

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 10, 2023

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon Members, I have received communication from Dr. Lackram Bodoë, MP, Member for Fyzabad and Mr. Dinesh Rambally, MP, Member for Chaguanas West, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Defence (Rates of Pay and Allowances) (Amdt.) Regulations, 2023. [*The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds)*]
2. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Administration to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an Inquiry into the Impact of Work-from-Home and Alternative Work Arrangements, Policies and Initiatives on Public Sector Productivity and Service Delivery. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
3. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Seventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) for fiscal year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the Eighth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on an examination of

UNREVISED

- the Report of the Auditor General of the PublicAccounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
4. Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 2) Order, 2023 [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
 5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Regulated Industries Commission for the year ended December 31, 2018. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following reports:

National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited

Seventh Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO) for the financial year 2017 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations in the Committee's Tenth Report from the 11th Parliament.

Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago

Eighth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT) for the years 2017 to 2021 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations in the Committee's Ninth Report from the 11th Parliament.

Thank you, Madam.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I am advised that, as provided for in Standing Order 126, there is agreement between the sides that Prime Minister's Questions will not be taken at today's sitting and will, in fact, be dealt with at the next sitting of the House. For the records to be clear, will the Leader of the Opposition confirm when in the month of February will the next sitting of the House be held? Leader.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, for the records to be pellucidly clear, the next sitting of the House will be on the 24th of February, which will also be Private Members' Day, and I did inform my friend that that will be the next sitting of the House. "You are surprised that das meh friend?"

Mr. Indarsingh: We know you have friends but none on this side.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Foot and Mouth Disease (South Eastern District Schools)

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Princes Town who is delayed in some traffic, Question No. 1 to the Minister of Education: Will the Minister indicate whether unconfirmed reports of foot and mouth disease at several schools in the south eastern district are valid?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker hand, foot and mouth disease is a mild contagious viral infection common in young children. Symptoms include sores in the mouth and a rash on the hands and feet. There is no specific treatment for hand, foot and mouth disease, however, frequent hand washing and avoiding close contact with people who have hand, foot and mouth disease helps to lower the risk of infection.

While one case of hand, foot and mouth disease was reported to the Education District Health Unit from the south eastern district in term one of this academic year, no cases have been reported, thus far, for term two.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, based on the one school that is reported, do you know if there are any plans to, at least, temporarily close that school while some sanitation is done to that school?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: To clarify for Member's benefit, there are no cases of hand, foot and mouth that have been recorded for term two.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, it has come to my attention and the question is that a school by the name of Princes Town Islamia Primary School has reported foot and mouth disease. Could you confirm?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again, there are no cases of hand, foot and mouth disease reported in term two to the Education District Health Unit.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Galleons Passage
(Servicing of Sea Bridge)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: Given that the *Galleons Passage* has been dry-docked to undergo its annual class recertification and its importance to the inter-island ferry, will the Minister inform this House when it will be returned to service the sea bridge?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you. Madam Speaker, at this point in time, the *Galleons Passage* is going through its reclassification surveys, which will then indicate the dry-docking that is required. Once that has been established, then we will be able to give a date when it will be back in service. However, there is no disruption to the sea bridge. The

sea bridge is being serviced by both the *APT James* and the *Buccoo Reef* for which they were bought for. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, given that the local dry-dock facility is not currently available, could you inform this House if the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited, NIDCO, has secured a suitable facility within the region to conduct the remedial work on the *Galleons Passage*?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, NIDCO has the responsibility for the dry-docking process, and I am informed that they are looking at all options to ensure that all the vessels requiring dry-docking, at a particular time, takes place. Thank you.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, again, based on fact that the local dry-docking facilities are currently not available to be utilized by NIDCO, has NIDCO explored and identified any dry-docking facility within the Caribbean region or within the region to facilitate this particular process?

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, I believe that question was your first supplemental question and it was answered. Member for Oropouche East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Licensing Offices (Steps Taken for Routine Services)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: Will the Minister indicate what urgent steps will be taken to address the current unbearable and terribly inconvenient process for obtaining routine services from the Licensing Division of his Ministry?

The Minister of Works and Transport (**Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan**): Again, Madam Speaker, there have been some challenges at the Licensing Office at San Fernando and at Caroni. This is due to the inspection of heavy vehicles,

trucks. You would recall that the Government did put a two-year moratorium on inspections. Unfortunately, that was not taken advantage of by most of the heavy vehicle operators. And, subsequent to that, and the new system being put in at licensing office where you have to, for the first time, present your vehicles for inspection, unfortunately, in the past almost 70 per cent of these vehicles were inspected, but were never presented to the licensing offices. Having now implemented this new system, these vehicles have to be presented and that has posed some level of challenge.

