daughter lives. He would not tell you there is a State of Emergency in Bahamas. He would not tell you of the problems in Singapore. He would not tell you that the IPL in India was cancelled and when that happened, Australia literally made their citizens stateless. So, there is a lot going on but the narrative that the UNC is painting is that only Trinidad and Tobago is in this position. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing is further from the truth.

And we are asking what is the purpose of the state of emergency? And that is Motion No. 2 and the whole thing about the vaccinations, and I will come to that

soon. And the question was asked, can the parallel health care system survive a 90-day state of emergency? Well, let me put it this way. It is because we have a state of emergency that the parallel health care system will survive for 90 days as we get infections down and we stop transmission.

Madam Speaker, I want to address a couple issues. I have begged the UNC from day one to leave the Chief Medical Officer alone. Stop bringing him into the political domain by one, misquoting him, and two, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar at the start of this thing accused the Chief Medical Officer and myself of hiding data. Leave Dr. Roshan Parasram out of UNC bacchanal. [*Desk thumping*] But the most egregious statement made today by Dr. Roodal Moonilal is when he quoted the Chief Medical Officer as saying, “People who are vaccinated abroad are 100 per cent protected and they should be allowed to come back to Trinidad and Tobago.” Let me put it on record because I called Dr. Parasram right after. Dr. Parasram said no such thing.

What Dr. Parasram said and what the science tells you, even though you are vaccinated you can still catch the virus, you can still transmit the virus. So when Dr. Moonilal says to let people go abroad and come back and the Chief Medical Officer says it is safe, it is not so because you can bring in the variants. Leave Dr. Roshan Parasram alone. And stop misquoting him please.

Madam Speaker, I want to show you the dog whistle that the chief advisor about vaccines to the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar said today. He tried to walk back his guinea pig argument. You know what he said today? “Why do we not bring in high quality vaccines like Pfizer?” Now, he did not say to join the other high quality vaccines we have, you know. You know what he is trying to do, to tell the population that what we have is not high quality. That is the narrative my colleague who went before me spoke about narrative; that is the UNC narrative.

The two WHO vaccines we have now Astra-Zeneca and Sinopharm are also high quality but you single out one that we do not have and call it “high quality”.

Madam Speaker, a lot has been said about vaccinations and what is the date for herd immunity, and why do I not go in my kitchen with a pencil with “meh” grandchild. That is how Dr. Moonilal, the hon. Dr. Moonilal speaks. So let me tell the country now what is in store for us with vaccinations.

I have said publicly that with our current vaccination supplies, current, and also incoming because we are getting more from COVAX next month, with our current vaccination supplies we can vaccinate 134,000 persons by August. That is a fact. But we are also working bilaterally with other vaccine manufactures and with the African platform to get more vaccines. So what is the plan to achieve herd immunity? And why can we not give you a date? You see, if hon. Dr. Moonilal will talk to Dr. Rai Ragbir, and I must congratulate Dr. Ragbir today for his non-partisan contribution. I must congratulate you.

The Cabinet—and this is not “taking a pencil in meh kitchen” as flippantly said, Cabinet on April 13, 2021, proposal for roll out of COVID-19 vaccines during phase three of the Ministry of Health’s vaccination programme. And I have spoken about this publicly. Well let me speak about it in Parliament.

When we get large amounts of vaccines to move towards herd immunity, this is the plan. We will be using approximately seven mass vaccination sites. Each site conservatively on the seven taken together, conservatively can vaccinate 8,000 persons a day. Five days a week 40,000 persons. In one month, 160,000 persons. Added to that, Madam Speaker, because the whole argument here is about vaccinations, what is the plan?

In addition to that, we are using the full reach of 109 health centres, conservatively doing 50 a day that is 5,450 a day, 27,250 a week, 109,000 a month.

So, when you add the full capacity of 109 health centres, seven mass vaccination sites conservatively, you are talking about 269,000 doses per month, per month. You want to vaccinate a million people, less than five months. That is the plan, but it depends on three things; one, availability of vaccines; two, the willingness of the population to accept vaccines; and three for the UNC to stay out of the process and stop sabotaging it.

But it goes and why can we not give a date? Because it depends on the type of vaccine you are using, and the interval between doses as my honourable friend Dr. Ragbir will know. The Astra-Zeneca has to be administered in a gap of eight to 12 weeks after your first dose. So if we use that, there is one date for herd immunity. If we use Sinopharm, the second dose is within three to four weeks, so the date is actually cut in half. But if we get Johnson&Johnson is one shot, then herd immunity is achieved faster. So you cannot pin a date on it if you understand the science. But the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar's chief vaccine advisor is Dr. Roodal Moonilal, who knows absolutely nothing, nothing about vaccines. And the plan is when we reach phase three, we are vaccinating in age bands using the data from the Central Statistical Office.

So how will this go? For instance, we know between the ages of 50 to 59 there are 165,000 persons. If you want to get 50 to 60 per cent of that you are talking about, 70/80,000 persons. We could vaccinate that age band in a week or two and that is how we achieve herd immunity. And once we do one age band, then we go to 40 to 49 where there are 187,000 persons in that age band. We are using the Canadian model which worked well. So that is the plan which I have said publicly, to achieve herd immunity, but it depends as I said on three things, availability of vaccines, willingness of the population to accept the vaccines, and for the UNC to stop sabotaging the national vaccination plan. So that is the plan.

Where are these seven sites going to be located? Queen's Park Savannah, NAPA, SAPA, Tacarigua, Divali Nagar, a site in Penal, yes, a site in Mayaro, and other sites will come on stream. That is the plan which I have said publicly. So we will be using the full extent of 109 health centres and between seven to eight mass vaccination sites. But vaccines are scarce all around the world. To hear the UNC speak, you can go into a store and pick up a million doses of vaccine. They love to quote Singapore, they love to quote Singapore. Asia Pacific News May 16th:

“But the speed of Singapore's inoculation program is being limited by the pace of vaccine supply arrivals.”

Singapore.

“Experts are studying whether to give one dose of the vaccine and extend the interval between shots...”

