

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, November 25, 2022*

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. Roodal Moonilal, MP, Member for Oropouche East, who has requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

**STANDING ORDER 17**

**Madam Speaker:** Standing Order 17, Definite Matters of Urgent Public Importance.

Hon. Members, we are all well past the midterm mark into the life of this Twelfth Parliament. We are into the Third Session of this Parliament and therefore, no current Member can be considered new or can plead unfamiliarity with the rules and procedures of this House without ascribing to himself or herself neglect. A Member of this House could not validly claim that he or she has not seen the practice notes or briefs that have been circulated during the life of this Parliament, including that which deals with the item Definite Matters of Urgent Public Importance.

Hon. Members, I have explained this Standing Order from this Chair on a number of occasions. However, I shall take this opportunity to reiterate that debates pursuant to Standing Order 17 require the adjournment of prearranged business of the House to discuss "a definite matter of urgent public importance". To trigger such an adjournment, the matter to be discussed must satisfy three substantive

criteria:

- The matter must be definite; and
- The matter must be urgent; and
- The matter must be of public importance.

Hon. Members, all three criteria must be met, each of which has a specific meaning and interpretation in parliamentary practice. Not one, not two, but all three must be satisfied. This is not my interpretation of Standing Order 17. This is the well-recognised, long settled, Westminster Parliamentary Practice. Moreover, the requirement that all three criteria, as defined, must be met is the established practice of this Parliament which has been upheld not only by myself but by all previous occupants of this Chair. While a Member's opinion on whether a matter requires an immediate debate is subjective, the Speaker however, relies on well-established, dispassionate rules in arriving at a decision on whether the matter attempted to be raised satisfies Standing Order 17 sufficiently to change the business of the House, to allow for an impromptu debate.

Hon. Members, putting it simply, a matter might be definite and it might be of public importance, but unless it has suddenly arisen, it cannot and will not qualify, and even when others have occupied this Chair, such matter did not qualify. A matter might be definite, it may have arisen suddenly, but if it is not of public importance, it cannot and will not qualify, and even when others have occupied this Chair such matter did not qualify. I will encourage Members to check the *Hansard* for their own verification, because although the person who sits in this Chair may change over time, this rule, that is Standing Order 17, and its application have been standard and consistent.

Further, hon. Members, this Chair has repeatedly lamented that some Members ignore the fact that there is another Standing Order that guarantees full

debate, ventilation, and even resolution of the issue. For example, we are here today for a full six-hour debate on crime, yet some Members will misinterpret the procedures and decisions of this Chair and seek to mislead the public into thinking that a one-hour, truncated debate which calls on the House to make no decision, and which was designed to get urgent responses to an issue that has suddenly arisen is preferred over a full-scale debate. This Chair appreciates that in this place you all, as Members, seek to represent your constituents by highlighting their concerns. Hon. Members, this Chair also understands that, from time to time, some of you may file matters which at best the very strong sense that those matters do not qualify under Standing Order 17. It is your right to do so. However, it is not your right to misrepresent the decisions of the Chair and procedures of this House. It is also not your right to represent as quotes, words which have not been uttered by this Chair.

On Friday, November 4, 2022, the Member for Barataria/San Juan sought to raise as a definite matter of urgent public importance, the issue of crime. That Member has had five years parliamentary experience preceding this Twelfth Parliament. With that hon. Member's parliamentary career starting in the other place, he had an opportunity to spend three additional years deepening his knowledge of Parliamentary Practice and Procedure. Therefore, this Member could not and should not have been surprised when he was told that the matter did not qualify under that particular Standing Order 17. He knew very well that it properly qualified under another Standing Order, and in fact, such a matter had already been approved by me for a full-scale debate under Standing Order 35. It was, therefore, rather disturbing that in the mind of the Member for Oropouche West, the matter not qualifying to be raised under Standing Order 17 translated to, and I quote:

“Speaker says no! Crime was not important. Crime was not sufficiently important to warrant a debate.”

—based on public statements made by that Member at a recently held news conference. While this Chair harbours no naivety that in today’s society the holder of the office of Speaker will be entirely insulated from criticism, when a Member deliberately spreads misinformation about the rules, practice and proceedings of this House, and adopts and publishes the statement of an uninformed member of the public, then such action is not in keeping with the rules and dignity of this House, and should be denounced by all Members of this House.

Such conduct can only be construed as a misguided attempt to mislead the records of this House and bring this House and the Chair of this House into public odium and disrepute. All hon. Members know that acts which bring the House into public odium and disrepute can amount to a contempt of the House, for which there can be consequences. Additionally, hon. Members, this Chair will object and call to order any Member who seeks to bring the Chair into the political arena and into public derision by saying things which this Chair has not said. The Member for Oropouche West and all hon. Members are kindly urged in the future to exercise more care and regard for the dignity of this House, the institution of Parliament, and the offices of this institution. Please all be guided accordingly.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

### **PAPERS LAID**

1. Notification of Her Excellency, the President, in respect of the nomination of Mr. Curt Simon, for appointment to act in the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]
2. Annual Report of the Police Service Commission for the period January 01, 2021 to December 31, 2021. [*Mr. E. Forde*]

**UNREVISED**

3. Sessional Report of the Second Session (2021/2022), Twelfth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Mr. E. Forde*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Police Complaints Authority for the year ended September 30, 2021. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]  
*To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*
5. Administrative Report and Audited Financial Statements of National Helicopter Services Limited for the year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Administrative Report and Audited Financial Statements of National Helicopter Services Limited for the year ended September 30, 2018. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]  
*Papers 5 and 6 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.*
7. Administrative Report of the National Investment Fund Holding Company Limited as at December 31, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 2012. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Audited Financial Statements of the Water and Sewerage Authority for the year ended September 30, 2018. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]  
*Papers 8 and 9 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*
10. Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards for the year ended September 30, 2019. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. C. Robinson-Regis)*]

11. Annual Administrative Report of the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee for the period February 2012 to September 2012. [*The Minister of Labour (Hon. Stephen Mc Clashie)*]
12. Annual Administrative Report of the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee for the period October 2013 to February 2014. [*Hon. S. Mc Clashie*]
13. Annual Administrative Report of the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee for the period October 2017 to September 2018. [*Hon. S. Mc Clashie*]
14. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs on an inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on the Micro and Small Enterprises Sector, Second Session (2021/2022), Twelfth Parliament. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
15. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Digital Transformation to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the impact of Work-from-Home and Alternative Work Arrangements, Policies and Initiatives on Public Sector Productivity and Service Delivery. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
16. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Labour to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the impact of Work-from-Home and Alternative Work Arrangements, Policies and Initiatives on Public Sector Productivity and Service Delivery. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
17. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the impact of Work-from-Home and

- Alternative Work Arrangements, Policies and Initiatives on Public Sector Productivity and Service Delivery. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
18. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs on an inquiry into the efficiency and effectiveness of the Central Statistical Office (CSO), Second Session (2021/2022), Twelfth Parliament. [*Hon. P. Beckles-Robinson*]
19. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA) on an inquiry into the Operational Efficiency of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Service Corporation and the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on its Service Delivery. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
20. Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Extension of Period for Payment of Fifty Percent of Fixed Penalty) (No. 3) Order, 2022. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan)*]

## **JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE**

### **(Presentation)**

#### **Public Accounts Committee**

#### **(Trinidad and Tobago Securities and Exchange Commission)**

**Dr. Davendranath Tancoo** (*Oropouche West*): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the:

Seventh Report of the Public Accounts Committee on an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Securities and Exchange Commission (TTSEC) for the Financial Years 2014 to 2018.

#### **Auditor General Report on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

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Eighth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on an examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2021.

### **CAPE Scholarship Programme**

Ninth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on an examination of the administration of the CAPE Scholarship Programme as reported on in the Special Audit Report within the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2019.

### **National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago**

Sixth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago (NIBTT) for the Financial Years 2014 to 2020.

## **URGENT QUESTIONS**

### **El Socorro South (Flooding situation)**

**Mr. Saddam Hosein** (*Barataria/San Juan*): To the Minister of Works and Transport: Will the Minister inform the House what urgent action will be taken to address the flooding situation in El Socorro South, where flood waters have remained stagnant over the last four (4) days?

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan)**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, El Socorro South is impacted by a number of main drains, and the Ministry has built a pump house to pull water into the Caroni River. The pump house is activated and working. The Drainage Division has visited the area of the continued flooding. The drains that run along the local roadway are much lower than the main drain that channels the water to the pump house causing the issue to flow. However, these drains fall under the

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San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. I would advise the Member if he can liaise with his councillor in the area to have these drains sorted out. The pump house is working, the Ministry function is working, the problem there is that the councillors need to get the water to the pump house. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, the people of El Socorro South have had water up to their knees over the last four days, how can the Minister state that those pumps are working to get the water out of the area?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Minister has a team called the Drainage Division, and we also have a mechanical division. Both visited the areas and have confirmed to the Minister that both pumps are working to satisfaction. The problem in the area is El Socorro South is a very low-lying area and what is happening there is some flash flooding on the streets and the localized drain. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Interruption*] One minute, please. Member for St. Augustine, if you wish to ask a question, please do it in the proper way. I am recognizing the Member for Barataria/San Juan. Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, having regard to the flood waters being in the area for over four days and the two pumps, as the Minister indicated have been working, will the Minister give an undertaking to mobilize additional pumps in the area to bring relief to these residents?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, clearly the Member does not understand what I just said, the water is not getting to the pump. If you put 10

more pumps, it will not solve the problem. The problem is that it is a localized area, the councillors have to get involved to make sure the localized water reaches the sump. This is a local government—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** One minute Minister. One minute Minister. [*Interruption*] Minister, one minute please? Members, I would really like to hear the answer and I am sure the public would like to hear the answer. Minister.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Ms. Ameen:** I would like to hear the truth.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am trying to rationalize [*Inaudible*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** So, Madam Speaker, again, this issue has nothing to do with the pumps, and bringing in more pumps will not solve the problem, the both pumps are working. Thank you.

**Robert Village, Tableland  
(Remedial works planned)**

**Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, in light of the critical nature of the landslip in Robert Village, Tableland, which impeded the passage of multiple heavy vehicles this week leading to traffic congestion, will the Minister inform the House what urgent and critical remedial works are planned to bring relief to the motoring public?

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there has been an occurrence of a significant landslip along the Naparima/Mayaro Road at the 30.4 km mark. This has deteriorated with the adverse weather and has caused damage to the roadway thus far. Geotechnical investigation and soil tests have been completed. Detailed designs are being developed and implemented by the PURE unit for the dry

season. In light of the worsening conditions, periodic maintenance of the roadway has been taking place to ensure that the road remains passable. In the interim construction is expected to start with a more permanent solution within two weeks. Thank you.

**Mr. Paray:** Minister, taking note of the fact that we have lost the secondary access road to Mayaro through the Manzanilla area, is there any opportunity to expedite any part of the work programme to bring some relief on the Tableland side?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, the answer to that is yes, I actually have a team there going through the entire area now to see what emergencies were—because we do have to utilize the PTSC in that area to bring some sort of relief to the residents of the area. Thank you.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, given the ongoing level of infrastructural collapse in Trinidad and Tobago, could you inform this House if your Ministry has conducted a detailed assessment and come up with a schedule of remedial works to be undertaken by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, I will not allow that as a supplemental question based on the original question asked and the responses thus far.

**Manzanilla Road  
(Action being undertaken)**

**Dr. Rai Ragbir** (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Works and Transport: Given the collapse of part of the Manzanilla Road which has made it impossible for residents to commute to work and school, could the Minister state what immediate action is being undertaken by his Ministry to alleviate the situation?

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as Minister of Works and Transport I visited the Manzanilla Road last evening and met with the onsite technical team from the Ministry. The ongoing assessment requires the water to subside in order to make a detailed recommendation. Alternate access is available along the Biche and Rio Claro route. The Ministry has also mobilized the PTSC to increase its service from Sangre Grande via Biche and Rio Claro to Mayaro. Thank you.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister I hear what you have to say, but at the end of the day what I am asking now, rehabilitation works from that area from Plum Road straight down to Mayaro, because that area from Manzanilla that has actually fallen apart is going to take a bit of a while, and more traffic, and heavier traffic flow. So I am going to ask, what rehabilitation—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, the question.

**Dr. Ragbir:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** The question.

**Dr. Ragbir:** What rehabilitation works, Madam Speaker?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, I am in constant communication with the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, and as I had given him the assurance, up to yesterday a technical team, today, is visiting that area to identify any spot that may pose a challenge to the commuters, to have some emergency work done on it. Because we recognized that we have to use that alternate route, and that too because of the weather condition would have been challenged. So yes, emergency work will take place in those areas. Thank you.

**Roopsingh Road Bridge  
(Rubble to be removed)**

**Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Works and Transport: Will the Minister advise when will the

rubble base from the recently collapsed Roopsingh Road Bridge be removed as it is currently blocking the free flow of water in the La Cuesa River?

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am advised that the Roopsingh Road Bridge is under the remit of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. During this year the bridge was in imminent danger of collapse and the corporation sought the technical advice of the Ministry of Works and Transport, and a Bailey bridge was constructed over the existing structure. The existing bridge did collapse as stated and the rubble base is causing a challenge to the free flow of water. However, initial analysis indicates that the base of the collapsed bridge is not accessible unless and until the present bailey bridge is extended. The Ministry awaits a proposal programme of works from the regional corporation. Once the bridge is extended with the technical advice from the Ministry, by the regional corporation, the rubble will be removed. It is a project that we are monitoring at the Ministry of Works and Transport. I thank you.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister, through you, Madam Speaker, Minister you are fully aware that the maintenance of the water course and the cleaning of the water course, while the bridge falls under local government, the maintaining of the water course is a responsibility of the Ministry of Works and Transport. And within recent times several residents from that community have experienced significant flooding—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, please, 15 seconds.

**Mr. Ratiram:** —while you are awaiting that information hon. Minister, can you indicate to the residents who have been flooded out, when the start of works will commence for the removal of that rubble?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, I think what I did not say before is that the Ministry of the—regional corporations are the ones who constructed the Bailey bridge. What they are awaiting now is some parts to extend the bridge. We are in constant contact with them, and as soon as they are ready to extend the bridge with the help of the Ministry of Works and Transport we will immediately remove the debris that is under the bridge. If we go to remove it now, we will have to remove the bridge, and that will take away the connectivity for the area. So it is posing a challenge, but unfortunately these are some of the challenges that the Ministry and the regional corporations are faced with. Thank you.

**2.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister. Minister, while they are waiting for these parts, can you advise if the Ministry of Works and Transport have the parts that they are awaiting on to extend that bridge?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** The Ministry of Works and Transport works very closely with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and the regional corporation and I can assure you if the parts were available at the Ministry, it would have been made available to the regional corporation. Thank you.

### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, Question No. 8 has been withdrawn by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

#### **Trinidad and Tobago Scrap Iron Dealers Association (Regulations for)**

**8. Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) ask the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry: Will the Minister state:

- a) whether the Government has held meetings with the Trinidad and Tobago Scrap Iron Dealers Association (TTSIDA) to create

and draft regulations for the Industry in the last two months; and

- b) whether a specific timeline for drafting these regulations have been proposed in order to allow the industry to recommence operations?

*Question, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are now 15 questions for oral response and we will be answering all. There are two questions for written response and we will be answering both. Thank you.

### WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### **Prime Minister and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Total Travel Expenses Paid For 2015 to 2022)**

- 24. Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:  
Will the Minister provide the total value of per diems paid to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries for official travel purposes during the period October 2015 to September 2022?

#### **Schools Under Construction (Details of)**

- 39. Ms. Anita Haynes** (*Tabaquite*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:  
Will the Minister provide a detailed status report on schools under construction throughout Trinidad and Tobago as follows:
- a) primary schools;
  - b) secondary schools; and
  - c) tertiary educational institutions?

*Vide end of sitting for written answers*

### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**UNREVISED**

**Environmental, Social and Reputation Management at TSTT  
(Details relating to Senior Manager)**

**14. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Will the Minister state:

- a) Who is the Senior Manager of Environmental, Social and Reputation Management at the Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago; and
- b) When did this person assume this position?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, TSTT has advised that the Senior Manager of Environmental, Social and Reputation Management at the Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago is Mr. Kamal E. Georges. And he assumed the position on July 01, 2022.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister indicate to this House when was the position—or, where was the position, sorry, of Senior Manager of Environmental, Social and Reputation Management advertised, locally, regionally and internationally?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Madam Speaker, I came prepared to answer the question that was put before this House. I am very happy that the Member for Couva South is very concerned about positions that are being advertised and qualifications, et cetera, because he was part of a government that promoted a telephone operator from that position to the head of the SSA.

**Ms. Ameen:** “Yuh cyah answer the question but yuh talking bout”—



**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker—

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Madam Speaker, I am answering the question.

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—rein in the Minister of Public Utilities.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Madam Speaker, I am answering the question.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, is that a point of order? Member, please continue.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** So I am very happy, Madam Speaker, that the Member apparently has an epiphany, he is very concerned about positions that are advertised, et cetera. Perhaps he should take the opportunity and apologize to the people of Trinidad and Tobago because he was part of a government that promoted a telephone operator to the head of an SSA—

**Hon. Members:** [*Continuous desk thumping*]

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, 48—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker—

**Ms. Ameen:** That is your answer? That is your answer?

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** He was not concerned about advertising at that point. He was not concerned about that.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** Couva South, yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, the Minister of Public Utilities seems to be very irrelevant here this afternoon.

**Ms. Ameen:** Yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And—

**Mr. Hinds:** Question, question.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister be very specific and inform this House of the salary that is being paid to Mr. Kamal Georges and inclusive of all allowances?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Madam Speaker, if the experienced Member of this House can pose this question on the appropriate Standing Order I will be more than happy to come here and answer this question.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, just in the context of asking supplemental questions and for the basic understanding of the Minister, he has a duty-bound responsibility to provide—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** But you—okay. We have 15—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** [*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you have 15 seconds to ask a supplemental question. Please.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister inform this House if any of the retrenched employees of TSTT were invited, of the 2,000 employees that have been retrenched by this Government, whether they were invited to apply for the position of senior manager of Environmental, Social and Reputation Management at TSTT.

**Madam Speaker:** I rule that question out of order in accordance with the Standing Orders. Member for Caroni East.

**Landslips at Fletcher's Road  
(Commencement of Repair and Rehabilitation Works)**

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**20. Dr. Rishard Seecheran** (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

With regard to the 3 landslips located at Fletcher's Road, will the Minister state when will repair and rehabilitation works commence?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Works and Transport.

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

Thank you, thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Fletcher's Road between Todds Road and Ravine Sable Road is approximately 2.3 kilometres in length. This road does not fall under the purview of the Ministry of Works and Transport, but that of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. As usual, the Ministry of Works and Transport stands ready to provide any technical advice that the corporation may require. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you, Madam Speak. Minister, how can the Ministry of Works and Transport assist vehicular traffic as a patient from an old age home has died because the ambulance and emergency services were unable to access the home.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Works and Transport.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, I think I just indicated that the road falls under the regional corporation. If the regional corporation wants assistance, they have to request assistance from the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Works and Transport stands ready to offer any technical assistance that may require. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Ministry of Works and

Transport create an alternative access road to the marooned villagers via the Ravine Sable Road?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Works and Transport.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, if the Member has that suggestion, I am sure the Member can write to the Ministry, the Ministry will send a technical team to assess to see if that is possible and there are certain guidelines before we create access roads. If the Member sees that as an option he can liaise with the corporation, the corporation can liaise with the Ministry and the Ministry again stands ready to do anything to assist the residents of the area. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, I have written you—

**Hon. Members:** “Ahhh.”

**Dr. Seecheran:**—in your capacity as Minister and you have not even—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, are you going to ask a question. Fifteen seconds.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, please reply to the letter that I have written to you with regard to this exact situation. When? When?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Works and Transport.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** This Member sends about 300 letters every day.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** And whenever you go through these letters it is the same thing, same thing over, and over and over. The Member knows fully well that this road falls under the regional corporation. The Member is supposed to know by now, he has a councillor in the area—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** If you did not reply—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:**—he has a chairman of the corporation. There is a process for these secondary roads—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister, Minister.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** [*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South. Minister of Works and Transport.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** That has been communicated several times, not only to that Member but to several Members on the other side. Please do not continue to waste the stationery. We told you go through the corporation, the corporation will write us and there is a formal process to initiate these things. We are willing to assist the corporations but we cannot take the instruction from an MP to go and build a road here and build a road there. It is not done like that, it is done on a network. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Can we get another supplemental question?

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Seecheran:** Minister, can I provide you with the stationery—

**Madam Speaker:** One, one—Members, Members. The Member for Caroni East now has audience. Kindly give him the opportunity to seek the interest of his constituents as everyone else here will have the opportunity if they have a question on the Order Paper or if they are recognized for a supplemental question. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, I have written the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government and I am now asking you, can you assist the residents of these areas through the Ministry of Works and

Transport?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** So that question has been asked and it has been answered. Okay. So can we—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** 300 letters and no reply.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South. I await you to allow the Member for Caroni East to continue. He is your colleague so you will determine whether he will continue or not.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** He can continue, Madam Speaker.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I have not recognize you as yet. I will call you.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Oh.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Hercules Trace, Ravine Sable Bridge  
(Commencement of Repair and Rehabilitation Works)**

**21. Dr. R. Seecheran** (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Will the Minister state when will the repair and rehabilitation works to the bridge located at Hercules Trace, Ravine Sable commence?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

**The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. If you would just give me a moment please, we had a small amendment to the answer. I am just retrieving the copy. Thank you so very much.