However, what the licensing office will be doing, as released yesterday at a press conference, as of Monday, they will be resorting back to an appointment system for vehicles over 6,000 kgs. Also, they will be commissioning a new inspection station at our Agua Santa Plant in Arima. They will also be removing some of the services at these two offices, one to the Mannie Ramjohn Stadium and one to the Brian Lara stadium, where transfers will be facilitated on vehicles there, easing up the workload at the two challenged licensing offices. And as the process continues, more systems will be implemented to ensure that there is a reduction in the bottleneck, again, which is taking place because of the fact that the truckers, as I would put it, have not taken advantage of the two-year moratorium on inspection offered by the Government. Thank you.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much and thank you, Minister, for the response. Minister, in the context where it is admitted that there have been some problems in the licensing office database, concerning the names of persons and minor errors in registering chassis number, et cetera, et cetera, is there any effort on the part of the Ministry to ease up the motoring public by way of a moratorium on fines and penalties, bearing the seriousness of that in cases where it is not the fault of the owner of a vehicle where inaccurate information is in the system?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, what is happening at licensing office is a cleaning up of a system that is over 70 years old. And because of the fact that licensing offices have moved to this new modern system, there are going to be some challenges when you come in with your records, because there are many people who are driving vehicles and they do not even know the vehicle is not theirs because of the manual system that operated. Whenever you go for an inspection now, if there are any errors, it has to be corrected. So the next time you go, you will not have this problem.

1.45 p.m.

What I have been told that has been put in place at the licensing office is that if these problems are identified at a garage, you no longer have to take the car back to license office. The garage would take pictures of the car, forward it to license office. You will go to license office in a separate line so you do not have to go through that hassle, and these records would be corrected. The system that we are putting in place is trying to correct the records at license office which have been wrong for the last 60 or 70 years. We are trying to clean up the database at license office. I can tell you, there are over 1.2 million vehicles registered at license office, but I am quite certain that we do not have close to that amount on the road. So this is about cleaning up the system at license office that have been there plaguing us for years. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, given the back up of traffic and vehicles that have occurred in the vicinity of the Caroni Licensing Office and the failure of the authorities at the Licensing Office to provide the appropriate signage and safety measures and so on, I would ask if the Ministry of

Works and Transport could intervene to secure this particular encroachment on the Southern Main Road leading to the Licensing Office before a fatal accident occurs in that jurisdiction? Can you give an undertaking that your Ministry will put in place the necessary mechanism to address this issue?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, I really do not have information on what the Member is speaking about, but if there is an issue and the new system being put in place does not address it, then I will definitely have the Traffic Management Branch visit the area to ensure that there are no disasters in that area. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, Question No. 4.

**Reopening of Couva West Secondary School
(Upcoming Examinations)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Education: Will the Minister inform this House when the Couva West Secondary School which was recently closed for repairs will be reopened in preparation for upcoming examinations?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Couva West Secondary School is not closed. It is currently operating on a rotational system, with the examination students, Form 5, attending school physically daily and Form 4 students in physical rotation. These arrangements facilitate the completion of SBAs for examination students. Teachers have been asked to engage the lower form students online. This is due to the discovery of mold in some classroom areas and specialist rooms which has rendered them unfit for use at this time. The ceiling in the affected areas must be

replaced, the roof is to be repaired, drainage works are to be done, and the entire area sanitized. This process is carded to be completed well before the start of examinations.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, could you inform this House which service provider has been engaged to address the issues that you have just mentioned?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Speaker, the service provider will be contracted through MTS, which is our project manager in this matter, and so they would provide us with that information once the contract is awarded.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: So, Minister, you are in no position to tell this House when physical classes will resume for Forms 1, 2, and 3 at the Couva West Secondary School?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: At this time we cannot give a firm date for that.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are six questions for oral answer and we will be answering all six. There is one question for written answer and I am asking for a deferral of two weeks, please.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

EU Blacklist (Removal of Trinidad and Tobago)

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

Will the Minister state why Trinidad and Tobago is still listed as a “non-cooperative jurisdiction for tax purposes”, despite the Opposition’s support of all four pieces of legislation which sought to remove Trinidad and Tobago off the EU blacklist?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The main reason for Trinidad and Tobago’s placement on the EU Commission tax blacklist is as a result of a non-compliant Global Forum rating under the exchange of information on request and the automatic exchange of information standards. These have legislative, administrative and operational elements. Regarding the legislative dimension, in 2019 and 2020, after discussion and consultation with the Global Forum, Trinidad and Tobago enacted four key pieces of legislation, namely the Companies (Amdt.) Act, the Income Tax (Amdt.) Act, the Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters Act, and the Tax Information Exchange Agreements Act. Trinidad and Tobago consequently engaged the Global Forum Secretariat to review these aforementioned pieces of legislation to ensure that they addressed the known deficiencies sufficiently.