The world is facing a vaccine shortage which has been made worse by the situation in India where SII which was supposed to be the vaccine supplier to the world, now cannot even supply enough vaccines to their domestic population. So UNC please wake up to the facts, both scientific and both supply and demand.

Madam Speaker, in addition to the COVAX facility we are working assiduously with bilateral talks with at least two to three vaccine manufactures. We have signed non-disclosure agreements. What is a non-disclosure agreement? It means the vaccine manufacture wants to protect its intellectual property; I cannot speak about the formula of the vaccine. I cannot give out anything to do with intellectual property. I cannot speak publicly about pricing or quantities at this point in time.

I urge all: let us at the Ministry of Health continue these talks. Every day that we talk we get closer and closer and closer. And when there is a product that is right for consumption by the public, we will come to the public and say, “We have

procured X at Y price and will be delivered at M date”. But for now, because of non-disclosure agreements we cannot disclose anything to do with intellectual property, pricing, quantities, and or delivery dates. But the Government is working hard on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, so I hope I have cleared up everything to do with vaccines. I just want to spend a little bit of time because it was mentioned about the parallel health care system. We need this extension for the state of emergency to do several things. One, to modulate the public’s behaviour. I mean, the *Guardian* front page today and I do not want to go into it in all that detail, but it speaks about the fact that the Commissioner of Police had made certain statements about people gathering more during the state of emergency than without the state of emergency.

We are asking people during this extension which is Motion No. 2, to please limit your activity outside of your homes to going to work, going out for essential supplies like the grocery, the pharmacy, dropping off food for the elderly, do all that, visit your grandparents during the day. But please, please, do not congregate. We are still seeing persons having luncheons, teas, and early dinners, and bringing groups of people together. The state of emergency is to modulate one’s behaviour; to recognize that the less we congregate the less chance for the virus to jump from an infected person whether asymptomatic or symptomatic, to a naive person who catches the virus. That is the purpose from this extension for the SOE.

And if persons comply with these requests we could start to see by the end of this weekend because people are asking what is the value for the SOE, because cases have not come down yet? If you understand the science as we have always been saying, and my colleague again, the hon. Dr. Ragbir said it, it takes about 14 days before you see the positive effect of any measure.

The SOE is now about nine days old, eight days old. You are not going to

see an immediate positive impact in number of cases until about this weekend and then moving forward with each passing day as people congregate less, we give the virus less chance to move from person to person you will see more positive impact on the numbers. We do not have to send condolences to more persons who lost their loved ones. They are not statistics. The deceased are somebody's mother, father, husband, wife. We want to see those mortality cases drop to zero, but we can all do our part by being responsible as politicians in our public utterances and by leading those who look to us for leadership which has been lacking from the UNC because your followers look to you for leadership.

So, the Government led by the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley goes in one direction following the science, asking persons to behave responsibly but then the UNC is saying last year the good figures were due to sunlight. Well, let me ask. Do we not still live in a tropical country? What has become to the theory as promulgated by the hon. Kamla Persad Bissessar that the good numbers we had last year was due to sunlight?

7.00 p.m.

And every medical doctor on the UNC twisted themselves like a pretzel with the exception of Dr. Ragbir, to back up that claim. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh did it, Dr. Lackram Bodoie did it, and that is the leadership that is missing because when your followers hear it is sunlight, it means they do not have to wear a mask, they do not have to social distance, they could go to the rum shop still, so you have one part of the country following the science.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1) please. I really do not know where the Minister is going with this.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So, you have one part of the country in North Trinidad and another part following the science and you have another part of the country

following the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar with voodoo science. We need to come together and stop playing the politics of divisiveness. Madam Speaker, with those few words I thank you and I look forward to joining forces with the UNC to fight this virus together. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I join this very important debate here today on the Motion that has been piloted by the Prime Minister, and after I have listened to the Member for St. Joseph and the Minister of Health, who in his parting words or his parting salvo indicated that he looked forward to the bipartisan approach and the support of the Opposition. If you listened to the Minister of Health, the Minister of Health was really on a political platform and really was not in any way extending a hand to seek the advice and support really of the Opposition in this fight against COVID-19 and this has been a consistent narrative and policy position of the Government. In fact, they do not want any help from the Opposition and they will not listen to the Opposition or take any advice from the Opposition. That has been the official position. But more importantly and it is important for me to respond a bit to some issues that have been raised by the Minister of Health because he indicated that in his contribution he was begging or he begged the UNC to leave the CMO or the Chief Medical Officer alone and out of UNC bacchanal.

Madam Speaker, we on this side recognize the worth of the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Trinidad and Tobago and also, we have a responsibility in light that the Government measures for halting the spread of COVID-19 fell short of their aims or their objectives, the question has to be asked whether the Government in fact was following the science as it claims. What advice for example did Dr. Parasram and his team, medical team, give the Government in the

run up to the Easter weekend when it was evident that Trinidad and Tobago was already in an upsurge and did the team believe that either of the two sets of regulations imposed after Easter, was adequate after for countering, sorry, the upsurge or did it make recommendations which was acceded to or rejected by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the reason we will bring Dr. Parasram into what is best for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It is not about bacchanal; it is about what advice was given and whether it was heeded by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet and whether it was rejected and I hope that in winding up the Member for Diego Martin West and the Prime Minister can answer that question as it relates to the health of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

And, Madam Speaker, then the Minister of Health indicated that the UNC was engaged in a narrative that we only want things that are bad for Trinidad and Tobago, and that those on the Opposition alluded to a football game being played in the United Kingdom and so on. It is not that we are trying to make Trinidad and Tobago—we want to paint a picture that Trinidad and Tobago is bad in terms of the state of affairs. We are dealing with the reality, and at the end of the day we want all of our citizens to be in a position to go back and watch football, our children to go and engage in outdoor exercises and outdoor activities, we want the elderly to be part and parcel of Trinidad and Tobago's society and this is why we will hold the Government to account. Because at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, when a government is elected to lead a country, they have a responsibility to plan, you have a responsibility to administrate, execute and implement for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, and that is the concern of the Member for Siparia and that is the concern of all in the Opposition. And we do not want the Government to fail. In fact, we have made it very clear

that on this side we are in support of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago accessing vaccines, all the vaccines that are approved by the World Health Organization.