Madam Speaker, in answer to question 21, I can say the repair and rehabilitation work to the bridge located at Hercules Trace, Ravine Sable will commence in fiscal 2023. The project is to be undertaken and funded by the

Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, what is the projected completion date of this project?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Upon the establishment I really could not say just yet, largely because we are affected by the rains and that has delayed our scheduling aspects. What I can say is that we are paying very close attention. I can undertake to obtain that information and be in direct contact with you so that we can work together as we have with many of your other colleagues on providing the solution in a timely fashion.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, what is the projected cost of this project?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** It is that very information that I was looking for in my supplemental. I had all of this prepared on the last occasion when this question was answered so I must apologize. I had the actual cost, the estimates in positions, but as you are aware these questions were rolled over from the last sitting of Parliament and we were ready for it. I can undertake to provide that for you during the course of this session because I can access that information.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Seecheran:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Ministry consider replacing the wooden planks of this bridge as an interim measure?

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** The wooden planks, we have instead, instead of replacing the wooden planks we have gone for concrete decking. We are trying to move away

from the wooden planks because as you know, notwithstanding the fact that there are load limitations on bridges people still risk it and hazard it. So we are on a wooden plank eradication exercise. The scope of works as I recall from the last occasion involved concrete decking, concrete structures, so that a more durable system is available, a safer passage.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mayaro to Guayaguayare Linking Road  
(Commencement of Remedial Works)**

**32. Mr. Rushton Paray** (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister state when will remedial works commence along the road that links Mayaro to Guayaguayare?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Works and Transport.

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Mayaro/Guayaguayare Road starts at the Mayaro junction and ends at the entrance of the oil field facilities. It is approximately 21 kilometres in length. In house patching works with hot mix asphalt have been conducted during the course of this year. Sectional road rehabilitation was also conducted last fiscal year, 2021/2022, along the Mayaro/Guayaguayare Road between the 2.4 kilometre and the 4.5 kilometre mark. This included overlaying with hot mix asphalt and was completed in June 24, 2022. The area addressed under the contracted work connected the communities of Plaisance which comprised several small businesses, farms, beach houses, regional sub-offices, Radix Cemetery and the populated village. The area also connects St. Margaret which consists of a church, small and medium-sized businesses, apartments and populated villages. Outside of the addressed area the road is generally fair with a few localized defects arising due to the heavy



equipment traversing the area to access the oil field through Galeota Point. In-house spot patching work to address these residual localized defects have commenced and are ongoing. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Minister, are you aware that the work that you now referred to in terms of some rehabilitation work that was done, the contractor did not complete the entire exercise stating that the funds would have run out and the distance was only half way done. Are you aware of that, Sir?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, whenever a contract is issued it is issued for a certain section of work. The money, once the money is allocated for that section, the money cannot run out until that work is completed. Maybe what the contractor is indicating, he would like to go further but this is the amount of money that he was paid. The work on these roads is done in interim where we will do a 2 or 3 kilometres now, and then as funds come in we would do a further distance and so. And that is how we work throughout Trinidad. So, to say that the contract was awarded to somebody for certain amount of money and the money ran out, that cannot happen, that cannot happen. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Minister, just further to the work planned in terms of the area on that road. Are you aware of any geotechnical work that may have been done in the one major landslip that we have along that road which is located near to the NGC gas line crossover in that Stone Bright area. Are you aware of that?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, the Highways Division will take up landslips and slippages throughout the country and geotechnical studies are done

before any contract is awarded because you have to do that before you do the designs. I cannot tell you exactly if that one was done because I do not know exactly where it is on the landslip listing. But what I can assure you is that before any work commences, a geotechnical study has to be done in order to come up with the design for the solution. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Vacation Revision Programme 2022  
(Estimated Financial Cost)**

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

Will the Minister state the estimated final cost of the Vacation Revision Programme 2022?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you kindly, Madam Speaker. The expenditure incurred in respect of the Vacation Revision Programme 2022 was \$3,392,355.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Minister be able to provide a breakdown of that expenditure as in where it was used, what it was utilized for?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. That information is not with me now, it was not a part of the question that was originally asked.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Minister undertake to provide the information at a subsequent time if the information is in fact available?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Speaker, should the question be asked and filed in the usual way the answer will be provided.

**Ms. Haynes:** Madam Speaker, the question has been asked as a supplemental. So it should be considered as asked.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Secondary Entrance Assessment Examination Results  
(Plans for Improving 2022-2023 Results)**

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

Will the Minister state what specific plans with measurable outcomes, if any, are being taken to ensure that Secondary Entrance Assessment examination results improve in the 2022-2023 academic year?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, school improvement is an ongoing exercise and there are schools which continue to demonstrate an acceptable level of performance in the Secondary Entrance Assessment, the SEA. However, the Ministry's guidelines for the academic year, 2022/2023, Term 1, for the reopening of schools stipulated the following measures to be executed at all primary schools: Teaching and learning activities involving teacher-led revision exercises where required; checklist of minimum learning outcome that students should possess at the start of the school year to allow for development of suitably designed test papers for the school level diagnostic test; analysis of school level diagnostic assessments to be done by teachers and the findings to inform teachers on the development of their work plans and schemes of work, and the use of curriculum guides to ensure that topics taught are in alignment with the schemes of work and daily or weekly plans.

Notwithstanding the above guidelines to be implemented at all schools, the Ministry of Education has identified 80 primary schools where there was a noticeable decrease in the academic performance in SEA 2022 and the following

initiatives are proposed to improve the SEA 2023 results in these 80 schools: Training of all teachers in Mathematics, English Language Arts and Writing in Standards 3, 4 and 5; after school classes in Mathematics and English Language Arts conducted online for students of Standards 4 and 5 and face to face where possible; an online literacy programme available at all levels used in classes; training in literacy leadership targeting school-based management teams; test preparation ensuring that the level difficulty of sample or mock tests matched the Revised Assessment Framework for SEA for 2021 to 2023; continued provision of devices for teachers and students to facilitate online learning activities; assignment of learning support assistance to aid teachers in the Standards 4 and 5 classes; assessment of students to detect psychosocial issues by the Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education and provision of support to address same and assignment of a dedicated school social worker in each of the identified schools to assist in addressing behavioural challenges on sight.

Madam Speaker, it is anticipated that over the next three years the national means in Mathematics and English Language Arts will see an improvement and that there will be a decrease in the number of students scoring under 50 per cent in the Secondary Entrance Assessment.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you Minister for that answer. Given the best practice in monitoring and evaluation, is there anything in place for a check, for the proactive measures to ensure that we are on track for better results for SEA 2023?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, the teachers themselves do periodic checks with the students and the curriculum officers of the

division will be checking with the teachers to ensure that they are putting the things in place to make sure the children are progressing along the pathway that they should.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, you would note that in budget for fiscal 2023 a total of \$50 million was allocated to ensure better exam performance overall. And so my question is, if the Minister could give us an idea of how this \$50 million is being allocated within these programmes.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Speaker, again, I am willing to provide answers to questions once those questions are asked in the right way. That does not arise from the question you have asked.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Chair determines what arises as a supplemental and it was allowed. But, Madam Speaker, question No. 35 to the Minister of Education.

**Students who Never Accessed Online Learning  
(Number returned to physical school)**

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

Will the Minister state of the 46,770 students who never accessed online learning, how many have returned to the physical school system.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, at the virtual meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration held on January 20, 2021 the Ministry estimated that 46,770 students had not logged on to the portals facilitating online

learning. During this period many of those students would have been receiving printed packages from schools for educational continuity.

During 2021 and to present, the Ministry of Education through the means test for device provision, Adopt a School Programme and other sponsors distributed 63,000 devices to students of government and government assisted primary and secondary schools. Over 8,000 Mi-Fi devices were also distributed. Some of the students accessing packages would have sat terminal examinations and transitioned out of the education system. Currently, approximately 188,000 students are attending school physically and the Student Support Services Division continues to monitor students who are displaying irregular attendance.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you. Minister, so is there no figure within the Ministry as to the number of students who have never accessed or never accessed any type of learning during the pandemic because we have been talking about learning loss during the pandemic. Is there some number then, of persons who were not accessing the school system during this time, if it is indeed not the 46,770?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Certainly, Madam Speaker. We would be keeping track of those numbers and those numbers are not with me now, but certainly we would have kept track of those and those are the numbers that the Student Support Services would have been targeting directly and in some cases our partnership with the community police in reaching out to the parents and determining what are the reasons for the students not attending school.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. So is there then a percentage of persons who were not accessing online but then came back into the physical school

system. So do we have a number of persons who were never online, missed two years and are now back in the school system? Do we have that number to give to the public at this time?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** That figure would have to be determined, Madam Speaker, based on our data collected by the Ministry of Education. But suffice it to say, that not being online during the two years did not mean that the students did not access education. Many of them were receiving printed packages and our teachers worked very hard to assure that so that even though they were not online they were able to have continuity.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. While they may have been receiving printed packages, the question of whether or not they were still within the school system as in terms of accessing the quality education in the manner with which they are required to do to pass these exams. So the question therefore is Minister, those students who were not online, not accessing class on a daily basis and had to sit exams, how many of them are there? What is the percentage within our school system who were not accessing quality education for the period 2020 to 2022?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you. Madam Speaker, the Member in speaking is explaining what she is wanting, but in her question she asked a different thing. So if you ask me exactly what you want then I will provide those statistics—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:**—and allow me to say that there is a misinterpretation that online education was the quality and the printed packages were not, when in fact it was the application of the students and the parent to the work that would have brought the quality of the education during that time.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Couva Community Pool  
(Reopening of)**

**15. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Community Development:

Given that the Couva Community Pool has been closed since September 2018, will the Minister inform this House when will the pool be reopened for use by members of the public?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Sport and Community Development.

**The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Couva Community Swimming Pool was built in the 1970s and is over 45 years old. As a result of its age it has been found to have several structural deficiencies. It has also been determined that the pool basin housing is compromised and thus subject to persistent leaks which have proven to be very difficult to repair in the circumstances it may not make practical sense to attempt to refurbish this pool.

Accordingly, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development is pursuing further specialist engineering advice and examining all available options at this time which may include the construction of a new swimming pool or significant structural work. A decision on this matter will be taken within the next few months after further specialist advice has been procured. Thank you, Madam Speaker.



**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister inform this House if you think that four years to do an analysis and engineering work and to come up with a solution is acceptable in terms of having the children of Couva South and Couva living in hope that this pool will be reopened?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is not four years. The pool was closed in 2019. Some refurbishment work was done and then it was recognized that there was structural problems. We reached out to SPORTT. They would have done their investigations and then we reached out to Ministry of Works and Transport who earlier this year around August recommended that we seek specialist advice and that is what we are doing. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, I will just want to put on the record that a disconnected Minister of Sport and Community Development must know—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you know this is not for statements. If you wish you can ask a question. So, would you want to ask a question?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** Well, ask a question. You have 15 seconds. It is not for statements, unfortunately.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, taking into consideration that the pool was only open for one month, could the Minister inform this House whether she was aware that the pool was only open for one month and then closed?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Madam Speaker, I do not think the Member knows what he is

speaking about. This issue was recognized in 2019. In 2020 all pools, all over the nation were closed, all public sporting facilities were closed—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:**—due to COVID. So he is misleading the House and misleading the public. I have given the answer, the assessment would be done and when we receive the report we would determine what happens next. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

### **Procurement of Laptops (Details of)**

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

With regard to the recent procurement of 7000 laptops, will the Minister state:

- a) the total cost of the laptops;
- b) the number of laptops that have been distributed to date;
- c) the timeline for the distribution of the remaining laptops; and
- d) the criteria used for the distribution of the laptops?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. With regard to the recent procurement of 7,000 laptops by the Ministry of Education, the total cost of the laptops was TT \$16.7 million, 7,000 laptops have been distributed to students and teachers in 578 government and government assisted schools. The distribution was completed on September 30, 2022, and the criteria used for the distribution of laptops was via an administered means test to ensure the devices were distributed to students in greatest need.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**ICT Access Centre  
(Details of)**

**37. Ms. Anita Haynes** (*Tabaquite*) asked the hon. Minister of Digital Transformation:

Will the Minister state:

- a) the number of ICT Access Centres that have been completed, operationalized and accessed by communities; and
- b) the construction schedule for the completion of the other ICT Access Centres promised?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Digital Transformation.

**The Minister of Digital Transformation (Sen. The Hon. Hassel Bacchus):**

Thank you, Madam Speaker. At present seven community ICT Access Centres have been completed, operationalized and are being used by the public. A further six which are co-located within community centres established by the Ministry of Sport and Community Development have been completed and outfitted. The community ICT Access Centres are housed within the larger community development centres as I said and these centres are therefore shared facilities. Consequently, the provision of ongoing service to the public is dependent on both entities being simultaneously ready. This requires having requisite personnel on board, facilities and infrastructure and all the other pieces ready to accommodate constant use and real time provision of security and janitorial services.

**2.30 p.m.**

Construction has been completed on seven centres and these have been outfitted, and the centre located in Belmont is currently in active use. The other six are at Lisas Gardens, Maraval, Tacarigua, Maitagual, Caiman, and Bel View. These will be brought into service shortly. The remaining 46 centres are in various stages of construction: 17 are being retrofitted; two are undergoing minor

completion works that will be in La Pastora and Edinburgh 500; four are in different stages of construction in Surrey Village, Harmony Hall, in Arima and the Mayaro Public Library. And in addition, 23 ICT Access Centres locations have been identified and are similarly in various stages of readiness. Proposals for the utilization of these sites will soon be submitted for the consideration of Cabinet.

It is therefore expected that there will be at least 53 community ICT Access Centres constructed, operationalized and available for use by the public by the end of 2023. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, in light of the 53 centres that you have announced, can you indicate out of that 53 how many are housed in actual community centres that are existing?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. H. Bacchus:** So the 53 comprise of the numbers where I described them. Some of them are standalone. I can get the actual breakdown for you because the majority of them will be co-located within community centres as they are. We do have some—the retrofitted ones that we are dealing with are within other spaces. You would have heard about the library and others, but I can get the actual number for you of the number that we will be retrofitting, if you wish.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, what is the total cost expended on ICT Access Centres since 2020?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. H. Bacchus:** I can also get that information for you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam. Hon. Minister, in light, again, of the 53 centres, and you have indicated some of them are located in these community centres, can you indicate why it has taken this long to outfit some of these community centres since there is no construction of the actual centres itself, but two years have been past and still there is a lot of work that is lagging behind?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, that question is quite unclear having regard to the question that was originally asked and the answer, so that I would not allow that. It is very unclear. Member for Tabaquite.

**Teaching Service Commission  
(Applicants Being Interviewed)**

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

Will the Minister state which year's applicants are currently being interviewed by the Teaching Service Commission?

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Teaching Service Commission is responsible for the conducting of interviews in the teaching service. A status of interviews by the Director of Personnel Administration based on the dates of assessment and subject areas is as follows:

- Mathematics: February 2017.
- Natural Science: Chemistry, January 2016; Physics, September 2016; Biology, January 2015.
- History: January 2018.
- Social Studies/Sociology: February 2015.
- POA/POB/MOB/Accounting: June 2009.
- POA/POB/MOB/Accounting—these are for T IIIs now—January 2016.
- Economics, T II, secondary: 2007.

- Economics, T III, secondary: July 2021.
- English: August 2015.
- Drama/Dance/Theatre Acts: January 2021.
- Spanish/French: December 2019.
- Computer Science/IT: February 2016.
- Visual Arts: January 2022.
- Physical Education: July 2018.
- Music: May 2021.
- Geography: August 2017.
- Agricultural Science: February 2019.
- Home Economics: Home Management, July 2016; Clothing and Textiles, November 2020; Food and Nutrition: July 2016.
- Technical subjects, which will be electrical, MET and woodwork: June 2018.
- EDPM/Typing/Office Procedures: December 2021.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, given that the Ministry has overall oversight for the functioning of the education sector, is there anything being done on a policy end to ensure that this absolute lag in terms of getting suitable candidates into teaching positions, that that can be corrected so that we have a properly functioning education system?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you. Madam Speaker, the dates called here reflect the number of applications that are lodged with the TSC and have been assessed by the Ministry of Education and are awaiting interview. So it is not a matter of the Ministry of Education not doing what it is required to do by law, but the Teaching

Service Commission now has to process the thousands of applications, especially in some of the subject areas, which is why they would have asked the Ministry of Education to restrict the number of applications because there are so many applications in and the backlog would be at the interview stage because of the number of applications that are in.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. What is the average time frame between an application being received and the interview being conducted? If the Minister has that information.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Madam Speaker, there is no average because it depends on the subjects. As you would have seen, some subjects, they are assessed and they are being interviewed having applied a very short time ago because there are small numbers of applicants. But where you have large numbers, obviously you are going to have a longer time to wait to get to the interview stage.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, you will accept though that that does not obtain for primary schools. So is there an average time for persons entering the primary school system from interviewed to being placed in a position?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** It certainly does apply also to primary schools because it would depend on the number of applications and how long you would take to get interviewed.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Ms. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, you said that there is no average depending on the subject area. So, therefore, there must be an average

time for primary school teachers from interview—yes. So, therefore, what is average time between an application being submitted and an interview in the primary school system for the placement of teachers within the primary schools?

**Madam Speaker:** So that question has been asked and answered, Member for Tabaquite. Do you have another supplemental?

**Ms. Haynes:** No, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. Member for Naparima.

### **Surplus Energy Revenue (Quantum of)**

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

Will the Minister state the quantum of surplus energy revenues received for the quarter January 2022 to March 2022 and the date on which that required surplus was paid into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund?

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Contrary to the question posed, there is no mention of energy revenues or surplus energy revenues in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Act. The reference in the Act is to petroleum revenues not energy revenues. I could have stopped right there.

Petroleum revenues are defined in the Act as:

“...the aggregate of the supplemental petroleum tax...”—SPT— “petroleum profits tax”—PPT—“and royalties but does not include unemployment levy, the oil impost and signature bonuses.”

Energy revenues, on the other hand, that the Member asked about, as defined for the purposes of Appendix 22 in the *Review of the Economy*, is far more than petroleum revenues. In addition to PPT, SPT, and royalties, energy revenues include unemployment levy, oil impost, signature bonuses, tax revenue from the petrochemical companies, Green Fund Levy, and business levy from all energy



sector companies.

Consequently, Madam Speaker, an uninformed observer, not being aware of the difference between petroleum revenues and energy revenues, could draw false conclusions. I am advised that for the period January 01, 2022 to March 31, 2022, the total petroleum revenues amounted to \$3,349,530,360. When compared with the estimated petroleum revenues of \$2,531,987,700, this yielded a surplus petroleum revenue collection of \$817,542,660 for the period. Since these revenues exceeded the estimated revenues for that quarter by more than 10 per cent, 60 per cent of the aggregate of the excess petroleum revenues, namely \$490,525,596, was credited to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund in September 2022. This sum formed part of the overall total of \$1.1 billion credited to the fund in that month.

It should be noted that the formula for calculating the amount of deposits to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is quite complex, and the definition of estimated petroleum revenues used to calculate the required deposits reads as follows:

“...the estimated petroleum revenues, other than royalties, shall be calculated on the basis of a unit price for petroleum derived from an eleven-year moving average for prices at which crude oil and natural gas were disposed of in a current financial year, such eleven years being five years immediately prior to that current financial year together with the prices projected for the disposal of such crude oil and natural gas for the five years immediately following the current financial year.”

As the hon. Member will appreciate, this complex definition can be subject to legal interpretation and the Ministry therefore sought advice from counsel in order to ensure that the calculation of deposits to the fund was accurately done and then made the deposits accordingly.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

### **EXPIRATION OF QUESTION TIME**

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, the time allocated for questions is now spent. The Whip has signified that all unanswered questions in accordance with Standing Order 29(10) be deferred to a subsequent sitting.

*Question time having expired, the following questions (42, 43, 45) were not dealt with:*

### **“A House for Christmas” Recipients (Areas Prior to Being Allocated)**

- 42.** Will the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development identify the areas in which the recipients of the “A House for Christmas” were resident prior to being allocated housing? [*Ms. M. Benjamin*]

### **Visitor Relationship Management System (Update on Status)**

- 43.** Will the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts provide an update on the status of the Visitor Relationship Management System (VRMS)? [*Ms. M. Benjamin*]

### **Largest Recipients of Foreign Exchange (Details of)**

- 45.** Will the hon. Minister of Finance provide a list of the ten (10) largest recipients of foreign exchange for the period October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 to September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022? [*Ms. M. Benjamin*]

### **GOVERNMENT’S FAILURE TO ADDRESS SERIOUS CRIME**

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Saddam Hosein** (*Barataria/San Juan*): Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

*Whereas* it is the Government's responsibility to ensure the public safety and security of the citizenry;

*And whereas* the Government has failed in its management of the organs responsible for national security, law and order and has been unable to provide for the safety and security of citizens resulting in massive increases in serious crimes;

*And whereas* the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has been progressively under-resourced and not equipped to respond effectively to the threat of widespread crime;

*And whereas* there has been an astronomical and continuous increase in the murder toll with a corresponding breakdown in the criminal justice system;

*And whereas* the Government has failed to present a clear and effective anti-crime plan to deal with this perturbing crime situation;

*And whereas* the Government has contributed to the disturbing crime situation as a result of 7 years of neglect in education, training opportunities, rising unemployment and a total breakdown of the social safety net;

*And whereas* thousands of citizens and businesses have been negatively affected by the high level of crime in Trinidad and Tobago:

*Be it resolved* that this House condemn the Government for its failure to effectively address the unacceptable and serious crime level affecting law-abiding citizens.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, it is always an honour to have the opportunity to speak in this Parliament. This is a privilege that few enjoy. It is a place where our voices must be used to speak not for ourselves, but rather for those who are voiceless.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Those who do not have the opportunity to stand in Parliament and speak— This week our Parliament had the distinct privilege of hosting the 11<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Parliament. And interacting with the young delegates as a mentor, they advocated that we as young people must be the agents of change, and there are a lot of us who sit in this Chamber who can learn from those young people, especially those on the Government Bench. Because it will take our country nowhere if the current status quo exists. There must a drastic change in our approach. And today, I hope that those in charge of making decisions for our country, especially those who are responsible for our safety and security, listen attentively.

