

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, December 02, 2022*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**STANDING ORDER 17**

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have considered the privilege matter raised by the Member for Port of Spain South on Friday, November 25, 2022. As you are aware, this matter concerns allegations by a Member of this House, that in response to a Standing Order 17 application, the Chair of this House made certain statements which have resulted in public odium and anger. At a first glance of all the surrounding issues and relevant learnings, I am of the view that a prima facie case of breach of privilege has been established and refer this matter to the Committee of Privileges for investigation and report. I so rule.

PAPER LAID

Report on the Operations of the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago and the Audited Financial Statements for the Financial Year ended June 30, 2022. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

URGENT QUESTIONS**Aftermath of Floods
(Relief to Homeowners)**

Ms. Vandana Mohit (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Social Development and Family Services: Will the Minister indicate the precise steps to be taken to bring relief to homeowners and occupiers who have suffered property loss, in the aftermath of this week's horrendous floods?

UNREVISED

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Mr. Deputy Speaker, could I crave your indulgence to stand down this question until the Minister is available? Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. In lieu of the Leader of the House's request, I also noticed that question two is also to the Minister of Social Development and Family Services. So, in the interim, we will go to Member for Couva South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So, Couva South, Question No. 3.

**National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited
(Assistance to Small Businesses Impacted by Flood)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Youth Development and National Service: Will the Minister state if any emergency assistance is being offered by the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO) to small businesses devastated by the recent floods?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Youth Development and National Service

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is outrageous in terms of what we are witnessing here.

Ms. Ameen: Oh, come on, man.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Youth Development and National Service (Hon. Foster Cummings): My friend from Couva South—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right—

Ms. Ameen: Stop trying to make up time.

Hon. F. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, Members, let us hear the answer.

Hon. F. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited is committed to assisting all small businesses notwithstanding the difficulties that would have been faced by small businesses as a result of the recent flooding events. We will make any announcements in relation to that at a future date.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, after having listened to the Minister of Youth Development and National Service, it is clear that there is no plan from NEDCO.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Could I ask the Minister if through his Ministerial responsibility, if he has so advised NEDCO to go out into the flood prone or hard-hit areas to do an assessment of small businesses which have been impacted by the recent flooding? Yes or no?

Hon. F. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is not the role of NEDCO, and in the event that NEDCO does receive requests from businesses so affected, it will be given serious consideration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, given your leadership at the level of the Ministry and taking into consideration that you are part of a Cabinet that has witnessed widespread flooding in Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members, Members. Question.

Mr. Indarsingh: Could you give a commitment that you will undertake to do or liaise with Members of Parliament whose constituencies have been impacted by flooding to ensure that there is support from NEDCO to assist small businesses in Trinidad?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, notwithstanding the flood politics of the UNC, the Government—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Trinidad and Tobago is—

Hon. F. Cummings: The Government remains committed to assisting all small businesses and each matter will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Major River Courses (Emergency Works Undertaken)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Works and Transport: Will the Minister indicate exactly what emergency clearing, cleaning, desilting and dredging works will be undertaken on the major river courses in light of the recent unprecedented flooding?

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it should be noted that during the period of major flooding activities, desilting and dredging works are challenging to undertake. At this time, areas of blockage and breaching points are being addressed. Examples of these areas being worked on include: Bamboo 3,

Bamboo 2, La Paille, Woodland and any other area remedial work has been identified. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Minister, are you in a position at this time to indicate the specific projects being targeted with the use of the now approved hundred million dollars extra for landslip and road refurbishment projects? Would you identify the areas, for example, with landslips that you are going to use this fund that Government has made available extra funding for that purpose?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, your initial question clearly posed and has stated emergency cleaning, clearing, dredging, desilting works at the river courses. So again, that question, not at this time. Supplemental? Yes, Oropouche West, I recognize you.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Minister, are you aware that the work currently being done in Woodland is simply the removal of vegetation that is blocking the river courses and the watercourses now, which should have been done in the dry season to prevent the flooding that occurred over the last week?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, clearly the Member—and I will actually invite the Member to a conversation. The dredging work has been done. We have two pieces of equipment down there actually rebuilding banks, but if there are certain areas that there might be vegetation—because this vegetation grew up within a month. Right? We are actually—we have a contractor on site rebuilding the breach in the new cut channel, and we also have the Ministry's Watermaster equipment rebuilding breaches in the area. So the desilting programme is an ongoing programme throughout the dry season and at this point in

time, wherever there are breaches that were identified, we are working on those breaches as we speak. And in the Woodland area, they are working on breaches. Thank you.

**Stagnant Floodwaters
(Urgent Steps Taken)**

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: Given that citizens continue to be negatively affected by stagnant floodwaters, will the Minister inform the House what urgent steps will be taken to address this critical situation?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport, along with local government representatives, have been visiting all areas where flooding took place. There are some localized areas, because of the geography of the area, the water will take a lot longer time to run off. One area that we visited, which I think the Member will be interested in, will be the El Socorro South area. I noticed you did not put that into the question, but I will answer you because I know that you are concerned.

The Minister of Works and Transport and the Chairman of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation visited the area two days ago. We identified some of the challenges in getting water to the pump house because we do have two pumps down there which are working. And the local government, at this point, is addressing the area where we can pull that water down to the pump site. So in terms of the El Socorro South area, we have identified it. The reason why there was a lot of water in that area, because of the topping of the Caroni River, a lot more water went into the area. Since the Caroni River had receded to an extent,

that has stopped and we will be taking full charge of that area to bring that relief immediately. Thank you.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, since you addressed the El Socorro South area, can you confirm to this Parliament whether or not the floodgates have reopened having regard to the Caroni River dropping in water level?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member—the floodgates open and close at times. If you have a low tide the floodgates can open if the river level is low. When I was there the river level was very high. But we do have people on site—and some of those gates operate in the different areas as a flap gate. So in other words, once the water on land is strong it will actually open the gate for itself. In some areas you have the screw gates. We have people on site, once the water drops below the gate, those gates are opened. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

[*Dr. Moonilal raises hand*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, those were the two supplementals there.

Dr. Moonilal: No, just one. I just did one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: My apologies, so Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thought you are not counting there. Thank you. Minister, in light of this question on stagnant flood waters, a lot of the water remains in the homes of persons affected, is the Ministry in a position to offer help by way of the provision, very temporary short-term provision, of water pumps and gully suckers to local government bodies or even to villages and communities themselves to help residents who have water settled under their homes and so on, inside their homes?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, once the water recedes—the water from the homes will recede. However, the Member is right, there are some

homes that need washing out, they need assistance, and this is where the local government and the ODPM, and they come in and do that part of it. The Ministry of Works and Transport, we are not really responsible for that level. We continue to fix breaches, reengage the banks and so, and to make sure the major watercourses are clear. But I am sure those are being addressed by the local government representatives in the area, the ODPM, the social development department, because it is a whole-of-government approach. Thank you.

**Prevention of floodwaters on Madras Road, Cunupia
(Measures being Undertaken)**

Dr. Rishad Seecheran (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: What immediate measures are being undertaken to prevent floodwaters from making the Madras Road in Cunupia impassable to vehicular traffic for the rest of the rainy season?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Madras Road is a historically challenged area, being a major low-lying point on the Caroni floodplain. As part of the plan for the 2023 financial year, dredging of the Caroni River mouth and watercourses will help to reduce the flooding in that area. Thank you.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Minister, why has the Minister of Works and Transport not considered using a retention pond in this area to hold excess water during periods of heavy flooding?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the whole conversation of retention ponds and so is a conversation that the Ministry—we are addressing on the national flood mitigation plan. However, if you put a retention pond in very low-lying area, the pond itself could turn out to be a problem. The area is being

looked at. Entire Trinidad and Tobago is being looked at in the national flood mitigation plan, and if it is recommended that that area should get one, I am sure the consultants and the experts will put that forward to the Government. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Caroni East, next question.

**Bottleneck of the Cunupia River
(Measures Undertaken to Widen)**

Dr. Rishad Seecheran (*Caroni East*): Thank you. To the Minister of Works and Transport: What immediate measures are being undertaken to widen the bottleneck of the Cunupia River, created by two retaining walls that have collapsed and narrowed the river's width from 25 feet to 3 feet?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport has addressed the situation where part of the walls had been removed to allow the free flow of water. This is a temporary solution given the substantial failure. It should be noted that both sides of the river bank—sorry, the river's residents backfilled the bank. It is in this area that we need to address. It will be addressed in the dry season. However, I can give the Member the assurance that within the last two days most of the wall has been removed. Thank you.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Minister, why did it take so long for the Ministry of Works and Transport to respond—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Seecheran: —as I have been writing to you about this situation for over two years now?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member should know, I have been responding to him. As a matter of fact, I did pay a visit on Saturday morning—the entire team of the Ministry met the Member on-site Saturday morning and explained to him, this is challenge where residents in the area went and backfilled and load a wall, and within a month the entire wall moved straight into the river. The Member knows that because the Member

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: The Member has been communicated with. The Member went on-site with nine engineers from the Ministry last week, and this is why we explained to him that it could not be done. This is a slippage that took place within a month or so, in the river being high. The Member understands the challenges of working in a river once the water is high. Two days ago, the river receded and the Ministry immediately went in and removed the wall. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental. Last one.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, as the Minister of Works and Transport, why did you not enforce the boundaries of the riverbank during this period?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, enforcing boundaries and things like that, a major player in that is the Chaguanas Borough Corporation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: And I will really appreciate if the Member can have a meeting with the chairman—with the mayor, sorry, and the Ministry of Works and Transport will definitely be working—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Members.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan. Member. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: That is not true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for—

Mr. Young: Have some respect.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister, you have completed your answer?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am a bit baffled by this question, knowing fully well that the Member went on-site with nine engineers on Saturday, understood the challenge, understood the problem, and the Ministry still went out in the last two days, as the water receded, and removed the wall. As a matter of fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have seen the councillor from the area posting up on his social media page, thanks to the people who came in and removed this watercourse. This is as early as yesterday. And then I got messages from the residents in the area saying thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members, we will now revert to Question No. 1. I call on the Member for Chaguanas East.

**Aftermath of Floods
(Relief to Homeowners)**

Ms. Vandana Mohit (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Social Development and Family Services: Will the Minister indicate the precise steps to be taken to bring relief to homeowners and occupiers who have suffered property loss, in the aftermath of this week's horrendous floods?

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Sen. The Hon. Donna Cox): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services recognizes the negative impact of disaster, such as floods and other unforeseen events on families and communities. The Ministry provides disaster relief to victims whose items were destroyed beyond repair as a result of natural or man-made disasters.

The Ministry offers grants to persons impacted by natural disasters who are eligible for emergency food support; up to \$20,000 in funding for minor house repairs; up to \$15,000 for sanitary plumbing assistance; a Clothing Grant which is up to \$1,000 per person is offered; a School Supplies Grant which amounts to \$700 for primary school children and \$1,000 for secondary school children; a grant to cover replacement of household items to a maximum of \$10,000; counselling and psychosocial support from the Ministry's National Family Services Division.

Additionally, the Ministry advises of its critical incident online application form available for persons affected by flooding and disaster who have not yet been visited by the Disaster Management Unit of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. And this portal can be accessed by logging on to the Ministry's website at *www.social.gov.tt*, and completing the application forms. We also have officers on the field working with the Disaster Management Unit of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Minister, I understand what your Ministry offers. Can you state specifically for those persons who are affected, where can they go in the next two weeks to a month to apply for the necessary grants offered by your Ministry, and how long exactly will they take to receive these particular grants?

Sen. The Hon. D. Cox: Well, as I stated before, persons can log on to the portal that we have an arrangement with the Disaster Management Unit, also at all the local board offices, and we also have officers on the field assisting persons with applying for these grants.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Last supplemental, Member.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Minister, I note your response and I understand that at this point officers are on the field. Can you state for us within the specific affected areas where exactly can residents visit for those who cannot access online to get their applications done so that it can be processed to receive the necessary grants?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

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

Sen. The Hon. D. Cox: Residents can visit all the social welfare offices. We have 11, and they can visit any one of those offices for assistance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, hon. Members, the time for Urgent Questions has expired. Thank you, Madam Minister.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are 13 questions for oral answer, we are asking for a deferral of Question No. 48, and I also understand that the Opposition has withdrawn questions 49 and 55, so we are answering all other questions. The two questions for written answer, the answer for question 44 will be circulated and we ask for a deferral for question 40. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The questions you quoted is 49 and 55?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, 49 and 55 have been withdrawn, and we ask for a deferral of 48.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip, I have your confirmation there? Thank you. And also, Members, as mentioned by the Leader of the House, deferral for question No. 48. I will now call on the Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Mr. Lee: Thank you. I am holding on for here. She is not here as yet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

Constituency of Moruga/Tableland (Breakdown of Landslips Repaired)

44. Ms. Michelle Benjamin (*Moruga/Tableland*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the Minister provide a detailed breakdown of the landslips repaired in the constituency of Moruga/Tableland for the period August 1, 2022 to date?

Vide end of sitting for written answer.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

BP, Shell and Lightsource BP Solar Photovoltaic Project (Changes in Terms and Conditions of bid)

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

Will the Minister state whether any changes have been made to the terms and conditions of the bid that was issued in 2020 for the construction of a 112 MW (megawatts) Solar Photovoltaic project won by the joint consortium of BP, Shell and Lightsource BP?

Question, by leave, deferred.

Prime Minister's Trip to Europe

UNREVISED

(Names of Officials who Accompanied)

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

Will the Minister state:

- a) the names of the officials of the Ministry who accompanied the Prime Minister on his recent trip to Europe to meet with International Energy companies in September 2022; and
- b) whether the officials listed in (a) were present at all of the deliberations between the Prime Minister, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and International Energy companies in Europe?

Question, by leave, withdrawn.

**Caltoo Bridge
(Commencement of Repair Works)**

49. Dr. Rai Ragbir (*Cumuto-Manzanilla*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

Will the Minister state when repair work will commence on Caltoo Bridge?

Question, by leave, withdrawn.

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

42. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of the Member for Moruga/Tableland asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Will the hon. Minister identify the areas in which the recipients of the “A House for Christmas” were resident prior to being allocated housing?

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Hold on, as far as the Chair has been informed, it is that the Minister of Housing and Urban Development is supposed to be with us virtually. So, Minister of Housing and Urban Development, are you there? Okay, thank you. Proceed, Madam Minister, Question No. 42.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the answer to Question No. 42 is as follows. Mr. Deputy Speaker, are you hearing me?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Loud and clear.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The persons who received houses in the HDC's "House for Christmas" programme are all citizens or permanent residents of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, who reside in various parts of the country—who resided, sorry, in various parts of the country prior to being allocated housing through their qualification for an HDC unit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the areas from which they came are: Arima, 11 persons; Arouca, four persons; Barataria, one person; Barrackpore, one person; Carapichaima, one person; Caroni, one; Chaguanas, seven; Couva, seven—sorry, Couva, two; Cunupia, one; Curepe, two; Diego Martin, 10; Erin, one; La Brea, three; Mayaro, one; Moruga, two; Mount Hope, one; Palo Seco, one; Penal, four; Point Fortin, five; Port of Spain, 17; Princes Town, nine; Rio Claro, one; San Fernando, 33; Sangre Grande, two; San Juan, four; Santa Cruz, one; Siparia, one; St. Augustine, one; St. Joseph, one; Trincity, one; and Tunapuna, two.

In total there were 132 persons, and these are the areas from which they came before they got the HDC unit in the Home for Christmas, up to—between the period August 23 and October 25, 2022. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Minister, based on your response, could you identify “A House for Christmas”, what was the criteria used for the distribution of these houses that these individuals got?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister.