And, Madam Speaker, it is important too, as I join with all my colleagues who have gone to take the opportunity to offer condolences to all of our workers who have died and whether we want to say whether they were in the frontline from a medical point of view, all, all. Whether they were police officers, doctors, nurses, supermarket workers, the ordinary citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to take the opportunity and join all my colleagues in paying tribute and extending condolences to all who have fallen in this battle against COVID-19, from the point of view of Trinidad and Tobago and I also want to take the opportunity to extend condolences to families and grieving relatives in the constituency of Couva South because it is heart wrenching. I have actually had to deal with families where persons would have succumbed to COVID-19 in numerous areas within the constituency for which I would not call, in relation to what has transpired. But Madam Speaker, it is important for us to understand and it is instructive to note that unlike the Government, we understood quite clearly as we do now of the devastating impacts of this virus to lives and livelihoods and we have noted to what we would call a distressing and unparalleled period in our nation's history.

Virtually every family in Trinidad and Tobago has been impacted in some way or the other, Madam Speaker, and at the end of the day we have to have the conversation as it relates to the crisis we are in, because at the end of the day, the Government was elected, they were charged with the responsibility of looking after the welfare and well-being of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And it is due to their lethargic, their politically biased, uncaring and unintelligent management of the COVID-19 crisis that we are in this situation today, Madam Speaker.

And the Minister of Health should be last one to be attempting to berate the Opposition about its lack of care and its commitment to Trinidad and Tobago. The last one on that side, on the Government side because in an article in the *Trinidad Express* on 6th of March, 2020, he dismissed the claims; he was very dismissive of the claims or the growing concerns that in relation to this country's vulnerability to COVID-19. In fact, in responding to these concerns, Madam Speaker, he stated that the deadly coronavirus is not Armageddon and that Trinidad and Tobago is ready to deal with any outbreak. And if my memory serves me right, I remember the Minister in an interview, with a television talk show host on the Morning Programme, he made it very clear in a very flippant manner that the threat was not real, in fact, he said if Trinidad and Tobago should get one or two cases, it might not get much and it was not—it was non-existent and that is the leadership that I speak about in terms of planning down the road. Because at the end of the day if the Minister of Health, together with his colleagues at the level of the Cabinet, would understand that it was not a parlour they were running but they needed to focus on planning one, two, three, four years down the road and the implication for what was confronting the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago taking into consideration that we live in a technological age, we live in the real world, information was coming to Trinidad and Tobago in real-time as it relates to what was emanating out of Wuhan, China, and in relation to the signals that were coming from the World Health Organization and what was happening in countries before it took root in Trinidad and Tobago, that was the issue that had to be dealt with and should have been dealt with.

And, Madam Speaker, the other important point that I want to ask because they continue to speak about mass vaccination and apparently now they have come on board to the realization that there is the need for mass vaccination, after dancing

all over the place and avoiding this particular issue. And, Madam Speaker, I want to ask the question: why to date Antigua and Barbuda has vaccinated 32 per cent of its population, Dominica 27, Barbados 26, Guyana 19 per cent.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order (48)(1), Standing Order 55(1)(b). [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Trinidad and Tobago is at the bottom of the ladder from a Caricom—

Madam Speaker: Member, objection has been made under Standing Order 48(1) and Standing Order 55(1)(b). I think we dealt extensively with the question of vaccinations. In the last debate we dealt with the various other Caribbean countries having done it, that debate is ended. I am sure you know the Standing Order that obtains and therefore, I would ask you to go on to another point in the few six minutes that you have left.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And it is important that I ask the question too: what is being done to bring down the numbers in terms of strengthening the parallel health care system? Because if we are to reduce the deaths, if we are to reduce the cases and so on, of infection and spread, we have a responsibility to ask what is being done as it relates to the parallel health care system. The Prime Minister, when he spoke in the first Motion, he said that the parallel health care system was established by—

Madam Speaker: We have finished the first Motion. We are now in this Motion and that sometimes is the disadvantage of dealing with the same topic in two separate Motions, so I cannot let you go back to that.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, it is important that as the parallel health care system continues to address the issue of reduction in cases and in deaths, it is important that we have qualified nurses who are trained to

deal with patients. And I say so in terms of the nurses to patient ratio and the very fact that we have heard from Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association, we have heard from a number of articles about the State and the pressures that nurses are being subjected to and today I hope that the Minister could assure us that those who—because we could create the bed space, but if we do not hire the necessary doctors, we do not hire the trained nurses especially in this particular fight, it is important, it will be remiss of sending the whole parallel health care system in another direction if we do not have the competent, trained nurses and so on. And it important too that we ask the Government to clarify the position as it relates to the rotation of doctors out of the Couva health care system. Because at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, the Government apparently did not leave the politics out of the board room as it relates to what transpired, as it relates to—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6) please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—this particular issue.

Madam Speaker: Okay, so I will ask you to find another way to bring across the point you would like to make, Member for Couva South.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, the important point is that we are in a crisis. You need your most experienced doctors on board, you need the generals in a war, and I am saying that at no point in time the Minister of Health who has the line responsibility, as it relates to the regional health authorities should not have allowed the senior doctors in the midst of this battle against COVID-19 to be transferred out of the health system out at Couva and whether there was politics at play and who gave the instruction for this policy to be implemented via the Chief Executive Officer, of the North—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Would you give way [*Crosstalk*] so I could reply? Would you give way so I could reply?

State of Public Emergency (Extension of) (cont'd)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2021.05.24

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker— [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Would you give way so I can reply?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, as I—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yuh see?