The Global Forum Secretariat, by way of feedback, prepared a technical assistance report in December, 2020, on the implementation of—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam—Madam Speaker, it is difficult, you know.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So I guess we did not recognize how loud our volumes are and continue, Minister of Finance. I am sure we recognize it now.

Hon. C. Imbert: I will try but this childish thing, I cannot handle it. Trinidad and Tobago consequently engaged the Global Forum Secretariat to review these aforementioned pieces of legislation to ensure that they addressed the known

deficiencies sufficiently. The Global Forum Secretariat, by way of feedback, prepared a technical assistance report in December 2020, on the implementation of the exchange of information on request and the automatic exchange of information standards, and further outlined 23 additional recommendations to make the legal framework more robust.

To comprehensively address these new recommendations, Trinidad and Tobago is currently involved in an intensive technical assistance programme with the Global Forum to ensure that the country has made the necessary legislative, administrative and operational improvements to undergo its Phase 2 Peer Review. Through the ongoing work of the technical assistance programme, Trinidad and Tobago is in the process of finalizing draft legislation that will comprehensively address the outstanding issues identified for exchange of information on request and automatic exchange of information.

In terms of the administrative and operational dimensions, the Trinidad and Tobago's competent authority, the Board of Inland Revenue, is in the process of strengthening that organization's confidentiality and data safeguards and exchange of information functions and processes. Once all legislative issues are addressed, Trinidad and Tobago will submit its application to become a party to the Multilateral Convention and will be able to take full advantage of exchanging information with the current 146 signatories.

Another reason for Trinidad and Tobago's placement on the list was our designation by the OECD as possessing a harmful tax regime because of what was seen as our ring-fenced free zone regime. Progress has been made in this area whereby, Trinidad and Tobago administratively closed off the regime to new entrants in January 2019, and the Special Economic Zones Act, 2021, was partially proclaimed in January 2022. In this regard, draft SEZ regulations are currently

being finalized by the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Finally, as it relates to our country-by-country reporting status, according to our 2022 peer review, Trinidad and Tobago was found to have deficiencies in our legal and administrative frameworks for the exchange of information and the use of country-by-country reports. Trinidad and Tobago has accordingly made a commitment to the EU to fully implement country-by-country reporting by 2023 and for this to be reflected in the 2023 peer review report. In so doing, Trinidad and Tobago is currently finalizing draft country-by-country reporting legislation for enactment in 2023.

Mr. Young: “All yuh eh understand ah word he say”.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon Member: “He doh understand ah word he say”.

Mr. Charles: Yes. Minister of Finance, when we were at the Joint Select Committee discussing these four bits of legislation, you told us that you were in constant communication with the EU. Why were—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, Members—

Mr. Charles: Why were these issues not identified before the legislation was brought to Parliament?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I think I made it abundantly clear in my answer but I will repeat that part of the answer in order to elucidate so that the hon. Member will understand.

Mr. Young: “Ah told you dey doh understand”.

Hon. C. Imbert: Trinidad and Tobago engaged the Global Forum Secretariat to review the aforementioned pieces of legislation; the legislation spoken about by the Member.

Mr. Charles: When?

Hon. C. Imbert: The Global Forum Secretariat, by way of feedback, provided a technical assistance report and further outlined 23 additional recommendations to make the legal framework more robust. So the answer is, the legislation we brought to Parliament was identified to target the known deficiencies at the time.

Hon. Member: Agreed by them.

Hon. C. Imbert: Subsequently—agreed by them, as my hon. colleague says—they have given us 23 additional recommendations. This is the world we live in and we have to swim in it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Why, Minister—all our Caribbean colleagues have been able to engage the EU and identify all the outstanding issues, passed legislation and come off the blacklist, why are we in this position today to identify additional and do these not apply to our colleagues in the Caribbean?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Those countries, fortunately for them, do not have an Opposition, UNC, that refuses to cooperate—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert:—and refuses to pass special majority legislation.