2.00 p.m.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is the same criteria that is always used by the HDC. The persons would have had to apply for the house and they would have had to qualify in accordance with the HDC qualifications. And once they did qualify they were allocated a home. Some of these persons are persons who have been awaiting qualification or allocation for several years and in the normal course, with the HDC’s qualification criteria, they are qualified and so they were allocated housing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for—

Mr. Lee: Yes, supplemental. Thank you, Deputy Speaker. Minister, as a follow-up question, the theme that the Ministry used, “A House for Christmas”, what was the rationale for using that theme as opposed to your answer where you said all the houses given out were nothing special, it was the same criteria used.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: We just thought that—shall I go ahead, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed, Member.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. HDC just thought it was a good tag line because it was starting in August, in the run up to Christmas and we just thought it was a good tag line. There was nothing particularly different about qualification.

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

43. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Ms. Michelle Benjamin

(*Moruga/Tableland*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts:

Will the Minister provide an update on the status of the Visitor Relationship Management System (VRMS)?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister.

The Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (Sen. The Hon. Randall Mitchell): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Visitor Relationship Management System was a project of the former Tourism Development Company Limited which was not implemented prior to the dissolution of that company in fiscal 2017. Tourism Trinidad Limited, the successor to the TDC, is currently developing a system of visitor feedback through exit surveys and development of visitor databases to identify potential areas of improvement to the visitor experience to allow better management of visitor relationship and provide a feedback mechanism for the tourism sector.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Minister, based on your response, seeing that the VRMS was not completed under the last company, could you state in your Ministry what is being done, how do you capture that visitor relationship experience?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Mitchell: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have visitor ambassadors located, for example, during the cruise season all throughout Port of Spain and they take feedback. Also, with the Cruise Ship Complex, when the cruise ship passengers are returning on board, they are provided with a survey. The survey results are compiled, and information

provided by the Tourism Trinidad Limited for improvement.

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

45. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Ms. Michelle Benjamin (*Moruga/Tableland*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the hon. Minister provide a list of the ten (10) largest recipients of foreign exchange for the period October 1st, 2021 to September 30th, 2022?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):—[*Inaudible*]—believe the question. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a surprising question. It is a matter of record that the public disclosure by a former Governor of the Central Bank in 2015, of the names of the largest recipients of foreign exchange at that time, in contravention of section 56 of the Central Bank Act, Chap. 79:02 and section 44 of the Exchange Control Act, 79:50, created a public conflagration. The fact that this was an egregious breach of banking confidentiality has been missed by many commentators recently. This is information within the bosom of the Central Bank which they and other financial institutions are forbidden from disclosing under penalty of law. Disclosure of this information will destroy the confidence which clients have in the Central Bank and in financial institutions that their private banking information will not be disclosed without their consent.

Further, unlawful disclosure of private banking information could never be in the public interest no matter what the circumstances may be. It would be irrational, unlawful, irresponsible, an abuse of power for me, as Minister of Finance, to engage in such a breach of trust and I have no intention of ever doing so.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Based on the Minister of Finance's response, is the Minister of Finance telling this House that he is not going to provide the list of 10 largest foreign exchange users of Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance, anything to add?

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is private banking information. To disclose that would be a breach of the law. I have no intention of doing so. Others may wish to do it, I will not.

Mr. Young: Others have done it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

One-Time Transport Grant (Details of)

47. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Given the Minister's announcements on October 27, 2022 that "total revenue for fiscal 2022 was \$2.7 billion more than announced" and referenced in the Budget Statement 2023 "a one-time transport grant of \$1,000 for all recipients of social grants on or before January 2023", will the Minister state:

- a) why weren't these grants introduced immediately upon the budget's approval given that fuel prices increased immediately;
- b) whether the Government will commence the distribution of these grants before January 2023;
- c) whether the Government will consider giving the grant to school bus and maxi taxi operators; and
- d) whether a means test be administered or will each recipient automatically receive the grant?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Part a): On September 26, 2022, the number of regular recipients of social grants, which includes persons in receipt of the senior citizens' grant, among others, was estimated at 175,000. These grant recipients are—*[Device goes off]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think it would be a good time to announce, please, all devices silent or turned off, please, please.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me repeat. On September 26th, 2022, the number of regular recipients of social grants, which includes persons in receipt of the senior citizens' grant, among others, was estimated at 175,000. These grant recipients are continuously audited by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services since for a number of reasons the list of recipients changes on a monthly basis. In order to ensure that all those who are entitled to receive the transport grant do in fact receive it, the period between the end of October 2022, after the 2023 budget was approved, and the end of January 2023 was selected as a reasonable period within which the list of recipients of the transport grant could be finalized and check for accuracy prior to the disbursement.

b) The target date for distribution of the transport grants is on or before the end of January 2023 as stated in the 2023 Budget Statement.

c) The estimated 175,000 recipients of these transport grants involved those most in need, that is to say, recipients of senior citizens' grants, public assistance, disability assistance and conditional cash support also known as a food card.

d) All of the targeted recipients are already the subject of a means test which is one of the reasons why this group of recipients was selected.

Craignish Village Landslip

UNREVISED

(Details of)

53. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

In light of the major landslip in Craignish Village and worsening road conditions along Naparima Mayaro Road, will the Minister indicate:

- a) which areas have been earmarked for rehabilitation works along the Naparima Mayaro Road;
- b) the name of the contractors awarded the contracts; and
- c) the process used to award the contracts?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

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

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Naparima Mayaro Road is essential for connecting several communities across south Trinidad, from Princes Town to Mayaro, and whilst providing a major thoroughfare to interlink the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway, the roadway is approximately 62.2 kilometres in length, starting from Mon Repos Roundabout and ending in Mayaro. Sections of this roadway from Princes Town through Rio Claro are prone to landslips and slope failures due to its soil composition and general topography.

Within the last fiscal year, the Ministry via the Highways Division and the PURE Unit, has undertaken works along the Naparima Mayaro Road, such as reconstruction of cylinder culvert crossings, strengthening and paving work, landslip repairs and road rehabilitation work. Works to undertake in this fiscal as follows: slope stabilization at the Naparima Mayaro Road, 25 kilometre mark. This work is 75 per cent completed. The contract was awarded to Ricky Raghunanan Group of Companies. The process for award was done via competitive tendering utilizing the Ministry's Procurement Unit; two, landslips

along the Naparima Mayaro Road under the Landslip Repair Programme, Phase 2A which have been assigned to NIDCO for repairs, L29 Naparima Mayaro Road, LP353 located before—heading east along the Naparima Mayaro Road using the open tender process; a contract was awarded to Para Singh General Contractors Limited, LP20 Naparima Mayaro Road located after Fairfield Road heading west along Naparima Mayaro Road next to Cool Water Restaurant. The procurement process, open tendering is ongoing and it is expected to be completed by the end of January 2023.

There is another critical landslip along the Naparima Mayaro Road located at the 30.4 kilometre mark at Robert Village. Geotechnical investigations were initiated and completed, and the designs for the permanent slope stabilization work are being developed. Thereafter, initiation of the tendering process for construction will be undertaken. Due to the nature of the proposed work it is envisaged that construction would be undertaken during the dry season of 2023 once funding is confirmed. Notwithstanding same in light of the degree of deterioration, the Highways Division will undertake continued interim road restoration work for the transmission of vehicles until the permanent works are undertaken.

Additionally, the PURE Unit will undertake significant road rehabilitation work along the Naparima Mayaro Road between the 38 kilometre and the 41 kilometre mark under the programme of works for this fiscal 2022/2023. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Princes Town, Member.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Minister, can you indicate along the Naparima Mayaro Road whether all geotechnical work has been completed with respect to the landslips identified?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that road, as I said, is a challenged road because of the soil type and so. Before any construction will start, the geotechnical studies are done, especially when we have to do the major landslips. So there are several landslips on that road and some are being formed on a daily basis. I cannot tell you all have been done. I can give you the assurance that before a landslip, before construction starts, the first thing that has to be done, even before the designs are done, is the geotechnical studies. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Minister, in light of the destruction of the Manzanilla Road, which leads to the Mayaro, and this being the only access point along the Naparima Mayaro Road that leads to parts of Princes Town, Rio Claro, Moruga/Tableland, can you confirm that this will be given priority—because you have not given me a start date in the new year. All you have said is depending on the weather and so on. But we may end up in a situation where there is no access to this area. So are you giving confirmation that work will begin within the new year?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do have a challenge on the Manzanilla Road and there are two accesses to Mayaro. One through Sangre Grande, through Biche and Rio Claro, and then through the Naparima Mayaro Road. Work on both ends of these roads have started already. We have to ensure that these roads remain passable so that Mayaro is never disconnected from the rest of Trinidad. So the assurance is given that work would have already started and will continue as long as we have to, to make sure that all

of Trinidad and Tobago remain connected. Thank you.

**St. Julien/Naparima Mayaro Road
(Details of Rehabilitation Works)**

54. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

In light of the rapid deterioration of the roadways and numerous landslips along St. Julien Road from the Sisters Road to the Naparima Mayaro Road, will the Minister indicate:

- a) the expected date when rehabilitation works will commence;
- b) the name of the contractors awarded the contracts; and
- c) the process used to award the contracts?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

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

Thank you again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the St. Julien Road is one of the historical roads which evolve with time and used to be a track and is located along a ridge without any major changes to the embankment or pavement structure. Additionally, the history of this road provides evidence that the soil composition makes it prone to landslips and failure. The first 1.7 kilometre-long section of this, at the junction of Sisters Road, falls under the restriction of the Princes Town Regional Corporation. The Victoria East District has responsibility for the remaining 7.1 kilometres of roadway from the 1.7 kilometre mark until the intersection with the Naparima Mayaro Road at the 8.85 kilometre mark. It is a secondary road with an average width of 4.8 metres. To date, there are approximately four critical landslips along the St. Julien Road. The most critical landslip along this road was identified at the 5 kilometre mark. Geotechnical investigations were commissioned and completed. Due to the subsequent adverse

weather event and the rupture of a large existing water main, the road structure and embankment was significantly eroded. As a result, this section of the roadway was deemed unsafe for public use and was closed. There is an alternative access at either side. The designs for a proposed slope stabilization works are currently ongoing. The intent is to procure and commence construction in the dry season of 2023 once funding is available.

However, there are land ownership and acquisition issues which are currently being pursued in order to undertake the construction work. Additionally, the PURE Unit will also be undertaking slope stabilization work at two landslips of similar magnitude located within the vicinity of the 2.1 kilometre mark and the 6.5 kilometre mark under the programme of works for this fiscal year.

NIDCO has been assigned the repairs of two landslips along Sisters Road under the Landslip Repair Programme. NIDCO has completed its procurement process, open tender, for these two landslips and the contractor Wide Turns Transport Services Limited has been identified to undertake the work. Works are expected to commence in March 2023. I thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Minister, are you aware that due to the snail's pace approach that this matter has taken, I have written for the past two years on this matter, drawing it to your attention. I have not had the courtesy of one single response.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Padarath: But I wanted to draw to your attention, Minister, to find out if you are aware that because of your lack of concern and consideration treating with this matter it has costed two elderly citizens in Princes Town their lives because a fire appliance could not reach in time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, please. Member for Princes Town, and the question is? The question?

Mr. Padarath: I asked the hon. Minister if he was aware, because of this incident with respect to the road, that it costed two elderly citizens their lives because a fire appliance could not reach in St. Julien despite writing him for the past two years and raising this matter consistently inside of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, the question does not arise in this circumstance. Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Cumuto to Manzanilla Highway
(Recommencement of Construction)**

56. Dr. Rai Ragbir (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister state the expected date for the recommencement of the construction of the Highway from Cumuto to Manzanilla?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, construction of the first phase of the Cumuto to Sangre Grande Highway commenced in January 2018. This priority phase entailed work under Packages 1A and 1B of the project and includes the construction of a 5-kilometre—of a four-lane dual arterial highway from Cumuto Road heading eastwards towards the Eastern Main Road. This segment is currently ongoing with Package 1A, 88 per cent, and Package 1B, 77 per cent completed.

Land acquisition is ongoing to facilitate the commencement of work on

other phases of this project, namely the Connector Road from the end of Package 1B to the Eastern Main Road, and the segment from the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to the Cumuto Road. The second priority for construction is a 1.7 kilometre-roadway from the end of Package 1B to the Eastern Main Road. Construction of this segment is expected to commence in 2023. Work on this highway is ongoing and was only interrupted due to the COVID pandemic. Work restarted immediately with all other construction projects. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Fyzabad

**Vitreo-retinal Surgery
(Number of Patients Waiting)**

57. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Will the Minister provide the total number of patients awaiting vitreo-retinal surgery at the ophthalmology clinics of the San Fernando General Hospital?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As at November 16, 2022, the total number of patients awaiting vitreo-retinal surgery at the ophthalmology clinic of San Fernando General Hospital is 128.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you for your answer, Minister. Minister, in view of this, can you state what arrangements have been made to deal with this waiting list?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Of the 128, we have identified 23 for urgent attention. Those cases will be sent to the private sector, as we do, because as you know, we do not perform VR surgeries at this time in the public sector. So those will go out and then we will treat with the others within the

next month so.

In addition, we are seeking to recruit specialists from Cuba to work in the public health system to do the surgeries which will alleviate the need for having to go to the private sector to get it done. Thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Fyzabad, Member.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. So my information is that the last specialist had left the job about three months ago. Can you indicate what sort of time frame you expect to have a new specialist at the San Fernando Hospital?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: We are working on two fronts. I was in Cuba two months ago. The letter actually went out from my office to Cuba last week requesting not only VR surgeons but also specialist surgeons to work in the public sector. Also, we are looking at one local who has indicated his willingness to work in the public sector and we hope that that comes to fruition in early 2023. Thank you.

**Augustus Long Hospital
(Status of)**

58. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Given that the treatment of COVID-19 patients is no longer required at the Augustus Long Hospital, will the Minister state the role of this hospital in providing services in the public health sector?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Augustus Long Hospital is the property of Heritage Petroleum Company Limited. And, as a consequence, this question should be posed to the line Minister under whose remit the company falls.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Fyzabad, Member.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you for that clarification, Minister. Minister, can you indicate whether at this point in time the Ministry of Health would have any interest at all in retaining this facility for providing services to the public?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been in talks for that facility and when a concrete decision has been made it will be announced.

**Flooding in St. Helena, El Carmen, Kelly Village
(Works Undertaken to Prevent Future Flooding)**

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

In light of prolonged rainfall and incidents of flooding in the areas of St. Helena, El Carmen, Kelly Village and environs, will the Minister state the works undertaken to prevent future instances of flooding in these areas?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry via the Drainage Division is at present working on acquiring the necessary statutory approvals for the project of dredging the mouth of the Caroni River during this fiscal year. The dredged area will stretch from the Uriah Butler Highway to the mouth of the river at the Gulf of Paria. Other proposed structural works along the Caroni River embankment are scheduled to be undertaken under this fiscal year under the strategic drainage plan. These works are expected to bring relief to the area of St. Helena, El Carmen, Kelly Village and environs. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, have any sluice gates been assessed and perhaps removed, repaired or replaced in the minor watercourses by the Ministry of Works

and Transport recently in these areas?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport, we have a programme for upgrade of gates and pumps throughout Trinidad and Tobago and a significant amount of work was done on the Caroni area. That is why in this area for the first time, with the magnitude of flooding that we got, the airport did not have to shut off the runway because of the new gates that were installed in that area.