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—I wind up as it relates to my final couple minutes in this particular contribution, it is important and we on this side, we are calling for the Minister of Health to ensure that there is an increase in the rate of administering the vaccines to at least five thousand vaccines per day by creating new centres and increasing nursing and medical personnel. We want to see the improved speed of testing with results not more than 24 hours, preventing patients waiting in tents for three to four days not getting to even lay down while awaiting results. We from the Opposition want to see that the Government purchase at least 300 oxygen concentrators to distribute to the centres to assist in oxygenation, have pulse oximeters for all COVID patients who have tested positive, Madam Speaker, and at the end of the day I want to reiterate that call not to rotate senior medical personnel and we call upon the Government to establish an actively functioning task force inclusive of the Ministry of Health, Education, Planning, Social Development, National Security. And the Opposition still remains at its disposal to establish joint teams with the Opposition and other stakeholders, such as the business community, such as the inter-religious organization, such as the joint trade union movement and so on, so that we can have meaningful dialogue to win the war in this battle against COVID-19. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Keith Scotland (*Port of Spain South*): Madam Speaker, as I rise to contribute to this debate in the support of a Motion to extend the state of emergency declared on the 15th of May, 2021, for another period of three months, and I listened to the

contributions made by the hon. Members on the other side, I wonder if the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago ever sat back in a quiet moment and reflected where this country would have been without the astute and sober leadership of the hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, in this time.

Madam Speaker, there is a seasoned Member, the hon. Member for Couva South, a seasoned campaigner in the sphere of industrial relations and he knows that things such as rostering of doctors under the RHA are the responsibility of the Director of Health, and in this case in the person of Dr. Ojoro, and that the hon. Minister of Health has nothing to do with the rostering and the transfers of doctors. [*Desk thumping*] And he knows that, but under the disguise of parliamentary privilege, he goes and casts aspersions and improper motives on the part of the honourable Minister of Health. And they wonder why we cannot get this thing together correctly.

Madam Speaker, the answer to the question where we would have been, if and but for the astute leadership of the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley and his team would be as follows, we would all be basking in sunlight, under a dome, not wearing masks, oblivious to what is going around us and dying of this pandemic.

Madam Speaker, I want to put the filibustering and the flip flopping of the hon. Members on other side on record. On March 25, 2020, the headline in the *Express* read as follows, “Kamla calls for 14 day nationwide shut down”. Madam Speaker, we are about here, the extension of a state of emergency and this is what the hon. Member for Siparia had to say a year ago:

“We cannot afford to treat this issue lightly, the lives of our citizens are at risk, and every measure to protect them must be taken, this is about putting citizens first. We remain resolute that the citizens must remain calm and keep themselves and their families safe and at home but the state must act in

this regard. I strongly urge the Prime Minister to immediately institute a fourteen day shutdown of non-essential services and businesses to better protect our citizens.”

This was in March 2020, when there was one death, one COVID-related death. We are now in May 2021 with over 320 deaths COVID-related, and you will tell me that from 1.30 a debate that should have lasted no more than just five minutes that we are still here debating whether or not we should extend this state of emergency for three months in order to protect lives. After a year ago it was declared then prematurely, Madam Speaker, that the advice was given and rightly not taken at that time, that we should shut down the country for 14 days. In this state of emergency, I want to say to the citizenry there is nothing to fear because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in this situation has always proceeded evenhandedly and in moderation. Every act taken is clothed with legality under the Constitution from section 7 to 12 and I just want to explain why we are here.

When the initial state of emergency was declared on the 15th, Madam Speaker, there was an option because it comes to an end in 15 days. And if— Madam Speaker, you would recall the reason that it was declared is because there was an outbreak which threatened the lives of the citizenry. The question now comes or falls to be determined, whether this outbreak and this threat is still live and imminent and the answer is yes and it is supported by the medical data. Therefore, in those circumstances, the Government responsibly is saying we need another three months in order to extend this state of emergency to give the measures a chance to kick in. It is that simple, and pursuant to section 9 we have come to the Parliament, rightly so under the Constitution, in order to seek and to have this issue ventilated.

There is no threat to any other fundamental rights and freedom. There is still

the freedom of speech. Everybody could say what they want and criticize, everybody. There is freedom of religion, we not going to church but you can have your Zoom. There is freedom of expression. There is freedom to enjoy your property and most importantly, there is freedom of your right as a citizen not to be deprived of your liberty, except by due process. That is why out of an abundance of caution, if you are detained for some reason under the state of emergency, you not only have, Madam Speaker, the Magistrates' Court, but you have the tribunal there, headed by none other than the former Attorney General John Jeremie, Senior Counsel Ian Benjamin, and Ravi Rajkumar. Everything is in place to show evenhandedness. So then, what are we really saying now? We are saying Madam Speaker, that this Government continues to show sober leadership, without any unnecessary inroads into the rights and we are dealing and we are extending this state of emergency solely for the purpose of dealing with this raging pandemic.

Even in all of this on the 29th of April, 2021, I was very in tune, the hon. Prime Minister said that in this rounds, we will not be in a position to be as helpful as we were at the beginning of this pandemic in 2020, because we simply do not have the money. But that being said, they turned night into day, squeezed something from stone, and between the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, they have still come with assistance for persons who are vulnerable. It means, Madam Speaker, that even now when we do not have, we are still looking after the vulnerable and that will continue for the three months ahead.

Where is the consistent approach from the hon. Members on the other side? I heard the last speaker say that they are supporting total vaccination. Madam Speaker, I could have sworn but I know sometimes that I daydream, that the hon. Member for Oropouche said that they will not be guinea pigs and no-one will

support the taking of the Sinopharm vaccine from China. I must have been—that must have been a nightmare but I thought that I read that in the newspapers and up to now it has not been denied. Where is the consistency? Where is the consistency with the Members on the other side? Where?

7.30 p.m.

Now, Madam Speaker, I wanted to add this to this debate, in extending this state of emergency, the main purpose is to save lives. We say on this side that all lives matter in Trinidad and Tobago and we try, despite political persuasion, race or religion to adhere to that policy. So hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, your life matters to us. Hon. Member for Couva South, your life matters and that is why we are here today to ask the Parliament to extend the time of this state of emergency so that we can save lives, not just the lives of the citizenry but the lives of each Member in this honourable House. It means therefore that we have to stop all of this filibustering and petty politics that exist and support this Motion wholeheartedly and not waste our time, four hours ends; staff have to go home, it is 7.30 but we are here debating something that the hon. Member for Siparia called for a year ago when there was only one death.

