

SENATE*Wednesday, January 18, 2023*

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**ELECTION OF PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE**

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the office of the President of the Senate has fallen vacant owing to the resignation of Sen. the hon. Christine Kangaloo with effect from January 17, 2023. In accordance with Standing Order 4(2)(m), I now call upon the Clerk to conduct the proceedings for the election to the President of the Senate.

Clerk of the Senate: Hon. Senators, in accordance with Standing Order 4(2)(m) of the Senate, I now invite proposals for the office of President of the Senate.

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. Clerk, I propose that Mr. Nigel de Freitas do take the Chair of this Senate as President. Sen. de Freitas is no longer a Minister of Government.

Clerk of the Senate: Do I have a seconder?

Sen. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing: Mr. Clerk, I beg to second that nomination.

Clerk of the Senate: Are there any other proposals? There being no further proposals, I now declare Mr. Nigel de Freitas—Sen. Nigel de Freitas be duly elected President of the Senate.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the sitting will be suspended to allow for the President to be robbed—robed by my—

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Excuse me. Excuse me.

Hon. Senators: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: I do apologize. I would like to remind the Senate that I am on my feet and—

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Thank you so much. Hon. Senators, this sitting will be suspended to allow for the President to be robed and assume the Chair. I now invite the Marshal to escort the President to be robed.

10.04 a.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

10.13 a.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, leave of absence has been granted to Sen. David Nakhid who is out of the country.

VACANT SEAT

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from Her Excellency the President Paula-Mae Weekes, O.R.T.T.:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency PAULA-MAE WEEKES, O.R.T.T., President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

/s/ Paula-Mae Weekes

President.

TO: SENATOR THE HONOURABLE CHRISTINE KANGALOO

WHEREAS by the provisions of section 43(2)(e) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the President, in exercise of the

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power vested in her, and acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister is empowered to declare the seat of a Senator to be vacant:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, PAULA-MAE WEEKES, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, in exercise of the power vested in me by the said section 43(2)(e) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby declare the seat of you CHRISTINE KANGALOO, to be vacant, with effect from the 17th January, 2023.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 17th day of January, 2023.”

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from Her Excellency the President Paula-Mae Weekes, O.R.T.T.:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency PAULA-MAE WEEKES, O.R.T.T., President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

/s/ Paula-Mae Weekes

President.

TO: MR. RICHIE SOOKHAI

In exercise of the power vested in me by section 40(2)(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I, PAULA-MAE

WEEKES, President as aforesaid, acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister, do hereby appoint you, RICHIE SOOKHAI, Senator.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 17th day of January, 2023.”

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Richie Sookhai took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, at this point in time, I am awaiting a further instrument of appointment which will be read out as soon as we receive it. Sen. Mark.

10.20 a.m.

Sen. Wade Mark: Well, first of all let me congratulate you on your assumption to the Chair. Mr. President, I would just like you to advise this honourable Senate at what time do you expect—seeing that we have a short sitting today—the Instrument to arrive here, because the temporary Senator who came from San Fernando since 7.30 a.m., and our Instrument was deposited at the particular location that it is supposed to be deposited at 8.00 a.m. this morning.

I am very, very concerned that because of the short sitting I do not know when this Instrument is going to arrive, so that our temporary Senator could take up her seat in place of Sen. Nakhid who is out of the country.

So I am asking you as President of this honourable Senate, if you can guide us as to when you believe, or what steps you can take to ensure that the Instrument which is supposed to be issued, and the letter that was delivered at 8.00 a.m. this

morning, when are we going to get that Instrument so our colleague could be able to take her seat? I ask for your guidance on this matter, Sir.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, the process that would allow for the answer to which you are seeking does not reside with the Office of the Parliament and, as such, I am unable to advise as you have asked, because once again the process does not reside with the Office of the Parliament. What I can indicate is as soon as we receive the Instrument, it will be read out. Thank you.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. President of the Senate, congratulations. I am pleased to advise this Chamber that the Government is prepared to answer all three questions for oral answer.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, before I pose my question, I want to give you the undertaking and the assurance that once I am in this Chamber no one will be allowed to rob you of your robe. [*Laughter*]

Mr. President, may I pose question No. 22 to the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Working Conditions at the Praedial Larceny Squad

(Measures to Address)

22. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

In light of reports in May 2022 that members of the Praedial Larceny Squad have stopped work due to concerns over poor working conditions and

alleged wrong doing by administrators, can the Minister state what steps are being taken to address this situation?