So, yes, there are works ongoing. All these are projects coming out of our national flood drainage plan, and gates and pumps are upgraded along the entire Caroni area with a lot of work planned for this fiscal year. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Minister, has the Ministry of Works and Transport considered a network of retention ponds to contain excess water in these areas?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I just answered a question similar to that. We are working on and working with the national drainage plan. A part of that plan is looking at the entire country and, yes, ponds are something that is on the table. At this point in time, no areas have been identified. But once the experts put forward that there are certain areas that we can put these—it is a holistic plan to minimize flooding in Trinidad and Tobago going forward and the plan is ongoing. And if there are areas for that, it definitely will be considered. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Seecheran: Thank you. Minister, would you enlighten us of the names of the

minor watercourses that have been desilted and dredged by the Ministry of Works and Transport recently in these areas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will love to facilitate that but I do not think the time allotted will be enough. So if the Member, once I can—if he poses the question in writing, I can give him a written—it will take him a couple of days to review it. I cannot give you that right now as I am here. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental. Last one.

Dr. Seecheran: Minister, are you aware that all of these preventative measures that I have just outlined have been done in Greenvale in the aftermath of the 2018 floods and why have they not been done in these areas of St. Helena, El Carmen, Kelly Village and Warrenville.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I will not allow the question at this time.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

**Catastrophic Flooding
(Relief and Assistance from Government)**

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I request your leave to raise the following matter to move the adjournment of the House on a definite matter of urgent public importance: the urgent need for Government to take immediate action to provide essential relief and assistance to communities which have been severely affected by catastrophic flooding in the past week which has caused significant destruction of property, displaced the safe living conditions and hindered the daily lives of tens of thousands of citizens.

The matter is definite because there has been a catastrophic flooding which

is plaguing several communities throughout Trinidad at the present time.

The matter is urgent because thousands of citizens have been and are being evacuated and cannot return home as water levels are reported to be extremely high in some areas, while many have been placed in life-threatening situations at their homes. There has been extreme destruction to properties such as, vehicles, home appliances, food supplies and personal items, which have been all submerged by flood waters. There are many areas where there is no supply of proper drinking water and water for cleaning which pose further threats to health given the possible spread of diseases.

The matter is of public importance as failure by the State to provide adequate relief, compensation, medical help, as well as to mobilize equipment and manpower to offer effective assistance to these communities can be detrimental to thousands of citizens. The flood waters remain at high levels and are stagnated, causing children and the elderly to become sick.

I so move, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have considered the Motion of the Member for Barataria/San Juan. And I am satisfied that this matter qualifies to be raised as a definite matter of urgent public importance. This matter also requires the leave of the House. Is the House prepared to grant leave?

Assent indicated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, leave has been granted in accordance with Standing Order 17(4). The debate on this Motion will stand over until 6:00 p.m. or as time transpires during the course of this evening's sitting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 24(3)

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek your leave under Standing Order 122 to suspend Standing Order 24(3), to allow the Attorney General to speak until the conclusion of his statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leave is granted. Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Leader of the House.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that Standing Order 24(3) be suspended to allow the Attorney General to speak until the conclusion of his statement.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members, please, I have ruled. Member for Oropouche West, I am on my legs. Again, please, Minister of Finance. Proceed, Attorney General.

2.30 p.m.

Litigation Portfolio and Savings to Taxpayers

(Estate Management & Business Development)

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I make this statement with the approval of the Cabinet and by your leave. As Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, I consider it my duty to account to this honourable House from time to time in respect of the Government's management of its litigation and savings effected to the taxpayers of this Republic.

The Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited,

EMBD, is a limited liability company currently operated by a board of directors appointed by Cabinet through the corporation sole. EMBD was originally formed in August 2022 as part of the divestment of Caroni (1975) Limited with its line Ministry being the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries. The original mandate of EMBD was to be responsible as manager for the development and management of the former Caroni (1975) Limited lands. This Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, took office in September 2015 and inherited a multiplicity of claims and resulting litigation for moneys owed.

Since November 2015, in litigation matters involving contractors' claims, the sole focus of EMBD has been to safeguard taxpayers' moneys through managing EMBD's litigation portfolio carefully. The strategy to manage that litigation portfolio has comprised the engagement of experienced attorneys, quantity surveyors and engineering experts conscientiously to pursue or defend EMBD's litigation matters and, where prudent, to settle reasonable claims. This strategy is ongoing but thus far, has been significantly successful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, forming part of this statement, which I make to this honourable House today, is a table which shows at November 30, 2022, a total of some 29 concluded matters involving claims before the High Court, the Court of Appeal and the Industrial Court in which significant sums of money have been claimed from the EMBD for the account of the taxpayer, that is to say, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, which claims have been resolved at 30th of November, 2022, either by way of negotiated settlement, court judgment or withdrawals of claims. This table demonstrates significant savings accomplished by EMBD through its prudent management and the rigorous support of its professional teams. It is to be noted that payment certificates had already been issued to contractors for most of these claims when the Government changed in 2015, with some 50 per

cent of those contracts having been awarded only in the very last year of the office of that Government, 2014 to 2015.

In summary, there is a cumulative value of all claims in EMBD's litigation portfolio, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from fiscal 2017 to fiscal 2022, amounting to approximately \$4.2 billion, inclusive of interest and cost. Of that sum, the table shows that, as at November 30, 2022, by negotiated settlement on prudent advice from its teams of experienced attorneys and its other experts, court judgments or withdrawals by claimant contractors, EMBD has reduced claims originally totalling some \$417 million in 29 legal matters, down to a total settlement sum of \$47 million, whittled down to an estimated 11 per cent of the original value of the claims. EMBD was therefore able to achieve overall savings to the taxpayers of some \$369 million. In other words, if these matters had not been defended or diligently managed, those claims of some \$417 million would have been entered as judgements against the EMBD.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the table which I have with me and which is part of this statement, I will highlight only a few of the 29 matters which are shown on that table.

In one, in the case of Felicity I Residential Site, five awards, the last of two were dated the 7th of January, 2014 and the 19th of December, 2014, amounted to a claim of \$8,681,687.60. That claim was withdrawn on October the 18th, 2018, by the claimant in that matter resulting in a complete 100 per cent saving to the taxpayer of that \$8 million sum.

Secondly, by way of highlight in the case of Lalbeharry Trace and Reform Residential Site, which awards were made in July of 2014, the claims amounted to \$971,613. That claim has been settled with the claimants accepting half of that sum, \$432,000.

The third instance, residential site at Factory Road, No. 3, of a claim which was made on the 4th of February, 2015, for \$1,452,761 on March the 3rd, the contractor's claim was dismissed with cost being awarded to EMBD of \$125,000.

Fourthly, in the case of Golconda, award and contract dated the 27th of May, 2014, a claim of \$860,753.21. On the 12th of May, 2021, consent orders were entered by which the claimants agreed to withdraw their claim and agreed to pay EMBD \$100,000 in cost.

And lastly, of the 29 matters which I wish to highlight, the case of rehabilitation of roads for Picton I project at Boodoo Trace No. 3, award and contract, 7th of July, 2014, claim amounting to \$2,438,945. On the 7th of June, 2022, \$2,200,000 was agreed in full and final settlement, inclusive of cost, for a matter which originally totalled \$5,840,901, with a net saving to the taxpayer of \$3,640,901.30. The total number of claims represented by these 29 matters, Mr. Deputy Speaker, amounted to \$416,963,378.66, of which \$369,345,921.59 was saved to the taxpayer given that the settlement accepted only \$47,617,000 of that \$416 million total.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, two further more recent matters deserve to be recorded for posterity in this honourable House. On May the 6th, 2016, Namalco filed a claim against the EMBD, that is to say Namalco Construction Services Limited, High Court action CV 2016-015229 for sums in excess of \$1.2 billion in respect of six projects. Of these, two are a part of the suite of Caroni Road infrastructure, Mahaica and Brickfield Road. And four are residential sites being developed by Caroni VSEP workers: Cedar Hill A, Roopsingh Road, Petit Morne II and IIA, and Picton. It was in the context of roadworks on these minor roads and the preparation of four residential sites that contractors were in line to receive billions of dollars of outstanding payments. Namalco's claim against EMBD in respect of

these four projects was for the sum of \$1.198,8765 billion inclusive of interest to May 06, 2016.

After a trial lasting the entire month of November 2019, Mr. Justice Ricky Rahim deliver his judgment on the 26th of April, 2022, and I quote from two paragraphs of that judgment. Paragraph 8 he described EMBD:

“...it is a publicly accountable body, whose duty it was to ensure that only sums certified as due or which could be established as due by measurement of work”—actually—“done...”—would be—“paid.”

The EMBD put together a robust defence.

The other significant finding of the judge, Mr. Justice Ricky Rahim of the High Court, which emerges from that judgment claiming \$1.2 billion, and in which EMBD has succeeded insofar an award of only \$427 million with EMBD having appealed—the other notable paragraph out of that judgment is Paragraph 334 of the judgment in which the judge set aside two supplementary agreements on the ground that being entered into as a result of a conspiracy and were therefore not valid. Quote:

“The court finds that the combination of actions on the part of Namalco...’—EMBD’s Chief Executive Officer Mr. Seebalack—“Singh and BBFL...”—engineer, Mr. William Aguilar; Mr. William Aguilar’s name being mentioned 16 times in that judgment—“were committed with only one intention. Put simply...”—says Mr. Justice Rahim—“to extract more money from the State entity EMBD than Namalco would have been entitled to both as a matter of damages on the Original Award for the stoppage (if allowable) and for future works on the said two (2) Projects.”

This judgment has resulted in a saving to EMBD and, by extension, to the taxpayer of \$314,406,886.

Namalco has appealed and we expect that the appeal will be successful on the cross appeal by EMBD on what in an important issue, and that is the ability of the court to go behind interim certificates that are signed off by engineers that are not in the best interest of the companies for which they are working.

Finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I bring to the attention of this honourable House the most recent judgment of the High Court, dated the 27th of July, 2022. High Court action 2019—that is the year 2019—No. 02146 *Mainway Industrial Installation Limited v EMBD*. In that claim, Madam Justice Joan Charles has dismissed an application by the claimant to extend the time for service of its statement of case to pursue the case for a significant sum of money amounting to \$170,780,693.10. And that claim was appealed and on the 7th of November the appellant withdrew, by notice of discontinuance, its appeal against that claim, consolidating and finalizing the saving to the taxpayer of \$170 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your leave, I beg to say thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. Pursuant to Standing Order 24(4), I ask the Attorney General: Mr. Attorney General, are you in a position now to confirm that the Estate Management Development Company Limited, in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, has indeed expended in excess of TT \$113 million on legal and professional fees involving litigation with only four major contractors?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Attorney General.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Hon Member, I, first of all, do not accept your premise that the EMBD—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, a question was asked and the Attorney General is answering. Proceed, Attorney General.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon Member, I, first of all, do not accept your premise that the EMBD is acting in collaboration with the Minister of Finance or the Ministry of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: I secondly answer the question to say that to the extent that you have asked a question with respect to specific figures, I will make enquiry and I will provide that answer.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: But I would say this by way of further answer, in relation to the 29 claims which the EMBD has so far—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:—if I may hon. Member, if I may answer your question?

Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you.

Dr. Moonilal: Watch the Speaker, not me.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, Members. Members. Members, please. Attorney General, proceed.

Dr. Moonilal: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oropouche East, I need no assistant.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I say that the amount that has been saved to taxpayers so far by EMBD's management of its claims is \$369,345,921.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: And there is the more recent judgment of Mr. Justice Rahim in relation to Namalco which was a claim of \$1.2 billion—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon R. Armour SC: —in which a sum of \$436 million has been awarded with a saving of a substantial 50 per cent of that—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon R. Armour SC: —and more. Thank you very much.

FINANCE (NO.2) BILL, 2022

Bill to make provisions of a financial nature and other related matters [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Excuse. Again, Members—Members on both sides, again, you all are free to exit the Chamber to have your necessary discourse, but you cannot afford to disturb the decorum of this sitting, please. So proceed, Clerk.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE

(NOMINATION OF MR. RAMNARINE SAMAROO)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Whereas section 123(1)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (“the Constitution”) provides that the Police Service Commission shall have the power to appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas section 123(3) of the Constitution provides that the Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of the persons nominated for appointment to the office of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas section 123(4) of the Constitution provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

And whereas the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President the name Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo, Assistant Commissioner of Police, as a person nominated to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas the President has on the 24th day of June, 2022 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

And whereas it is expedient to approve the Notification;

Be it resolved that the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this matter is one that has a slight history, in that, the notification came to us—and I think I answered that question here sometime before. The notification came to the House in the manner of which I just described and required that the House treat with it to effect the nomination of this officer. However, the notification came just before the House was due to go on recess, and the House recessed and the period for which for the nomination was to have taken place expired before the House came back out and had the opportunity to treat with it. And, as a result of that, we took a little time to get some proper advice as to

whether a new notification was required or whether the subsisting one was still valid. We are here today acting on that nomination of 24th June, 2022, and will proceed with dispatch.

It falls to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not to provide any personal knowledge and/or endorsement of this office, but to accept the work of the—

Dr. Moonilal: We are not hearing you clearly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the same thing with other Members?

Hon Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Are you hearing me now? I was saying, Mr.—is that better? Is that any better? Okay. Thank you. Sorry about that. I was saying that the qualification of this officer, which I will present now, is not from my personal knowledge or my personal endorsement, but trusting the work of the Police Service Commission who would have done the screening and the examination of the suitability of this officer and would have offered him to the Parliament for consideration.

I proceed to indicate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that officer Ramnarine Samaroo has a fairly long qualification list in terms of academic training, and I may mention a few of his accomplishments dating back to 1998 where he obtained passes in A levels in law. In 2005 from the University of London, he obtained a Bachelor of Laws. In 2012, he obtained from the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies an associate degree in Human Resource Management. In 2017, he obtained a certificate of completion for Bullet Proof Manager programme. In 2017, he also obtained from the Australian Institute of Business, a Master's in Business Administration (Human Resource Management). In 2019, from the

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)

2022.12.02

National Police College of Jamaica, he obtained a certificate of completion of the strategic command course, and he had some significant postings in the police service.

He was appointed to act as Assistant Commissioner of Police in 2021 and posted to the Office of the Assistant Commissioner, North East, in charge of the Division of North Eastern, Northern and North Central. He was promoted to Senior Superintendent in 2020 after he was transferred to the Professional Standards Bureau—he came from the Professional Standards Bureau in 2017. Office Samaroo is also a computer literate. He was a court prosecutor. He had some training in leadership, project management, time management, mentoring/coaching, and strategic management. His personal interest is being able to lead a team to success through increased effort, motivation, performance and productivity.

With respect to his ranks in the police service, in 1986 he enlisted in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, he was transferred to the Port of Spain Division. He served in Belmont in 1987. He was exposed to all areas of policing. He transferred to administration in December 1989. He experienced the attempted coup in 1990. He was promoted to the rank of Corporal in 1997, promoted to the rank of Sergeant in 2005, promoted to the rank of Inspector in May 2011, promoted to Assistant Superintendent in December 2014, and, as I said, his most recent promotion in 2020 to the rank of Senior Superintendent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, colleagues, this is an officer who has an extensive academic record, extensive policing in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. I know of no reason why I should second guess the Police Service Commission, and on that basis, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move.

UNREVISED

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)

2022.12.02

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, Member. Just one second.

Question proposed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here today to discuss all aspects of the nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police; not to be nominated to the substantive post mind you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but merely to act in the position. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this speaks to a slothfulness on the part of the Government—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles:—led by the hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo was nominated on June 24, 2022, the same day the House sat to debate a private Motion on the surge in crime. The first sitting of the House, after Mr. Samaroo was nominated, was Tuesday, 05 July, and the question arises: Could we not have considered the nomination then?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: This is mostly—we are dealing with crime. We are dealing with the most significant appointments at the senior level, and what we have is sloth, laziness and incompetence. Since Mr. Samaroo's nomination, there have been 11 sittings of the House. Today's sitting is the 12th. Why the delay? Why does this Government not deal with the important issues before us in a timely manner?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: Mr. Speaker, there is another issue. The notification was sent by

Deputy Commissioner of Police
 (Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
 Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

the Police Service Commission to the House on the 23rd of June. I have the letter here. It was sent—sorry, from the Police Service Commission to Her Excellency Paula Mae Weekes on the 23rd.