Madam Speaker, this is the unkindest cut of all to me—the unkindest cut of all, I will say it now. Yesterday a day of national prayer was called for, and I heard something that to my mind was unbelievable. I heard, Madam Speaker, that it was said that prayer and lockdown—I have already showed you, Madam Speaker, where the hon. Leader has already called for a lockdown a year ago—but it was said that prayer cannot help. Madam Speaker, as unworthy as I am, I still lift my eyes unto the hills, you know, because I know something might come down on an unworthy person as me.

How could that be said in a time of need, in a time when we are trying to get

every iota, every sinew in our body, on the national politic to fight this variant. When we think we have it down for Easter, it rears its head again. When we think it is a Trinidad variant, it is a Brazilian variant, and that will be the words of encouragement from someone who leads, according to them, the popular vote in this country—that was not so—that prayer will not help. Well, Madam Speaker, I reject that. I reject it outright and I say that more importantly this Government is doing more than just praying.

We are just not sitting down praying you know, we are acting. And here is how we are acting. Today at 1.30—I missed it at my constituency, but thousands of hundreds of families throughout the country, including Barataria/San Juan can come on an afternoon and you would get some dasheen, some cassava, some plantain, some squash, some pineapple, some citrus, some pawpaw, cucumber, pepper, tomato and some chicken. That is what we are doing, we are helping in a practical way. And it is not just for PNM constituency, it is for every constituency in Trinidad and Tobago, the 41 constituencies. [*Desk thumping*] This is a government for all and the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley is a man for all seasons. [*Desk thumping*]

And do you know, Madam Speaker, I thought about it you know, it is not a novel thing with the PNM: start with the hon. Hon. Dr. Eric Eustace Williams who took us out of colonialism; George Michael Chambers who took us in a time of transition economically; Patrick Augustus Manning who brought developmental plans, and then comes the man for all seasons, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, [*Desk thumping*] who has taken us through this pandemic. So, Madam Speaker, what we say, three months is what we ask the support for. We say wear your mask, we say sanitize, we say get the vaccine, we say keep your distance, stay at home if you do not need to come. And at the end of the day, as my learned Member, my

hon. friend for Couva North would have said, if he remembers, we shall overcome even this virus. Madam Speaker, I end my contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I saw the Prime Minister, if you wish to ask if he would give way.

Mr. Hosein: I did not see the Prime Minister's hand.

Madam Speaker: Excuse me?

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: I said I saw the Prime Minister, if you wish you can ask him if he will give way to you.

Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker, after his disastrous intervention today, I will give way. He needs a chance.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria San/Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join this debate on a Motion to extend the state of emergency by a period of three months. Madam Speaker, I listened to the Member for Port of Spain South and in his contribution, he started off very powerfully by asking where the country would have been without the leadership of the Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West. Well, Madam Speaker, let me tell you where we would have been; we would have been vaccinated, we would have had laptops and we would have had open hospitals for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the parallel health care system that the Government currently boasts on, stands on the shoulder of the People's Partnership Government led by the Member for Siparia. The construction of the Couva Hospital, the Arima Hospital, the Point Fortin Hospital, Madam Speaker, these are the institutions—the National Tennis Centre that is used as a vaccination site, Madam Speaker, these are

the ideas and the brainchild of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia, and that is where we would have been. It took a pandemic, Madam Speaker, for them to open that hospital—it took a pandemic. [*Desk thumping*]

We raised this matter several times from the period 2015 to 2020 and the Government just failed to open the hospital. It took COVID-19 for that to happen.

Mr. Al-Rawi: And on Standing Order 55(1)(b), from the start to now, the fifth speaker to say this, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member for Barataria/San Juan, I will give you one minute to wind that up and go on to a fresh point, and when I mean “fresh”, nothing referred for the day; it is late in the day.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you. Madam Speaker, the Member said we are here today because of the sober leadership of the Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Scotland: Sober.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, under the sober leadership of Dr. Keith Rowley, the Member for Diego Martin West, we are in a state of emergency. [*Desk thumping*] We have a virus that is completely destroying our country where we have 375 citizens dead under the leadership of the Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise under Standing Order 55(1)(b), with the imminence of a state of emergency curfew, Madam Speaker, for the sake of the staff.

Madam Speaker: So again, Member for Barataria/San Juan, as I said, it is late and I have asked you to do something that is completely fresh. Even though you feel you may be answering, that was in answer to points that were made so it is no point answering an answer. Please, having regard to the time and the fact that this is tedious repetition, please carry us to a place that we have not been.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I am mindful of the time and I am also mindful as a Member of this Parliament, I am allowed to contribute for my time. So, I want

that point to be brought across to the Attorney General.

Madam Speaker: I really do not think you have heard yourself and therefore I will give you one opportunity to comply with my guidance. If not, I will then exercise the powers that I have.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, under regulation 7, because we have emergency regulations that were promulgated under the state of emergency, section 9 of the Constitution, and under that particular regulation 7 it gives police powers. And under the police powers, Madam Speaker, if you would allow me to quote from the regulations, it says:

“Where a police officer considers that a number of people are gathered together in contravention of these Regulations, the police officer may, in addition to his power to arrest and charge such persons, alternatively—

- (a) direct the gathering to disperse;
- (b) direct any person in the gathering to return to the place where he is living; or
- (c) remove any person from the gathering.”

Now, Madam Speaker, what I would like some clearing up on is this issue. Under the state of emergency, we understand that rights can be suspended via executive order through the Constitution. Now, Madam Speaker, is it that this particular section is interpreted in giving the police the power to enter private property without a search warrant?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b), this was raised before.

Madam Speaker: I think—I was waiting to hear where you were going, but while I was not sitting in the Chamber, I heard the Member for Oropouche East on the television deal with the very aspect of the regulation.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I take your guidance, and the point I am raising is this, is that there has been commentary on the issue as recent as yesterday where Senior Counsel Martin Daly—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b). Oropouche East directed us to that same article—same article, Martin Daly.