Mr. President: Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein): Thank you very much, Mr. President. Because of reports of concerns by the staff of the Praedial Larceny Squad over their working conditions, among other things, I convened two meetings to ascertain the true situation with respect to the operations of this unit.

The first meeting involved the executive team, led by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and the head of the Praedial Larceny Squad. The second meeting saw the head of Division along with representatives of the Praedial Larceny Unit and the executive team of the Ministry. These meetings highlighted the nature of the issues faced by the Praedial Larceny Squad, thereby prompting an immediate response from the Ministry.

As it relates to treating with the current accommodation of the Praedial Larceny Squad, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has identified a section of the research compound in Farm Road, St. Joseph, to house the north and north-east stations of the squad in the short-term.

Refurbishment works were completed within the third week of August, and the officers took occupation on August 28, 2022.

Additionally, upgrade works were completed on the Carlsen Field station which currently houses both in south and central stations temporarily. The south and east stations, as well as the administrative office, have been assessed and the procurement for the required infrastructural improvement are well underway.

Additionally, the procurement of the three new vehicles are at the evaluation stage, and an award of the contract is expected by February 2023.

In closing, Mr. President, I would like to reaffirm the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is committed to addressing the administrative and occupational health and safety concerns of the entire Praedial Larceny Squad, and all personnel under this remit. Thank you.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Thank you, Mr. President. Can I ask the hon. Minister, apart from those two issues highlighted by the hon. Minister, are there any other outstanding issues surrounding working conditions involving the Praedial Larceny Squad, apart from those two that you have highlighted to this Senate?

Mr. President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Thank you, Sen. Mark. As you know and the country knows, I am a hands-on person at the Ministry, and I worked, I called the meetings with all the stakeholders, the entire Praedial Larceny Squad, some were working, they could not come, but they were met afterwards. The entire team at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, we met, we spoke and I intend to fix every problem that we have at the Praedial Larceny Squad.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: The Praedial Larceny Squad is an important, very important squad within the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, because the farmers look forward to working with them. We intend to increase the squad in a couple of months' time, and we have allocated in the budget, money to deal with this. So I thank you and I give you the assurance.

Sen. Mark: Through the President, hon. Minister, given the expanse and the coverage as it relates to the policing by the Praedial Larceny Squad, can the Minister indicate whether the provision or acquisition of three vehicles for that unit would be adequate, or whether—let me just deal with that. One question at a time.

Would you want to share with this Senate whether that is a first start or first attempt on your part to adequately provide those facilities, in terms of vehicles, for this squad, the three, and you have more in mind?

Mr. President: So what is the question Sen. Mark, is it the first attempt?

Sen. Mark: My question is a simple one. Can the Minister indicate whether the three vehicles outlined by him are adequate for the workings of this very important unit? That is the question.

Mr. President: Thank you. Minister.

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Thank you, Mr. President, thank you, Sen. Mark for the question. As I said before, we are concentrating on the three vehicles, bringing them up to standard, and we intend to increase the vehicles to the rest of the unit. So we are looking to get more vehicles down the road.

Sen. Mark: Could the Minister advise this honourable Senate as to whether there is a time frame for the repairing of those three vehicles, so that they can be made available to the squad to carry out their important function? Is there any time frame for the completion of same?