3.00 p.m.

The very next day, the Office of the President forwarded the letter, 24 June, 2022; the next day. And what we have—and in that letter it said, and I quote:

According, the nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo for the purpose of making an acting appointment as Deputy Commissioner of Police is as a result of the following:

- (a) In the absence of Mr. Williams, while on vacation leave and thereafter...

Let me repeat:

...and thereafter in the vacancy consequent on the acting appointment of the substantive incumbent of the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police.

So this could have been a routine matter that could have been dealt with months ago. And since that notification, we have had a parliamentary sitting on Tuesday 05 July, to discuss the Bail (Amdt.) Bill; Friday 09, September, Procedural Motion to save Bills; Monday 12th, Ceremonial Opening; Monday 26th, Budget Presentation; Friday 30, September; Saturday 01, October; Monday 03, October, budget debate; Tuesday 04, October; Friday 04, November; Friday 11, November; Friday 25, November. We have had so many sittings that if this was accorded the priority that it ought to have been given by any self-respecting government, this matter should have been dealt with.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say from the onset that we on this side support

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

the nomination of ACP Ramnarine Samaroo to act in the position of DCoP, Deputy Commissioner of Police, by virtue of his qualifications, his experience, track record, performance at increasingly higher levels among several departments and administrative divisions within the TTPS, his community works, specifically within the Iere Village area, and more generally throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Lastly, his spirituality as evinced by the fact that on most Sundays he attends a community church in the Iere Village in Naparima constituency.

These attributes were obtained, not from the skeletal CV, and I will speak to that later in this contribution, provided to MPs, but based on intensive research gathered through interviews with random police officers, also from classmates, villagers, and others. I congratulate him on his nomination and subsequent appointment to act in this most important post, pending the outcome of today's debate. And I hope that my praise for him will not be a kiss of death, as I have been warned by some of my colleagues, but of good virtue—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Retract that for me, please. Retract that.

Mr. R. Charles: I retract it. I reiterate, I reiterate that we on this side recognize the importance of filling these positions that determine our safety and security. Nothing I say today must detract from the fact that we believe that senior officials of the TTPS are, for the most part, hardworking officers left to operate in systems that are, archaic, antediluvian, “Third World-ish”, bureaucratic and more so designed to frustrate even the most dedicated public servants. No wonder, with 555 murders to date, we are currently experiencing the worst year of murders in our history.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now, again, Member, I have given you a certain amount of leeway. Right? I think we dealt with crime at our last sitting. Today's sitting, we

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

are dealing with the appointment of Mr. Ramnarine. So I want us to stick close to his profile and his résumé and that necessary information, please.

Mr. R. Charles: I am guided. While we support his nomination, we are left to wonder whether, for all his attributes—and this deals with his nomination—for all his attributes and passion for making a positive impact on crime, his efforts and that of other appointees—and I am dealing with appointments, Mr. Deputy Speaker—of his appointment, his efforts and that of other appointees to senior positions within the TTPS, will come to naught, given the monumental failures and leadership shortcomings which bedeviled the police service.

If I were given freedom, I would have said yesterday that the country breathed a sigh of relief. But it is clear that the Prime Minister has faith in his beloved Cabinet Minister who has performed well and in whom he is well pleased.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, let us stick to the text. I would like us to stick to the text.

Mr. R. Charles: I will stick to the text. Factors that will affect the performance of the DCoP Samaroo. That is sticking to his appointment. A convoluted appointment process that wastes parliamentary time. We should today be addressing the fundamental issue of making short-term acting appointments in the TTPS a routine matter for the Police Service Commission. That is what we should be discussing today. This acting appointment should be made swiftly, routinely, and in the normal course, and ought not to be a matter for our legislative body.

Our Prime Minister is on record as saying that his government intends to bring an amendment so that short-term acting appointments in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service will be finalized by the Police Service Commission and not the Parliament. He said that the last time we debated this matter.

UNREVISED

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

So why are we here today, not discussing this amendment, which would have made this debate and similar parliamentary sessions unnecessary? It would have been a routine matter. Where is the prioritization that informs efficiency and good management? Mr. Deputy Speaker, *Newsday*, November 23, 2022, The Police Service Social and Welfare Association President, Acting ASP Gideon Dickson correctly described the selection process of which we are discussing today, which we are witnessing today as:

“...‘cumbersome, bureaucratic, and without merit.’”

He questioned:

“‘What is the mischief that the authorities are seeking to dilute by the enormity of political interference, even just to appoint an officer to act as commissioner or deputy commissioner?’”

So, here we are today, as usual, majoring in minors, dealing with the symptoms of our problems and not the fundamental cause of our predicament.

I call on the Prime Minister to stop wasting Parliament’s time, demonstrate true leadership by addressing the fundamental issues surrounding our cumbersome approach to making acting appointments in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Bring the legislation and correct this egregious anomaly. Discuss it with us in good faith. Let us come up with better ideas that will improve the performance of the TTPS. Our political leader says it repeatedly, and I will say again, bring good legislation to Parliament and you will get our support.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: This is the only way our country can move forward.

The second concern I have with this appointment is that the entire appointment process is convoluted and it needs reform. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

recall the PNM's infamous, fruitless, hurriedly put together 10-point crime plan. And I will refer to the first item. The first item said that they would—the first point in the 10-point plan: to immediately abolish the existing convoluted rules.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Now, Member, I am giving you some leeway. This is the third time. All right? Hold on. This is the third time. I want you to stick to what is the resolve in this particular Motion. Okay? We have an individual that is recommended and I want you to stay close to the text, which is his résumé, his profile. We are not going down the road of what legislation, what is to come and what has gone. Right? So, this is the third time. Proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a situation where we are dealing with the appointment of a DCoP and I am talking specifically of the context in which he would be operating. We could appoint and fail, because that is the—it seems to be reality in Trinidad. We have to analyze critically how he is—what is he going into? What is he going to meet? Could he perform? And are his qualifications suitable for that?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a—he, Mr. Samaroo, good as he is, would be going into a situation where all senior appointments in the police service are acting appointments. And you could say that that is not important. You could tell any SEA child that that is not important. He is going into a situation where all the CoP and DCoPs are acting.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: We have Mr. McDonald Jacob, acting, seemingly indefinitely as Commissioner of Police. We have Mrs. Erla Harewood-Christopher, acting as DCoP. We will soon have Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo and Curt Simon, Acting

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

DCoPs. This mean that every single position which falls under the remit of the PSC is occupied by persons acting in their positions and nobody could tell me that that is not important to be discussed in this Parliament today.

I wish to make the statement today, because we are relying on information that came from the PSC via the President to us, that the PSC is letting us down. They are responsible for only four positions in the TTPS; only four. And not one of these is filled substantively. And then I am told I cannot mention that. I will, and if I do not, I will do it outside.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, the last statement you made, kindly retract it.

Mr. R. Charles: I retract it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Because, again, you know what you are doing. You know what you are saying and what you implying. Retract that last statement, please.

Mr. R. Charles: I retract it absolutely, totally and unreservedly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The problem with us here today is that this process will be repeated in a matter of months. We will again, be called to make further acting appointments soon. This is because two of the four persons acting in the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police position will retire shortly. Will they be given substantive positions before they retire? Those are critical issues. Will they be able to make a meaningful impact in the short time they hold those substantive positions? And how fair is this to them and for morale in the TTPS generally to be acting for months and then positions are given to others?

Acting Commissioner McDonald Jacob will reach 61 next year; 61 next year. This is according to *Newsday*, April 11, 2021. Mrs. Erla Harewood-Christopher will reach 60 in May next year, having been born on the 15 May,

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

1963. These are relevant, critical issues. Mr. Samaroo will be 58 next year, being born on the 9th of January, 1965. Mr. Curt Simon will be 56 next year, being born on the 8th of October, 1967. Only the last two appointees will have time to make a measurable impact in their substantive positions. And this begs the question of succession planning. We could come here and debate a list. “Look the list, go with the list,” ignoring that there is a succession planning component that makes the list relevant in a future debate. This begs the question of succession planning by the Police Service Commission. After all, retirement ages are known. I know them, and so surely must be the Police Service Commission.

And I say all these things because I have an interest in reducing crime in this country. The Police Service Commission does not have to wait until someone retires to initiate and complete the process of making appointments. The Police Service Commission should, by now, have a list of appointees and their successors. So we are discussing this appointment, they should have a list, who will follow and who will follow me afterwards. This is what have occurred in the colonial era. You had succession planning. Somebody at a level of an ACP now should be gearing up for that position and putting himself, giving the track record of performance, and we will all be the beneficiaries of that. What we need is a seamless process, where ideally there should be a six-month handover period when retirees and proposed successors will work together to ensure continuity, efficiency and a seamless transition.

I must make the point—and this speaks directly to some of the interventions. We have a question. We are a coequal branch of government. We are equal to the Executive and the Judiciary, and we cannot to be told that, “Here is a list, look at the list,” and rubberstamp. That is disrespecting a coequal branch of government.

UNREVISED

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

You have to look in the US Senate to see the actual kind of questions that a coequal branch gives to every appointment, including the appointment of the US Ambassador to Trinidad and every judicial appointment and every senior position within the Executive of the United States. We as a coequal branch are repeatedly told, “Come here, read de thing, rubberstamp and only ask questions. He went to school here, transferred here. He went to dis place, he do”. That is not, I repeat, not adequate for is self-respecting Parliament.

Hear the disrespect. We are given notice of the nominations and provided with a skeletal CV of the person. We are not provided with their track record. We have to deduce their vision for the job. We have no measurable performance indicators. It is as if all they expect us to do is rubberstamp the nominations forwarded by the PSC, Police Service Commission, to the President.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, the Police Service Commission, but it is coming via a certain channel and you are creating some implications. So move on to your next point, totally move on to your next point.

Mr. R. Charles: I move on to my next point. The job—I would have liked to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is the vision of this gentleman. I had to get it in other ways. As I repeat, I repeat, we must not have a process which appears to appoint persons who have the imprimatur and the agreement of the Executive. These appointments come at a time when many of us have lost confidence in the ability to deal with crime. So, how has the process been simplified? How has it been made free of political interference? In Canada, it is automatic.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1) and 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Again, move on, Member, move on, move on. Because you are—same point just stating differently.

Mr. R. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, our concerns notwithstanding, we support, given all that is before us and all the interference from that side. We support the nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo to act in the position of DCoP. We have done extensive research and note the following. He has served in many branches of the TTPS and therefore, has an informed understanding of the many functions of that institution. He has been actively involved in the Police Youth Clubs, specifically the Iere Village Police Youth Club. And this suggests to us a keen interest, not only in crime suppression, but more so on the areas we have stressed of crime prevention and crime rehabilitation. I think officers like him will bring a realignment of the police service away from its emphasis on crime—for crime suppression to crime rehabilitation and crime prevention.

Academically, he is as good as any police officer in any part of the world and, in my view, better than many. I have reviewed the transcripts of police officers in the United States, Canada, Australia. He could stand heads and shoulders above many. He has an LLB, an Associate Degree in Human Resources from the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies. In an effort to further his studies, he pursued his Master's in Business Administration, specializing in Human Resource Management.

In 2019, as the Prime Minister said, he was selected for a training seminar in Jamaica, where he completed a course in strategic management for executives. I am sure that he knows about setting SMART goals, something I have repeatedly been talking about in this Parliament: specific, measurable, relevant, achievable and timely. So that I would expect to hear that police response time will be 10 minutes. I will expect, given what I see in his CV, that we will be getting data and targets, such as the murder rate will decrease by 10 per cent annually. I expect we

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

will be getting information from that kind of thinking that speaks to the fact that the recidivism rate in the prison service would be reduced by 15 per cent in a three-year period. Those are the kinds of expectations we on this side have for such a gentleman in the police service.

I met him once for less than four minutes. I heard him address the gathering at this year's Divali function held at the Princes Town Police Station, and I was very much impressed with his articulation of the challenges facing the country in general and the TTPS, in particular. He seemed to be the kind of officer—he seemed to be the kind of officer who will stand up for what is right. If he gets an instruction, for example, to falsely arrest someone, he seems to be that kind of police officer that we need. At the same time, he will not let friendships, politics—this is the impression I got—or career advancement ambitions get in the way of his ethics, his professionalism, and spirituality. And you could see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could not get that from the CV and that speaks to the inadequacy of the CV as a form of evaluating an individual. I am normally skeptical of the police. But at that function, I was impressed with the officers in the southern division. I could only remark as a citizen—as a senior citizen in the country, I could only—give these fellas the tools and they will get the job done.

More so, based on random discussions with a cross-section of officers of the TTPS, I gather that he has the respect of the rank-and-file officers in the service having, among other things, risen through the ranks, starting from his appointment as a constable in 1986.

In conclusion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a review of the performance of the TTPS tells us that there are many hardworking officers in that institution ill-served by agencies that continue to fail them. We can make all the appointments we wish,

UNREVISED

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

but putting good officers to operate in antediluvian systems with poor policy framework will make them inefficient. And the question I ask in closing: How can they perform with a shamelessly slothful judicial system? They can take hundreds of guns off the streets, but lack of scanners at our ports will immediately be replaced.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, Member. You have been going fine just now. So, again, please, that last statement there, let us get away—move away from that.

Mr. R. Charles: So you want me to withdraw the statement?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, just move on away that.

Mr. R. Charles: You want me to withdraw that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes. Just move away from that. You know clearly—

Mr. R. Charles: That good officers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. You know clearly what I am speaking about.

Mr. R. Charles: I withdraw—[*Inaudible*]
—all I could say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, we do not need the extra statement. We do not need it. Just withdraw. Thank you.

Mr. R. Charles: I withdraw. I wish to say that in Canada, acting appointments are routine, predictable, transparent and seamlessly achieved. In the UK, it is routine, with the length of the acting appointments being specified.

Even in Barbados, I have read their *Gazette* about acting appointments—we are dealing with acting appointments now—of senior officers in their police service, which specify the time frames of the acting appointment. So, why can we not to be told that Mr. Samaroo will act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police for a period of six months? Which actually in the UK, it is said that an

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2022.12.02

acting appointment should not exceed six months, unless they get specified approvals. So, everywhere else you look, you see sense, you see order, you see a hierarchical organization that is seamlessly operating. One person leaves, another person acts. And I know that my senior is going to go on holiday next year, so I begin preparing for that acting appointment. In Trinidad, it seems as if we just come to Parliament and we just throw it and—all these officers today, and we are dealing with two, they do not know whether they would be approved or not today, into an acting position, in a senior position. This should be routine. This is not for Parliament.

And I would like to just, in my last line, beg this Government to operate with the police service as if we are operating on global standards. In my last statement, I read the Barbados police—read of the vision of the Barbados Police Service. And I think we need to listen to it:

“...enhance law enforcement and public safety deliverables by integration of modern technology and through a competent workforce leading in international police standards and enabling efficiency, accountability and professional excellence.”

My last, last statement. Their forensic centre aspires to be the best in the Caribbean. Let us put that in our pipe and smoke it. When we ask: What is the accreditation? We are told, “Doh ask that. That is not important.” No answer.