Today, I will use my voice to stand here for the thousands of families who have lost their loved ones due to murder. I speak for those who have had their homes and their privacy invaded by criminals. I speak for those who have been victims of gruesome sexual violence and I speak for those who have been deprived of their property by thieves. But most importantly, I raise my voice as a concerned citizen of Trinidad and Tobago to express my dissatisfaction and disgust at the current crime epidemic in our country.

Our citizens, Madam Speaker, are afraid. They are scared of losing their lives and their property. We have come from a time where you could have left your house open, but now this Government has condemned us into self-imposed jails, guarded by burglar-proof and security cameras. Where has our beautiful Republic gone? Our nation's schools are a second home for a child. It is a place where our children are meant to be safe. And none of us in this Chamber can deny that it was heartbreaking seeing the video of the infants of the Rose Hill Primary School hiding under their desks, seeking protection from open gunfire in broad

daylight. Yesterday, our nation was plunged into fear as the head of a man was discovered in a drain along the highway in the vicinity of Maloney.

Criminals are no longer waiting for the dead of the night to commit crimes. We have become desensitized to murders, and those who are killed are condemned as a statistic rather than as a citizen. There are times that I am at lost for words when we hold the hands of our constituents who are grieving for their loved ones. You will never be able to feel that pain unless you experience it for yourself and at that time, there is little comfort you can offer. I will never forget the pain of seeing and hearing the Riley family at the funeral of Ashanti. Both my colleagues, the Members for St. Ann's East and D'Abadie/O'Meara were present and can attest to the hurt and grief.

Today, I pilot this Motion with a mustard seed of hope that something can be done to keep our citizens safe. I am saddened, I am hurt and angry at the situation, and the Government does not seem to be bothered as there are no efforts, actions or plans being implemented to reduce the unacceptable level of criminality. The Government must be held accountable for the runaway crime situation. It is the primary responsibility of a government as the protector of the citizens.

How can the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security sleep comfortably at night when on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, 2022, two boys while playing football were shot? An eight-year-old was shot in the head and an 11-year-old shot in the leg. When you read the headlines of the Trinidad *Guardian* on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, 2022, it reads a:

“Toddler, dad gunned down in Tunapuna”—where a two-year-old and her father were gunned down on the eve of Father's Day.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, 2019, the *Newsday* reported:

“8 See Daddy Killed”.

And it was reported in that article, Madam Speaker, and I am quoting:

A relative said—“How could you come into a house and see so many children with their father and murder him in front of them? These people are evil, demons, monsters,’ the tearful relative said.”

“These children witnessed their father being killed, taking his last breath on the ground. Some of them are not talking, they are just in a trance is really sad just sad...”

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, 2022, the *Trinidad Express* reported that:

“More than 30 bullet casings were found by police following the murder of a...”—25-year-old—“at Sun Plaza, Monroe Road, Cunupia...”—on a busy Saturday—“afternoon.”

Hours before we commenced this debate, we recorded murder number 542, where a 14-year-old boy was gunned down and the killers said they were looking for someone else. This is now our reality, Madam Speaker. This is the reality of Trinidad and Tobago. Crime is a runaway horse. Something must be done by the Government to address this situation. And, Madam Speaker, there is no anti-crime plan. The Government has failed us to tell us what is their plan going forward.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, the latest announcement by the Prime Minister was that crime will be treated as a public health issue. It was reported by the *TTT* news, a state media company, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, 2022, and I quote:

“Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley has declared violence in this country a Public Health Emergency.”

The Prime Minister went on, and it was quoted in a *LoopTT* article dated the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 2022, and he said, and I quote:

It will be a—“...national plan of action which will involve the defining the

problem, identifying the causes and risk factors, designing a response, testing the interventions, and implementing/scaling up effective interventions with continuous evaluation.

The team will be co-chaired by the Permanent Secretaries at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services...the Ministry of Health with oversight from the Office of the..."—PM.

"It will involve the Ministry of National Security, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, the Ministry of Education and the Tobago House of Assembly."

But, Madam Speaker, three days after the Prime Minister made such a declaration, the Minister of National Security went into the Senate and said that the Prime Minister did not declare crime a public health emergency.

So, can you imagine, Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Security is saying one thing, the Prime Minister is saying another thing, obviously the population is confused, meanwhile the Minister of Communication is being paid a healthy salary to repost updates on Facebook, make TikToks, and put ads on the newspaper, but nobody can tell us what is the anti-crime plan to protect the children of our nation.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** What are the assurances that you are going to give to the citizens that they will be safe?

Madam Speaker, we all know, and this is very relevant to the Motion as it deals with unemployment as a driver for criminality in Trinidad and Tobago, young people in this country have little or no opportunity. They are hopeless, they are struggling at home. You are lucky if you are able to leave, but many are here and most of them are demotivated. Some, very hopeless. And there are young

people who do not even know what opportunity means or what it could look like. And are we in this Parliament—is the Government satisfied with the opportunities that they are affording to young people?

There is always talk about the employment of young people and we are the future of the nation. We have a Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, and besides the one-off interventions that they have, where is the structured approach to really addressing youth unemployment? Are they talking to the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, and other relevant Ministries? There is need for a structured approach. We need a structured approach. Do not tell us about one-off events, PR events and one-month programmes.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** It is about changing the system that negatively impacts young people. When was the last time the Government actually sat down with the young people and really asked them what do they want? Do you hold focus groups and assessments with these young people?

Madam Speaker, we must ensure that we get people working. We must ensure that they spend their time productively and take them out of the streets. Do you know that for some jobs the minimum pass that you require are three CXC or GCE passes, but the qualification to be a Minister or an MP is that you must be over the age of 18? So if there are no requirements to become a Minister, why is there not a greater effort to change what employment of young people looks like in this country? The Government must be blamed because you speak about supporting young people but you are doing nothing to truly help the young people. You are doing nothing.

And, Madam Speaker, I grew up regularly being around—worrying little



about national security in terms of my safety because when I grew up the place was generally safe. Over the past seven years it has deteriorated to the lowest level that we have seen in our history.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** And not everyone is fortunate like the Government Ministers to have 24/7 state-sponsored security. And whether the Government is willing to believe it or not, they are in fact insulated and that is something that needs to be recognized.

It seems that sitting there for the last seven years, they may have forgotten what it is like to feel like a regular average citizen. But can you imagine the woman who has no choice but to travel home alone at night, the young people who must walk to school early in the morning and sometimes in flooding, and the average citizen who go about their business shopping for groceries and worried about sometimes a stray bullet hitting them in the car park? And could you image the fear of parents when they send their children to school, that there is the possibility that there may be open gunfire on the school compound? So, Madam Speaker, a handout is not the definition of helping these young people or making the young people in this country feel safe.

And then I ask the Government—and I hope that the Minister of National Security spends his time, instead of politicking, but rather telling us what is the anti-crime going forward to make our country safe.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Because you will remember, Madam Speaker, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, the Prime Minister quickly had a meeting with the National Security Council, together with the divisional heads of the TTPS, and around that time there were 16 murders in four days. So, obviously, it was a time for PR tactics. Can the

Minister, when he is responding, tell us what came out of that meeting? Because since that meeting there were over 40 murders in Trinidad and Tobago; 40 murders.

Can you tell us what are the objectives of that meeting? What differences came out of that meeting? Because, Madam Speaker, a couple days ago, all we heard is the Prime Minister, after taking a break from playing golf, gave us an entire composition or an essay about West Indies cricket. So while he is on Facebook talking about cricket, our citizens are being bowled out by criminals. They are being bowled out. And then I move on, Madam Speaker, to the appointment of a Commissioner of Police.

This is a very critical issue because this is the position that leads the TTPS. It provides leadership for the TTPS. And, Madam Speaker, we were left without a Commissioner of Police in this country because of political interference. It was the first time in our history, our country did not have a Commissioner of Police. Madam Speaker, because of the political interference with the list that came out of the Police Service Commission, it caused the entire collapsed of the Police Service Commission, again because of political interference. And then we learnt the Prime Minister admitted that he was the person who interfered with the list at President's House with the Chairman of the Police Service Commission.

Madam Speaker, it was all a plan to get a sitting Commissioner of Police out of office. And, Madam Speaker, that must never happen again. Because the history of that matter is now where we currently face because the Police Service Commission is now telling us that they need more time to submit a particular name for the post of Commissioner of Police and this will be done in January. After over 542 citizens have died, we now have to wait an extra—what?—month to get proper leadership in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. But this, Madam

Speaker, must be bolted on the chest for the Member for Diego Martin West for the failed and unstructured leadership of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service because of the political interference with the Police Service Commission.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, we are recording over—today, it is recorded as 552 murders; 552 murders, with five weeks again remaining for the rest of the year. The highest murder toll we had was in the year 2008 with 550 murders being recorded.

Madam Speaker, it is no doubt that that record will be surpassed in this year of 2022. This displays a total level of incompetency when it comes to tackling crime because the Government continues to throw billions and billions of dollars towards national security, but we see absolutely no results. In fact, one criminologist, Dr. Randy Seepersad, has projected by the year 2030, we will reach over 710 murders being recorded per year. Totally unacceptable, Madam Speaker.

**3.00 p.m.**

And Madam Speaker, we must also look at what is taking place with the detection rate. Because if you are having all of these murders continuously, what is the detection rate? Madam Speaker, for the year 2021, we had 448 reported murders. Out of that 448, 49 murders were detected. Unacceptable. For 2020, 393 murders, 57 detected; 2019, 536 murders, 42 detected. That is totally unacceptable. Criminals are running freely on the streets, because there are no consequences for their actions. And in order for the criminals to be arrested, the police service must have strategic leadership. They must be properly resourced and you must have a competent Minister of National Security taking the leadership role.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** So, Madam Speaker, over \$830 million has been thrown to the TTPS for artillery, training, vehicles. And this is the result, because we have heard the answers coming out of the Standing Finance Committee when we dealt with the budget. And I would like to remind the citizens and share some of that information that the Minister provided.

Madam Speaker, in the police service right now, the sanctioned strength is 7,884 officers and the actual strength that we have right now is 6,514. So, therefore, there is a shortage of 1,371 officers. That leads to an overtime bill of \$360 million in the TTPS. With respect to vehicles, the total fleet is 1,965. Out of that, 1,250 are operational, 715 are not operational. That means it is about 36 per cent of vehicles in the TTPS are nonfunctional and that is why we will have low response times when citizens call the police and tell them that their homes are being invaded. And then the police will respond by saying: "Well we do not have a vehicle to come to your home right now." And that lies squarely at the feet of the Government, because they are the ones responsible for providing the money for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Madam Speaker, one of the most important issues that we have to deal with is border security. Because in Trinidad and Tobago we do not manufacture firearms. The Minister of National Security will always tell us that there are certain numbers of illegal firearms in Trinidad and Tobago. And I saw a *Trinidad Express* article, dated July 13, 2022, and it is saying—I am quoting it:

"Minister of National Security Fitzgerald Hinds said an analysis from the...(SSA) has determined that there are approximately 12,000 illegal firearms in Trinidad and Tobago."

And:

"...87 per cent of the murders...are as a result of firearms."

So then, how are these firearms coming into Trinidad? Well, the Minister also said—Minister Young, when he was Minister of National Security said, in a *Guardian* article entitled:

“...70 illegal immigrants held in two weeks”

And:

“Young confirmed...”

I am quoting:

“there are 214 illegal ports between Trinidad and Tobago.”

So if you are able to identify that there are 215 areas in which our borders are compromised, why have you not taken the steps to have these particular areas manned and controlled so that you do not have illegal influx of individuals or firearms coming into the country? It is not rocket science, Madam Speaker. It is simple commonsense approach that the Government needs to take when it comes to crime. You have identified over 200 weaknesses in our border and you still cannot get it right? You have bought brand-new Cape-class vessels for the coast guard. You tell us that the 360-radar system is working properly, but yet you have thousands of illegal firearms continuously coming through our ports of entry?

Madam Speaker, they boast about we have scanners at the ports. Well, what is taking place at the ports? Because this is a point that the Leader of the Opposition raised, that Customs and Excise falls under the Ministry of Finance. And she has asked that that be placed under the Ministry of National Security and it will make sense for strategic development, Madam Speaker, going forward. Because there's a complete disconnect with both Ministries. If the department of Customs and Excise is placed under the Ministry of National Security, there may be a more synergetic approach when it comes to border security.

Madam Speaker, what I am going to look at is a *Trinidad Guardian* article:

“Customs officers complicit as illegal guns pass through ports”

It is an article dated 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2022, an article coming out of this month. What they are saying is that several Customs officials are in fact facilitating the trade of illegal firearms in Trinidad and Tobago. There are persons doing illegal things—and I am going to quote from the article. This was very, very alarming. And I quote:

“There was a lady customs officer recently who allegedly examined a barrel in Central and said there was nothing and let it go. Incidentally, that barrel had firearms and ammunition. Then there were two other barrels...she”—also—“cleared that police had under surveillance... after that”—and—“she was supposedly transferred from there.’

‘That situation with the female customs officer is really disturbing. There are certainly no proper checks and balances in place. From what we heard in this particular instance, the police later went to the customs officer’s home after she allegedly left the country without seeking the proper permission.’”

So, Madam Speaker, we are seeing that within the persons who are in charge of really managing our border and regulating what comes into our country are in fact complicit in some of these illegal activities that take place. And yet the Government turns a blind eye to this particular issue.

Madam Speaker, when they ask about the scanners at the ports, this is what the article says, and I am quoting again:

“Most of the bonds where these weapons come in do not have a scanner. Only Shed 10 has one in Port of Spain and I can tell you that scanner is not working. Added to that, one of the particular bonds is private and we do not have control over that bond’s opening and closing hours; meaning things can come in and go in even when Customs officers are not there.’”

And Madam Speaker, that is the reality of what is taking place right now, at the Customs and Excise Division. So, I explained how the guns are coming in. We have projected numbers of the total number of guns that are in the country, 12,000, according to the Minister of National Security. One Independent Senator referred to a report saying that there were 32,000 illegal firearms in the country.

But Madam Speaker, let us see the performance of the TTPS now, when it comes to firearms. Over the year 2013 to 2022, there were a total number of 7,368 firearms that were in fact recovered by the TTPS; 7,368 over that period 2013 to 2022. And Madam Speaker, what is shocking is that these are the types of files that are coming in. The high-powered firearms are rifles, machine guns, and submachine guns, of a total of 553 of those firearms.

And then you look at the persons who are arrested for possession of the firearms. Between the ages of 20 to 24, 645 persons. Between the ages 25 to 29, 513 persons. So it shows that they are young people; a lot of young people who in fact in possession of these particular firearms and ammunition.

Let us look at how many persons were murdered between the ages of 16 and 35. According to CAPA, this is statistics out of the TTPS, of the 2,343 individuals murdered, 1,212 were between the ages of 16 to 35, accounting for 52 per cent of all murder victims, 52 per cent. Most of our young people, half of the statistics given by the persons who were murdered because of firearms, were in fact young people between the ages of 16 to 25. So, when I stand here, Madam Speaker, and I say that the Government is failing our young people, the statistics are here to prove my statement. The statistics are here to prove it.

Because Madam Speaker, the young people are dying at the hands of bullets. When a bullet is fired from a firearm, it does not distinguish whether you wear a red jersey or a yellow jersey during election time, you know, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** And then, I want to look at the criminal justice system side of this. Because that plays a very critical and important role. Because criminals will continue to offend where there is no punishment or there is no fear of punishment. Madam Speaker, when you look at the Forensic Science Centre, and this was a question I asked in the Parliament. It is a written answer to question No. 150, the last session. Madam Speaker, there are over 42,000 ballistic reports outstanding at the Forensic Science Centre. There are over 32,784 DNA samples waiting for analysis at the Forensic Science Centre. And then, because of this we learnt that the DNA lab at the Forensic Science Centre was shut down from the period 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018, to the 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2021, Madam Speaker. And nobody told us anything about this. That DNA lab was shut down for three years, Madam Speaker, three years. And then you wonder why matters are taking so long in court.

And you might ask why am I raising this, Madam Speaker. We oftentimes say that the Government will come to say that they are not the one to be blamed for crime. But Madam Speaker, who has the responsibility for the Forensic Science Centre? That falls under the portfolio of the Minister of National Security. So that is their responsibility.

Madam Speaker, the pathology department, there is a position for four forensic pathologists at the centre, only two so far have been filled. We have murders every single day, Madam Speaker, in this country. So, what is really taking place? If you have a properly working criminal justice system with frontloading your cases with DNA, with ballistic evidence, you might engage in proper plea bargaining, so that matters are completed quickly. But rather, this Government decides to play politics with plea bargaining. But Madam Speaker,



that is subject to another debate.

When we look at what is taking place with the SSA, over the years from 2015 to present, since this Government came into power over \$2 billion was spent on the SSA. And what is there to show for that? What is there to show for that? Because the SSA, if it is being used in the right manner, it will be used to gather evidence on criminals. So that law enforcement would be able to predict the moves of the criminals and be able to prevent and suppress some of these criminal activities such as murder. But when you are using SSA and intelligence apparatus to spy on political opponents, you will never achieve the aim of stopping criminals.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** And, Madam Speaker, what the SSA says, in one of their annual reports is very, very alarming in this country, because this is what the SSA says. The SSA says that:

“Despite a number of illegal weapon and ammunition seizures, there remains the unabated import of several updated and even more sophisticated weapons. As such, several gangs now have in their possession weapons, which are automatic.

These need to be destroyed...”

This is SSA.

“as intelligence reports reveal some seized firearms do make it back on to the streets, in the hands of criminals.”

So the SSA, Madam Speaker, what they are saying and confirming is that when weapons are retrieved and seized by law enforcement, somehow those weapons are finding its way back onto the streets. How can a weapon in the custody of the TTPS or any law enforcement authority leave that particular area and find itself back on the streets? And this is the SSA at page 28 of their 2020 report saying

this, Madam Speaker. And yet the Government again turns a blind eye to these issues. They turn a blind eye to these issues, Madam Speaker.

When we look at what is taking place with gangs, because everything in this country, according to the Government, is that gangs are the cause for murders. Gangs are the cause for murders. Well, let us look at what is our situation with respect to gangs in this country. With respect to gangs, again this was a question I asked the Minister of National Security, question 145 for written response. And in 2022, the Minister confirm that there are 134 gangs. He confirmed in 2022 that there is 1,462 gang members. And for the year 2022, having 1,462 gang members, 134 gangs, you only made one charge; one charge under the Anti Gang Act, one.

You would remember a time ago when the former Attorney General, the Member for San Fernando West told us that if the Anti-gang legislation is passed, they know the streets, they know the gangs' name, they know who the gang members are, they are going to "pick up all ah dem, throw dem in jail, prosecute dem." Madam Speaker, where has that gone? The police service is confirming—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** The police service is confirming to this country that there are 1,462 gang members in Trinidad and Tobago and you have arrested or charged only one person, Madam Speaker? That is absolutely unacceptable in this country, because our citizens everyday are being killed because of gangs in this country. What are you really doing? What is the Government doing? Fourteen hundred and sixty-two gang members are roving around this country freely. You have an Anti-Gang Act that is currently the law. You have a TTPS. You have an SSA and you are not arresting these persons and bringing them to justice?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Something is terribly wrong and something does not sit well,

Madam Speaker, at all. It does not sit well.

Imagine you had a man who has had his head severed, found in a drain along a highway and you have no CCTV footage to see that; one of our major thoroughfares in the country? You do not have CCTV footage to see who would have committed that heinous crime, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, do you know the area in which Andrea Bharatt was found and other women were found, that this Government does not see it fit to put CCTV cameras in that area in order to prevent further incidents like that from occurring? It is shameless. It is shameless.

Today, the United Nations commemorate International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. And you would remember when this country went into shock at the deaths of young Andrea Bharatt and Ashanti Riley. The Government came to this Parliament very hurriedly and wanted to pass the pepper spray legislation and amendment to the Firearms Act. Where is the implementation of that particular piece of legislation? Not a single person in this country has access to pepper spray, not in a single person.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** What happen to all the vigils and the marches and the prayers that were held in this country? Has all of that gone in vain? It is about two to three years now that legislation has been passed and not a single person can legally hold pepper spray in this country, not a single person. I cry shame on this Government.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, I cry shame on this Government. They asked us to pass the Evidence Act. We passed the Evidence Act somewhere around 2020 or so. That allowed for the police service to record interviews at police stations, record confessions, admissions, to allow for the admission of CCTV footage into

court, to allow for electronic means for ID parades so that you can increase and better the criminal justice system. Do you know, Madam Speaker, after all of that protection for witnesses under that particular piece of legislation, just last week a state witness was gunned down? No police station right now is using that particular piece of legislation. Because, why? They do not have the equipment. They do not have the recording devices. They do not have the cameras. They do not have the videos. They do not have the necessary equipment in order to properly operationalize that particular piece of legislation. Madam Speaker it is totally unacceptable of the failures of this Government to really deal with the situation of crime.