Mr. President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Thank you again, Mr. President and Sen. Mark. Only yesterday evening I met with the fleet manager of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and we spoke. They are in the process right now, as we speak, that they are working on them. As a matter of fact, they drove in with one yesterday that was repaired, to meet me at the office, and they would be working on the two others. As I said, I am in constant contact with the fleet manager. A new one came in there, and I am in contact with him. I could assure the farming community that we will increase the vehicles to deal with the farming community, at the Praedial Larceny Squad. I am taking a special interest in the Praedial

Larceny Squad.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, final supplemental.

Sen. Mark: The final question to my hon. colleague. Hon. Minister, as you are aware, there is an inadequate supply of personnel to man this very important unit. Can you advise this Senate what steps are being taken by your Ministry to provide more personnel in that particular unit, so that that important function can be properly executed?

Mr. President: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Again, Mr. President, Sen. Mark, within the last three to four weeks, as I told you before and I am telling the country again, I have been meeting personally, together with my colleagues at the Ministry, and we are getting the recommendations from the Praedial Larceny Squad, because they are the ones actually in the job, and I am here to listen and we are here as the policymakers to execute and get it done.

They have requested more personnel at the squad, and we are working on it, but there is a process it has to go through to employ and to advertise. You know, the whole procedure to get them in, and I give you in particular, and especially the farmers of this country, the Praedial Larceny Squad will be increased.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Next question on the Order Paper, Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Are we waiting for the individual? Who is the person coming?
[*Laughter*] Question No. 23.

Community Residences Act Section 17

(Proclamation of)

23. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister:

Can the Minister state when will Section 17 of the Community Residences Act be proclaimed?

Mr. President: Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister. **The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):** Thank you, Mr. President. The proposed time frame for the proclamation of section 17 has been determined as the end of March 2023.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, supplemental.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask my hon. colleague in the Office of the Prime Minister, in light of the fact that the proclamation of section 17 is to happen or take place at the end of March 2023, can the Minister explain to this honourable Senate whether she is aware of a licence being issued to a home that has been condemned by several reports issued by bodies that have been charged with examining the operations of this very home, or such a home? Can the Minister advise whether the Government has issued such a licence or licences to such homes?

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, you have asked two questions there and both are not allowed. Next supplemental.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask through you Mr. President, if the Minister could indicate what were the reasons for the length of time it has taken to have this matter addressed, and action taken as stated by the hon. Minister, by the end of March 2023? Can the Minister indicate to this honourable House what were the factors or reasons for the delay of such a very important provision, Mr. President?

Mr. President: Minister.

10.35 a.m.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Mr. President. Prior to the coming into force of the laws governing the children's home and the regulations, we did not have a regulatory framework before. We needed to give the facilities time to get

themselves ready. Throughout that period, Government has been working alongside the Children's Authority to provide the necessary technical and financial assistance to assist the various homes to bring them up to code.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Through you, Mr. President, when the regulations necessary to govern this piece of legislation, particularly when section 17 is proclaimed, can the Minister indicate, Mr. President, when those regulations will be tabled?

Mr. President: Minister.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Mr. President. Hon. Member, the regulations were indeed done. However, we needed to give the facilities time so that they could reach their human resource capacity, their physical infrastructure capacity, et cetera. We have determined that by the end of March the homes that are ready to be licensed would be licensed because due to funding allocated to Gender and Child Affairs for the purpose of helping the facilities, they would get up to code.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, another supplemental.

Sen. Mark: Yeah. Can I ask the hon. Minister, in those circumstances, through the President, when do you anticipate, hon. Minister, that the regulations would be tabled or formally issued or gazetted? Can you advise?

Mr. President: Minister.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Mr. President. That would happen when the proclamation is done. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Next supplemental on the Order Paper, Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Supplemental or question?

Mr. President: No. Sorry. Next question on the Order Paper.

Sen. Mark: I know that you have been away for a little while, so I forgive you.

Carapo Temple

UNREVISED

(Status Report on Vandalism Incident)

24. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

In light of the vandalism which occurred twice in one week in May 2022 at the Carapo Temple, can the Minister provide a status report on any investigations into this incident?