So, I would say, I wish DCoP Ramnarine Samaroo well, advise him to let his faith help him navigate the vicissitudes and exigencies of the TTPS, ill-served by a poor policy framework that is clueless and visionless, and I ask him to remember the injunction, the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Do not be deterred by the fact that the labourers are all acting in their position as

UNREVISED

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

labourers. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Prime Minister. Prime Minister, you have—[*Inaudible*—]minutes.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If one thing can be said of my colleague from Naparima, it is that he never misses an opportunity to tell us how much TV he has watched and how many magazines he has read.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Because, representing the UNC and being so spirited in his response, one would not believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the predicament that we are in with respect to the appointment of senior offices in the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago was a UNC demand and a UNC creation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while I do not wish to go, to veer away from the citations that I read, I simply want to correct the record, or let the record reflect against the background of what was said by the gentleman from Naparima. And to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to tell you that before the change was made from what existed, these appointments were, as he said, routine in our police service. Appointments of a Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police were public service routine appointments. It was the UNC, in talking to Prime Minister Manning, who negotiated to get laws passed and came up with this arrangement, which he today describes as archaic and antediluvian, cumbersome and bureaucratic. That is the outcome of what they have put in place. And all I am doing and I am supposed and could do is to follow

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

2022.12.02

the law.

To hear my colleague come here today and talk about the skeletal CV of officer Samaroo, giving the impression that that has something to do with the Government. The CV I read to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has nothing to do with the Government. I read it as presented to us by law through the Office of the President to this House.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he tried to give the impression that there was some competence issue here with respect to this appointment being done before. Let me clarify for the benefit of those who would want to listen. A notification came just before the House went—a matter of days before the House went on recess. The recess took place and, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, particularly with this matter, one has to be very careful that you follow the law. Because you may recall, as he castigates those who are doing it today, saying that we should not be wasting Parliament's time doing this. I want to remind the Member for Naparima that appointments to the position of Deputy Commissioner of Police were being made routinely without coming to the Parliament. It was a few months ago, when there were issues of acting in the police service, that it was discovered by the legal fraternity that the appointment has to be made in a particular way because it has been enshrined in law in the Constitution.

So to come here today, and say it is routine, and it is this and it is that, and jump up and down like an animated toy, it is the law which you asked for and which you put in place. And do not ask me to break the law, I have an oath of office. If you were paying attention, you would have realized that this matter arose because of a discovery that it requires to come to the Parliament, and it is against

UNREVISED

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

2022.12.02

that background that I said the other day—and I am glad you agree—that it is the waste of Parliament's time for the House to have to come here. And you are saying you must come with urgency with a flambeau in the night because he comes in in the morning, get it done by the evening, to make a temporary appointment, to make an appointment of an acting position at the top of the police service. I agree with you for once that it is a waste of Parliament's time.

But when the period for acting, or the period described, or the purpose for which the appointment has been made in the case you mentioned of the Commissioner going on leave and Officer Samaroo should have been appointed to cover the period, and it never got on the Order Paper before the Parliament went on recess, and the period expired as a matter of few days and you say now, it is a waste of time. Let us agree on that. Do I take it that when I bring the nomination here—when I bring the legislation here, the amendment, that we will have the support of our colleagues on the other side? Do I take it that that is a commitment you give? Because the record does not show that we can think so. But I take you at your word, the amendment will come, and when it comes, we will know exactly what your commitment is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member said he met the officer for four minutes, and during that four minutes, he made some marvelous conclusions—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—as to what one can expect of the officer and, of course, he said that one can expect that the officer will not arrest anybody on political directions and instructions. That is just another of the unnecessary statements that cast aspersions and destroy the morale of the police service. Who in Trinidad and Tobago could stand before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and say that somebody was

Deputy Commissioner of Police
 (Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
 Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

arrested on the destruction of any deputy—any political person in Trinidad and Tobago; who? Who can say that? But to have said that is simply to cast an aspersion on the police service.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: To the best of my knowledge, persons in Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Charles: When I—[*Inaudible*]—to raise that point—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, one second, one second.

Mr. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, listen, Member.

Mr. Charles: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are you contesting the ruling that I made?

Mr. Charles: No, I am not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And just for the records, you will have to check *Hansard*.

Mr. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member.

Mr. Charles: Yes Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I did not stop you. Proceed.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member—

Mr. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, there was no distraction when you in the Chair, other than—when you in the booth chatting—unless the Speaker rose so, please. Proceed.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member, I want to stay very close to what I put out here and follow your rulings, but I am simply responding to what the Member said because I think we are in a debate so, I do not know why he is getting upset. I have introduced nothing new. I am simply responding, albeit not agreeing with his contribution. The Member talks about the fact that we should be doing like Barbados, and doing like the UK, and doing like the American Senate. Yes, we could do that if the law is amended to permit us to do that. But to make comparisons of what is happening in the American Senate, there is one missing component and that component is the actual officer comes before the Committee and that officer is spoken to by the Committee. Is it that which is being recommended now by the Member?

Because I could say the police service was going very well when the public service was making the appointments of the same set of people in the police service. It is since the Parliament has gotten involved in this process that it has become the subject of this political animation that we are seeing here and the casting of slurs. And I, therefore, have no confidence that if the individual officers come before this House, that any improvement will flow because of the behaviour of my colleagues—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: —in trying to give the impression that we wasted time. Mr. Deputy Speaker, given what happened with the discovery of the requirement for this action, this Government carefully took advice and that took some time to get proper legal advice as to whether in fact the submission from the President could still be used, even if the period which was described in the purpose had elapsed. So, I do not know why the Member spent his time using the opportunity to

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

2022.12.02

castigate the Police Service Commission. I guess a lot can be said about the police service and other commissions, but the bottom line is that in the other side of his mouth, he would be speaking about the need to let the commission be 100 per cent independent and do as they please and you only receive from the independent commission when the independent commission responds to you. That is what it is. And in talking about what should and should not happen, he ignores the fact that the Government is not allowed to do what he is implying to do because they have argued that the Government, in particular the Minister, must stay as far away from the process as possible; the Minister. As a matter of fact, when the Government sought to trigger the process for the nomination of the Commissioner of Police, the Government ended up in the court and it was argued and ruled on the ground that, “Okay, well, let us keep the Minister away from it,” and that was the old amendment the court made.

So do not come here today and take the time that is given to you and jump up and down behind the lectern giving the impression that the Member for Naparima is some paragon, when in fact what you are doing is misleading people and seeking to revise and review our history and our circumstance. Nothing that the Member said has improved the debate on whether or not we should choose this officer; nothing, except to give the impression that the Government has some control over the Police Service Commission to improve it, or that the Government had something to do that the Government did not do. This is the system that you asked for that is in place.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you do not believe me, this acting and super acting and perineal acting has been described by a UNC Attorney

Deputy Commissioner of Police
 (Nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo)
 Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

General as the best arrangement in place, when they, in government, had a Commissioner of Police acting for God knows how long and the Attorney General then said is the best arrangement because if he is acting, he will work harder to try and get the job. That was the UNC's position told to the country by the Attorney General in that government. So when you come here today and trying to give the impression that you are against these positions, the only thing that came out of your contribution today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a commitment that when the amendment comes, as it is going to come very soon, that the Opposition will support an amendment to the Constitution in the relevant Act to remove this from the Parliament. I beg to move, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members—for the records, hon. Prime Minister, the Clerk just brought my attention. “I beg to move”, it was said?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, just for the records, could you just.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE
 (NOMINATION OF MR. CURT SIMON)**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, proceed.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I will, thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Next Motion.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: To the next Motion, yes good. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas section 123(1)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago provides that the Police Service Commission shall have the power to appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas section 123(3) of the Constitution provides that the Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of the persons nominated for appointment to the office of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas section 123(4) of the Constitution provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

And whereas the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President, the name, Mr. Curt Simon, Superintendent of Police, acting as Assistant Commissioner of Police, as a person nominated to act in the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas the President has on the 16th day of November, 2022 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

And whereas it is expedient to approve the notification;

Be it resolved that the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Curt Simon to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

2022.12.02

Mr. Deputy Speaker, following the requirements of the law and the restrictions as laid down in the Constitution, I want to point out that the qualifications as submitted and reported to the House by me is as presented by the Office of the President who would have received this pertinent information from the Police Service Commission, the independent body which is the only authority which has it within its power to appoint persons to act in this position or to discipline persons who operate as Commissioner of Police or Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the matter before us is an officer, Curt Gerard Simon, who has a record in the police service, a professional experience. He worked doing general police duties in the southern division, 1990 to 1992. He was a police detective in southern division, 1992 to 2005. He was a homicide investigator, Homicide Bureau of Investigations, 2005 to 2015. He worked in the Fraud Squad from 2018 to 2019, and he worked in the central division in a managerial position from 2020 to the present.

With respect to his certification, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he obtained a Certificate in Criminology from the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine in 1996. He also obtained an Associate of Arts in criminology—Criminal Justice, excuse me, with high honours in 2014 from the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2017, he obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice, Police Science, magna cum laude, of the College of Science and Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2021, he obtained from the University of the West Indies, a research project he did on “Retired Homicide Investigations: Perceptions of Factors Impacting the Investigations and

Deputy Commissioner of Police
 (Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
 Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

Solving of Homicides”, a phenomenological study, and he got a Master of Science Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice for his research.

Once again, another officer who has been in the police service for quite some time, has widespread experience across the police service, and who has some level of certification. And these attributes have been assessed by the Police Service Commission and they find it fit and proper to respond under law to this House, through the President, asking this House to approve their recommendation, that Officer Simon be allowed to act in this position of Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, once again, I say to the House, I have no contrary position, I have no reason to have a contrary position at this time and therefore, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second—hon. Members, I will now propose the question for the debate.

Question proposed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call on Oropouche East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have 45 minutes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: How much?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: 45.

Dr. R. Moonilal: 45?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: 30.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: 30 minutes and—

Dr. R. Moonilal: How much minutes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So 30 minutes, plus the additional 15, which makes it 45.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to join this debate on a very important matter, notably, the notification of Her Excellency the President for the specific appointment of—a specific appointment to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Deputy Speaker—I nearly referred to you as Deputy Commissioner—this is a critical matter that the Parliament is called upon to address in the context of what is taking place in the national community, and the crisis that this country faces at this time. We are here to debate the appointment to a very senior office in the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service by virtue of a particular process and with your leave, I will read the Motion—notwithstanding the contribution of the mover earlier, I would read the Motion because I would like to root my contribution specifically in the Motion that is before us. It says and I read:

“Whereas section 123(1)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (‘the Constitution’) provides that the Public Service Commission shall have the power to appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas section 123(3) of the Constitution provides that the Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of the persons nominated for appointment to the office of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas section 123(4) of the Constitution provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated under

Deputy Commissioner of Police
 (Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
 Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2022.12.02

subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

And whereas the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President the name Mr. Curt Simon, Superintendent of Police, acting as Assistant Commissioner of Police, as a person nominated to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police;

And whereas the President has on the 16th day of November, 2022 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

And whereas it is expedient to approve the Notification;

Be it resolved that the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Curt Simon to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.”

This is a Motion moved by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I took the time and effort to read completely the Motion into the record because I want to begin with section 123(1)(a) of the Constitution, which incidentally the Motion itself begins with one recital. Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I place on record this section, 123(1)(a), says:

“The Police...”

—from the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago:

“The Police Service Commission shall have the power to—

(a) appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;”

I stop there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this law was effected via constitutional change, powers of the Police Service Commission, 6 of 2006 and 12 out of 2007. This is a law, a

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

change, a reform that took place in 2006 and 2007. It was done under the Manning administration of that time. So I want to dispel any lingering doubts that anyone would have. I want to dispel those doubts that this had absolutely nothing to do with what the UNC passed, what the UNC moved, what the UNC approved. It is a PNM law.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: In 2006/2007, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a few Members in this House, including myself, the Member for Siparia, the Member for Diego Martin North East, the Member for Diego Martin North West, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, I cannot think of anyone else, but a few of us were on the compound at that time and there was a major initiative on the part of the Manning administration, in collaboration with the United National Congress Opposition that saw a bipartisan approach to change in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and all legislation and law and the Constitution as we deal with the Police Service Commission's appointments and so forth. And a team was established that included, then Prime Minister, Patrick Manning; Opposition Leader, Basdeo Panday; the Member for Siparia, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar; the Member for Arouca/Maloney, Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis, and a couple other Members. I am not sure if the Member for Diego Martin West was on that Committee. I am not sure if the Prime Minister at that time had any great regard for his contribution or any regard for any input he would have on that matter. But those persons in the main made up a committee that undertook a considerable amount of work and effort, enormous amount of meetings and consultations and dialogue and so on, that led to this matter, coming to the Parliament under the Manning administration.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: And I am saying this and reiterating this because I do not want anybody in the public to believe that this law that brought about that change was done by the United National Congress—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal: —or the United National Congress wanted it necessarily. It was passed under a government of the PNM. Now, I can understand the Member for Diego Martin West not having such insight, because he was never really in the inner circle, or a key Member, or one that the Member for San Fernando East at the time had any regard for. So I begin by stating this point. Let me move on now.

Section 123(3), quoted in the Motion as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

“The Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of the persons nominated for appointment to the offices of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner Police.”

So the Police Service Commission has its role spelt out, directed, in the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

At 123(4)—section 123(4):

“The President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives.”

All of these matters arose as a result of constitutional change under a PNM administration then led by former Prime Minister, Patrick Manning. So here we are today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here to make an appointment and I want to make a couple introductory remarks on this matter. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have had the opportunity to speak before on previous appointments for the position

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2022.12.02

of Acting Commissioner of Police and so on, and the Prime Minister routinely moves these Motions and therefore, generally, he would be aware of the appointments that were done before by the Parliament pursuant to this process.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the challenges, and I will come to the legal issue in a moment, but one of the challenges in the process, the administrative challenge is that whereas for previous acting appointments, we have had sight of the Police Service Commission's letter, in one case dated the 23rd of June, 2022—we have had sight of the context in which an acting appointment is to be made. In the context of Mr. Simon, Mr. Curt Simon, unless I did not myself receive it, we do not have a contextual letter from the Police Service Commission outlining the nature of this acting appointment. We have a Motion, the Motion is filed in the Parliament and we are debating a Motion. But could we enquire, for example—we did not have to previously, but we may now have to enquire—how long is Mr. Simon expected to act for?

4.00 p.m.

The President issued a notification, it says that the gentleman will act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. How long would he act for? Who is he acting for? When would he cease acting as a Deputy Commissioner of Police? We do not know this. Whereas in the previous appointment, a letter from the Police Service Commission spelt out that the previous person was going to act for Mr. Williams, and then thereafter act in a vacant position pursuant to the departure from that position of Mr. Jacob, who is acting as Commissioner of Police. So, it in a way, it handicaps a debate that we do not know for how long. This gentleman could be acting from today, Friday, December 2nd, a good day, could be acting from today to Monday. We do not know. He could be acting for a few months, for

UNREVISED

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2022.12.02

a year. We do not know. We simply do not know, and that undermines the spirit of the legislation itself—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—that the Parliament is asked to approve an acting appointment—and this has absolutely no disrespect or it casts no aspersions on Mr. Simon himself. We will get to him specifically in a lil while—but we do not know, from any correspondence before us, how long is he expected to act for. Because it cannot be that he will act for a long, long, period of time, some period that we are unaware of, in this position, because that defeats, as I said, the spirit of transparency. We must be told.

So, in future, I would like to ask the Government and so on, and the requisite and responsible department, to provide us as well with the correspondence from the Police Service Commission, which will be sent to Her Excellency the President, copy that to Members of Parliament, so we will know the context in which these acting appointments are being done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Now, we are told in our Motion—because that is all we have, unless somebody has something else that I do not have—we are told that this gentleman is actually on the verge of becoming a—playing some type of double role. He is a substantive Superintendent of Police. That is his substantive position. He is currently acting as Assistant Commissioner of Police, and now he is going to act as Deputy Commissioner of Police. When we had one man acting as Commissioner of Police, they made a big fuss between 2010 and 2015. Now we have one man acting in two positions: Acting Assistant Commissioner of Police and Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police and substantive Superintendent of

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

Police.