Mr. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Member, there is a different between Questions on Notice and Urgent Questions. Urgent Questions, you have a natural monopoly but you have to

wait for me to recognize you. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Through you, Madam Speaker, is the Minister aware of the impact to the local insurance industry based on the Tax Haven Defense Act passed in the German Parliament for EU blacklisted countries?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As recently as a couple of weeks ago, I participated in a virtual meeting with the lead personnel in the Global Forum. We are also in constant contact with the EU ambassador here in Trinidad and Tobago who is assisting us. In fact, an EU delegation came to Trinidad and Tobago specifically to discuss this and other matters and therefore, we are abreast of all current developments.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Would the Minister be honest and admit that we—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: Whoa! Hold on, hold on.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, there is certain sort of innuendo in that question and I know you know better than that.

Mr. Charles: Would the Minister admit finally that we supported all four bits of legislation—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: —on the assumption that they will get us off the list?

Ms. Ameen: And they did nothing with it.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So based on the questions and the gravamen of the question, I rule that out of order.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]—anymore supplemental?

Madam Speaker: One more.

Mr. Hosein: One more.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in light of these 23 additional recommendations, can the Minister indicate whether or not the European Union has given Trinidad and Tobago a deadline date in which to comply with these recommendations?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Again, Madam Speaker, I recognize that sometimes hon. Members opposite do not listen and they do not care to listen, so I will repeat the last paragraph in my answer.

Hon Member: We do not trust you.

Hon. C Imbert: Trinidad and Tobago—I was very clear, I did not stutter—has accordingly made a commitment to the EU to fully implement country-by-country reporting by 2023, and we are currently finalizing the relevant legislation for enactment in 2023.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.00 p.m.

Four Per cent Wage Increase Offer (Government's Reconsideration)

87. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Labour:

Given reports of discontent by top trade unions in the public sector over the Government's four percent wage increase offer, will the Minister state whether the Government will reconsider this offer?

Mr. Imbert: I will answer that, Madam Speaker. I will answer it.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Having been unable to reach agreement with public sector trade unions for collective agreements—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Having been unable to reach agreement with public sector trade unions for collective agreements for the period 2014 to 2019, the matters were reported as unresolved disputes to the Special Tribunal of the Industrial Court in October 2022. It should be noted that:

“Under the Essential Services Division”—of the court—“is the Special Tribunal established by the Civil Service Act, Chapter 23:01...”

The tribunal—“...hears and determines disputes in the Civil Service, the Police Service, the Fire Service, the Prison Service, the Teaching Service, the Supplemental Police and the Central Bank. The special tribunal consists of the Chairman of the Essential Services Division of the Industrial Court and two other members of that Division selected by the Chairman.”

The Government now awaits the hearing and determination by the tribunal of these disputes.

Meetings with Reputed Gang Leaders (Offering Lucrative Contracts)

88. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Will the Minister state whether the Government has held meetings with reputed gang leaders to broker a pact by offering lucrative contracts?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of National Security and the law enforcement agencies under its purview have not engaged in any discussions or negotiations of any kind whatsoever with reputed gang leaders or suspected or

known gang leaders in any attempt to broker any pact whatsoever through the use of contracts of any kind. This is not the policy of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and it has not happened.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: We are not unaware of the current crime situation, and in particular the issue of serious, violent crimes currently affecting the population, which is mainly driven by gang activity. In this regard, the Ministry, through its law enforcement agencies, has chosen as the best approach to enforce the relevant laws to control their activities and as well to implement several other strategies to mitigate and deter gang activity. For example, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has recently implemented the Gang Reduction and Community Empowerment project, otherwise called GRACE, with the object of strengthening the society's ability to resist gang proliferation and enhance lifestyle choices away from criminal activity. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*] —in Crowne Plaza.

Hon. Member: Diego Martin North East.

Mr. Charles: Diego Martin North East, yeah.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Yes. In the light of the fact that the Minister said—

Madam Speaker: All right. Just one minute. Just one minute. Member for Couva South I always remind you of that lovely baritone voice—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker:—that is great for another Chamber, but can be disruptive in this Chamber. Please control your volumes. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: In light of the fact—thank you—that the Minister has said that it is not the policy of the Government to engage in discussions, is he denying or is he aware of newspaper reports which talked about a:

2006 Crowne Plaza meeting between Patrick Manning, then Prime Minister, with reputed gang leaders to make peace between them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: What I know of is the fact that a Commissioner of Police came to a joint select committee, which I chaired, to tell us that a Member of the Opposition, sitting in this House today, was followed by undercover police because intelligence revealed that he was about to have a very surreptitious, and God knows for what purpose, meeting with gang leaders in the city, having paid their bill at—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker—

Hon. Member: “Weeeee”!