When you look at the DPP's office, you have vacancies in the DPP's office. You have 50 state prosecutors with only 46 of them working and they are responsible for 39 Summary Courts and nine Criminal High Courts, Madam Speaker. Why are they not hiring more prosecutors in the country?

Madam Speaker, I go back to the point of the CCTV cameras. And in Trinidad and Tobago, there are 1,796 CCTV cameras according to the Minister from an answer given on the 4th of November, 2022. And out of that, 673 of those cameras are nonfunctional. Six hundred and seventy-three are nonfunctional. Madam Speaker, then the Government makes this big announcement that you are going to get an additional 2,500 CCTV cameras. Well, Madam Speaker, I do not believe them. If you cannot manage 1,796 cameras, are we going to trust you to manage 2,500 additional cameras?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Are we going to trust you to do that? For seven years you could not install one brand new camera or fix a camera, and you want to now tell us that you are going to implement 2,500 cameras? Madam Speaker, all of that is just

political waste of time talk by this Government. Madam Speaker, this Minister of National Security is a complete waste of time.

Madam Speaker, I want—[*Interruption*]

**Ms. Ameen:** Madam Speaker [*Inaudible*] obscene language.

**Mr. Hinds:** Obscene language?

**Madam Speaker:** Members.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Shameless.

**Madam Speaker:** Members, if you all want to bring something to my attention you do not do it that way.

**Ms. Ameen:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to bring to your attention the inappropriate language being used by the Member for Laventille West, under 48(4). Thank you very much.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, Minister, if it is that something inappropriate was said, just kindly just withdraw it, if something inappropriate was said.

**Mr. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, I do not consider the description that I used to be obscene nor inappropriate. I thought it was quite appropriate. It may have offended the Member, it may have offended the Member, but I did not consider that, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** So—

**Hon. Members:** [*Continuous crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** No, no. Members, Members, Members, I am on my legs. Okay. But in any event, if it is that you are admitting that it may have been something that may have offended your friend, then just let us, you know, do the noble thing. Let us just withdraw it and let us continue with our very important debate.

**Mr. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, my friend should equally apologize to me. My

friend offended me as well.

**Madam Speaker:** So, the point is that you did not raise something and I am not going to stand here and engage in a tit-for-tat. Okay? I have said to all Members at times before that an eye for an eye will make all of us blind. Okay? I know you to be a very noble gentleman, and, therefore—

**Hon. Members:** [*Continuous crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** You see, this is why we get nowhere. And, therefore, I mean, let us just do the noble thing and let us get on with it.

**Mr. Hinds:** In deference to you Madam Speaker, and with the dignity to be accorded to you and this honorable House and the nation of Trinidad and Tobago, I withdraw the comment that offended the thin-skinned—

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you for being so noble. And I just want to say to all Members, while we sit here, the Member for Baratavia/San Juan has brought something to this House that is dear to all our hearts and to our constituents. Let us stop taunting each other and afford each other the respect and the dignity that each other deserves, and that this type of debate deserves. Member, please continue.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I just want to say you have five minutes left of speaking time. That would be your full time.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** I oblige, please.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, the behaviour of the Member for Laventille West reminds me of a statement that the Member for Oropouche East made. He said wisdom is often chasing the Minister. But I think he is a bit faster than wisdom.

Madam Speaker, I want to look at some of the statements that the Minister

would have been making. Minister, you will have your chance to speak. There are some statements that the Minister made in the public domain. And Madam Speaker, I want to just go through some of these statements very quickly, because these are not my words. The *Trinidad Express* editorial on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 2022 responded to the Minister when he spoke and made comments about what took place at the Rose Hill Primary School. And he said that the children were never at any peril of any physical danger. This is how the *Trinidad Express* described the Minister. And I quote:

“How dense could Minister Hinds be to have clearly missed the point of the public’s pain arising as a direct result of this incident?—the shock and outrage at seeing pupils in such a situation of deep instant trauma.”

Not my words. These are the words of the *Trinidad and Tobago Express*. Then the Minister says Madam Speaker, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022:

“No, my duty is not to ensure that people feel safe and secure”

This is coming from the Minister of National Security. Madam Speaker, any Minister of National Security who says that should have been fired a long time ago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** He should have been fired. That is an admission and an abdication of the responsibility of the Minister of National Security to ensure that our citizens are safe.

Madam Speaker, then he says on the 10th May, 2022:

“Crime ‘horrendous’ but I won’t resign”

Minister of National Security, the citizens are outside asking for you to please resign.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** And, Madam Speaker, then the Prime Minister is telling the country do not cover up for your criminal relatives. Madam Speaker, there is a video that was on social media with the Minister of National Security on a mike telling people that if your find a gun, “call de police but doh tell dem who gun it is yuh know”. But the Prime Minister is telling people in this country disclose who the criminal relatives are, while the Minister of National Security is telling you, you do not really have to say who it is. Madam Speaker, concealing evidence and harbouring criminals is an offense in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** He should have been fired for that statement. And then Madam Speaker, the Minister of Public Utilities is in public saying if we change the Minister of National Security, that will not solve crime. Madam Speaker, I agree. We must change the entire Government.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, foreign countries are warning their citizens not to come here. You have people afraid to go out at night. Madam Speaker, Christmas is quickly approaching. This is a time of high economic activities. People will be robbed. The Government needs to get serious and tell us what they are going to do to arrest this crime situation. And, Madam Speaker, if they cannot do that then they must resign. Because as the Prime Minister said, when he was the Leader of the Opposition, if the Government cannot deal with crime, then the Government is part of the problem, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, while I conclude I may have just a few seconds, I want to say that we must decentralize the Ministry of National Security, use technology, manage the human resources, use proper intelligence, improve the



criminal justice system, create jobs and have a proper social security net, a holistic approach to the fight against crime, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I noted your comment at the beginning of this sitting, but it is my respectful view and the view of my constituents that crime is always an urgent, definite matter of public importance. I thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** This Motion requires a seconder.

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, I second the Motion by the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and I reserve my right to speak at a later time.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Motion being seconded, I shall now propose the question for debate.

*Question proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise today to respond, as best as one can, to this flimsy Motion coming from the Member for Barataria/San Juan. Madam Speaker, this Motion in its second recital talks about the failure of the government to manage:

“the organs responsible for national security, law and order”

You hear those words? The organs responsible for.

I have said in this Parliament before that as a Minister of Government I owe a constitutional responsibility to the Cabinet. I owe a constitutional responsibility to the Parliament. I owe a responsibility to my constituents and the people of Trinidad and Tobago who we represent. And I try to draw a distinction between that constitutional responsibility and my own passion, care, love for the security, the safety of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, including myself. And the

difference between that position and the organs, as stated by the mover of this Motion, who are responsible for, same word responsible, but a different connotation. Yet the Member ended his contribution with trying to criticize me for what I did not say, and uses the same construction. That is why I told you it is flimsy, unsupported with any level of intellect, and ought to be disregarded.

**3.30 p.m.**

The other part of the Motion, Madam Speaker, and other recitals, talks about the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has been progressively under-resourced and not equipped to respond effectively to the threat of widespread crime.

I had a conversation up to last night with the Commissioner of Police as I often, as I regularly do, and specifically asked him, as I did the previous Commissioner at some point, whether it could be truthfully said that the police organization was without the resources that it needed to effectively carry out its job. And both men in their own different ways would have said to me, and I am sure they are both listening, that it cannot be so said. There will always be a need for more resources but the problems are not about resources.

And in fact, the current Commissioner when I pressed further, he identified the issues that he as professional police, he as the leader of the police organization, interpreted as the major challenges to responding to crime, none of which was about the lack of resources. So where did this flimsy Motion come from? This—if I may be permitted a colloquialism, exposed, wet behind the ear, not a technical police expert or person, Member for Baratavia/San Juan.

Madam Speaker, first of all, talking about organs, national security consists among others of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, one, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force; the Fire Service; the Prison Service; Immigration; the SSA, an intelligence gathering agency under law; TOCU that is to say, the

Transnational Organized Crime Unit; the Customs, under the Ministry of Finance; the CDA, Chaguaramas Developmental Authority, with very important responsibilities in so far as our border is concerned, particularly on the western peninsula, Chaguaramas.

And there is cohesion between all of these agencies including the Customs, and the CDA, and others. Information-sharing and deep collaboration as we take a multi-agency approach to dealing with this problem in Trinidad and Tobago. We have as well, the National Operational Fusion Centre which conceptually and in practice is the nerve centre, the epicentre of the entire national security platform, where collaboration, training, response to different crises are managed.

We have border security, again, a multi-agency approach to that. I would have told this Parliament recently we engage in two international corporation agreements in AIRCOP and SEACOP, applying and replicating a model in Trinidad and Tobago for the airports and the sea ports that is now established in many countries around the world, sharing. And in Trinidad and Tobago we have the Joint Maritime Control Unit. These are the organs.

In so far as the management, as the third recital goes, of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, let me say to the young Member for Barataria/San Juan, unwary as he is. The management of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is very, very diffuse. That is the way I will put it. It involves the Police Service Commission which treats with the appointment of a Deputy Commissioner and a Commissioner of Police, they hire them. We know nothing about what they do. They produce a result which comes to this Parliament for our consideration. You hear all about merit list, I have never seen one in my life, neither has the Prime Minister, with all of the "schupid" talk.

**Mr. Hosein:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** With all of the “schupid” talk you hear in this country from time to time. And the police service—

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, 48(4), I believe that word is an unparliamentary word that the Minister would have used.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** “Look nah.”

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, Minister, what I would say is find another word. Okay, please.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Okay, Madam Speaker, stupid talk. Since he “doh like it”.

**Madam Speaker:** Not so much that the Member does not like it. The Member has raised a point of order—

**Hon. F. Hinds:** “Ole talk, ole talk”, Madam Speaker. “Ole talk.”

**Madam Speaker:** And you know, we really owe some respect also to our constituents out there.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Okay.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** “Ole talk, rah rah,” talk, talk without knowledge, without information, just empty talk.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** And they are also responsible, that is to say the Police Service Commission, for treating with appeals coming from police tribunals in matters of discipline for breaches of their Standing Orders, and breaches of police regulations and what have you. And then the police service is also in part, this is why I say it is diffuse, managed by the Commissioner of Police who hires, and disciplines, and promotes all other ranks other than his own, and that of the Deputy Commissioner of Police. From Assistant Commissioner to the last joined recruit. And then the police service is accountable to the Minister in the context of the Government's

policy dispensation to it. And the Minister ensures that it carries out the Government's policy though its operational function is entirely a matter for the Police Commissioner.

And then you have the National Security Council, a policymaking body to which the police and other arms of the national security platform are also accountable, a subcommittee of the Cabinet. And the police are also accountable so called, so put, to the Constitution, they have to follow closely the constitutional law. When they do not, there are sanctions coming on a daily basis in the courthouse.

They are accountable to the law generally, apart from the Constitution the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago. Not the least, the Police Service Act, Chap. 15:01. They are accountable that way to the courts. They are accountable in some ways to the DPP. There are many decisions that Parliamentary laws tell the police you have to get the opinion, the advice, the clearance of the DPP before you proceed, and where that does not exist they routinely consult with the DPP in relation to some matters. They are accountable to the Police Complaints Authority just as well, which has the purview for dealing with corruption and serious misconduct on the part of the police.

All of those reasons are why I say, the management of the police service is very diffuse. So to talk about the Government managing the police service is again a very linear, narrow, simplistic misunderstanding of our reality. Not surprising from the Member for Baratavia/San Juan, who has just come to this Parliament, mouthing off loudly as his colleagues do without taking a little time to read and to learn about the history of this country, and to learn about the matters of the Parliament, before making yourself large? Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Hosein:** [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, just withdraw that.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** One minute please. Just withdraw that.

**Mr. Hosein:** [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** Thanks, let us get to it.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, we have taken several steps to ensure that there is cohesion among all the different arms of national security as I have explained, and so that continues.

One such collaborative effort is the business of the CCTV cameras. I have answered questions around that on many occasions in this Parliament, and all I can say to the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and the Member for Naparima, again, is that when you file a question about how many cameras and how many are in use, that is on a particular day. The day after they could have fixed five. The day after three more could have gone down for some reason, a criminal could have shot one.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What is it now?

**Hon. F. Hinds:** All of those things. Hear the Member for Siparia, “What is it now? What is it now”? I will tell you what it is just now, if you could hear.

**Madam Speaker:** So one minute, the debate is not this way. Please, some of us maybe need to wear a little earmuffs. Please continue your conversation directed to the Chair.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you very much Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Siparia, I am certain you are entitled to join this debate when you wish, and I am sure you will raise many points. So if you could really await that opportunity which you will get as soon as you catch my eye.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** But just to answer the Member, I will say 19. Madam Speaker, I was talking about the cameras, and I was talking about collaborative effort. All the

arms of national security come to bear in terms of where they should be located and so on and so on, based on their needs and so on, and that is done. And we told this the country recently that answers are along the way now to bring on board even more, more modern applications and therefore we will certainly see an improvement in that regard.

Madam Speaker, you hear the Member for Barataria/San Juan, I can tell you, recently the Ministry of National Security in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service hosted a forensic science symposium. And that was as recent as February past, where we dealt with issues of DNA, and the use of the science of DNA, and ballistic technologies to improve our crime-fighting, crime management systems. And the scientific method in a world of organized crime, in a world where people are afraid to be witnesses, not now, that is happening a long time ago. Twenty-five years ago when I came to this Parliament that was an issue. They were killing witnesses before preliminary enquiries. We amended the Evidence Act over and over again to deal with new developments. But the Member for Barataria/San Juan has just come, he does not know this. And as I told you, he did not take time to learn anything, read anything. So he thinks like Christopher Columbus because he did not know that the world was round, it was flat. And because he did not know that we were here, he felt that he discovered us.

So Madam Speaker, we had a symposium where we taught, we shared with the police the business of identifying new and synthetic drugs. Some of the old drugs like opium and heroin, and cocaine, and marijuana, and so on. They are now making new psychoactive substances and using precursor chemicals, and they present these like little sweets and lollies and Chubbies and all kinds of little—not Chubbies, “jub-jubs” and all kinds of little creative ways to fool the children. They are manufacturing marijuana now in laboratories, changing the construction of

them and making the THCs far more potent so when young people use them it runs the risk of sending them stark raving mad. And we shared with the police in that seminar and a total of 28 officers across several law enforcement and protective service agencies benefited in that seminar. We taught them about some of the trends and the marketing methods and all of this. Fentanyl and all of these strange drugs that are about the place now, Madam Speaker.

And Madam Speaker, we also shared with the police, improvements and the way in which modern police should continue to proceed along the lines of ballistic technologies, and they have been doing that. I heard the Member for Barataria/San Juan talk about detection rate. What the Member does not realize is that there has been an improvement, but he does not read, he does not take time to learn.

Only yesterday in the *Guardian* newspaper, *Guardian*, the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2022, there is a story, I think it was page three, headline:

“...Top Cop expecting ‘steady flow’ of solved...”—cases, as six more persons were charged for murder.

And the Police Commissioner went on to explain that there was a murder of a police officer, a PC Lashley, may his soul rest in peace, and may his family be comforted. Within a week, the police were able to arrest two persons and charge them for murder among the six. And let me quote the Commissioner if you may permit me. He said that he is confident that more murders will be solved by police officers. His optimism comes after six persons were charged with murder over the last 48 hours, including two for the murder of the policeman in Tobago. A total of 25 murder charges were laid in just the last month.

What the Member for Barataria/San Juan does not know is that the police organization pulled together some retirees led by a batch of mine, who was a crack shot in homicide, and these retirees work with active police officers, serving



officers, in what they call the Cold Case Unit. Cases that might have been there for 15/20 years unsolved. And they are dealing with these cases, re-interviewing people, checking up on witnesses again, checking up on suspects. Using most of all the modern methods, the scientific methods as I have just told you, ballistics, DNA, the biological techniques, and they have been solving these murders. That did not happen between 2010 and 2015. That is happening now and the Commissioner is as a result confident that we will see what was a trickle becoming a flow and I am equally confident because I know the science will work. I have seen it.

We took 21 police officers because they were complaining of shortage of resources in the Forensic Science Centre, and a wise decision was taken to take 21 officers and cause them to be trained in these scientific methods, particularly in the line of ballistics, and then as firearm and tool mark examiners. And when that was completed they were sent to the Forensic Science Centre where they now are. So you would have heard the Member talk about how many thousands of backlog cases. That little team has cleared up about 1,500 of them within recent months, and are now better able to trace the sources of weapons and which weapon is used in which crime from the ballistic testing and that is assisting the police. I can bear testimony to that. And I take credit to some extent along with the work of Almighty God and those professional officers in the Forensic Science Centre and the police. We just took a decision that we will rearrange some things, do things differently. And now, the Homicide Bureau of the police service are reporting to me and the Commissioner, as Minister, when they had an opportunity recently, that things are ticking over nicely. Not perfect, but the result is as you heard the Commissioner say in this article, let the Member for Barataria/San Juan "take dat".

But you see, there are people this country, Madam Speaker, sadly enough,

sickly enough, who celebrate crime and celebrate murder when it is happening under some other government. Celebrate it. There are people who celebrate it. They are happy to see it. Quite apart from the fact that people are crying and suffering out there. You hear them every day singing off the top of their voices "how much murders, how much murders, how much murders". Well, that would not solve it, you know. It is action like I have just described that will deal with it, and that is what we are all about.

We are having discussions and we are working with UNLIREC, an international agency in the areas of serial number restoration. Some criminals take off the serial numbers from the weapons, and there are ways to restore that to know where it came from, who was the manufacturer, who was the distributor in the country from where it came, who purchased it in Trinidad and Tobago, and if you cannot tell that, when it ends up on a crime scene we were able to do it. And he did mention because I raised it here some time ago, 7,500-and-something firearms confiscated, and we are in the process of destroying them. I cut the first one symbolically a few weeks ago at the police academy.

And then the Member asked very, very naively, "How could firearms get from law enforcement into the hands of criminals"? The Member is a Johnny come lately? I can tell you, when I was a police officer at the Police Training College as an instructor in the police, we had a case where a police officer on the west gate, he would be posted there for duty and his friend or friends would come and he made his firearm available to them to go and commit crime. It is when they went and committed crime the police caught them in the crime, and then we realized it is a police gun. And I am talking now about 1970-something

And he does not know, he did not even ask the Member for Siparia who would know and would not teach him that 42 guns went missing from the Trinidad

and Tobago Forensic Science Centre. They are exempted from having the need for an FUL in the Firearms Act. And they are guns there for ballistic testing, 42 of them went missing on one occasion when that government was in power. And the Member for Barataria/San Juan would come here today and ask, "How could guns get from illegal hands into—" he asked that. Yes. And guns are in the hands of criminals for other reasons too, you know.

We have reports of people who were charged for criminal offences in this country, have guns, licensed guns. So everybody is talking about crime, crime, crime, but Madam Speaker, my question like Peter Tosh in a wonderful song that I love, asks, "Everybody talking about crime, but tell me who are the real criminals"?

I told you here before, Madam Speaker, with all the talk you are hearing about crime and Motion filed here today, you would never hear the Member for Siparia or any one of them mention the name Krishna Lalla or SIS.

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, 48(1) please. What is the relevance of any of this to this debate? This is a Motion on crime.

**Madam Speaker:** Well, maybe we will see in a little while. Okay. I am giving the Member some leeway.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Not once. We have a criminal investigation taking place—let me teach him who I am talking about crime. We have a criminal investigation taking place as we speak in a matter called LifeSport that started when the Member for Siparia was Prime Minister of this country, still going on. I saw a Member of Parliament resign as a Minister of Government and a Member of Parliament for that crime. This is a crime debate. And the first opportunity, "de matter eh finish yet, yuh know" the chips still up in the air, but the Member for Siparia brought back that Member in the very Parliament again. That is why I tell you, everybody

is talking about crime, crime, but tell me who are the real criminals.

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, 48(6). No member shall impute improper motives to any other Member of the House.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Improper?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Of course, that is what you just did.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, improper? I appeared before a joint select committee of this Parliament recently, and I had to sit there and listen to the Member of Parliament who is a member of that Committee for Oropouche East asking me questions about crime.

**Madam Speaker:** So Member, Minister of National Security, you have five minutes.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** One minute please.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** You have five minutes left of ordinary speaking time.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** You are entitled to an additional 15 minutes to complete your contribution.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** If you so wish.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I so wish.

**Madam Speaker:** Please proceed.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Everybody talking about crime but tell me who are the real criminals. And I could tell you, as Chairman of that joint select committee, Madam Speaker, a police commissioner at that time came before the joint select

committee and told us that a certain member of Parliament, who is now asking me questions, was being followed by the police for collaborating with a group of criminals, and apparently got a tip off which is a crime, and desisted from going to the meeting. And then called the Commissioner of Police after to find out what that was all about. There is more to be said but not now.

And as I say not now, I remember Jack Warner who was a Minister of National Security, appointed by the Member for Siparia. And when he was so appointed the world knew of him, the world wanted him. And today, we are seeing that in plainer terms, in terms of developments last week. The Member for Siparia took him and put him in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, but everybody talking about crime, crime. Tell me who are the real criminals.

And when I mentioned Krishna Lalla a while ago, that was a case where the day after elections in 2015 that person, that businessman left Trinidad, never to come back, \$120 million of his property is caught up in legal action, the Government forfeited it as we speak.