So, it creates an elongated, convoluted process when you have persons in this type of position and they just act, and act, and act. And there was a lot of quarrel about the Partnership administration had a Police Commissioner for five years, acting. Recently—I think just recently, there was a time when there was no Commissioner of Police, not even an acting one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: And money had to be passed to the police by the Minister of Finance. I think he may have been acting as Commissioner of Police in the circumstances, where they had to work out something, pursuant to financial regulations, to pass money, and that is the stage we reached. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot imagine the Member for Diego Martin North/East as a Commissioner of Police. I perish the thought. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me move on with Mr. Curt Simon, the notification. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the related matter here—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, one second. Again, please, Members.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the related matter here is a statement that is always made and it is made in the press and so on that—you know, let me begin with a blanket statement. You know, if one Prime Minister had not gone to the President's house and snapped out from the hands of a Police Service Commission Chairman a merit list, we would not be here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right. Member, we are not—that is not part of the Motion today. Okay?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So move on from that particular point.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has promised on a previous occasion, and they are signalling, but forever signalling that there will be a new amendment to deal with this process, which we all agree, is a process that we should look at. And the United National Congress, under Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, cannot agree to any amendment unless we see it, unless we read it, unless it is laid in the Parliament and it is tabled before us.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: To ask us to agree to an amendment and you have not even drafted it, you have not considered, could the Prime Minister tell us now whether the legislative review committee or a sub-committee of Cabinet has in its hands any draft amendment to the selection and recruitment process to take away this cumbersome process?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Tell us. I suggest you do not, you cannot, because there is nothing. So, we have to come here all the time to guess how long an acting appointment is for, to approve it. And, in one case, we had to do it quickly during the budget debate because the Commissioner was leaving the country to England, I believe, for a short while. So, it is not enough to come every week with this type of mundane and mantra-type speeches and so on. Tell us where is the amendment?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: When can we expect it?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: You have had seven years in office and still blaming the UNC, still blaming the Member for Siparia, still blaming—I do not know who—still blaming everyone, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, we would like to know from the

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

Prime Minister today, before he blames us again, when will the amendment come that will seek to deal with this matter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: When exactly? Mr. Deputy Speaker, the notion that the police is sacrosanct and insulated and neutral and independent, that is an ideal that we work for in democracies. We work for that ideal, but that is not often the reality. We have had situations in this country, in our recent history, when there has been in the public domain, even in judgements of the Privy Council, our highest court, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had a situation where when we reflect, the Privy Council stated in its judgment that there were times when prosecutions were politically tainted by political operatives. So appointing—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, all right. We are not here to debate this, in this particular Motion. So stay away from the Privy Council ruling. Right? I will prefer you stay away.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. I move on to Mr. Simon. Like the Member for Naparima, I also conducted my enquiries.

Hon. Member: Surveillance.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I would not say surveillance, but I conducted enquiries because I was notified before that I would be required to speak on this matter. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can tell you that from what we have learnt of Mr. Simon. He is not a gentleman that will wire himself with recordings to trap people. He is not a gentleman that will be easily bullied and manhandled by political operatives into taking decisions, into witch-hunting, into satisfying the political directorate,

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2022.12.02

because the independence of the police service is enshrined in our Constitution as a fundamental principle. It is fundamental to the rule of law as well, and Mr. Simon must stand tall and stand strong, at a time like this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: He must. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have had the opportunity to speak to persons acquainted in some way with the work of Mr. Simon. Because Mr. Simon, as his CV will tell us—and we have it in our hands here—he has had a considerable experience, I believe, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we go from 1990 to 2022, we have had, you know, 30 years, 32 years or so in the service. We have had a gentleman who has worked in the southern division and well-known to persons in that region, who has been in the Homicide Bureau of Investigations, the Fraud Squad, central division, of course, I think until recently or possibly still there in the central division. And our enquiries suggest that this candidate is not one that will be easily manoeuvred, manipulated and bullied into doing anything that is illegal as directed by the political elite in this country. And that is something that we want to signal, at this time.

The candidate also has qualifications: a Master of Science degree in Criminology and the Criminal Justice System from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine; Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice, Police Science, and a magna cum laude, a Master—Bachelor of Arts, an Associate of Arts in Criminal Justice with high honours, a certificate in criminology. I am happy to welcome, Mr. Simon, assuming that he is approved today, to the position that he will act in. Because, Mr. Simon, wherever you are, you are coming into this position with the highest murder rate in the history of Trinidad and Tobago staring you in your face, Mr. Simon.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: So I want Mr. Simon to be aware. I do not think he could do anything to change that, at this time, but he must be aware that all these qualifications he has in criminal justice, criminology, police science, all of these qualifications and skills will be called to the fore to deal with a murder rate that is in excess of 558 and the final month now began for the year. This is the situation that Mr. Simon will come into, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we go along in this CV here, abbreviated as it is, skills and abilities—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, skeleton CV, résumé—skills include developing software packages for sharing documents, evaluating, implementing policies, research methodology, problem solving, a solution-oriented individual, excellent communication skills and a team player we are told as well. He has several accomplishments under his belt. He has worked with—amazingly, he has worked with the technology. He seems to be a techno-driven cop. He seems to be someone attuned with the technology that is so relevant at a time like this. And Mr. Simon comes into the job at a time when we are told that there is little use of technology in solving crime, but we are not here to talk about crime. So I will move on with Mr. Simon.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So, again, you made the statement and then you corrected yourself also.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Of course.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So, please, move on from that particular aspect.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I know the gentleman from St. Joseph would be uneasy if we talk about crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Identify the Member properly.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The Member for St. Joseph would be uneasy to discuss anything related to murder and crime. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the candidate before us as well, is a practitioner in the justice system. He is a very qualified professional. We wanted to check as well his date of birth, because a matter that has been raised time and time again has to do with succession planning. And while as someone in the field of labour and industrial relations, we understand the importance of acting appointments to remuneration packages and termination benefits and so on, sometimes, you know, we underestimate the importance of these acting appointments, because they lead to something else. But, Mr. Simon, I believe, was born in 1967. That means that he does have a few years of service that he can provide in this position, assuming that the process is corrected, of course, and that he may even go on to other positions in the TTPS and in the law enforcement community.

So, the Opposition, in this regard, would have very little objection, would have very little critical analysis to bring to the appointment of Mr. Curt Gerard Simon to the position, but to indicate as well our displeasure with the process, our displeasure with the amount of information that is provided. Now, we are fortunate in a way—the Member for Naparima, myself and others—it is a small society. So, you know, people know people, so you can enquire about persons, find out about them and this is what—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I participated, along with the Member for Siparia, in those parliamentary debates. It was Wednesday, March 15, 2006, in which this constitutional amendment Bill was debated.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—Wednesday, March 15, 2006. We participated in this debate. Mr. Manning led off, of course, then Prime Minister, and Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar spoke, Mr. Basdeo Panday, Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis. In fact, strange enough, I do not think the Member for Diego Martin West participated in this debate—Mr. Gerald Yetming, myself and others, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we were contemplating then as well, this issue of bringing transparency to appointments at the highest level of the police service. Because what we had before was secret backroom deals by shadowy characters, will meet in late in the night at unsocial hours and determine who will be Commissioner and who will act and so on, and we wanted transparency, disclosure, openness and a veto power. And maybe as we go along we can discuss that again, you know, whether this itself is in need of some type of reform. Because it cannot be that this system serves us so well and you have the highest murder rate in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. But I say so more about that. I do not know, the people do not like to hear that.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to remind ourselves of the debate in 2006, when a PNM administration led to this type of change, the PNM administration of which Diego Martin West was a part of. I do not know if he was fired before or after this debate, but he was a part of the government at the time and he well knows this debate. He well knows what gives rise to this debate, why we argued for this type of system which they have completely messed up in the last few years by tinkering with the independent institutions, by interfering with the Police Service Commission, by pulling back merit lists from people's hands and so on, they have interfered with it. Having said that, I will now say—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Orders 48(1) and 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, we went through that earlier in your discourse with regard to your last statement again. So, again, move on totally out of that, please.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really do intend to move on, so I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the gentleman from Oropouche could say what he likes, but the record will show that yes, it was a PNM government under Patrick Manning, facing a crime wave, very much like we are facing now, had a suite of legislation called crime Bills, and he offered those Bills to the Opposition for their consideration. They received them and they decided, as a requirement for passage of those laws, they wanted the appointment of senior officers in the police service removed from where it was in the public service, where there was a provision for the Prime Minister to have a veto, meaning, that the Prime Minister, his approval, had to be had for a public service appointment—a recommendation to be effected by the service—and we called that a veto. And they said that for supporting of these legislations that required a special majority, the then Opposition will only support those crime Bills if their Prime Minister agrees to modification of the system for the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. I do not know why my colleagues will come here today, and try to revise that and say otherwise. Everybody in this country knows that. So, why are you coming here today to say it was a PNM law? It was a batch of legislation which required the support of the Opposition. It did not have in it any change in the way a Commissioner of Police or his deputies were appointed.

Deputy Commissioner of Police
 (Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
 Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

That was a requirement to get the support of the Opposition.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And in order to get the support of the Opposition, the PNM Prime Minister agreed to make these changes in the process for the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. And I defy any one of them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to get up here now and say that is not so.

Hon. Member: It was not so.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: A point was raised by the Member for Oropouche East, about requiring to know what the Commission said about the length of time that Mr. Simon would act for. I have a document which I referred to, when Mr. Samaroo was to have acted. I have now been provided with a similar document covering the appointment of officer Simon, because that point is probably the useful point that the Member made that we should know.

I said earlier on that when officer Samaroo was not on the Order Paper before the term when he was supposed to act expired, we were put in a situation where we had to get some clearance as to whether, in fact, we could proceed on the same notification. So, for the benefit of Members, permit me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to read the letter that I have just got, which appears to me, to be identical, but I would just for correctness and completeness's sake, I will read it.

The letter is dated the 15th of November, 2022, and it is addressed to Her Excellency the President and it says—the heading is:

Your Excellency,

Re: Nomination for Acting Appointment in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Ministry of National Security

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

2022.12.02

And that is in bold. And I continue:

The Police Service Commission, in accordance with section 123.

And it makes a series of references to the actual law, and it goes on to say:

That the Service Commission Order 2021 has nominated Mr. Curt Simon, Superintendent of Police, Acting as Assistant Commissioner of Police for acting appointment to the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Her Excellency is informed that by correspondence dated 26 September, 2022, the Acting Commissioner of Police informed that Mr. Wendell Williams, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police, was to proceed on vacation leave from 09 October, 2022 to 29 May, 2023, and would retire from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service with effect from 30 May, 2023. Mr. Williams has since proceeded on the aforementioned leave.

Accordingly, the Commission has nominated Mr. Curt Simon for the acting appointment to the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police and submits the name Curt Simon to Her Excellency. The following is provided for Her Excellency's information:

There are three offices of Deputy Commissioner of Police, one of which—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: —is filled and the substantive incumbent has been appointed to act as Commissioner of Police. It should be dated 23 June, 2022.

To her Excellency,

The nomination of Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo was submitted to the Police Service Commission for the purpose of making an acting appointment as a

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

2022.12.02

result of the following circumstances:

- (1) The absence of Mr. Wendell Williams, whose name was previously approved by the House of Representatives to act as Deputy Commissioner of Police and who was to proceed on vacation leave from the 29th of June, 2022 to 10th July, 2022, to travel out of the country and thereafter; and
- (2) In the vacancy consequent on the acting appointment of the substantive incumbent of the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police, the Commission has noted that there has been no approval to date, from the House of Representatives regarding Mr. Samaroo's nomination. The Commission wishes to inform that Mr. Williams returned from his vacation leave on the 11th of July, 2022. However, he has since proceeded on vacation leave prior to his retirement as indicated above.

In the above circumstances, two offices of Deputy Commissioner of Police are currently vacant without incumbents. Accordingly, the nomination for the undermentioned persons are submitted: Mr. Ramnarine Samaroo and Mr. Curt Simon. Thank you for the consideration of this matter and please be assured, Your Excellency, of my highest regard.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I read that in full in its convolution, its clarity and its legal standing, to make the point that the quicker we get rid of this from this House, the better use would be made of Parliament's time. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

UNREVISED

Deputy Commissioner of Police
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley (cont'd)

2022.12.02

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Curt Simon to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, at this time, this sitting will be suspended for 15 minutes.

4.28 p.m.: *House suspended.*

4.45p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, earlier in the sitting leave was granted under Standing Order 17(4) for debate on a definite matter of urgent public importance. I will now call on the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and you have 20 minutes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Catastrophic Flooding
(Relief and Assistance from Government)**

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I would like to thank my colleagues in this honourable House for giving leave to raise a definite matter of urgent public importance, which is the urgent need for Government to take immediate action to provide essential relief and assistance to communities which have been severely affected by the catastrophic flooding in the past week which has caused significant destruction of property, displaced the safe living conditions and hindered the daily lives of tens of thousands of citizens. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I begin my substantial contribution, I would just like, on behalf of the United National Congress and the

Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago, to express our grief and sorrow to all of those flood victims for the losses and distress that they have faced—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein:—over the past week because of this flooding situation. And I was very happy and grateful that the Opposition was given an opportunity to raise this matter as an urgent definite matter of public importance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have attempted in the past to use this particular Standing Order and we are so happy that today leave was granted for us to raise this matter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Currently, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our country is drowning; drowning for the last few weeks, not only because of the flood but because of unprecedented mismanagement and incompetence by this failing PNM Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to speak on a few areas that have been affected by these flood waters, ranging from the constituency of Moruga/Tableland, Gafoor Trace, Glod Road, Ramlal Trace; my constituency, constituency of Barataria/San Juan, the El Socorro south area, Abass Avenue, Pargarsingh, El Socorro Extension, Temple Street, Chanka Street, Rangoo, Hingoo Settlement, Parry Lane, Rafeek Hosein Trace, Patraj Trace.

We have floods hitting in Tabaquite, Bonne Aventure, Mamoral; Caroni Central, Sharpe Road, Carlsen Field; Couva North, Nizam Mohammed Street, Rajballie Street, Bank Village, Fairview Drive, Palm Avenue, Exchange Road; Oropouche West, Woodland, Pluck Road, San Francique, Gayah Trace, Nazim

Avenue, Suchit Trace, Rahamut Trace, Rahamut Lane.

In Naparima, we have Papoorie Road, Cunjal, Lengua. In Mayaro, we have several destructions that took place there in the Mafeking area; Cumuto/Manzanilla, Plum Mitan, Biche, Charuma, Leemond; North Oropouche, Sangre Chiquito. St. Augustine, they have been hit very hard in the Bamboo No. 2 area, Real Spring Valsayn, Spring Village and St. Augustine South.

Caroni East, El Carmen, St. Helena, Kelly Village, Warrenville and Chin Chin Road, Cunupia.