Madam Speaker: Member, if you can, as I said, you have a right to speak but within the confines of the Standing Orders, so can you go on to a fresh point, please.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I understand what the Government is doing this afternoon—

Madam Speaker: Well, listen, I do not know what the Government is doing but I know what I am doing and I understand what you are doing and we will comply strictly by the Standing Orders, particularly having regard to the fact that we are now an hour and a half later than I would like us to be.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, one of the issues also, it was touched on, deals with the tribunal. This issue was not dealt with in terms of the tribunal, Madam Speaker, that I am going to raise. It is that a tribunal was set up to determine matters relating to the detention of persons and it was said that there are not any regulations relating to the detention of persons. Now, Madam Speaker, the issue I am raising is really the quorum of the tribunal. The quorum of the tribunal is now—a member of that tribunal is—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 55(1)(b). Oropouche East dealt with this point, Madam Speaker, respectfully.

Madam Speaker: And I believe Chaguanas West also dealt with the tribunal, so again.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, there is a case called *Panday v Virgil*, I do not know if that case was referred to in this debate but I listened to the debate and I did not hear the case. Madam Speaker, that case—

Madam Speaker: It is not just a question of whether a case was called or not, it is a question of the case supporting a point.

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Okay? And I am saying that if we have dealt—if it is on the tribunal, I am not allowing anything else on the tribunal.

Mr. S. Hosein: So, Madam Speaker, there are rights under the Constitution and one of the rights that was not suspended under the Constitution is a right to a fair trial and the right to fairness by any tribunal. And the point that I am raising, Madam Speaker, is that you cannot have a former PNM Attorney General sit on a tribunal to determine the rights and the freedoms of individuals who are detained.

Madam Speaker, justice must not only be done but it must be seen to be done and therefore I am raising the point with respect to an apparent bias on the part of a member of that tribunal. And I think it is important that I register that objection on the *Hansard* of this country.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise firmly on Standing Order 48(8). To impugn the decision of the Chief Justice of this republic offends the Constitution and the Standing Orders [*Desk thumping*] and I take great umbrage to a junior Member—to an hon. Member of this House impinging upon the jurisdiction and discretion of the hon. Chief Justice. That offends the separation of powers, 48(8).

Madam Speaker: Objection upheld. Continue.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Now, Madam Speaker, what we are facing here is unprecedented times and we must understand that we must communicate with the population and if this is the attitude of the Government

towards the Opposition, clearly they are in it by themselves and not in it together.

[*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member, I would ask you to withdraw what you just said.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I am confused in exactly what statement imputes the Standing Orders that I am required to withdraw.

Madam Speaker: I would ask you to withdraw what you just said.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I withdraw and I move on.

Madam Speaker, based on what is happening now is that we have heard a lot of the restrictions; we understand the emergency powers, we understand the Public Health Regulations that were passed and approved by the Minister of Health. Now, Madam Speaker, when you look at all of these restrictions, so far we did not hear the science to go with it.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 55(1)(b). The issue of the data, the positions, all of this has been traversed, Madam Speaker, respectfully.

Madam Speaker: Again, I uphold the objection. The data to support that was dealt with particularly by Oropouche East.

Mr. S. Hosein: Now, Madam Speaker, when you look at what the Minister of Health would have said this afternoon when I asked an urgent question regarding the variants of COVID-19 that are present in the population in Trinidad and Tobago, the Minister indicated that there are two variants, the B11 and the P1 which is known as the Brazilian variant. And then, Madam Speaker, I went on to ask the Minister, “So in what instance will you test a sample to determine whether or not it should go towards sequencing to determine if there is a variant present in the sample”?

Madam Speaker: And this is a supplemental question being developed under the wrong item. Okay? As you very well said, these are questions you asked under the

Urgent Question, we are now in the debate on the extension of the state of emergency and therefore I would ask you to, whatever you are going to say, to confine it or tailor it to deal into the subject matter.

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Speaker: We are not going back to questions.

Mr. S. Hosein: No, please, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please.

Mr. S. Hosein: I am just referencing where I am going with this. In Her Excellency's Statement she did in fact indicate that the Brazilian variant is—

Madam Speaker: But we are not dealing with Her Excellency's Statement and I have just made the point; that was an earlier debate, it is finished. There is a Standing Order that says that if a question has been raised and it has been substantively dealt in the same session, you cannot deal with it in a following debate.

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Speaker: And part of the difficulty that we are facing, as I had explained, is substantially the same subject matter in two separate debates.

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Speaker: So please tailor whatever you are going to say to this debate, please.

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes. Madam Speaker, the variant that the Minister indicated this morning—

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

Mr. S. Hosein: But I barely said anything, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Bring it into this.

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes.

Madam Speaker, the point I would like to raise is the fact that the testing for these variants must be aggressively pursued, because when the Minister indicated to us that they are testing samples from only repatriated individuals, that is where the concern lies and that is where I am going with this. Because, Madam Speaker, as the Minister of National Security would have informed the population is in fact that the Brazilian variant was found in an illegal immigrant which is part of the community of Trinidad and Tobago that did not come through the legal ports of entry of—

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 55(1)(b), and on the revival of Motions and questions already passed, Madam Speaker, respectfully.

Madam Speaker: But certainly in terms of if you are going to deal—and I am going to give you a little leeway because it has already been answered or addressed in this debate about the Venezuelan illegal immigrant. It came in in the concept of borders and all of that, so please, very quickly make this relevant to this and not amount to tedious repetition.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam, I understand the point with respect to the borders, the point that I am making is with respect to the sequencing of those COVID-19 samples that were taken to send to the lab at the UWI.

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 48(3)—

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, this is ridiculous now, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order—

Mr. S. Hosein: It is an abuse of the Standing Orders.

Madam Speaker: Would you let the Attorney General make his point?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise respectfully on Standing Order

48(3).

Madam Speaker: You know, Member for Barataria/San Juan, it is difficult for me to again repeat about addressing a matter that we have dealt with. All right? So again, let this be the last time for me; take the guidance to please go on to something that is fresh that we could entertain within this debate.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I will go on to something fresh. Madam Speaker, I am going to conclude my contribution now but I would conclude by saying this, that now is a time for leadership in this country. And I hope you would allow me, Madam Speaker, for just a couple of minutes to just conclude my point. Madam Speaker, the leaders of this country must set an example for the citizens to follow in terms of the protocols in this country, so when persons go out arm-wrestling without masks and no social distancing, and when a person goes on a platform without a mask and “buffs” the nation for not wearing a mask, Madam Speaker, that is the hypocrisy that must stop and they must lead this fight of COVID-19.