And I am moving on from that. All I could tell you in conclusion, is that every year while the Member for Siparia was Prime Minister, she had truckloads of toys giving out. Since Krishna Lalla has gone, no more toys. But everybody talking about crime but tell me who are the real criminals.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, contrary to the question of resources, I can tell you in 2019 the Ministry—the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service was allocated two billion—sorry. The police service was allocated \$2.08 billion. In 2020, 2.3; in 2021, it decreased slightly from 2.369 to 2.339. But it increased again in fiscal 2022, where their allocation was \$2.393 billion, and for 2023 the police allocation is \$2.531 billion, increase. But yet you hear the Member for Barataria/San Juan

under the inspiration, and under the hand of the Member of Siparia talking about resources.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** And “ah doh” want to say who Devant Maharaj says is her advisor, but that is a talk for another time. The police service recruited 300 new recruits in the last fiscal year, 300. I attended their passing out parade about six weeks ago and delivered feature address remarks to the trainees.

Madam Speaker, in terms of vehicles for the police service, last year, a few months ago, the Cabinet authorized and purchased 80 brand new vehicles of various types for the police service, and recently, an additional 31 vehicles. And as I speak to you an additional 24 is being sourced. And by January or February we expect another 66 or 69 vehicles, and those vehicles are to support some strategic patrols that have been instituted by the police leadership, Police Commissioner and his team. And he, the Police Commissioner, reporting to me because I do not function operationally, I function at the policy, resource providing, policy-directing level. And the Police Commissioner is reporting that these patrols are of significant impact in the national community. Hence the reason why you are seeing more confrontations between law enforcement and lawbreakers, criminals.

Transnational crime is afflicting us and therefore international collaboration is critical. We collaborate deeply with the United States, our friend. We collaborate with the UK. A month ago, I had the permission of the Cabinet to go to the UK with the Commissioner of Police and another head in national security, we spent one week, and we toured their training academy, their command centre, the North Hampshire Command Centre. We toured the National Crime Agency, MI6. We went to various institutions. We went to their firearm registry to see how they do it, to infuse one's mind with modern best practices.

**4.00 p.m.**

And the Commissioner and I vowed, and we have already begun to implementing those to strengthen the police. And talking about strengthen, two nights ago, I visited—two evenings ago, I visited and left after dark the Police Academy, where I say sometimes to my friends I was born because I became a man there. I joined at age 18. And we toured the Police Academy to see the library which was not there when I was there. Police officers are now going there and studying all kinds of things, methods of policing. I went to the mock crime scene platform. They have a house, offices, they have moot court. And when I see and I listened from the police what they are doing, I realized that what they are doing is strengthening the police organization. It is like going in the gym and every day they are lifting weights, they building muscle. So not everyone would see it but I am confident that they are building muscle. And therefore, Madam Speaker, if you would allow me that metaphor, they are getting stronger and stronger to be able to resist the modern methods of crime, transnational crime, that they face.

We collaborate with Canada. We collaborate with the region through Caricom IMPACS, regular meetings. And in a couple of days I have, as Minister, another consulate meeting, meetings of Ministers of National Security in the Caricom region. Today, an issue developed and I was able to make contact with the police in Grenada and feedback suggests they are on the job to assist this country. We collaborate and in that collaboration, there is intelligence sharing in this transnational crime platform that is so critical.

And training: every single day, this Minister of National Security signs off on police officers of all ranks, members of the defence force of all ranks, the prison service, immigration, to go to get best practice training in other parts of the world,

and they are expected to come home and apply that training into the system, and that is happening.

They share equipment too. They assist in their donor manifestation. We actually have in Trinidad and Tobago something we did not have when the UNC was in government, but the Prime Minister and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago pushed very hard to the US and now we have the ATF officer in Trinidad and Tobago, one of them; Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms a special unit in the US working closely with us in Trinidad. The DEA is here on the ground; the FBI, because we have a lot of movement between Trinidad and Tobago and the United States. The HSI, the Homeland Security people, they are here. And we collaborate and we work, and they work very closely with our TOCU, as I call them, and the thing is happening.

You would have seen, Madam Speaker, some successful raids on certain warehouses recently. I heard the Member for Barataria/San Juan talked about border security, does not understand anything about it.

**Hon. Member:** You do?

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Of course, I do.

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Of course, I do. So when he asked sheepishly, “How come guns end up in the hands and we have such—if we have radar working 360 and we have radar, it working perfectly, how come illegal firearms coming in here?” And he would have heard us say that even our legal ports of entry are used by corrupt officials and corrupt citizens, because we do have corruption. And if they look shocked, I will tell them we had it in Cabinet in this country, in other Cabinets, not in my own.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]



**Hon. Member:** It started from Balisier House.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** And I am reading with great interest about the Merida Initiative, an initiative between the US Government and Mexico because of their proximity, obviously. And because of serious crime challenges, international crime, human trafficking, gun and drug smuggling, they went into this Merida Initiative, which apparently from the reports is working particularly well, and I am studying it very closely.

And, Madam Speaker, without letting too much tales out of school, I propose to approach my colleagues of the Cabinet for consideration of matters of this nature and possibly, if I can win their concurrence, to ask whether we could become a part of this effective international corporation to deal with real problems. Problems around wanting to disrupt the capacity of organized crime to operate; pillar two, to institutionalize capacity to sustain the rule of law; pillar three, to create a 21<sup>st</sup> Century border structure because we have to make improvements to our own as an island state; and pillar four, building strong and resilient communities, something through the GRACE programme, a gang reduction programme we are now collaborating with United States in. This is to make the communities more resilient.

My colleagues who will speak after me in this debate will demonstrate more fully the whole-of-government and the whole-of-society approach we will take. You will hear the Ministry of Education, you will hear the Minister of Youth Development and National Service, you will hear all of my colleagues demonstrating, as they will have time to do, how we take a whole-of-government approach to this, with a focus on the young people in this country, and a whole-of-society approach too.

At 5.00 a.m. two mornings ago, I had a meeting at my office, Madam Speaker—yes, 5.00 a.m. Because when a societal group made contact with me and told me that the matter they wanted to raise was sufficiently urgent, and I looked at my calendar and I saw on that day it was chockablock, and I would have no time, at least before 9.00 p.m., I then suggested to them, may we meet at 5.00 a.m., and they agreed and we met and collaborated. And I was so pleased to see the consciousness, the security consciousness on the part of this group and pledged that we will continue to work together, and we will. So we do not only take a whole-of-government, we take a whole-of-society approach in dealing with this.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan is an attorney-at-law by profession, like me. And, Madam Speaker, he understands, I presume, the impact of the criminal justice system on what we are trying to achieve in national security. Because the police would arrest after investigation and all of those things in accordance with the law but eventually, the matters end up in the court, in the criminal justice system and we need collaboration and support there too. And I must tell you, I am very encouraged we are seeing that we are getting a lot of that. A lot of room for improvement but we continue.

This Government, using this Parliament, within recent times brought a number of pieces of legislation here. These legislations, some of them were not new, existing on the books, but as the crime situation evolves and new practices, new perversions come on the scene, then we react to it. So we had an amendment to the Sexual Offences Act. We passed the anti-gang law, watered down as it was because they would not lend support. And to correct the Member for Barataria/San Juan, the police are using that law and are arresting and charging people and it is far more than one. The Firearms (Amdt.) Bill, we did that. The Administration of Justice (DNA) (Amdt.) Bill, Domestic Violence Act, Interception of

Communications (Amdt.) Bill, Bail (Amdt.) Bill, Dangerous Drugs Act, Anti-Terrorism Act, prohibition of scratch bombs, Family and Children Division Act, all of these pieces of law we came to this Parliament and asked this Parliament's support to amend in the protection, the safety, the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. We do that.

Recently, when we had this abomination in the country, telephone wires being cut, people's gates being taken away, manhole covers being taken, this Government intervened decisively. We told the country we knew it was an industry and we knew that not all in the industry was involved in that wicked act of corruption and stealing, but we knew we had to intervene and we did that. We banned it, we stopped it and we told them that we will fix it. We met with them this morning, as the Attorney General told us in a press conference, a very successful meeting and we are well on the way to regulating that industry.

Madam Speaker, I was telling you about the Cold Case Unit before I close. In 2022, 67 murders they solved. For 2021—that is old murders. From 2021, they solved in this year 14 of them. In 2022, they solved—yeah. From 2022, they solved four of them, cold case—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:**—yeah, cold cases I am talking about. From 2019, sorry, four; from 2015, one; from 2016, two. So this Cold Case Unit, they are engaged in rehashing the evidence, looking at it and doing the business.

Madam Speaker, as I conclude, it is simply not correct to say that the police organization is underfunded. The Police Commissioner will bear testimony otherwise. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago takes its responsibility particularly seriously, Madam Speaker, and we are on the job in the business of

protecting the safety, the security of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I thank you,

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Siparia.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join in this debate today. And may I say, contrary to the view of the last speaker, the Minister, who termed the contribution of the Member for Barataria/San Juan as flimsy, I want to congratulate our MP, Saddam Hosein, on his contribution on the Motion before this House.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And if I may refresh our memories with respect to the Motion itself, Ma'am, thank you:

“Whereas it is Government’s responsibility to ensure the public safety and security of the citizenry;

And whereas the Government has failed in his management of the organs responsible for national security, law and order and has been unable to provide for safety and security of citizens resulted in massive increases in serious crimes;

And whereas the...”—TTPS—“has been progressively under-resourced, and not equipped to respond effectively to the threat of widespread crime;

And whereas there has been...”—a—“continuous increase in the murder toll with a corresponding breakdown in the criminal justice system;

Whereas Government has failed to present a clear and effective anti-crime plan to deal with this...situation;

Whereas Government has contributed to the disturbing crime situation as a result of 7 years of neglect in education, trading opportunities, rising unemployment, and a total breakdown of the social safety net;

And whereas thousands of citizens and businesses have been negatively affected by the high level of crime in..."—T&T—

Be it resolved that this House condemn Government for its failure to effectively address the unacceptable and serious crime level affecting law abiding citizens."

Madam Speaker, after listening to the flimsy contribution of the hon. Minister of National Security, I am still convinced that this resolution of this Motion is of good worth for debate in this House, and that the resolution should be adopted to condemn the Government because the Minister has provided no plans, no policy, nothing to give comfort to a beleaguered population when it comes to crime.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And if it is the Minister thinks that right now, as we are looking at murder numbers—I think the hon. Member, MP Saddam Hosein, mentioned 352. When I looked at my phone, WhatsApp, people messaging, at 1.30 p.m., it was 340-something.

**Hon. Members:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Now it is three, five—

**Hon. Members:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** In other words, Sir, as we speak, the numbers keep coming in as increasing. And the Minister asked that we must look at the

history. And when we look at the history, the history records that every time the PNM is in power crime increases. Every single time.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I have the stats but I do not need to go through it. We are all aware that every time—in fact, immediately after the 2015 election, there is an article reported in one of the newspapers where a professor is saying that, in that one month 20 murders took place; 20, taking the murder toll up immediately after the PNM came into office. And each year we have seen the numbers keep on increasing. So, Minister Hinds, the young persons who have been murdered, the children, the woman being murdered, that is not flimsy, that is cause for serious concern.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** When a 13-year-old gets gunned down, that is not flimsy, that is cause for concern. So to brand the contribution as a “flimsy contribution” is to really, you know, not do justice to people, to families who are bereaved families, those who are suffering from the onslaught of crime in their families, in their neighbourhoods, in their communities. And therefore, hon. Minister, you talk about, you have action; you talk that, you are not to be in the operations, that you are doing policy, but you have brought nothing here with respect to policy. And that is what is happening is the PNM, their brand, their rulebook is always find someone else to blame, blame somebody else.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Recently, the Prime Minister talked about in families you must bring in the criminals and you must do whatever with the guns. Blame someone else. So, the Minister is saying, “Look, it is not me,”—wash his hands, wash your hands. “It is not me”—Pontius Pilate—“Not me because it is the

TTPS who has to do operations, my job is policy.” Where is the policy? You talked about, you have resourced the police; you are collaborating internationally, locally, regionally, and so on; you recruited more police; you have given them more vehicles, and none of it seems to be working. So you have to change your mindset and your thinking, with this hands-off approach.

When you say it is not for you or for the Government to deal with operations, if the operations are not working, you have to come in and deal with it. And how can you do it? You do it through the Parliament, through legislation. You do it through policy guidelines. Yes, you cannot go and appoint a WPC, you do not go and appoint a reserve police officer and so on, yes, I agree you cannot do those things but you must be able to do those things that will bring the crime rate down. We did it. We have a track record. We brought the crime rate down to the lowest ever in decades.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** We brought the murder rate down, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, Minister talking about “ole” talk and I think all that contribution, with the greatest respect, was just talk and no action, “ole” talk.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I always talk about NATO. I had a friend who used to say, “NATO, no action, talk only.” Because whatever you are doing, it is not working. Therefore, you have to rethink, reset, begin again because everything you told me and told us today is not working.

So, CCTV cameras. Minister talked about MP Saddam Hosein raising the issue of CCTV cameras and he said, “Well, when I gave that answer, it had to do with on a particular day and it changes day by day.” So, I asked the hon. Minister—well, across the floor—“Well, tell us then, what is it today? How many

are working? How many are functional? How many are not?" I heard 19. I do not know what that means, it just came across in the crosstalk. So he still has not told us. Have you remedied that situation since the question was asked in Parliament to your good self? You answered it about the CCTV cameras. Has something changed?

So when the Minister was asked here in April, he indicated in response to a question from the Opposition that almost half of the CCTV cameras were not working. The Minister said there were 1,796 CCTV cameras installed throughout T&T. The Minister said of this number, 1,063 were fully functional, with 733 considered be either not fully functional or non-functional. The Minister was unable to say if the 733 cameras were in hotspot areas. So, that is the state of play then in April, so what is it now? Has this been rectified? Have you improved on any? Have you made them functional out of the number 733 that were not functional? So just across the floor to mention that MP Hosein talked about CCTV cameras is not good enough. Has anything improved? Have you done anything to better that situation?

And I remembered the tragedy of the death of our daughter of our soil, Andrea Barrett—may her soul rest in peace—I remember that, when it was reported that the CCTV cameras were not functional in that area. And if they were, we would have been able to have a better understanding of what happened. We might have even been able to prevented what happened. So, has that camera been repaired since then? Has any of the 733 been repaired? The Minister needs to tell us, someone on that side must tell us. It is not good enough to come here and say you are collaborating and somebody, you have more TTPS and, I would say, blame someone. Okay?



So this Government now comes and is to blame the TTPS. "It is not us," he said it again today, "We do not deal with operations, we deal with policy. And therefore, what is a beleaguered nation in the throes of this crime crisis, what are we to believe and what are we to do, turn around and blame the police officer? I will not do that. The buck stops with the Government. They are in charge and they are responsible.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The TTPS are functionaries of the State, but you are the Government and it for you to make the policy directions that will better guide and assist the police officers.

And we come now to the gang legislation the Minister spoke about. You know, Sir, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he talks about the gang legislation. The Minister, the former AG, Member for San Fernando West had told this Parliament when we came to deal with the law relating to gangs, boasted over 2,000 gang members, "We know who they are, we know their addresses, just pass the law and we will lock them up, we will bring them to justice." You know, our Member filed a question in the Parliament, which was answered in this Parliament. The question filed by, I think MP Saddam Hosein, asking for—question 145 to the Minister of National Security, the estimated number of gang members at September 2015—February 2022, total gang members: 1,056, 2020; 2019, 2,484; 2018, 2,484; 2017, 2,484; 2016, 2,038; 2015, 1,084.

And out of these the question was asked, how many of these persons— any of these persons over the time have been charged? How many were charged? And it tells us in this year of 2022, when Act No. 4 of 2021, which is the Anti-Gang Act, that the Government brought and watered down because we would not give them the special majority at that time—we had given it before they had not dealt

with the problem so, obviously, the law was not working. And we are told in this answer to this question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one; one. Number of charges laid under the Anti-Gang Act, one, 2022, one. So, obviously, that too is not working. You brought that as a be all and end all to end gang-related crimes and I believe the TTPS has said over 90 per cent of the crimes are committed—murders are committed by gang members. So, that is not working, what do you do then? What do you do? And you cannot come, as I said, and wash your hands and tell us it is not for you to get the TTPS to do their work. They are doing their work. But then you say you resourced them and, again, that is not true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at the resources given for National Security, you have dropped it by half. From 2015/2016, over \$10.8 billion down to 2023, 5.7, you cut it by half. So do not come here and pretend you are resourcing National Security because you have cut it by half, from over \$10 billion, down to your last estimates in 2023—we just did the budget not too long ago—to \$5.7 billion. So that too is not true. So you will have people believe, you want the country to believe, “We are resourcing the TTPS, we are resourcing all agencies of National Security,” when the truth is further from anything you have said because you have cut it down by over \$5 billion.

The Motion talks about under-resourcing. So it is not good enough to come and tell us—quoting the figures. You have to tell us where it was and what you have done with it, and what you have done given on your own books, filed in this Parliament, laid in this Parliament by the Minister of Finance, all those estimates, you have cut it by half for 2023. So what joy do we have? Resourcing? No. Policies and programmes to deal with crime? No. We have none of those. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are some issues off the top of my head I wanted to raise, it is the gangs, the CCTV in response to some issues raised by the Minister.

Now, what I see Government's plan to be—because we were hoping today to hear about an anti-crime plan, to hear about your policies going forward, and we heard nothing about that; nothing. So what is the rulebook? First of all, say nothing. The Government's rulebook, one—rule one, say nothing. In January 2016, a *Newsday* editorial titled, “Worrying silence”, knocked the PNM Government for its deafening silence in the face of a serious spike in murders, and I quote from that editorial:

This Government, when in Opposition, was highly critical of the then administration for its “vaps” and “vaille que vaille” approach to the crime situation.

It continues:

The shoe being now placed on the other foot, Dr. Rowley and his team must know that the patience of the same people who voted for them overwhelmingly is wearing thin.

This is in January 2016, eh, just mere months after that 2015 election. The editorial continues:

We will not be unfair and say that we expected them to have dented situation more significantly.

It continues:

But silence in the face of rampant lawlessness can well result in the belief that they do not know what to do.

We fast forward to October 2022, a month or so ago, and it is an outraged *Express* editorial captioned, “Silence as crime soars”, that blasted lack of a response from government as rivers of innocent blood continued to flow. I quote from that editorial, October 2022:

“The Government’s complete disconnect from the nation’s prevailing state of fear over crime can only mean it has given up and decided to leave the public to fend for itself against criminals. With the murder toll just days away from crossing the 500 threshold and set to eclipse a record of 538, the Government has not even a hint of a crime plan on offer.”

This is the editorial and today, still no anti-crime plan presented by the Government. The editorial continues:

“We have to wonder what is the point of any government if not to deal with the country’s most critical problems which, in the case...”—of T&T—  
“would be rampant crime and a lacklustre economy.”

Continues:

“Based on his insistence on retaining the clueless Fitzgerald Hinds in the National Security portfolio, we have to assume the Prime Minister likes it so.”

“...the Prime Minister likes it so.”

The Minister talked about actions and plans, I think the only action now is that Minister Fitzgerald Hinds should resign or be fired instantly.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The editorial continues:

“The failure at countering crime should be a source of shame to the entire Rowley administration, which came to office promising a safer and more secure nation. Yet, on this issue, the Government has adopted the same brazen attitude of callousness that has the country under siege of criminals.”

**4.30 p.m.**

These are not my words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are the words from the *Express* editorial, October 2022, as recent as October 2022.

So, rule one, say nothing. We brought Motions to this House on numerous occasions and the Speaker ruled that they were not matters of definite urgent public importance, and we abided with that ruling. Today, the Speaker pointed out, "Well, you could use another Standing Order." This is one of the other Standing Orders that could be used to raise matters that we felt were pressing and of public interest, the issue of crime. As you well know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not questioning the ruling of the substantive Speaker but, as you well know, these Standing Orders have different time limits and therefore, when we file a private Motion, we have to wait one month for that Motion.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, I heard you.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I understand, but I would prefer if you could move on from that particular aspect, please.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure. Well, I am saying we have brought this Motion under a particular Standing Order on crime.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Right, No, but I suggest that you move on. Right? It is not part of this particular debate, so I will prefer that you move on.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Certainly, Sir. And I would like to share that we believe on this side that crime, the spike in crime, the spike in criminal activities and so on, is always a matter of definite urgent public importance for the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And so, we welcome the opportunity, under this Standing Order, to be able to raise the issue of crime. So, rule one, I am saying in the PNM rule book, say nothing, and I have shared two editorials with you. The second rule is to gaslight the nation, the rule book of the PNM, two. A few days

after the January 2016 *Newsday* editorial on Government's silence, I confronted the then Minister of National Security in the Parliament and called on him to account for the spike in murders, and his response was: "Spike, what spike? We do not have a spike in murders." Six years later, Sir, nothing much has changed.

Consider some of the recent news headlines, and this is why we think this is such a critical matter:

"Children, 9 & 11, shot in head, chest..."—*Express* August 17, 2022.

"Boy, 8, critical after shot in head"—August 18, 2022, *Guardian*.

"Boy killed, body dumped in outhouse"—October 11, 2022, *Express*.

"A 9-year-old gunned down while playing with friends"—October 16, 2022.

"3-year-old child among four shot dead"—October 23, 2022, *Express*.

"BABY ESCAPES DEATH

7-month-old covered with parents' blood"—October 28, 2022, *Express*.

Minister—"Hinds: Gangsters not marking children for death"—October 27, 2022.

And in spite of the Minister's statement and denials, we on this side, Sir, we will not and cannot turn a blind eye to the slaughter of the children of our country. We cannot do that.