Mr. President: Minister of National Security.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very warmly, Mr. President. Mr. President, according to information received from the Commissioner of Police on the 27th of June, 2022, officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Northern Division, north, conducted an exercise which resulted in the arrest of one person who was subsequently charged for the offence of sacrilege committed at the Carapo Temple. Having defaulted on payment of a fine imposed by the Arima magistrate at the Arima Magistrates' Court in July of 2022, the accused was taken to the Golden Grove Prison where he was confined. However, he was again released on November 18, 2022. Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, a supplemental.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister what steps, as far as he is aware, will be taken by the TTPS to address what appears to be a trend emerging where churches, temples, mosques are desecrated by individuals and for reasons best known to themselves? Can the Minister indicate whether he can advise us, what steps can be taken or he has been advised will be taken by the TTPS to discourage such desecration?

Mr. President: Minister.

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. President, perhaps even anecdotally one would have observed

that a number of those incidents have in fact taken place in religious—in places of worship across Trinidad and Tobago over the past few years. I am certain that in the generality, in the very arduous efforts of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to police this country and to maintain law and order, they would have been paying particular attention to places of worship in light of that kind of activity, providing the patrols and the security that is obviously required in those circumstances.

It is not, however, only a matter for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, it also directly involves the municipal police. And as the Senator would know, the Government has increased substantially the numbers of municipal police officers across the regional corporations in Trinidad and Tobago. And part of their focus is to look on local buildings, public building, public grounds, cemeteries, facilities, places of worship in order to ensure that they are properly patrolled and secured on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Mr. President, can I ask the hon. Minister whether the Government is contemplating making any changes to the legislation to address this trend as a deterrent or a potential deterrent for any future would-be persons or individuals who may seek to desecrate our mosques, our temples and our churches?

Mr. President: Minister.

Hon. F. Hinds: I not aware of any consideration for amendment to the existing legislation. In fact, it is my view that the improved policing that I have just described would treat with some of this. In some of the cases, from my own anecdotal recall, Mr. President, persons who might be afflicted with psychiatric conditions have engaged in some of this conduct. So it is a matter for the whole of

government to deal with, other elements of the Government, that is to say. But to answer the question specifically, I cannot support the proposition that a change in legislation necessarily is under contemplation at this time.

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Wednesday, 25 January, 2023 at 1.30 p.m., at which point the Government proposes to debate the Finance Bill to completion.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]*—*a quick question. Can I ask the hon. Minister, Leader of Government Business, when—Private Members' Day, are we addressing that on the Tuesday of January, that is the 24th? Because you talked about the 25th which is the Wednesday. So are we coming on the Tuesday to deal with Private Members' business?*—*through the President.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, as indicated, we propose to next convene on Wednesday the 25th. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: Sen. Mark, it is not going to be a long debate. Make it brief.

Sen. Mark: I know. I know. But I am asking the Leader of Government Business whether Private Members' Day which is entrenched in the law that we are a part of, whether that would be observed in the month of January, as is

normal? I am just trying to get that as a commitment and an undertaking.

Mr. President: Members, is it your will that you wish for me to suspend for five minutes so that you can have a discussion on this matter?

Hon. Senators: No.

Mr. President: All right. Leader of Government Business.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, thank you. What I can—the commitment I can give to Sen. Mark is that we will have some communication and as always the Government will take all possible measures to ensure that the Opposition and the other side of the aisle is given the facility of moving for Private Members' Day. So I will have direct communication with the Leader of the Opposition Bench on this matter. As it stands now, we are adjourning to the 25th. I give you this commitment.

Mr. President: Hon. Members, before I put the question, permit me to express my gratitude for the congratulations that have been conveyed to me in my election to this office as the President of the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: As indicated, when I took up the office of Vice-President of the Senate so many years ago, I reiterate today that I intend to work with each and every one of you towards the maintenance and adherence to the higher standard of debate in this Chamber and decorum. Again, I express my gratitude. Thank you. Let me also say to Sen. Sookhai, welcome to the Senate of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.44 a.m.