And in the constituency of Siparia there are several areas, Katwaroo Trace, Dignty Trace, Mahadeo, Clarke Road, Lachoos, Sunrees, Ramlal, and the list goes on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and our heart goes out to these citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who have been distressed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And as I said before, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is not only because of unprecedented rainfall, this is because of unprecedented incompetence and mismanagement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we raised this issue before in this very Parliament, you would hear me complain, you would hear my friends from Oropouche, from all over complain that the pumps are not working, the Government is not cleaning the rivers, they are not maintaining the watercourses and the drains.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: All of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, caused what happened over the last weekend.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government learnt nothing from 2018, because

had they learnt anything from 2018, our citizens in Trinidad and Tobago would not be suffering.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: We would not have people marooned in their homes. We would not have children getting sick at home because of the stench of that stagnant, dirty floodwater. You have to have ambulance, volunteers, getting people out of their homes so that they could seek medical attention all because of the incompetence and mismanagement of this Government when it comes to the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And they will come to say, “It is rainfall,” but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I walked with the facts here today. I walked with the facts. Under the budgeting exercise, the Ministry of Works and Transport is responsible for maintaining the watercourses, and under it there is a line Item called, Flood Mitigation Erosion. In 2022 they were allocated \$29.9 million, allowed to spend that. They spent \$7 million. Under Drainage and Irrigation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they were allocated \$31 million, they spent \$5.3 million. Major River Clearing Programme, 2022, they were allocated \$12 million; the Revised Estimate was \$1.5 million. Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Flood Mitigation Programme—hear this one—they were allocated \$4 million and spent \$800,000. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the other programme of upgrade to fix the existing drainage pumps and gate inventory, these are the flood pumps and the floodgates, they were allocated \$15 million and spent \$3million. Shame, I call on this Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker; shame.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: While we hear that they spend hundreds of million dollars in legal

fees, they can barely spend \$1 million in flooding mitigation programmes to help our citizens in our constituencies.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, then we saw what took place on Monday night where we have seen that this Government has completely collapsed when it comes to disaster management. You had people in traffic for over six hours on Monday to get from home—from work to home. Why? Because one lane of the southbound highway had water on it—it had flood water, and the other two lanes you could have walked through that water, and that caused an entire country to stop because they did not have a plan. Seven years you have been at the steering wheel and there is no plan. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not surprised that the Prime Minister is missing from this particular debate, something that has been deemed as a matter of definite public importance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Not a single word did we hear from the Prime Minister with this flooding situation.

Citizens in this country have had flood up until their chests. They have to leave their homes, lost all of their livelihoods, their homes, and the Prime Minister says absolutely nothing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Absolutely nothing. And he is absent from the Chamber today because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he simply does not care about the people in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And I apologize if I am speaking very loudly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am very passionate about this issue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: I have spent the last week with my constituents and it is not easy hearing mothers cry because their children are getting sick, because they are drinking water that has been contaminated by flooding. Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Member, please, those outbursts.

Mr. S. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had to call the fire service to get elderly people out of their homes to seek medical attention and up until now the water has not receded.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my constituency has been a bit more unique in that this water, the flooding situation has been here since last Wednesday before the torrential rainfall. I have a letter in my hand, dated 23rd of November, 2022, which was the Wednesday, that I sent to the Minister of Works and Transport, Mr. Rohan Sinanan, and he has not even acknowledged this letter, Mr. Deputy Speaker; not even acknowledged it. I wrote on Monday to the Director of Drainage, Ms. Katherine Badloo-Doerga, on the 28th of November, 2022, asking for an urgent meeting on this matter; not an acknowledgment. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you learn this, that the Drainage Division is situated in El Soccoro South where it has been flooded. That is the area where the Drainage Division is and my constituents are under water, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is the shame that this Government faces.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, then I saw that the PNM is advertising a rally on Sunday, business as usual. “Doh” be mobilizing CEPEP workers to go and get a crowd on Sunday. Send those CEPEP workers on the streets.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Send them in people’s homes to help them clean up. All those delegates you are registering for Sunday, send them with a mop and broom in the

constituencies to help clean up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Members. Right.

Hon. Member: That is what they do for PNM members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So, again—thank you. Again, Member. Member for Barataria/San Juan, I have given you some leeway but let us move on with the business at hand. Right? Let us go on with the business at hand.

Mr. S. Hosein: Sure. All those PNM Ministers who are delegates at that event, Mr. Deputy Speaker, should put on tall boots and go and clean out people homes—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein:—because that is what you are getting paid for, to help the people of Trinidad and Tobago; to help the people of Trinidad and Tobago. But they will not feel it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they do not understand the hopelessness. Somebody sits in their home and sees flood water gushing through their door and they can do nothing about it; absolutely nothing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that feeling of hopelessness and helplessness is something they will never feel, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because this Government simply does not care about the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And after all of this catastrophe and all of this disaster, the Office of the Prime Minister will put out a Facebook post yesterday indicating that they will now allocate \$150 million towards flood relief; \$150 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$40million will go towards the flood relief programme, \$100million will go towards landslip and road rehabilitation, and \$10 million towards farmers; not a

single cent for flood prevention. Not a single cent for flood prevention. And then they are telling us, “You have to go and electronically apply for all of these grants.” Mr. Deputy Speaker, people, since 2020, are waiting for a Salary Relief Grant, do you really think that the people who have faced this flooding disaster will get their grant?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: It is all a mamaguy. It is mamaguy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government really needs to come clean with the population because people out there are suffering. I challenge them, put on your boots, come in the areas and see what the people are experiencing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, five days of flood inside of your homes; five days, we have to take boats to take food into people’s homes because they cannot cook, their kitchens are flooded. Their foodstuff that they had has been completely destroyed. People have lost almost every single thing. And while this Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has collapsed, I have to thank all of the hundreds of volunteers who have been helping.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: I thank all of the religious groups. I thank all those NGOs who have been providing meals and providing other cleaning supplies. I thank all of those persons on the field. And there is a particular group I would like to thank, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of young people who have really stood for their country. They have these modified 4x4 pickups, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and those are the ones who can access the particular areas where we could carry relief to the people, and do you know that the licensing department is giving those fellas, or those people who have those trucks problems to get their vehicles certified? If it was not

for those vehicles, we cannot go into the area to provide relief to those citizens.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government really has failed the people of Trinidad and Tobago when it comes to flooding.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: On Sunday, I had to visit the constituency of the Member for St. Joseph where there are a lot of farmers in that particular area. And the farmers there, because of the flooding, Mr. Deputy Speaker—some of my constituents plant in that particular area—have said that they have lobbied the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to help build the banks around the river, to help with giving them pumps to get the water out of the area.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I learnt of the estimated loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars of food that could have been feeding of citizens lost because of flooding due to the mismanagement, the neglect and the incompetence of this particular administration, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Some of these damages could have been prevented but the Government simply did not do their job.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And the Minister of Works and Transport can come after me and respond and say that they have done all that they could do, that it is because of climate change, it is because of unprecedented rainfall. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the books, the budget books that they have provided to us with the figures that they have not spent the money, that equates to them doing absolutely no work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: That is their documents, they provide that to us. So do not come and say that these are things that you have done, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because if you had done the necessary work, people today would have not have been

suffering like they are currently.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that the other areas, such as the DMU, such as the ODPM—I can give you one example of what took place in my constituency, part of the DMU, their response was not up to par, Mr. Deputy Speaker. After the floods came, then they decided to share out sandbags in some of the areas when the sandbags could not help anymore. The ODPM, I do not know if I have to draw a map to show them where El Socorro South is because they have not visited my particular constituency as yet, and many other of my colleagues, that the ODPM has not arrived yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Then some of my constituents, before this particular debate, messaged me to let me know—and this happened across the board also, and I hope the Minister of Public Utilities responds—that they have cut off water in certain areas. So areas in which the floodwaters have receded, those residents now have problems with cleaning up simply because they do not have water. They do not have water to clean up.

So what is the plan to really assist these persons who are affected with the clean-up exercise? Because that is going to be our next step going forward. That is going to be the next step forward. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government, the Ministers who—to come after me—

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

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much—they can come to say all that they like, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the facts speak for themselves.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: The facts speak for themselves. And I want to say, the Minister of Works and Transport who had primary responsibility for this issue will blame everyone else. The Minister of National Security who is always asleep will not come on the field and see what is happening, and the ODPM falls under his

particular Ministry. And my colleague, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, he was not such a very good Attorney General, and it seems as though he is not very good at local government also. And I want to say before I leave here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the only structure that we have to move is this PNM Government out of office. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member for San Fernando West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have 20 minutes, Member.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Sir. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I noted the contribution of the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan. I welcome him to getting onto the field because I can testify that Minister Sinanan and I, and our colleagues, Minister Gonzales, the Minister of Communications as well, Minister de Nobriga, each and every one, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, the Member for Point Fortin, we have all been on the field, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I was very happy to see the Member for Barataria/San Juan actually on the field as he is supposed to be as an MP. There were parts of the constituency of St. Augustine that I did not see the Member for St. Augustine in, but I am sure she must have been there. The fact is—

Ms. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—each Member has a responsibility.

So let us deal with the Motion before us. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reality is that there is a system for management of disaster in circumstances such as this. It is largely located in local government. The Government, as a matter of record, has

engaged in dredging, in river and embankment works through the Ministry of Works and Transport. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can testify, in the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, immediately upon coming into office, carrying the baton from my colleague, the Minister before me, the hon. Sen. Kazim Hosein, the first thing we did was to engage in the cleaning and meticulous management of waste collection right throughout every single one of the 14 municipal corporations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is for a visual explanation to tell you, in the drainage areas alone we collected 40 times the height of the Twin Towers. Take the Twin Towers, stack it up forty times its height, that is the amount of refuse that we collected. We went into drains, we went into communities, we went into structures. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is local government's engagement, alongside the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; alongside the Ministry of Works and Transport that does the preparation for local government receiving what disaster can look like. Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a lot of noise, quite respectfully.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members. Members. Hon. Members. Member, again, we are here as a result of the urgent matter you all requested. So, please, let us listen to the information on both sides. All right? Let us listen to the information.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me deal with the facts now; 11 out of the 14 regional corporations received significant affect as a result of the weather. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we were visited with something which is going to become constant. We were visited with, along the southern storm track, we were visited with five continuous days of rainfall. The MET Office has confirmed,

and I will put this on the record, that the above normal rainfall that we received in November, 200 per cent more rainfall, is, and I quote:

“...record-breaking level of precipitation in Trinidad and Tobago, with this November being the wettest on record since 1946...”

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are events that happened, take 2012, take 2014, take 2018, take any one of the years of significant event, we have had a significant event and it did not take a hurricane or a tropical storm to see what we saw. Let us translate this for the people of the country, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Threefeet of rainfall fell in four days and when communities, such as the many communities we have, be there locations including Woodland, in Penal/Debe; if it is looking at Bamboo No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, south Valsayn, inside of the catchment area that we are looking at—there are many communities, Mayaro, Manzanilla that were affected by threefeet of rainfall, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Carry that now where the community is six feet below road level, we saw 10feet of water in some instances.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan said that the Government has collapsed and put this at the feet of the Government. The hon. Member is apparently unaware that the local government corporations are run, seven by the United National Congress and seven by the People's National Movement. And therefore, the hon. Member's condemnation is a condemnation of his own colleagues in local government.

Take, for example, the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, which is sitting down or was sitting down on \$7million of unspent balances; \$7million of unspent balances. Is the Member for Barataria/San Juan condemning the Mayor of Chaguanas, Faaq Mohammed, for not engaging in cleaning and structures that the political leader, the Member for Siparia, could easily call upon local government to

Catastrophic Flooding
Hon. F. Al-Rawi (cont'd)

2022.12.02

do? Is the hon. Member complaining about the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation?

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, hold on, one second. Member for Barataria/San Juan, you had your opportunity, please, not across the Chamber, please.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I heard you, retract please.

Mr. Hosein: I retract.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And, Members, if you all want me to get more stern, I can, but, please, it is an urgent matter; it is definite, let us listen and learn. Proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the cause, let us be specific, we have, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—regional corporations—

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Go on.

Mr. Ratiram: Yeah. I stand on Standing Order 48(1) that he is misleading us with respect to the local—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Okay. Thank you, Member—

Mr. Ratiram: He is misleading us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Ratiram: That is not how it works.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan says that everything has collapsed and there is failure, let me put it into context of what we are treating with in local government. When a regional

corporation has responsibility for footpaths, for maintenance, for roads, for certain drains that lead into areas, is the hon. Member saying that the United National Congress is going to bring litigation perhaps against their own councils? Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, take an example of Bamboo No. 2 where there was—

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand on 48(6), I never said anything about litigation up to now in my 20-minute presentation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, look at Bamboo No. 2 where we had significant flooding, where three incidents were pointed out that the Minister of Works and Transport investigated, sluice gate, a pathway where a contractor passed over that went into repair, works inside of the drains; i.e., they were cleaning the river and the embankment areas, but, more importantly, where local residents in Bamboo No. 2 cleared 80feet of embankment allowing the ingress of water. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in those circumstances, is the hon. Member saying that the United National Congress, representative for the area, holds the blame for taking no action? Surely the hon. Member cannot be suggesting that, because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you analyze that our local government are the eyes and ears—our representatives are the eyes and ears of people, then the effect of Barataria/San Juan's submission is to blame his own people. Look at Bamboo No. 2 alone as an example where the councillor is a UNC councillor. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you accept the blame game in flood politics then you are going nowhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I reject the submission that people have done nothing. The hon. Member said that sandbags were given out after the fact. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I stand here now I can tell you, 60,000 sandbags was deployed in the last five days; 60,000. It is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an important thing to remember

that the weather system that we were treating with is not confined only to flooding. If you look at the phenomenon that we experienced there was massive occurrence of landslides. This is the first time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we were treating with north coast in the positions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 141 landslides alone, 126 flooding events alone, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 60,000 sandbags given out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Disaster Managements Units were on the field in full force. The hon. Member says that no deployment happened. Let me say this today, not only were the 14 Disaster Management Units in full force, UNC disaster management—controlled corporations or PNM-controlled corporations, they were all out.

Secondly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you know that in terms of relief operations yesterday alone, we had 110 CEPEP workers out on the field in Mayaro, 90 in Bamboo. Today alone, 120 CEPEP workers out in the Bamboo area alone. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had 35 municipal police out on the ground cleaning, mops, brooms; 10 of the instructors and 25 of the recruits.

You know what the UNC posts have to say about that? That is security for Ministers. Before there is a representation to say to the municipal police, as volunteers under the coordination of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, thank you for coming to engage in work, they chose to deprecate and create fake news.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of expenditure, I think it prudent for the Minister of Works and Transport, in his calculation, to put on record as he would in a short while, that Works and Transport works alongside the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, alongside Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

When we look at the consequences, we have had events, what is the plan? How do we treat with these events? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to tell you that we apparently have not paid attention to a very important publication coming from the Ministry of Public Utilities. The Ministry of Public Utilities put into the public domain on the 30th of November, the publication from the World Meteorological Organization. In that World Meteorological Organization publication, they have said to the world, the events which we have witnessed will continue till about February or March of next year, after which they expect significant drought in places that experience drought. So we are not out of the situation, and we expect, and we are in preparation and active management of a new situation.

So what can we do in terms of the look forward? Number one, we went in to ensure that the flooding was managed as best as we could. The fact is that the Caroni floodplain, the Oropouche floodplain, the Mayaro—experience in the Nariva floodplain, all of those were occupied with water. After that the pumps were ensured of returning to operation. The Minister of Works and Transport put in auxiliary pumps as well. We are now at the stage of clean up.

I would like to say a personal thanks to the staff at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, the Permanent Secretary, in terms of arranging, already for today, the emergency relief centres for assessment of damages. Particularly today in Mayaro, Rio Claro, Plum Mitan, we are looking at positions happening there. We are looking at four active areas where we have put out field tents to ensure that we are in the ground. Real Spring, in Bamboo, in Woodlands and in Mayaro, we have put out four emergency centres, and we have taken our municipal police and our CERT volunteers house to house to ensure that the communication of damage happens to the Disaster Management Units. We

then ensure that that goes to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. We ensure that self-help comes in so that the Government's money can reach the people affected.

So we are not listening to the Member for Barataria/San Juan. We are out on the field in emergency situation, in field offices, in four hard-hit areas. The Minister of Social Development and Family Services has already spoken to the access that can be had but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I can assure you is that the Disaster Management Unit team, under the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, we will track the events to ensure that the right relief reaches the right hands.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I can say is in the go forward, this year in addition to the Cabinet moneys which will come for disaster relief, at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government we have received \$380-odd million extra in the Public Sector Investment Programme. The mission at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government is to spend all of that money on the ground. That is a part of the rural development drive in local government.