Just last night, I believe, another child was gunned down in Morvant. Investigators are considering the possibility that this teenaged boy was targeted by killers who mistook him for someone else. Gunned down—wrong place, wrong time; right place, right time. I do not know which one, but there is never a right time for a child, a teenager to be gunned down.

It is more than a dereliction of duty for this Government to invalidate the critical state of the national experience by denying and downplaying affairs. A special report by the Trinidad *Guardian*, October 2022, revealed and I quote:

“Innocent children have become collateral damage, sitting ducks and pawns in the growing epidemic of gun violence among warring gang leaders and their families’ involvement in criminal activities.”

And so:

“This is the stark reality in T&T as gun violence has swept across the country...

Close to a dozen boys have lost their lives in the last 22 months.”

They are—“...all under the age of 17, were either directly or indirectly the target of the killer (s).”

And therefore, this is grave cause for concern and for action.

Rule three—rule one, I said, stay silent; rule two, gaslight; three, clichés, old talk as it were. No action, as I said, NATO, no action, talk only, and the failure to bring a crime plan.

April 2016:

It is time now for T&T to declare—

This is “*trinidad689rising.com*”:

It is time for T&T to declare a sense of war against criminals in this country. This is what Minister of National Security then, Minister Edmund Dillon, told the country.

October 2017, Minister Dillon, again:

We have reached a stage where we have to declare war on criminals.

Again, National Security Minister Dillon. So that is in April 2016, October 2017.

Fast forward, July 2018, just days before the National Crime Prevention Programme was launched by the Prime Minister, and he declared:

“We have not lost the fight against crime...”

This is the Prime Minister. Vowing, he said:

“We will redouble our efforts with respect to national security and national safety issues. We are not going to concede that those who behave like this and endanger the population, are to be left unattended.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, ironically, perhaps prophetically, the Prime Minister blanked his own launch of that National Crime Prevention Programme.

At the time, the Opposition recognized it for what it was, an expensive PR programme that will bring no resolve, no comfort, no confidence in the ability of the Government to fight crime, and that is what has happened. Since then, has the crime gone down? Has it abated? Has it stagnated? No, it continues to rise.

A response to our questions at the last meeting of the Finance Committee, we are now being told that that NCPP, that famous plan, is being reviewed. So it was launched, but never got off the ground. Another gimmick, another PR stunt. We still wait to see.

When the Prime Minister likened crime to a public health emergency—do you recall that, Sir, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Do you recall that? National health emergency. Again, big words, PR, nice phrase, doing something. Nothing has happened. We never found out what were the details, what was the description of calling it a public health emergency, what steps would be taken to deal with the crime fighting. Nothing. Buzzwords, Sir, publicity stunts, gimmicks. We do not expect any better. It continues.

So, rule book, again, stay calm, make excuses, PNM rule book, four—rule four. When confronted by the media over T&T being ranked 6<sup>th</sup> amongst countries with the highest crime rates in a report posted by the World Population Review, the Minister of National Security lamely responded that, and I quote:

Crime is a moving target and there is no overnight fix.



That is like today, talking about the CCTV cameras. The Minister said, "That is at a particular point and a particular day." It is the same thing. Crime is a moving target, there is no overnight fix. Well, Minister, it is seven years your government has been in office; seven years now and you have not been able to bring the crime down. Instead, under your watch, it increased.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** It continues to increase. So, we are not talking about overnight fixes, we are talking about plans, policies and programmes sadly lacking from you and your government.

So, further, would you believe it, Sir, that no quick fix for crime comment is a recycled excuse from the former Minister of National Security, Edmund Dillon. He used it in the 2017 budget contribution in this very House, no quick fix for crime. A repeat of the same buzzwords, the same gimmicks that do not work.

Another favourite excuse is to blame the nation for crime. The Prime Minister is especially fond of lambasting citizens for not coming forward with information about criminal and criminal activity. But like the rest of us, the *Express* has had enough. Looking at the editorial, earlier this week, just this week, and I quote from it:

"Perhaps the Prime Minister is unaware of the number of family members and friends who have been killed by gang members in reprisal exercises."

Continuing:

"Maybe he has also not been paying attention to some of the following: the number of police officers who are on charges of serious crimes, including murder; the number of criminal acts perpetrated by people dressed in police uniforms; reports of criminal evidence disappearing while in police custody, and this list goes on."

Continuing from the editorial:

“In many communities, residents have watched as petty criminals rise to heights of power with the full protection of corrupt police officers. Some have learned the hard way that their own safety lies in looking the other way instead of going to the police.”

Continuing with the editorial:

“It is deeply distressing and disturbing, frankly, for the country's Prime Minister to still be casting about like this, on what is our prolonged number one national ailment.”

End of quote from the *Express* editorial earlier this week.

So, we have heard the reports of witnesses being killed. It is not surprising that no one trusts the Government. And if they cannot protect the average citizen, how can they protect witnesses? And that brings into front play, foul play, the whole issue of the witness protection programme as to how that is being managed. How can it bring people forward? Says: “Yes, yes, come forward. Bring your evidence, be a witness.” I think there was a question asked by a media about, would you be willing to come forward as a witness? And the majority said, no, no, no, because you do not feel safe. The witness protection programme has fallen apart from since early in the term of this Government.

We had asked to have a joint meeting on crime and that was one of issues we raised, the whole issue of the witness protection programme. I think they do with everything else and today, for Minister Hinds to ask that we must collaborate with him in some scheme that they have to help deal with crime. We have put forward so many issues to help deal with crime. And I remember when we put as one of the items—I remember clearly—was the witness protection programme. Is it working? Does it exist?

Recently, we had someone who was killed and that whole issue about whether he should have accepted witness protection or not became, you know, a live issue all over again. So, today, I am asking the Government, tell us the status of the witness protection programme, and do not tell us that it is a particular thing on a particular day. It must be fixed in reality. It is fixed by law how it should work and it should be resourced. So, tell us about the witness protection programme, so that people could feel safe to come forward to help us in our criminal justice system.

So, I go down to the PNM rule five now: when everything else fails, just blame the population and blame Kamla. And this is a favourite of the Prime Minister, a favourite to several Members on the other side, a point that it is beyond pathetic that when you have constitutional office, you have parliamentary majority, you have entire Ministries at your beck and call, you have the keys to the public purse for seven years, and all you do is still blame Kamla, blame the UNC and blame the Opposition. But that is not working anymore. You have done it for too long too far and you keep looking in the rearview mirror.

Today, the hon. Minister gets up there to talk about some person call Krishna Lalla. What does that have to do—

**Hon. Member:** “Mamoo”.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Whether it is “mamoo”, uncle, “nennen”, it does not matter. What does that have to do—yes, Sir—with the Motion for debate?**Hon.**

**Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What does it have to do?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And that is what they do. It is ad hominem attacks all the time, coming to talk about LifeSport. The Minister mentioned it, so I want

your leeway to respond. The Minister talked about LifeSport.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence. Silence, please.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And that the Member for Siparia has brought the Member back into the House, obviously, referring to a Senator who was in charge of the Ministry of Sport. That person went to court and won his matter in the courts of law—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—and seven years later, all you could do is name-call. So you name call Krishna Lalla and you name-call the persons you say we brought back into the Senate. You just call their names. Seven years later all your conspiracies and theories of criminalizing persons, demonizing persons, you have failed. They have collapsed, as with former AG Anand Ramlogan and former Sen. Gerald Ramdeen, all your conspiracies and making up things.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So, without a word of evidence, you could call people's name in this Parliament who are not here to defend themselves. And that is why I think MP Saddam was right, Saddam Hosein, when he objected to the Minister naming a Member from the Senate that this House should not impute motives to any Member of any other House.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** They cannot do it. You know, today, Sir, we are in the Senate, and as I was coming here, I recalled, I began my parliamentary career in the Senate, not this part of it. In those days, we did not even have a Senate Chamber. We would have sittings either here or sometimes in the tearoom when we had sittings at the same time. And from then, 1994, when I started in the

Senate, I then became a Member of the House in 1995 of the then Panday administration, remained and, up to today, a Member of the House for the same seat of Siparia.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And I recalled when we were in the Senate, we could not call or impute motives to anyone in the House, we will be stopped. And it is the same way when I joined the House, it is a rule in the Standing Orders, you cannot impute a Member of another House. So that is bad enough. And then dealing with persons who are not Members of the House, then you call names. So that is what the PNM does. Find some ghost behind a post—looking for ghost behind a post to raise the boogie of a ghost, and calls this one name and that one—and that means it is okay. It is quite okay for this Government to have failed in the fight against crime, just call somebody's name. Call a name.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have an additional 15 minutes. You care to avail yourself?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I thank you very much, Sir. I did not realize we had reached so far.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I thank you very much.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So, I am saying, you know, there are certain rules and boundaries, yes, and there is a time, a right time and a right place for things. But the Minister, Fitzgerald Hinds, the Minister, was totally out of order today, and we will look at other ways to bring this matter up again, when he started to impute motives against other persons from the other House.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So why does he not tell us about the alleged unholy alliances they have with criminals? Why does he not speak about that and tell us what they are going to do? There have always been these whispers and rumours about unholy alliances between elements in the PNM and so-called community leaders—yes, nice name, community leaders—when, in fact, there may be, well be gang leaders, well-documented locally and internationally.

In an article published in a *Guardian* by Raymond Ramcharitar, 22 January, 2014, captioned:

“The PNM and crime: A reminder”—January 2014, you know.

“The PNM and crime: A reminder”, and that author wrote as follows:

“...the PNM’s open and symbiotic association with crime didn’t start in 2007. It started half-century before. Eric Williams’s early disciples included a group of heroic community activists (otherwise known as thugs)”—I am quoting from the article—“from the John John area called the Marabuntas, who accompanied Williams on his trips to the wilderness of Central Trinidad and elsewhere during the ’56 campaign.”The article continues:

“At election time, they (or other criminals) went around picking fights at political meetings with non-PNM supporters.”

The article continues:

“Letters to the editor in the *Guardian* during the ’56, ’58, and ’61 elections campaigns complained of thuggery at meetings...”—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** [*Inaudible*—please, Standing Order 48(6).

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, hon. Member, I know you are quoting from the article in 2014, I think you said—

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:**—right? January 2014, *Express*. Right? And I know you are quoting, so remember they become your words once you enter it into the *Hansard*.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Okay, Sir.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Fair enough? So, I will give you a certain leeway and I will determine whether I should desist from you continuing in a short while. Right?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I thank you very much. I want to remind this honourable House that the hon. Minister, in making his contribution, asked us to read our history, to examine our history. The hon. Minister accused us of not considering history and not—what? I think he told MP Saddam, you did not read it or you did not consider it. This is part of our history. This is recorded in the *Express* of 2014 as part of our history.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So, I will end the quotation, Sir. I will take guidance. But, again, this is part of the history. We will move on. The U.S. Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council, in its 2021 report on Trinidad and Tobago stated, and I am quoting from their report:

“Corruption...”—is—“a problem at many levels of government. Opaque public procurement processes...”—were—“a concern.”

“There...”—are—“allegations that some politicians and Ministers have close relationships with gang members and facilitated procurement and contracting of road, bridge and construction projects to companies owned and operated by criminal enterprises.”

This is the U.S. Department of State's Overseas Security Advisory Council in 2021, their report on Trinidad and Tobago. It continues:

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not enforce the law effectively, and officials sometimes

engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.”

Again, from the US Department of State, I am talking about the unholy alliance of the PNM with criminal elements.

In a July 2010 article published in the *Foreign Affairs* magazine, and I quote from that report:

Over the past decade, gang violence—

So, this was in 2010, July. Over the past decade will take us back from 2000, quote:

Over the past decade, gang violence and government corruption have caused civil society to nearly unravel.

And it continues:

More than 500 people are murdered in T&T each year.

Again, this was in July 2010, looking backward. In 2002, Manning, then Prime Minister, convened a meeting with gang leaders in a bid to halt violence. That is part of our history. That is a fact. That is not a figment of my or anybody's imagination. That is history. In 2002, then Prime Minister Manning, convened a meeting of gang leaders. I do believe the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney was part of that meeting, if I am not mistaken.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** [*Inaudible*]—mistaken.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am mistaken. So the Member was not there. But the then Prime Minister—it is okay, Sir. Thank you. You were not part of the meeting? Thank you for that clarification. And so, he offered them increased pay-outs in the form of the development grants for landscaping and construction projects. Manning began referring to some of these kingpins as community leaders, and they in turn began acting as a force of political mobilization. During the May 2010 elections, police says candidates from Manning's party were



handing out cheques worth thousands of dollars to gang members and promising more for fat contracts.

So, I give that history, Sir. In February 2019, our Prime Minister, the hon. Keith Rowley, reportedly stated that gang leaders were free to tender for state contracts as long as they had not been convicted of any crimes. That was February 2019. On July 2019, the *Guardian* published an investigative report—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, again, please quote clearly your source, eh, please.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure. July 2019, Trinidad *Guardian* published an investigative report exposing that the Government gave contracts worth almost TT \$6 million to seven reputed gang leaders in north Trinidad, despite Government's denials. I am speaking here, Sir, of the unholy alliance reputed or investigated or alleged between Government and criminal elements. And the basis of that *Guardian* exposé was the findings of a Special Branch report prepared in mid-May 2019, detailing moneys that were paid to alleged gang leaders based in communities in Port of Spain to Diego Martin areas over the last three years. So that was in 2019, reported in the *Guardian*, July 2019.

And what is the story now, Sir? The story now, there are allegations that, once again, given the uptick in the murders taking place, where it is alleged that 90 per cent of it is from gang leaders committing these heinous crimes, the story is, once again, that the Government's operatives—some operatives of the Government have called in these gang leaders and said, "Listen, we are going to give you your construction contracts, we are going to give your contract, just ease down and bring down the crime." Whether that is true nor not, and the Members can tell us if that is true, I ask and I question—but this is the story when you pick up your WhatsApp, your phone, Facebook, this is a message that is coming through, that

the Government has called these warring leaders, gang leaders in to offer them contracts and construction and so on. So why does the Government or this PNM always fail?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Standing Order 48(6).

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** All right. So, again, Member, the last statement—

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:**—again, I would just like you to omit it from the records and move on, please, the last statement that you just made.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well, I am asking a question for the Members to clarify whether this is so or not so.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** No. But you made a statement before that. So, I would just like you to retract it and you can move on.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Okay, well, whatever it was, retract. We will have to instruct the *Hansard* what to retract, please. Well, I do not know which one. Sorry, Sir.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Well, you said you retracted it, so you can move on.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well, I do not want to retract my whole statement. So it is a specific part I am being asked to retract, I assume.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay. Hon. Member—

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:**—I will care not to repeat it.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Okay.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** It is your words. You would have said it, and I am just saying the last part before you asked the question just to—

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Oh, the question stays, Sir. Yes, okay. Thank you, Sir, and I think that would properly advise the *Hansard* reporter. I would not like

to get all my sentences deleted or omitted after nearly 45 minutes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** And as I am on my legs one time, you just have about four more minutes, approximately.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I thank you for that extra minute. So, why does the PNM always failed when it comes to the fight against crime? Why? Why? And I remember the Member for Diego Martin West, now Prime Minister Rowley, in February 2014 to a crowd, an audience in Diego Martin West—to an audience, sorry, the Member for Diego Martin West, he said and I quote:

We are looking at it as a management issue and have to hold people accountable.

Continuing:

Right now, the level of crime and insecurity is affecting the national growth.

The Prime Minister continued, our then Opposition Leader:

We have a team of experienced persons, not just politicians and experts working towards coming up with the best response for the people of T&T to respond to those who choose crime as the way of life.

So all the answers then, team of people, experienced experts and so on.

So, bear in mind, this is back in 2014, when the murder toll was much lower than where it is now; much, much, lower. The detection rate was higher. That was back in 2014, February, and then we move along. What has happened to all these experts and the team and so on? What has happened? Very little the promise have they been able to bring to fruition to implement. They promised scientific and evidence-based investigation strategy. Yes, you need that. What we got instead was forensic science failure. They promised the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. What we got instead was a missing merit list and a constitutional crisis. They promised a police management agency and police service inspectorate, none

of which have materialized. They promised a police manpower audit. The audit report was sent to the JSC, a Motion to adopt the JSC report was debated, November 09, 2018, and we have no idea what has happened to that report since then. They promised a disaster risk management policy, we got an ODPM in crisis. Look at the flooding, you know. I heard a question earlier about water in El Socorro for days, all over the country, but that ODPM, what did we get instead? A revolving door of senior management since September 2015. They promised a joint border protection agency, instead we got an illegal migrant crisis. We have murdered and missing fishermen, and arms and ammunition continue to cross into our borders. They promised to restore confidence in the armed forces and protective services. We got grounded helicopters, berthed vessels and starving soldiers.

They promised a whole-of-government approach to national security. Instead, what we get? Confused Ministers who routinely contradict each other. Today, MP Saddam Hosein gave some examples where the Minister is contradicting what the Prime Minister said with respect to that portfolio. They promised an Independent Senator to Chair the National Security Committee of the Parliament. What we got instead? The flagrantly biased, incompetent partisan Member for Laventille West. So all these promises and many more, Sir, none have come to fruition. A pile of broken promises. Again, we come back to what Minister Hinds talked about, “ole” talk, no action, talk only, and that is what this Government does.

So, I agree with the Motion brought by my colleague. I support the resolution contained in that Motion, and I thank you for the time to contribute to this debate. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Youth Development and National Service (Hon. Foster Cummings):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution at this point in time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Motion brought by the Member for Barataria/San Juan speaks to, in the run up, the question of the Government's, in his own words, failure to or neglect in respect of education, training opportunities, and I will focus my contribution on that because, ofcourse, that statement is certainly not true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, crime is a very complex matter that affects all of us in society. As a matter of fact, it affects societies across the world. There is no one cause for crime and, certainly, there is no one solution for crime. In addressing the reduction of crime, it is important for us to have an understanding of the root causes and, in so doing, we look at the question of economic factors, social environment and family structures.

**5.00 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we take a closer look at these categories we will find factors such as lack of finances, lack of educational opportunities, lack of support, lack of leadership, parental inadequacy, family violence, lack of hope, and the list goes on. As I said before, no one variable can be associated or isolated in this fight against crime. It is in this regard that I stand firm on the premise as we believe a whole of government approach is required and that is what we have been doing and that is the approach of this Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Member could not certainly be serious about speaking about lack of training opportunities

on behalf of the young people of this country. We do know and we acknowledge that there is a category of young persons who analysts refer to as NEET, which involves young persons not involved in education or training, and the Government of course is determined to provide training opportunities for this category of young people and certainly for all the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

In recognition of this fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister established a Ministry dedicated to Youth Development and National Service, and as a result the Government intends to focus on the development of our young people and the training opportunities available to them, to direct them along a productive path. Because when the Opposition speaks about crime—and of course, as far as the Opposition is concerned, they will hold on to the issue of crime which affects all of us, which we are all very concerned about, and politicize it and turn it into a political issue that they can use on a political platform, because, of course, there is no track record on the part of the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago. So they hold on to a doom and gloom perspective to fear citizens into re-electing them into office with the hope that they can bring a solution, although they changed about six or four or five National Security Ministers when they were in office.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member spoke about the lack of consultation and discussion with the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. This Government, upon coming into office, set about a series of consultations; the very focus groups that he spoke about, town meetings and discussions with youth workers and youth groups and came about with a National Youth Policy, 2020-2025, which has been approved and which we have been using as the basis for the implementation of many of the programmes—that the Member spoke about and

referred to as off-the-cuff programmes and PR stunts, et cetera, et cetera—a very organized approach to how we deal with training opportunities for our young people, because the crime situation cannot be viewed in isolation. It is not a question of coming up with a crime plan and giving it a name, operation X, operation Y, because as we look at the root causes of crime we have to tackle it from the base, and therefore, since we recognize that many of our young people have fallen victim to criminal activity, the Government is determined to create opportunities for all of them to allow them to realize their fullest potential.

Very soon you will see the establishment of a national youth development agency. Cabinet has already approved the proposal for the establishment of this agency. And what does this agency intend to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It is intended to improve the efficiency and to address issues of duplication because there are so many programmes falling under various Ministries targeting our young people and the question of their development that we are going to seek to bring all of these programmes under one umbrella organization so that we can improve the effectiveness of delivery. In looking at training and retraining, we have mentioned—and I did mention in my budget contribution that the Government has taken the decision to focus on, “How do we address the question of training opportunities throughout Trinidad and Tobago for our young people”?

What did our friends on the other side do when they were in office? They closed down many of the programmes that existed; the youth camps, the non-residential centres, many of the other non-residential training programmes that created opportunities so that young people could equip themselves with skills to enter the job market or to become entrepreneurs and develop themselves and create employment for themselves and for their peers, the UNC closed it down. What was their solution for crime, a state of emergency?—pass through the

communities, lock up everybody, put them in detention; many of them having to come to approach the courts afterwards to get redress and that was the crime plan of the UNC. That was the crime plan.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** But today under this Government, a government of vision and purpose, you can see the programmes being implemented, step by step, for the benefit of all the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And when the Opposition speaks about, “Why call out particular names in this country”, they are all levels of crime, you know. If you enter an office and a contractor tapes off their name off their van and builds your house, that is crime. That is also crime.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** If you preside over a Ministry that was supposed to put programmes in place for young people's development and a provider went away with \$30 million and did not have one day of classes for anybody, that is crime too.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** So when you ask, “What is the relevance of LifeSport”? The LifeSport was a well-designed crime plan of the UNC disguised for youth development.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** So I am sure the previous speaker is very familiar with those matters.

**Mr. Lee:** Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Inaudible*—the last statement by the Member about UNC's crime plan—in crime.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]



**Mr. Young:** “But A-A, allyuh eh” spot the irony?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please. Please. Members, please.