Madam Speaker, this is a fight for all of us. These rules and these laws apply to every single one of us here no matter who we are, no matter our designation or no matter whether or not we made the law; it shall apply equally to every single person. Madam Speaker, as we fight this virus together, we are saying on this side, that while we support the state of emergency, what we have to do, Madam Speaker, is ensure that we aggressively pursue a vaccination programme because that is the only thing that will take us out of this pandemic. We still have nationals that are locked out of Trinidad and Tobago, we need to bring them back home.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b). This was raised several times.

Mr. S. Hosein: That was not raised.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, it was, you were not listening.

Madam Speaker: Member, you said you were winding up, please wind up.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: And remember you told me it is on something fresh. You have a few more minutes, just wind up.

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes, please, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, as I wind up, our Constitution guarantees rights, freedoms and liberties to every single citizen. While some of those rights may at this time be suspended, it is a time where we call for responsible action and responsible leadership and responsible communication by those that are in charge. I thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

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

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there is a lot of effort being put into trying to find out where this virus came from and it is a big international challenge and a lot of scientists and governments and so on are involved. And I, today, think we missed an opportunity because we could have become very famous, Trinidad and Tobago, but I think somebody interfered with the process before one of my colleagues answered that question as to where the virus came from, by simply letting the world know it was created by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. I have been accused of allowing the virus to come into the country. I have been accused of allowing it to kill people. I have been accused of causing it to make people lose their jobs. But, Madam Speaker, I understand all of that because I was in the Opposition too, but the one thing I always knew is that if I did not have something reasonable to say, I warmed the seat. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, as we ask for this extension, it is my view that any reasonable citizen seeing us being in a state of emergency for the purposes as

outlined in detail today would know that we cannot reasonably expect that in seven days' time things would so dramatically improve that we would not need the emergency conditions that we are asking for. Madam Speaker, I want to quote from an earlier debate in this House when a state of emergency was called because there were some murders in the country, unwanted development of course, but arising out of the murders in Arima, I think it was, a state of emergency was called in Trinidad and Tobago. Not that a handful of people in an area were threatened or a handful of people had a couple of guns in their hands and had created criminal conduct that we had a state of emergency, you know, this time it is every single citizen in the country that is threatened and simply by standing in the presence of the breath of another person. And in declaring that a public health emergency, we could easily have spent 10 minutes today dispensing with this matter but of course the Opposition has to do what the Opposition has to do, and of course to give the impression that the state of emergency in Trinidad and Tobago is unwarranted, unwanted or too late or is supported.

Madam Speaker, we in Trinidad and Tobago approached the fighting of this virus by not going to a state of emergency. In fact, we are among the last of any country to go to a state of emergency, not for fashion or for flare but because our circumstances now are requiring it and it is only now that we have got to that situation. [*Desk thumping*] As I speak to you now, Madam Speaker, there is a debate taking place in another Caricom country where they are seeking to extend their state of emergency by six months, not 60 days or six days; six months, and they are telling the people in that territory that seeing what has happened in Trinidad and Tobago and in the Seychelles, it is clear to them that they would need a period of about six months to keep the country in a certain response level to hold the virus at bay to be able to bring the population to a safe landing.

Madam Speaker, so for those who believe that this state of emergency is something that ought to be fought, something that ought not to happen and it is because the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago somehow “fall down on de job”—well, it has to be the whole world “fall down”, [*Desk thumping*] because, Madam Speaker, I will take the moment to tell you exactly where a state of emergency is being used or has been used as a fight against the COVID virus in a pandemic: Canada, Australia, Portugal, Japan, Colombia, Argentina, Egypt, Dominica, Chile, Peru, Chad, Pakistan, Cambodia, Burkina Faso, Bulgaria, Philippines, the Czech Republic, the Dominican Republic, Barbados, Bahamas, Jordan, Botswana, India, the Maldives, Italy, Mauritius, Vietnam, Romania, Uruguay, Slovenia, South Africa, Greece, Georgia, Honduras, Cyprus, Brazil, Morocco, Finland, Antigua, Jamaica; every corner of the world, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

8.00 p.m.

So, my colleagues who stand in opposition to the Government, that is their assignment, to try to make a case that Trinidad and Tobago is in this group because of some failing on the part of the Government or the Prime Minister. I wish you good luck with that.

Madam Speaker, when we set out to confront this virus, it was the Prime Minister of the country who led the charge and called the country to notice and said that we are going to use the Public Health Ordinance because state of emergency or not, it is your personal conduct, it is your personal response that will go a long way to protecting your person and your family and your community, so we do not need a state of emergency to tell you that you need to protect yourself. And, Madam Speaker, the population responded admirably because we did lock down the country and, in fact, we are not in a perpetual lockdown. After we did

lock down the country in April, we came back out carefully, and I want to emphasize that. When you lock down, what history has shown in the last few months, the last year or so, you have to be careful how you come back out because many countries, having seen a response to the lockdown and the state of emergency and so on, come back out too quickly to begin to assemble a normal lifestyle and the next thing you know, you are in a far worse position and having to take firmer action.

Madam Speaker, we have been asked today by our colleagues, why we do this and if we have any guarantee that it will work? Madam Speaker, in this business, there is no guarantee. It is the option that has been shown to work best by people who went before us, Madam Speaker, and we know why we are doing it and we said it was very simple. We need to keep the population from moving around and mixing too much and we need to keep people in a place where they may be doing less of that. Because the normal moving and mixing would result in a level of infection that would give us too much grief because more infections means more sickness, more sickness could mean more death, and we are trying to avoid that.