But while we make sure that that money goes into maintenance, into drains, into footpaths, into all of the structures that we have to do with roads and rehabilitation, whilst we put that alongside \$100 million in the secondary road repair company, alongside the Rural Development Company, both of those engaged in roads and bridges, et cetera—many of the Members opposite can speak to the relief that we have engaged with. The Members can speak—Couva North can speak, Chaguanas West can speak, Chaguanas East can speak to direct interactions with me and with my colleagues in ensuring that we get bridges and roads attended to.

So while we have Rural Development Company, Secondary Road and

Rehabilitation Company, the corporations now with \$386 million extra this year, alongside that Ministry of Works and Transport, PURE, attending to all of these, the citizens of this country can look forward to that money hitting the ground. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we seem to be on our own because the Leader of the Opposition is championing that local government reform must not happen, and worse yet, that the life of the councils ought not to continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1); 48(1). What is the relevance of this in this Motion?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. What Standing Order Member?

Mr. Lee: 48(1), Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is no relevance. This is an urgent matter that we are talking about, flooding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. Member, I will give you some leeway. Just make your point quickly and move on. As I am on my feet, you have just about three minutes.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the allegation coming is that local government has not engaged—

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 48(6). The Leader of the Opposition has at no point in time did—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Thank you for the point. Thank you. Proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are uncomfortable because the truth is about to come out. The fact is that local government response to disaster, in the context of this Motion, is materially encumbered by the United National Congress attempting to set aside the active sitting councillors. Tight now they seek to injunct

us. I would not go into sub judice, so I will end there. So whilst we are here on a matter of urgent public interest, definite interest, whilst the Member for Barataria/San Juan stands and “galleries”, as he is performing the duty that he is bound to perform, alongside every Member of Parliament that is out in the field as we are, we cannot look to salvation from the Opposition, because their simple position is to block, distract and make sure nothing happens.

Mr. Charles: I rise on Standing Order 48(6). He is saying that the person on this side “stand up and gallery”. The man is performing his function, his—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, flood politics is not to abuse the honourable people of this country. Whilst the people of this country receive relief, the Government will press on with its work.

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I commend each and every person in this country that is—

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand on 48(4), that is insulting language, that is offensive language. If we are representing our burgesses who have been affected by the flood, if we are representing our constituents who are affected by the flood—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Member, proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the mere fact that persons have to jump up because they are so uncomfortable, means I have proved my case. The Government will continue to perform based upon facts. Our mission is to spend on the people of this country. We will not be interrupted by the hon. Members opposite in their schemes to design—designed to cause failure. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

[Members Webster-Roy and Ameen rise]

Ms. Ameen: His time is up?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, listen, eh. Members, listen. I do not want you put me in this particular spot. But, Member for St. Augustine, if it is that we are going one left, one right, you would have missed the turn. You would have missed the turn. I hope the Chief Whip can defend me if I decided to call the person on the other side. So, Member for St. Augustine, proceed.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, let us be serious. You all requested an urgent, definite and important matter, and if it has been approved, let us deal with the matter on the House. Five minutes.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

[Member Ameen rises]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, I need you in the booth. Everyone will speak from within the booths.

Ms. Khadijah Ameen (St. Augustine): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was pellucidly clear that the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government was way over his head when it comes to flood prevention and disaster.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Ms. K. Ameen: A failed Attorney General is now a failing Minister of Local Government.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Ms. K. Ameen: And I want to advise you that visiting St. Augustine for five minutes and doing a whirlwind tour, where you touch down and take photographs is not being “on de field”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Out of the kindness of my heart, I advised the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, when he took up this appointment that pocket squares do not—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence. Go ahead.

Ms. K. Ameen: I advised the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, when he took up this appointment, that pocket squares do not fill potholes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: And I will tell you today, I will say to you today, that PR does not stop flood.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: I felt sorry for the Member who spoke, because he literally resorted to speaking rubbish—speaking about rubbish. The last time he attacked the Member for Siparia, I want to remind him that he was forced to apologize for telling untruths.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: The Opposition is not opposed to local government elections. I want you to get that clear, and stop misleading the public.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: The Minister was all over the place in this debate. You only had 20 minutes. The Minister was unable to stick to the urgent matter of flooding because he has not done anything. He seemed totally incompetent in this debate and in real action. Incompetent and impotent. That is this Government when it comes to flooding.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Attacking the UNC corporations for unspent balances, when all regional corporations have unspent balances. And you want to know why? It is because the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and the Ministry of Finance release moneys late.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: In some cases the day before the end of the financial year, and it is called “suppressing the funding”, and that is a deliberate undermining of local government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: So do not come here to blame the regional corporation, blame the citizens. You are out of place. You are out of place to attempt to blame our hardworking UNC councillor, Ms. Seema Ramsaran—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen:—who is the councillor for Bamboo No. 2, that falls under a PNM-led Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Two more minutes, Member.

Ms. K. Ameen: So if you want to talk about blame, “doh” blame the poor little councillor, ask the Chairman of Tunapuna/Piarco what happened to the resources for Bamboo No. 2.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to advise the Minister and the Government that the issues in Bamboo and other areas are not so much local government challenges, but squarely falls under the Drainage Division and the Ministry of Works and Transport. But maybe if the Members of the Government were not busy dancing at their mayor’s balls—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen:—they would actually have some real preparation to do with their Disaster Management Units. I could tell you that one month’s rent from certain people on that side will clearly help many persons recover from this disaster.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: And I want to ask, which Member on the opposite side who collects rent will be the first to give one month—just one month’s rent—towards flood relief?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Put your money where your mouth is.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: The flooding that we experienced did not happen overnight, it was preventable. All these buzzwords that the Minister used, and not one word about the 14 Disaster Management Units that fall under local government. When the ODM advertises a list of shelters, and not one of them is stocked and staffed with even a bottle of water—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: —you have failed miserably on the field to prevent flooding and you have failed miserably today to reply for only 20 minutes; only 20 minutes. This Government is incompetent and impotent. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Tobago East.

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There has been an all-of-government approach to treating with the aftermath of the inclement weather.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, I recognize the Member for Tobago East.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you. As I was saying, there has been an all-of-government approach to treating with the aftermath of the inclement weather that we would have experienced over the last few days, even the last month, and the effects on communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is one factor that is often overlooked when we have natural disasters in our society, and that is dealing with the social aspect, the soft aspect of it. So while we have the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and the Ministry of Works and Transport dealing with the infrastructure issues, ensuring that we put measures in place to prevent flooding, as well as to treat with the effects of flooding as they occur, we have the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services responding with that human side of it, ensuring that we reach out to families, ensuring that we reach out to those who are most vulnerable.

I also want to highlight something that was done by the Gender Affairs Division of the Office of the Prime Minister. On 16th of November, in response to those women who find themselves in shelters or in spaces where they are vulnerable and they need additional feminine care, we would have reached out through the UN system and some of our partners to access what we call “dignity packages” or “feminine care packages”. The Gender and Child Affairs Division on 16th of November, would have received the first batch of those. And we would have handed it over to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government for distribution to women in affected communities, so that those women who unfortunately have to leave their homes and have to enter a shelter, or even if they are in their homes, because of the impact of flooding, need that additional support, would have access to feminine care packages. So that was done.

Additionally, I want to highlight the psychosocial support that is provided, because that is important. While we are dealing with the clean up, while we are providing food, there is also that need to ensure that persons who may be dealing with it emotionally, having those stressors, get that additional support. So the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, through the National Family Services Division, would have ensured that they have a hotline in place to provide counselling services, as well as social workers on the line and out in the communities, reaching those who are most affected, to help them to cope emotionally and help them to deal with the stressors.

So in terms of persons who are out there who need the additional support and need that counselling support, I am encouraging them to reach out through the hotline number, 623-2608. Also, for those persons, because they are in a very dangerous place, and may be considering suicide because of the emotional impact, there is help available. I want them to please reach out to the toll free hotline 800-COPE, that is, 800-2673.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services would have received to date approximately 3,246 applications.

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

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Applications are being processed through the support of field officers on the ground who work alongside the Disaster Management Unit. And I want the public to know some of the various grants that are available through the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

For households affected, there is up to \$10,000 for those who are require— to provide stoves, beds, et cetera. For students who have been impacted, primary school students, \$700 per student is available. For secondary students, \$1,000 per student. For those who need additional food support, there is a grant of up to \$550

available as an emergency relief. For those persons who may need minor repairs to their homes, that is available, a grant of up to \$20,000. For persons who need assistance with sanitary plumbing, there is also a grant of up to \$15,000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I would have started, I want to end. The Government has taken an all-of-government approach. We have the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, as well as the Ministry of Works and Transport dealing with the physical infrastructure issues. We have the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services attending to the needs of persons, their psychosocial needs, as well as their clothing needs, as well as their needs for food and, in some instances, their need for shelter with the rental assistance programme. I want to encourage citizens to reach out.

Also, I want to take the opportunity to thank those in the UN system, particularly the UNFPA for their assistance with the feminine care packages, what we call the “dignity packages”, because apart from the batch that we would have distributed on the 16th of November, we received an additional batch yesterday, which will be distributed through some of our key NGOs, and we are ensuring that those agencies that work closely with women on the ground are able to distribute those packages to women in needy communities affected by flooding.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (*Siparia*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I welcome this opportunity to speak in this debate, and I am very happy to see your good self in the Chair today, having had this particular Motion approved.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So we want to thank the House for this opportunity to deal with the flooding issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right. Thank you, MP for Siparia. I think probably it is a good opportunity, seeing that it has been raised for the second time, because Barataria/San Juan also mentioned it, the matter is definite, the matter is important, the matter is urgent. And subject to the Standing Order, the Chair will so rule.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed, no need to go down that road, Member.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you on that. As I said, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this very definite, urgent matter of public importance, the widespread flooding. In my own constituency, Sir, if I may, I would say a large percentage of that constituency is flooded out, just as in other constituencies: Wilson Road, Julian Trace, Sumanie Trace, Rochard Road, Sammy Trace, Teemul Trace, Satnarine Trace, Penal Rock Road, Teeluck Trace, Jhulai Trace, Mulchan Trace, Nagassar Trace, Goodman Branch Trace, Goodman Trace, Dabiedial Trace, Naipalia Trace, Ramlal Street, Sunrees Road, Lachoos Road, Clarke Road, Ramdharry Branch, Ramdharry Trace, Mahadeo Trace, Digitsy, and the list goes on, Sir.

I am itemizing this for a particular reason. I know MP Saddam Hosein mentioned some of the other areas. I do this because I find that we have not, it is my respectful view, that when the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government spoke, the Minister did not zero in on the meat of what this debate is about. If I may remind us, it was about the urgent need for Government to take immediate action to provide essential relief and assistance—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—to communities which have been severely affected by flooding in the past week, which has caused significant destruction of property, displaced safe living conditions and hindered the daily lives of tens of thousands of citizens.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You can correct me if I am wrong, but the Minister did not pay any attention to what it is was on the debate. The Minister talked about rubbish and disposal and collecting rubbish, all rubbish in my respectful view, but nothing about what are the essential relief assistance that will be provided. Persons have lost their vehicles, appliances, food supplies, personal items. People have left their homes and cannot return, because the water is still there. Then we have the threat to health and so on.

None of this was addressed by the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. Instead, Minister chose to talk about unspent balances, trying to blame UNC corporations. My colleague, MP Khadijah Ameen spoke a little about that, but there is a little more.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: There is a little more to that, because the Minister is not recognizing the unspent balances when it comes with respect to flood mitigation, when it comes to drainage and irrigation, major river cleaning, fixing drainage pumps, gate inventory and so on, MP Saddam Hosein spoke of these. So you will find for Flood Mitigation, Erosion Coastal Programme under the IDF—

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

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —you would see here 23 million unspent in Flood Mitigation, Erosion Coastal Programme. They were allocated over 29, spent seven. When we go to the other item, Drainage and Irrigation, again there was a

26 million unspent balance with respect to—with respect to dealing with flooding, and it continues in all these areas. MP Saddam had brought it out.

Now MP from Tobago talked about the soft side and the social side and so on, but the first thing they had done was to close down all these regional social development offices—regional. And now you are asking people to go online to fill up a form, “when dey doh even have a home to sit down in”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: When they do not have devices. So to tell us to go on the soft side, sounds really good. At least the Minister attempted to deal with—to provide relief, saying we would go on the soft side, the social development side. So tell us before this debate ends, what it is that you are doing to provide essential relief and assistance throughout.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government speaks of Bamboo No. 2, and blames UNC corporations. Bamboo No. 2 is in Tunapuna, a PNM corporation. Do not attempt to blame the UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, I want to thank you, Sir. I think you are about to stop me, or is there a time left?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, you have two seconds.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Two seconds. I want to thank you very much and, again, I plead with the Government, tell us what you are going to do to provide essential relief to these flood-hit areas. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Works and Transport, and you have five minutes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I take this opportunity to respond to this honourable House on the matter raised by the hon. Member on the urgent need for Government to take immediate action to provide essential relief and assistance to communities which have been severely affected by catastrophic flooding in the past week which has caused significant disruption of property, displaced the safe living conditions and hindered the daily lives of tens of thousands of citizens.

I want to highlight that word “catastrophic” flooding. I think today I hold the record for any Minister to answer 11 questions in one day. But what was significant about one of these questions, I think it was question 11, raised by the Member for Oropouche East, where he—and today has to be a very good day for the Member—Member, today you said that the flooding is “unprecedented”. Now, I term that to be never—

Hon. Member: Unprecedented.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: —unprecedented flooding, which I term to be never before in Trinidad and Tobago, and no record of that level of flooding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, without having to blame anyone, let us understand what we went through. We went through, a few days ago, 80 per cent more rainfall that ever before in Trinidad and Tobago. By the end of this month, we would have had almost 200 per cent more rainfall in Trinidad than we have ever had before. Our infrastructure is almost 60 or 70 years old, and even with the normal level of rainfall our infrastructure—

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, relevance, I mean, 48(1). This Motion is about what they are bringing to provide relief for the country, not rainfall.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is five minutes, and I wish I had five hours so I could complete it, but we have five minutes. So please do not interrupt as we go along.

The infrastructure in this country under normal circumstances would have been challenged. No part of the world the infrastructure could cater for an increase of 200 per cent more rainfall. This is what we are dealing with, and the Members clearly understood that, that is why the Motion was phrased in that way. These are unprecedented times.

At the Ministry of Works and Transport, I can tell you what we have been doing. We have ensured that connectivity around the country has been restored. There is no part of this country that is cut off at this time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Coming out of what we went through, that is a significant achievement. The only areas where flooding still exist is areas that is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, this is the final speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You know, you all—listen, you hear every single thing at times, eh. Rest assured, Barataria/San Juan. Rest assured. Proceed.

5.45 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Injury time, please? Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had the reduction in flooding within two days of no rainfall. The areas that are under water now are the very low-lying areas where we normally will have some time before the run off is there.

What the Ministry is doing right now, we have identified all the breaches on all the watercourses and immediate action is being taken to restore these river banks as we speak. All our pumps are operational, so no part of this country is under any severe flooding where life is threatened in any way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can go on and talk about what we are going to do going forward but I do not think I will have the time because we have a national drainage plan that the Ministry has already started to put boots on the ground, projects out of that. However, rather than we sit here and we try to put blame on everyone for this level of flooding, we must look at what is happening around the world and see how Parliaments are working together, how they are working together to restore—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—a normal level—around the country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the people like Mr. Lal from Bamboo—

Ms. Ameen: “But yuh nevah went and look for dem”.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—right, who would have done everything and all—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member—

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: “Give meh one minute, please, nah?”

Hon. Members: No, no! [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Ms. Ameen: I know Lal—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, Member for St. Augustine.

Ms. Ameen: “Doh call Lal name in here!”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

Hon. Member: Injury time. Injury time.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon, Member, your time has expired.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 9th of December, next week Friday at 1.30 p.m. At that time the Government intends to debate the Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2022.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.46 p.m.