**Mr. Young:** [*Inaudible*]—“eh” spot the irony?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Overruled. Proceed.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a fact that in this country the UNC was in Government. It is a fact that under that Government there was a Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. It is a fact that they had a programme called LifeSport. It is a fact that they announced to Trinidad and Tobago that that formed part of a crime initiative, a crime prevention initiative. Those things are facts and form part of the history of this country. And it is a fact—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—that many criminal elements in this country were involved in that programme, and it is further a fact that moneys designed and associated and allocated to that programme found its way into the hands of persons who did not provide services in this country for that money.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Those are facts, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And so this Government, in a very organized fashion, is providing programmes for the development of our young people.

So the very camps, the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres across Trinidad and Tobago that were closed down by the former administration, this Government has taken the decision to reopen all of them.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** In Chatham, south Trinidad, work has already commenced to refurbish that facility and make it available to house 250 residential trainees at that facility. Young men in south Trinidad will have the benefit of that facility in

the not too distant future.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** In Freeport, in Persto Praesto—and, you know they like to talk about us doing programmes only in areas where the PNM has representatives, I do not think in Freeport that we have a PNM representative there, but the Government will as well reopen the Persto Praesto Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** It does not stop there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we continue to unveil opportunities for our young people's development, the Government will construct a new facility, a flagship facility at Wallerfield to accommodate 500 participants, male and female, and that facility will come on stream shortly.

We will also repurpose the Chaguaramas Development Centre as a Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre for our youths in west Trinidad. And that only deals with the residential component because we understand that some of these young people come from a situation where they will not get the kind of support that they require to successfully complete such a programme, and therefore those facilities will offer a residential support to allow them to successfully complete their training programme. It is a two-year programme and it would be focused on technical/vocational training for many of the young people in various disciplines.

It does not stop there; we know that we need to take some programmes into the communities. We currently have at several locations, that is to say, California, Los Bajos, St. James, Basilon Street, Malick and Laventille; we have existing at those locations, non-residential youth development centres which constitute a safe space for young persons to report to, and be able to acquire over time the kind of

skills that would allow them to enter the various industries in this country and would allow them to also take part in business, and this is for the benefit of all citizens, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All the very young people who being unemployed or not having access to proper training would become easy and available to be recruited by the gang leaders and those who follow a certain lifestyle in this country.

Not only will we refurbish, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these facilities and execute programmes in collaboration with YTEPP, in collaboration with MIC, in collaboration with NESC, CARIRI with their Business Incubator programme, the UWI, UTT and the Cipriani College of Labour, we will execute programmes within these communities for the benefit of our young people. The Government is determined to expand the cadre of non-residential centres to some of the areas I am about to mention as we discuss the areas of Moruga, Enterprise in central Trinidad, Sangre Grande in the east, Belmont in Port of Spain, La Horquetta, San Fernando, Malabar, Beetham Gardens, Sea Lots, Diego Martin. We are taking training opportunities throughout Trinidad and Tobago for the benefit of our young people. We have announced previously, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I am dealing specifically with the point presented by the mover of the Motion that the Government has failed to provide training opportunities for our young people. You would know that we have announced the refurbishment of the St. Michael's School for Boys in Diego Martin and that is to deal specifically with a category of our young persons referred to as CHINS, which would be Children in Need of Supervision, because we do not propose to just, as I said earlier, announce Anaconda, or whatever the case may be as though our crime solution just involves crime prevention and monitoring, and so forth.

What we are about to do is get to the root cause of the problem and make

sure that those young persons who could fall victim to these types of behaviours have some kind of productive position to lead them into a more sustainable life. Cabinet has also recently approved the appointment of a committee, an advisory committee to develop a programme for the rehabilitation of female CHINS, which will be young ladies referred to in that category and in need of supervision. And very soon we will receive that report and be able to provide a facility similar and in line with the facility at Diego Martin, formally the St. Michael's School for Boys. And when we look at the question of those young persons exiting community homes, you—Mr. Deputy Speaker, earlier this year we were able to commission the Josephine Shaw home in Port of Spain to provide for our young women, who are vulnerable young women, the question of hostel services and transition facilities for those exiting community homes so that they do not end up on the streets and fall victim to crime; that is the matter we are discussing this afternoon. As well, we have expanded, we have started the expansion of the facility in Ste. Madeleine to accommodate a greater number of our young men. Josephine Shaw would be for our young women; the one at Ste. Madeleine is designed for our young men.

Some months ago, just about six weeks ago we turned the sod in Sevilla, in the constituency of the Member of Parliament for Couva South, to have additional facilities there at the Sevilla House that would also cater for our young women. And in the facility in Beach Camp in Palo Seco, where we have begun the establishment of a national service complex, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at that location we will as well introduce a transitional facility there and hostel for our young women. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are about creating opportunities for our young people and so the Government is determined to put emphasis on agriculture as a career option for young people throughout in Trinidad and Tobago and so the talk

about young people not being interested in agriculture, we have debunked that, because when we advertise these programmes they are all significantly oversubscribed. So training for our young people, as the mover of the Motion claims that is not available and that is being done vaille-que-vaille, and it is being done for photo opportunities, he said in this presentation, we introduced a programme called the Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme.

On the implementation of that programme, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we advertised that programme we were looking for 200 participants, over 1,400 young persons throughout this country applied to be considered for entry into that programme. And what does that programme offer our young people, many of whom may not have decided on a career path or who may have been available to get involved in criminal activity? That programme offers them a two-year training, one year at UTT ECIAF in Centeno that will cause them to be certified upon successful completion in modernday agricultural techniques and practices. And following upon that one-year training at ECIAF in Centeno, they will then be assigned a two-acre parcel of state land, a starter home, land preparation services, courtesy the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and a \$20,000 grant to assist them with startups. So we are getting them into productive activity. We are adding to our farmers pool by training our young people in agriculture. We are adding to our food security because we are going to get more crops or more produce, more animals, meat and poultry from these farms, and our young people would not only be able to themselves become agro-entrepreneurs but they will create employment for their peers and their friends. That is the work that the Government is determined to execute and it is happening as we speak.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** We know that there are significant portions of idle state land

so the Government is determined to utilize some of that land, develop it and make it available for our young people and have them trained as modern-day farmers.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** I visited ECIAF UTT a couple of weeks ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I was quite pleased as the Minister of responsibility for Youth Development to notice many young persons who entered that programme who have stayed the course. They are about eight months in the programme now and they are determined that they will complete this programme so that they can get the benefit of what comes after the first year of training. It does not stop there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we as a government are determined to provide more and more opportunities for our young people.

You would recall that our hon. Prime Minister visited Guyana some time ago and would have observed in that country certain agricultural practices, and following upon that visit a second team went over to Guyana to do a more detailed sort of discussion and analysis, and on return to Trinidad and Tobago, in consultation with NAREI from Guyana and the University of the West Indies here at St. Augustine, we were able to develop a Youth Agricultural Shade House programme to train 100 of our young people, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the production of high-value vegetables and other produce. They have already started training at the University of the West Indies, and I can tell you, this is another programme when advertised, we were looking for about 100 participants and over 450 young people tried to access this programme and we were able, of course, to get the 100 that we were looking for. The programme will continue over the next three years. That is opportunity for our young people.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Upon successful completion, these young persons will be

formed into an agricultural co-operative, and part of the Tucker Valley estate in Chaguaramas will be set aside for the—we have gotten certain shade houses donated by the Government of Guyana and therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will have a facility there where they will be able to practise their trade that they have learnt.

So this question about not have an opportunity, where does that come from? It is either somebody is not paying attention or somebody is attempting to mislead the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The Government is providing several—more, and more, and more training opportunities for our young people to steer them away from a life of crime, to make opportunities available for them for their own development, and the mover of the Motion of course has this information available to them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know that there is also the Youth Agro Fast Track Incentive grant in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; we very recently were able to distribute to several young persons who have become involved in agro-processing, who are expanding their poultry business, who are into livestock, they have been able to benefit from a grant. Most of them or some of them up to the tune of \$100,000 each to expand their business endeavours in the field of agriculture, and very soon—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 48(1), while the country has been flooded out and farmers have been significantly affected, they come here to hoodwink the population with his contribution, totally irrelevant to what is before us. This is a Motion on crime and it is totally irrelevant—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member—

**Mr. Ratiram:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, Member, please. And just for the records—just

for the records:

“And whereas the Government has contributed to the disturbing crime situation as a result of 7 years of neglect in education, training opportunities, rising unemployment and a total breakdown of the social safety net;”

Please rest. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** It is clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker—it is clear that my friend on the other side did not read the Motion put forward by his colleague from Barataria/San Juan. I thank you for educating him.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Move on. Move on.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, very soon we will be introducing another programme in aquaculture. I know that the Member purports to like agriculture so that some of his constituents can be free to apply for this programme. We will be launching it soon and we welcome applications from all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—including Couva North.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay. Hon. Member, you have an additional 15 minutes, you care to avail yourself?

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me spend some time speaking about some of the other programmes that we have launched outside of agriculture. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would be pleased to know that the Government has determined that under our national service programme, we will, at Mausica, establish a national service complex to execute programmes—



**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—such as the CCC—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—the very successful MiLAT programme which is the Military-Led Academic Training Programme for our young men—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—the MYPART programme—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—which is another programme led by the military treating with technical/vocational training, and at that location we will also offer some level of hostel and transition facilities. We will do the same thing at Beach Camp in Palo Seco where we will be able to double the intake for these very successful programmes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** We are also very familiar with the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme; the RAPP, which is the Retiree Adolescent Partnership Programme which involves volunteers who have retired from their profession, coming forward to work with our young people, very successful programme. That is how you steer, mentorship for our young people.

So to come to talk about no training opportunities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I had two hours, I could spend two hours telling this—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—country about our training opportunities for young people in this country. And we launched as well a programme called A.L.L.S.E.T. What does that programme do? It is the Alternative Learning and Life Skills Enhancement Training Programme, training in heavy equipment operations.

Recently, 100 young persons were certified in the operations—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—skid steer, backhoe, excavator, bulldozer, dump truck.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** All of the citizens and young persons—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Mr. Deputy, would the Member give way?

**Hon. F. Cummings:** No, I will not. All of the young persons from Couva North can apply and be accepted into these programmes and become successful young people.

We also introduced the diversified—skills for a diversified and technologically-driven economy, so areas of web design, coding and mobile app development for the benefit of the citizens of Couva North and of Trinidad and Tobago. So all of those young people can also apply, and I can tell you that over 112 successful participants took part in that programme.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** It does not stop there, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think the Member would be happy if he had deleted that part of his Motion. Now we get an opportunity to tell Trinidad and Tobago what the Government is doing for young people in this country.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** AMPLIFY, another programme; not kneejerk as he suggested, well thought out, well executed, well planned as a result of consultation and discussion with young people throughout Trinidad and Tobago and persons involved in youth-led organizations and other organizations designed to assist young people. This programme amplifies a programme in music production and life skills and therefore we were able to train over 100 successful applicants—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:**—in music production and music arrangement, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**5.30 p.m.**

You would be pleased to know that in conjunction with YTEPP, we have offered certification in barbering, hairdressing, hairweaving and digital enhancement skills, and another 100 young people have benefitted from that programme. We will roll out that programme over the next three years 100, 100, 100, and it will be available to young people from Pointe-a-Pierre, young people from Siparia, young people from Couva North, young people from Laventille East/Morvant, to all our young citizens, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It does not stop there because we are determined that we will create as many opportunities for the development and training of our young people. All of our citizens can apply.

You would be pleased to know that we have registration started today, only this morning at 8.00 a.m. Yesterday we were able to launch, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the part-time component of the Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme. Understanding that there are so many young persons involved and interested in agricultural work in this country, the Government has decided that a part—in addition to the full-time YAHP programme we will, of course, have a part-time component for those young people who might be otherwise employed but they have an interest in agriculture and they want to develop themselves in that way. So we launched it yesterday. Applications opened this morning and all Members of Parliament can inform their young citizens that they can go online to the Ministry's website and apply to be part of the part-time Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme. We will recruit another 200 young persons to train them as farmers in this country, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** In addition, the Government, through the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, executed Project Trending for young business people, to train them how they could utilize social media to expand their budding business.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

This is geared towards entrepreneurs to demonstrate to them how they can achieve business growth through the use of social media. We were able to train during the fiscal over 200 young business people, Madam Speaker, in this programme.

In addition, we were able to execute, in conjunction with the University of the West Indies, the National Leadership Training Programme. In this programme another 100 participants from the executive arm of youth-led and youth-serving organizations would have been trained, Madam Speaker. We are very pleased as a government that we have been able—and I thank the Prime Minister for his foresight and for his vision in putting together a Ministry specifically dedicated to the young people of this country, to make sure that those who are considered in the category “neat”, that I explained it before, not in employment, not in any formal education or training programme, those persons who might be in society and not having the opportunity to realize their fullest potential, the Government of Keith Rowley, this Keith Rowley administration, is determined to provide opportunities for them, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I can speak to success the MiLAT Programme. We were able, some months ago, to attend a graduation ceremony for the MiLAT Programme. And it really was so heartwarming to see these young men. One young man in particular gave a story of how he grew up, the community he came from, how he did not have the family's support, how he went through secondary

school and came out with zero O levels. As a result of his enrollment in this two-year programme, currently conducted by the Specialized Youth Service of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, in conjunction with the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, that young man was able to graduate from the MiLAT Programme with six O levels, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** The Civilian Conservation Corps recently held their graduation at Couva at the NESC Auditorium and I was able to attend that graduation, Madam Speaker. Over 700 young persons from throughout this country graduated from several areas and disciplines in skills enhancement so that they could now go on to equip themselves, become employed, create employment, start up a little business. That is what the Government is doing. It is not just talking about who, how much we must lock up and arrest and put in prison. We provide opportunities for the development of our young people throughout this country. And the CCC Programme is one such programme providing that opportunity.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** How could the Member in his Motion even think about saying that the Government has failed or neglected to provide education and training opportunities? How could he? The facts are clear. Look at all the programmes I have been able to mention, some of them predating my entry into this Ministry and many of them quite successful.

Madam Speaker, we commend the voluntary reserves from the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force who have been working with these young persons. The CCC Programme, Madam Speaker, celebrates 20 years of its existence and they have built an alumni of over 28,000-plus after exposing 36,000 young persons to

the programme. This speaks of a success rate of over 80 per cent. It must be noted that globally the average success rate for programmes like this is 60 per cent and therefore, the Government is certainly doing something right, Madam Speaker. Certainly.

Often times many of our young people become involved in crime or criminal activities due to the absence of more positive and productive activity. In this regard, my Ministry remains committed to offering the programmes I have mentioned that allows for our youth to constructively utilize their time by learning skills that are profitable and that will cause them to achieve their fullest potential, as I said before.

I must mention at this point in time, Madam Speaker, that our Ministry offers as well decentralized services through our youth development district offices. And I must put this on the record because clearly some of the Members on the other side may be unaware or have not advised themselves or made themselves aware of the very many programmes coming out of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. We have six offices across Trinidad and Tobago. So for the benefit of the Opposition and for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, these offices are located at Point Fortin, Rio Claro, San Fernando, Chaguanas, Sangre Grande and St. James. I am sure that it is in close proximity to many of the Members of Parliament.

At these offices—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** You want one in Naparima? Okay. We will have that discussion. Many of these offices are equipped with trained youth development professionals who are there to guide and to counsel our young people into what direction the Government has prepared for them. Madam Speaker, youth

development is facilitated through training programmes to upskill our young people. Over the last fiscal year we have launched many programmes and I had the opportunity a short while ago to share them with the national community. The music production, the AMPLIFY, the A.L.L. S.E.T., the barbering, the social media management, the coding, the web page development, the National Leadership Training Programme, the Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme, the Youth Agricultural Shade House programme. And in 2023 fiscal we will be rolling out many other programmes because we know as we analyze the uptake and the interest that has been shown in these programmes, we have been given the confidence from the presentation of the Minister of Finance in the annual budget that he will make the funds available for these programmes for the benefit of the young people of this country.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** And so, how could it be possible for the Member to speak about a lack of education and training opportunities when in one year this Ministry has added eight new programmes to our already robust suite of services? It must be noted, Madam Speaker, that these programmes do not just stop at teaching young persons new skills but trainees also gain access to mentorship, life skills training and entrepreneurial training. Madam Speaker, these elements are incorporated to ensure that there is understanding about how to successfully put your skill to use.

We will as well assist them in terms of job placements and training in entrepreneurship. So we are not just training them and leaving them to fend for themselves. We are holding their hands and leading them into productive living, Madam Speaker. And this is what the Member, who moved the Motion, needs to be advised about. With the right education, skills and attitude, they will be prepared to access, as I said, employment opportunities, allowing them to earn an

income or various streams of legitimate income ultimately improving their quality of life. And that quality of young person we expect will not be available to the criminal element to get involved in criminal activity and add to our very concerned and concerning crime situation.

In terms of enterprise development, Madam Speaker, the Ministry is not just focused on equipping youth with the skills to seek jobs but we are very interested in empowering them to become job creators. We are seeing more and more young people becoming interested in their own business, in becoming their own bosses and starting off as entrepreneurs who we will assist. We will equip NEDCO to be able to facilitate, advise and finance many of these start-up businesses. And that is what we hold out to the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. This is an interest that we will nurture and we will support.

The National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited, NEDCO, which is under this Ministry, is available to assist these young business owners. And I must say that there are five branches of NEDCO. There might not as yet be one in Naparima but we have one in San Fernando, there is one in Chaguanas, there is one in Arima, there is one in Port of Spain and therefore, Madam Speaker, persons and young persons interested in entrepreneurship can visit many of these offices and receive a wide suite of entrepreneurial development services. Mentorship, financing and training are available for our next of generation of entrepreneurs.

At our 2022 Youth Week initiative, which we held in August in commemoration of International Youth Day, two entrepreneurship villages were held within one week, providing a space for our young entrepreneurs to promote and sell their products and services to help boost their businesses. So that the doom and gloom position from UNC is certainly not going to take root because the



young people will, listening to this contribution, will know that there are opportunities for them, positive opportunities for their development.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** We are interested in putting on the front page—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you have one minute left.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. What we want on the front page are the opportunities that the Government has for our young people and the successes that will come when they take advantage of these opportunities, not about crime and crime and crime. We are about presenting opportunities for the development of all our young people, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** I hold this out to all Members of the House. I hold this out to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And to all our young people, Madam Speaker, the Government is on the right track in tackling crime in this country and in presenting opportunities for the development of all citizens, particularly our young people. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Dinesh Rambally** (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Madam Speaker, I start by first of all endorsing this Motion, this most pertinent Motion brought by the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** And I, of course, adopt and endorse, I support both the Member for Barataria/San Juan and the political Leader of the Opposition in their contributions.

Madam Speaker, I would like to just respond—I start by responding a bit to what I

have heard being stated by Members who spoke on other side in response to this very important Motion. And I know the hon. Minister of National Security was speaking about who are the real criminals and he sought—he attempted to thunder away, who are the real criminals, as to imply that the real criminals somehow are affiliated with persons on this side.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Now, I want to say—and I know the Minister of National Security would want to hear what I have to say in response because he is thumping his desk very loudly. I wonder if the Minister and his colleagues, like the rest of the country, have they heard recently of an indemnity agreement totally unknown to our Constitution? We never heard about that before. So, I want him to tell us, who really are the criminals.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** I want to know if he knows that you have a man who is misrepresenting on an affidavit in America—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:**—still being a part of the Government. Who are the real criminals? I want to know if he is aware and he recalls that you had a merit list for the Commission of Police going to the President's House.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 49, please. And I do not know if the Member does not see the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre sitting right here too.

**Madam Speaker:** So, Member, you know once that is raised—so it is not that you cannot mention it but you cannot develop it at all. So maybe to be careful, you might just want to leave it alone. It is not that you cannot mention it but you

cannot go into—

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay? Yes.

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Madam Speaker, I was referring to a merit list reaching the President's House and then really mysteriously what has happened with that. Madam Speaker, you have a situation—and I want to say to Member for Arouca/Maloney, and this is fundamental problem that those on the other side have with the Constitution, you are presumed innocent in this country until proven guilty.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** That is a fundamental problem that they seem to have on that side.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Standing Order 48(6).

**Hon. Member:** What is that?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** What is that? You do not know that Standing Order?

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, Member, please refrain from the insulting language and imputing improper motives. Okay? So if you could withdraw that and find another way to say it.

**Mr. D. Rambally:** I withdraw wholly. Madam Speaker, you have a situation in this country where a child is gunned down in a playground and the Minister of National Security says, "Wrong place, wrong time." I really want to know where does the label, "who are the criminals, who really are the criminals" lie?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Madam Speaker, in this country children are ducking for cover. Teachers putting themselves out of, you know—in real risks, putting themselves in harm's way to cover those children who are ducking for cover. And

I wonder where that label, if we have to ask that question like the Minister of National Security, “who are the real criminals”, where would that label lie? Men died in a pipeline gasping for breath—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:**—and this Government's gem, their crown jewel, Paria, says that in a commission of enquiry—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Standing Order 49, please.

**Madam Speaker:** Again, as I say, be careful—

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:**—with these matters. As I said, you could mention it but you cannot—you could refer to it—

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:**—but you cannot go into any details. So, again, because of the care you may want to but—

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:**—be careful.

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am guided. And, Madam Speaker, I am saying that these divers gasping for breath, they died. And you have an article today telling us that someone says that Paria's response was that their response was excellent. Madam Speaker, who really are the criminals?