And, Madam Speaker, for the second time, given the way that this had been beaten, lastly by a colleague from Couva South and he asked me a question and I want to answer him because out of respect, not out of incompetence or the record of *Hansard* being inaccurate, but out of respect for the fact that he asked this specific question because they are building a narrative that has nothing to do with reality. I was asked, Madam Speaker, whether in fact the Government had got advice about locking down this country or a state of emergency in March to deal with what we are dealing with now. I answered it in the beginning but they are so hell-bent on trying to tell the population that this could have been avoided had the

Prime Minister taken certain actions given to him, advice by the Government advisors, had he done so. That is what they are trying to sell, Madam Speaker, and I want to put it on *Hansard* for the second time today that it cannot be refuted. I have received no advice at any time from any advisor with respect to taking any action in March that the Government did not take. [*Desk thumping*]

And I will go further, Madam Speaker. As I managed the team responding to this virus, I have been in the forefront in encouraging the actions that we take. The same actions, Madam Speaker, the same actions that some people that as soon as I take them, jumped out on the television, “rah, rah, rah, rah, meh restaurant, meh restaurant, meh restaurant”. Madam Speaker, Toronto’s restaurants have been closed to diners for over 360 days since the start of the pandemic; restaurants in Toronto, among the longest ban on indoor dining anywhere in the world. And it is not only Toronto, you know, Madam Speaker, Montreal, Los Angeles, Paris, New York, London, Singapore, Hong Kong and Seoul. It is only this week—on this weekend, New York restaurants opened. And if you check those countries, Madam Speaker, I am not the Prime Minister of any those countries. [*Desk thumping*] It is governments and states taking action in the face of the one thing that we have in common. We are all fighting the same virus that is having the same effect, [*Desk thumping*] whether you are black, you are white, you are Indian, you are Chinese, you are in a cold country. Madam Speaker, this week, COVID-19 shut down the climbing on Mount Everest, of all places in the world, 27,000 feet up in the mountain, the base camp reporting COVID community spread.

So, Madam Speaker, when my colleagues come here and spend the whole day trying to tell people in Trinidad and Tobago, “It is the Prime Minister that caused it. It is the Prime Minister that caused it.” I simply take that to mean they have nothing useful to say [*Desk thumping*] because they have been given the

opportunity around a table to tell us useful things. They had nothing to say, other than to buy hydroxychloroquine. They come out on a million platforms every night, Madam Speaker, and we get the advice publicly. As we get the ridicule, we get the advice publicly. Do not close the bars, they have to sell chicken. Do not close the borders, bring everybody home, you are making them stateless. Madam Speaker, we were being accused of making people stateless when we closed the borders to protect those of us who were home. When Australia closed their borders, they told Australians, if you come home, you go to jail and pay \$10,000 on top of that. We did not do that, Madam Speaker. But, of course, if you listen to my colleagues here, I mean, we could not be more ridiculous.

We know that there are hardships outside and when they make that statement about those outside, they never mentioned once that this Government has sent cash outside to some of our missions to help those [*Desk thumping*] who are in difficulty. We have sent money to New York, to Miami, to London to help those persons who find themselves [*Desk thumping*] but people wanting to come home is not a reason to come home in a pandemic, Madam Speaker.

And let me get to the point about what we can do and will do. When we closed to those persons who live abroad and said, "Hold on in place until it is better." We, Madam Speaker, can now say, the same way they could go to football matches because all of the fans in the football matches in England are vaccinated people with vaccines that their Government control, we do not have that position. And it is the same thing with many of our people abroad, in a country where they are now vaccinating in a big way, we can now say very soon, Madam Speaker, that once our vaccination level reaches up to a certain height, because so much vaccinations have taken place in North America, then easily, Madam Speaker, vaccinated people can now travel from one country to another. So we will see

scheduled transportation between Trinidad and Tobago and the United States and Canada as soon as there is some improvement in our vaccination here. But that is a long way from where we were when we closed the borders. And, Madam Speaker, we still have to be careful because the variant in India, in South Africa, in the United States, in England had become a feature of the management. South Africa had to stop using a particular vaccine because their variant was not responding to it.

The British Government is shutting off access from India because there is an Indian variant which they feel threatened by. We felt threatened by a Brazilian variant, so to the extent that we could prevent that from happening, it makes good sense so to do. And that is why today I took note of a Member of the House here coming and saying that the Chief Medical Officer says that once you are vaccinated abroad, you are 100 per cent safe to come into Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, it is either he was not paying attention to what was being said or what the country is doing, or he was deliberately seeking to mislead the population to their detriment.

And I wonder why Members of Parliament would do that? And again, I come to the conclusion that the reason why our colleagues on the other side have to resort to this kind of behaviour is because they have so little to work with that they have to create that kind of scene, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, when the state of emergency was declared this is what the then government said in 2011:

“We are not an irresponsible Government...”

I say the same thing today. And they said that the state of emergency was called:

“...on the basis that it is significant tool to restore stability and ensure public safety.”

Madam Speaker, I adopt that statement today.

And, of course, Madam Speaker, the person who piloted the Bill on that day, he said:

“We in this Parliament are not expected to make statements to incite discord or subtly induce discontent in our society.”

Madam Speaker, that still holds. It goes on to say:

“Our focus must also be the greater good and the Government’s actions, though to some may seem extreme, are in proportion to the threat and are sanctioned by the Constitution.”

Madam Speaker, I endorse that too today.

Madam Speaker, it was also said in that debate by those who are in Opposition today:

“...15th day is drawing nigh...”

We are here long before 15 days. We came here at the first opportunity, you can say, because we still have what?—another week within the 15-day period.

“15th day is drawing nigh, we recognize that 15 days is a diminutive time for our operational plans...”

So 15 days was too short to respond to the death of 10 people but today we are arguing that it is too much to respond to saving the lives of 1.4 million people.

Madam Speaker, it was so important that at the end of the debate, it being the backbone of why that emergency was called in 2011, that it was said again:

“The danger is real...yet that does not always avert tragedy.”

And a state of emergency, Madam Speaker—it was said again on page 178 of the debate of that time— it was said that it is:

“a...tool to restore...public safety.”

Madam Speaker, I do not think it is necessary to keep the staff here any longer to convince anyone that we need to extend this emergency to get the best of

our population to protect ourselves from the coronavirus 19 threat. Madam Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.13 p.m.