Madam Speaker, Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, who spoke just before me, he spoke about crime and facts. Now, you have a man talking second in this debate on the other side is the subject—

**Madam Speaker:** [*Inaudible*]—we have a hon. Member.

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes? Okay.

**Mr. D. Rambally:** You have an hon. Member speaking second on the other side in response to this Motion and is a subject of a Special Branch report, and that is a fact.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

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

**Hon. Members:** [*Inaudible*]—just talked about Constitution.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Exactly.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, go ahead. Again, be careful.

**Mr. D. Rambally:** So, Madam Speaker, the question that the Minister of National Security asked, who are really the criminals? I too have that question. Who really are the criminals?

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** And, I want to say—

**Madam Speaker:** Member. Member.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Yes. Please. Okay. Let us—okay? Let us continue in a dignified manner.

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I know the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo would have spoken about LifeSport and I would generally speak about LifeSport as well. Madam Speaker, and whilst not getting into the merits of a particular case, you have a newspaper report saying that whatever case was existing, you have critical claims being thrown out, Madam Speaker. So, I do not know where this LifeSport claim is really going but that is the way of the Members on the other side who have spoken so far.

I want to quickly deal with, Madam Speaker, some of the claims. I think the

Member who spoke before me, Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, he started off by attempting to convince himself that the work that, you know, was being done in relation to youths in the country, that is was somehow helping with the situation with crime. And I want to ask him rhetorically, if all of this that you have highlighted, what you purport to have undertaken with the Government, how come you have that the number, the murder rate at this point in time, today being the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, having reached 549? How is it that this number is spiralling out of control and there is no discernment that can be made with respect to a lower level of activity with our youths when it comes to crime?

So, Madam Speaker, just quickly to respond as well, we have a situation here that a lot of programmes were mentioned and I just want to quickly say, by way of reference, in response to the Member of La Horquetta/Talparo. Madam Speaker, in respect to YTEPP and MIC, we have—according to the *Trinidad Express* on the 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2022, the JSC on Social Services and Public Administration met with TVET providers to discuss the state of technical and vocational programmes and their contribution to achieving the development goals of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, YTEPP reported that trainee enrollment was down from 4,000 persons over the last six years to 1,500 persons due to a decline in funding which has made them unable to fund centres.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** YTEPP's Manager of Research, Ava Billy-Jackman, stated that because of a decline in funding, YTEPP, the agency has been unable to service as many centres as before. YTEPP is unable to operate the centres in all secondary schools which they once did. Billy-Jackman has stated that YTEPP has gone from 26 centres to eight centres. MIC's CEO, Anil Ramnarine, stated that funding has been cut by 50 per cent in the last five to six years which has caused a decrease in

enrollments. He stated and I quote, Madam Speaker:

“...our annual allocation was basically the driving factor for us moving from at one time training in excess of 4,500 students per year, to now...about 1,500.”

I did not hear the Member referring to some of these statistics. The MIC CEO stated:

“...there”—was a—“demand...for more training but...”—MIC was—  
“...guided by the public purse and what is afforded...”—by—“the Ministry of Education...”

So, Madam Speaker, even when we look at some of what has been stated by the Member—the hon. Member who spoke before me, he neglected to get into the nitty-gritty and to really provide us with what really is taking place. And I do not know, Madam Speaker, if, as I started off by saying, he really was really trying to convince himself that things were being done and it was, in fact, working.

A phrase came to my mind. Many years ago we heard, “A decrease in the increase in crime.” And I do not know, hearing the hon. Member speak and giving his contribution and saying that, “We are not going to talk about crime and we will talk about the youths and the youths do not want to hear this,” the youths want to live. They want to survive in this country.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** So they do not want to hear about the increase in the increase in spiralling crime. They want to live and that is a basic right that everybody has. And I want to commend the Member for Barataria/San Juan because—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:**—the first clause in this Motion and it is very telling:

“Whereas it is the Government’s responsibility to ensure the public safety

and security of the citizenry;"

And that is what the Government is failing with respect to.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** So, Madam Speaker, crime is climbing very high, drastically, and there is no end in sight. The latest that I heard this afternoon whilst being in this Chamber was that, 33 year old Joel Garcia shot dead at St. John's Road, St. Augustine, taking the murder rate up to 549. Madam Speaker, there is no—it is undoubted, this is a national crisis but all we have gotten from this Government is empty rhetoric and political spin.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** Madam Speaker, before entering the Government, the hon. Prime Minister told the country, he would measure the success of his crime policy based on how the population feels. Well, today after seven years of this Rowley-led Government, there is not a single person who feels safe. After seven years of this Government, Trinidad and Tobago is set to record the highest murder rate in our history—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:**—while the Government, Madam Speaker, has destroyed and disseminated every productive industry in this country. The only business that is booming in this country is murder and mayhem.

Madam Speaker, I turn very quickly to the absence of justice. I want to stress that the reason for this Motion here today is not simply about the murder rate, you know. It is not simply the fact that we will have the highest murder rate in our history today. This Motion today is also about the prevailing sense of despair and hopelessness that now engulfs our entire country. This Motion, Madam Speaker, is about the widespread belief that admits that this murder and



mayhem, there is no justice for victims.

This year, Madam Speaker, we have seen innocent children being murdered and the Minister of National Security writing this off saying, "They were in the wrong place at the wrong time." And as I indicated before, referring to the primary school children cowering in fear on the floor of their classroom while gunfire was ringing out in the background and, again, the reaction of the Minister of National Security was nothing short of pathetic. We have seen young women being kidnapped, raped and killed in this country, and you have the hon. Prime Minister saying, "They should choose their men wisely." This is a government that does nothing but blame the victims of crime in a shameful attempt to deflect their own failure.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** And as the Member for Baratavia/San Juan had indicated, the Prime Minister is more concerned with West Indies cricket and the fact that they were losing in a cricket match and, at the same time, contemporaneous with the commentary, you had innocent children losing their lives.

**Mr. Hinds:** UNC losing election for 15 years.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** And, Madam Speaker, to respond to the Minister of National Security, to that last comment, this is what is the inevitable truth. Having regard to your incompetence, this is the inevitable truth—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:**—that this—only the UNC now could save Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Rambally:** The people are seeing the writing on the wall, you know. It is

only those on the other, Madam Speaker, they are deflecting. They are deflecting blame.

**6.00 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, the people did not vote for this Government. They voted for a government that could get the job done, and they are not seeing that. They are not seeing a government that could get the job done. So I know the Minister is trying to heckle me while I give my very important contribution, but what he must know is that the murder rate, at this point in time you have a situation where it does not reflect the real number of victims in this crime.

And why I say that, Madam Speaker, I know we may have to take the break at a point in time, and I want to just state this point. Why I say it does not reflect the real number in murder victims, it is because those victims also have surviving friends and loved ones. They are the ones who suffer the most from crime, and this number is growing in Trinidad and Tobago. So you have two crimes essentially being committed for each one, the murder and the crime of the perpetrator not being brought to justice.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

### **COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES**

**(Mr. Davendranath Tancoo)**

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very kindly. I rise to move the adjournment. But, Madam Speaker, before I do so, there is a privilege matter to be raised.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Leader of the House, yes? Leader of the House, call on the Member for Port of Spain South? Member for Port of Spain South.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Keith Scotland** (*Port of Spain South*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 32(2) of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to raise a matter directly concerning the privileges of this House. The matter involves statements made by the Member for Oropouche West at a media conference held by the United National Congress on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, 2022.

During that media conference the Member made the following statements, and I quote:

Even Madam Speaker herself must know persons who have been affected—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Port of Spain South, please ensure in your text you identify the Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. K. Scotland:** Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I am quoting:

Even Madam Speaker herself must know persons who have been affected by crime, persons who have been murdered, persons who have been robbed, raped, assaulted and battered. So, you can imagine my shock. You can imagine our shock as a nation when the Speaker said, no, crime was not important enough and it was not urgent enough to warrant a debate.

The Member further stated that he was told by a good friend of his that the Speaker's decision was a dereliction of duty and parliamentary malpractice. He added that:

There was a pushback and anger against the Speaker for preventing a debate on the issue of crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, having carefully considered the utterances of the Member for Oropouche West in a public forum where he asserted that the Speaker of this House uttered the words attributed to the Chair, at some point in time, in some place within the context and meaning of proceedings of this House, I am of the

respectful view that prima facie which may have brought the House and the office of the Speaker into disrepute. They may have even conveyed the impression that the Speaker said those words from the Chair of this House. In the alternative, the statement of the Member for Oropouche West at this political meeting certainly insinuated that the Speaker of the House does not believe that crime is important or urgent enough to warrant debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I carefully scrutinized the Parliament's records and I am at pains to identify a single instance that can support this untruthful and damaging narrative. I can confidently and unreservedly state that those words never emanated from the Chair of this House, and I am equally confident that such words were not the response of the Chair and the Speaker to Standing Order 17 applications filed recently by the Member for Baratavia/San Juan.

Further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on every occasion that the Opposition has filed a Motion, matter, adjournment on a Motion under the current Standing Orders to address the issue of crime, the parliamentary records will reveal that the Chair has never refused same. In fact, on earlier occasions, the Chair, the Speaker, actually directed the House to the Standing Order that will guarantee the debate or discussions being sought in an effort to guide and assist all Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it appears that this Member, who should no doubt be cognizant of the parliamentary rules and procedures, made a deliberate, mischievous and reckless decision to misrepresent the proceedings of this House as well as the rulings of the Chair. I know this Member, like all other Members, has benefitted from orientations, seminars and post-elections training on parliamentary practice and procedure.

The statement made by the Member for Oropouche West constitutes a false and perverted report of the proceedings of this House, which is in itself a contempt.

Moreover, the publication of the false statement is likely to bring the House and chair of this House into public odium and disrepute. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are very serious and egregious matters of contempt against this House—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. K. Scotland:**—an insinuation that we must all strive to protect, and an institution that we must all strive to protect and to defend and not damage.

Even further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member wilfully represented the process by which a Speaker considers an application for an adjournment of the House to a debate on a matter of public urgent importance. As a consequence of this distorted and injurious report of the proceedings of this House, the Member for Oropouche West has cast a false and negative reflection on the character and impartiality of the Speaker, and has possibly placed the Chair in an invidious position with members of the public.

Based on the foregoing, I humbly and respectfully submit that the Member for Oropouche West has committed a flagrant contempt of this esteemed House by wilfully misrepresenting its proceedings and the Chair of this House. In this regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move that this matter be referred to the Committee of Privileges for investigation and report, respectfully, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, I am in receipt of the request for leave to raise—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Couva South, please. Hon. Members, I am in receipt of the request for leave to raise a privilege matter in accordance with Standing Order 32 of the House of Representatives as presented from the statement of Port of Spain South. The request for leave to raise the privilege matter in

accordance with Standing Order 32 of the House of Representatives, a decision will be reserved for a subsequent sitting. Leader of the House.

### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camile Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of December, at 1.30 p.m. Mr. Deputy Speaker, at that time, we will do the two Motions on the Notification of the Deputy Commissioners of Police. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do know that there is a Motion on the adjournment.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Chief whip, we may proceed.

**Mr. Lee:** Yes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, there is one matter that qualifies to be raised on the Motion of the adjournment of the House. So therefore, I now call on the Member for Mayaro. You have 10 minutes.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

#### **Deplorable Road Conditions and Persistent Flooding (Mayaro/Rio Claro and Environs)**

**Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro):** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to offer a few brief words on this matter on the adjournment which I feel compelled to bring to this House at this time. If I can just quickly read the nature of the matter. It reads:

The consistent disruption to the communities of Mayaro, Rio Claro and environs due to the deplorable road conditions and persistent flooding without any substantial remedial action to alleviate same by the Minister of Works and Transport.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this matter is very urgent and critical to the people of

the Mayaro constituency. The Mayaro constituency consists of about 40,000 citizens who all work and live and raise their families within the constituency. The constituency encompasses about 314 square miles, 28 communities, three administrative districts, five secondary and 19 primary schools. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mayaro is a complex economy driven by agriculture, fishing, energy, tourism and other government, banking and financial services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the common defining factor which links these economic engines to the success and well-being of my constituents is our road network. This network of roads and bridges is key to our economic and social prosperity. This economic and social prosperity is not only limited to the constituents of Mayaro, but the national treasure chest earned \$4.5 billion in taxes and royalties from only one of our tenants in the Mayaro constituency. Today, due to negligence, poor planning and a lack of maintenance, our entire road network is on the verge of collapse.

As of today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our two main arteries in and out of Mayaro, connecting us to key commercial hubs of San Fernando and Port of Spain, is virtually cut off. The Naparima/Mayaro Road from San Fernando to Guayaguayare Village is in its worst state in 100 years.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Paray:** We are on the verge of a total disconnection of that southern, what we refer to as our East-West Corridor, taking you from Mayaro to San Fernando, due to major landslips, especially in the Princes Town to Rio Claro route. If this situation is not afforded urgent consideration, the impact to the Mayaro constituency will be severe: disruption to commercial activity, a very high impact to the energy sector; a very destructive impact to the movement of school children throughout the constituency; and a delayed and disrupted emergency response.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we move to our north-south artery, the Manzanilla Road has now become virtually shut off from vehicular traffic. The impact as well, loss of a secondary route to Mayaro; lack of mobility of hundreds of children attending schools in Sangre Grande; disruption of key emergency services of the ERHA, the TTPS and other essential services; retail and wholesale distribution of our farmers and other small and medium-sized manufacturing businesses.

Our fail-over route to Sangre Grande through Biche, Plum Mitan is riddled with potholes and landslips. This adds an additional four to five hours to the journey and can cost the travelling public an additional \$100 per day. Our failover route to San Fernando and Chaguanas through the Tabaquite/Brothers Road, Tabaquite/Brasso suffers a similar fate of neglect and poor maintenance, costing precious man hours and exorbitant cost to the travelling public.

When you compound the fact that the Ministry of Works and Transport has offices in the constituency, both Highways and Drainage Divisions are woefully understaffed and they are starved for basic tools and machinery, I have to wonder if they have been set up to fail. Our drains and rivers and main watercourses continue to suffer from a weak maintenance schedule due to the factors that I have described above.

By now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you must appreciate the dire circumstances the constituents of Mayaro face. We feel hurt, we feel betrayed, we feel a deep sense of despair. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we in the constituency of Mayaro are law-abiding citizens who give our pound of salt to national development. I therefore insist and demand that the Government pay attention to the cry of our young students, our professional middle class, our business community and our elderly citizens, who all have paid their dues to national service. Give us what I believe we feel is due.



Allow me an opportunity to offer some suggestions as proposed by many of our constituents, because they feel that not enough ideas or solutions are being afforded by this Government to fix some of the issues in the long term. In term of our road network, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order to reduce the amount of heavy traffic that traverses the Naparima/Mayaro Road which clearly cannot handle it anymore, there is a suggestion that the Government look at upgrading the Edward Trace/Saunders Road, linking Moruga to Rio Claro and Guayaguayare, upgrade that road and instruct all heavy duty, extra heavy and special licenced trucks that they must use that route to get Galeota Point. Get them off the Naparima/Mayaro Road.

Upgrade the Torrib/Tabaquite/Brothers Road leg to New Grant. All vehicles leaving Mayaro/Rio Claro for Princes Town, use that route, reduce the amounts of traffic on the Naparima/Mayaro Road.

Upgrade the Tabaquite/Guaracara leg to Marabella, hence all traffic leaving Mayaro/Rio Claro for San Fernando now have an alternative route, thus reducing the traffic on the Naparima/Mayaro Road.

Upgrade the Cunapo Southern Main Road to Biche/Plum Mitan to remain our back up link to Sangre Grande.

In terms of the Manzanilla Road, we ask that the Government consider raising the roadway using PVC sheet piling which was successfully used on the Manzanilla Resort.

It is my view, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the advent of climate change, we may be seeing a new normal with the behaviour of the Nariva Swamp. We urge the Government to explore and develop a network of retention and detention ponds to capture and hold the excessive runoff during the wet/hurricane season. This will avoid or reduce flooding in our major flood zones in the constituency, Poole

Valley, Navet, Biche, Mafeking.

As their voice in this Parliament, as the elected representative of a community of decent, hardworking people, I ask the Minister of Works and Transport to tell the people of Mayaro today that there is hope, tell them not to despair and that you have a plan to bring relief in the short and medium term. Give us hope today, Minister. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I now call on the Minister of Works and Transport. And hon. Members, I now call on the Minister of Works and Transport and according to Standing Order 44(4), I have given him permission in order to have some visual aid. Proceed.

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I take the opportunity to respond to this honourable House on the matter expressed in the Motion before us today, which refers to the consistent—[*Technical difficulties*—]Rio Claro and environs due to the deplorable road conditions and persistent flooding without any substantial remedial action to alleviate same by the Ministry of Works and Transport.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the community of Mayaro/Rio Claro and environs is served by a roadway from Manzanilla/Mayaro, Naparima/Mayaro, Rio Claro/Guayaguayare and Mayaro/Guayaguayare. These roads are attached to a natural low-lying area bracketed either by the Atlantic Ocean, the Ortoire River or land swamp areas. Over the year the challenge has been the issue of coastal erosions and flooding. This is not a new phenomena. However, the issue of climate change has brought these challenges on frontal attention of the Ministry of Works and Transport and the residents.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the problem, as expressed by the Member of Parliament, may sound very simple, “just go in and fix everything, fix everything”. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have sought your permission to actually display and to show that the Ministry is not operating by guess. We are actually operating with the studies and exactly what we are dealing with in the area. If I am just to show a map of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Member displays map*]*—*and I know it might be difficult to make out, but this is the soil type in Trinidad and Tobago. This is another map of the Mayaro/Rio Claro area, and what this says is that the soil type in these areas is clay—

**Hon. Members:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please!

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:**—is sand and sandy clay and swamp clay, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So the challenge in the area has always been the soil type.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard the Member of Parliament say it is uncaring. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2011, there was a study conducted which was handed in in 2011. I think it would have been March of 2011, where the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago sat on this study done by the Royal Haskoning DHV Company, and that indicated what should take place in Mayaro. The then government sat on this 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015, and did nothing for Mayaro, but today they care everything about Mayaro.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were several things that was supposed to be done. And unfortunately, what the study recommended is that a major part of Mayaro had to be relocated because of the flooding in the area. Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** One second. One second, Member. Member for Mayaro, you are hearing the Member?

**Mr. Paray:** Yes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay. All right. Please, Members, let us listen to the response.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know they will not want to hear this. Well, unfortunately, this is the reality that we are dealing with. They took the Royal Haskoning study and they said they are not accepting that and just left it there and did nothing for Mayaro; nothing at all for Mayaro.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the challenges in the area are soil type and the amount of flooding in the area. Mr. Deputy Speaker, just recently we had an issue on the Manzanilla Road. This issue did not just happen overnight. This is an issue that has been happening for a while. And, you know, the response from the UNC was to go on a Monday forum and draw a picture of my house—*[Member displays picture of house]*—and draw a yellow river, a yellow river running through my land and claimed that that is the cause of the flooding. Mr. Deputy Speaker, foolishness. Total foolishness. But I understand when a leader gets set up by people who do not know and they are trying to make an excuse. What they are supposed to do is to use the Royal Haskoning study and educate the population on what is happening with the flooding.

**Hon. Members:** *[Inaudible]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence!

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Rather than that they go on a platform and try to say, “Oh, this person divert a river.” Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am a responsible Minister of Works and Transport, and immediately seeing the Opposition talking that garbage and nonsense I initiated an investigation by the Ministry of Works and Transport, and a report on what is actually happening in the Mayaro area, especially in that Nariva Swamp area.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you go back from 1964, the maps from 1964, and

they will tell you what happened in that area, and what is happening in that area. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you go back to 1994—sorry, the first one was 1964; 1994, another study was done. In 2014/2013, there was a similar instance and an investigation was done as to the cause and what is actually showing up on the map, okay? Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2014, what they did, they spent how much millions of dollars to try to remedy the problem. They could not. Today, the same problem occurs and it is because of the geography of the area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Nariva Swamp encompasses almost 224,000 acres of land and all that water drains through the Mayaro area. And that is why when they went to rebuild the road in 2014—I heard the Member saying, we need to raise the road. Why was not the road raised then? Because it is simple. It is the Nariva Swamp, it is a protected area and you will not be allowed to raise the road. It is a natural flow of water. What happened there, happened in the 70s. It happened, I think in the 90s. It happened in 2013 under you. And as the Member rightly said, this seems to be a natural phenomena with climate change that is taking place. So it is not that the Government is neglecting the area or anything, we understand what is taking place right now around Trinidad. It is not only—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, you have three more minutes.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** It is not only in Mayaro. It happened in Cedros. It is happening in Tobago. But what I can give you the assurance is that the Ministry does have a plan. We do a major landslip programme that is targeting areas like that, the entire Mayaro Road.

In terms of flooding in the area, the Member knows, I speak to him all the time on the phone, how much work is actually going in to cleaning the rivers up there, but it is a natural flood-prone area. And one of the recommendations coming out of the Royal Haskoning study is that most of the people should be relocated.

Rather than taking that study and throwing it away, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, they did nothing for Mayaro and now want to come and say, “This Government does not care about Mayaro.” It is unfortunate. And to come and try to put blame on somebody’s house and say they moved a river, which does not exist, too me, it is very wicked to do.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** The Ministry of Works and Transport will continue to do our part. We will maintain connectivity, we will rebuild the road in the shortest possible time. And to the people of Mayaro, I can assure you that a lot of work is planned for your area, just like all parts of Trinidad. I give you that assurance to the people of Mayaro and we will get back to some level of normalcy once there is a change in the weather patterns. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 6.28 p.m.*