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, 48(6). I was a member of that JSC and the Minister is lying.

Hon. Member: What!

Mr. Hosein: The Minister is lying, I was a member of that JSC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: What, the Member—the Minister lying.

Madam Speaker: Excuse me. Member. Member for Couva South, certain words are not allowed in here. I am not certain what the Member for Barataria/San Juan said because of the amount of noise that was taking place otherwise in this Chamber. Okay? Member, I hope you did not use that word also. I will ask both of you to stand up and retract that word.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I do retract the word, and the Minister has told untruths in this House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, your opportunity to retract the word.

Mr. Indarsingh: I retract, but I heard the Minister making accusation of my colleague on this side of the House—

Madam Speaker: Members.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I sat here, I did not hear any colleague's name called. I did not.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes, he said a certain Member of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker: I heard no—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva, we are not having a conversation. I know what I heard you say. I did not hear any colleagues' name called. Okay? And I would ask all Members to compose themselves properly, on all sides.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), the Member has imputed improper motives to Members on this House, on this side of the House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: And he has clearly imputed improper motives, and I would ask that he apologize and retract and withdraw the statement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: So, in light of what the Member said, the Member said it was said at a joint select committee, which was in public; which was in public. So that I overrule the point about imputing improper motives. Member for Naparima, you

have a supplemental?

Mr. Charles: Is the Minister aware that it is not good practice to bring gossip and old talk into discussions?

Madam Speaker: Member, overruled. Member for Mayaro.

**Point Radix Access Road
(Urgent Action Taken to Rebuild)**

91. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Will the Minister advise what urgent action has been taken to rebuild the Point Radix Access Road (Ortoire) and to facilitate access to critical telecommunications infrastructure?

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Without demure of gossip, Madam Speaker, the Mayaro Regional Corporation has been attempting to address this matter by conducting site investigations and generating estimates to determine the appropriate funding required to undertake rehabilitative and infrastructural works to retain the slope.

Further to this, for the period 2020 to present, the Mayaro Regional Corporation has been carrying out rehabilitative works to ensure that Point Radix is accessible. Given the resources available to the corporation, further assistance has been requested from our engineering department at the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to find a suitable solution to the issue which is ongoing. Repairs to the roadway have in fact been done by an external agency and a stakeholder, and the area is currently passable. Our engineering department at the Ministry is currently engaging the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company on further works to be done to stabilize the slope and roadway as repairs that we have conducted so far are temporary in nature.

Early-bird Tenants

UNREVISED

(Secured by InvesTT)

92. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry:

Will the Minister state who are the 12 early-bird tenants that InvesTT was able to secure at e-Teck's Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, prior to its completion?

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The 12 tenants that InvesTT were able to secure at e Teck's Phoenix Park Industrial Estate are:

1. Pillai Tools Company Limited; and the sector, logistics and distribution manufacturing; country of origin of investor, Trinidad and Tobago.
2. Ali's Hardware and Metal Fabrication; and the sector, the proposed work is manufacturing; country of origin, Trinidad and Tobago.
3. Do Care Hygienic Product Company Limited; sector, manufacturing; country of origin, China.
4. Summit Luggage Company Limited; manufacturing; country of origin, China.
5. Sudden Reflection Glass; sector, manufacturing; country of origin, Trinidad and Tobago.
6. MSK Seafood; sector, logistics and distribution; country of origin, China.
7. First Caribbean Marketing Company; sector, logistics and distribution; country of origin, China.
8. Global Tobacco; sector, manufacturing; country of origin, Trinidad and Tobago.
9. Valcom E.M.I. Limited; sector, distribution; country of origin, Trinidad and Tobago.

10. Pour Me One Brewery; sector, food and beverage subsector; country of origin, Trinidad and Tobago.
11. Centaur Construction and Services; sector, manufacturing; country of origin, Trinidad and Tobago.
12. Ramps Logistics; sector, logistics; country of origin, Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition to the above, the anchor tenant, PriceSmart Trinidad and Tobago Limited, is establishing a distribution centre at the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Can the hon. Minister say whether these 12 tenants, the contracts are memorandums of understanding or are they contracts that are signed, sealed and delivered to operate on the Phoenix Park?

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: They have all executed with e TecK a letter of offer which is a legally binding agreement.

Availability of Couva Hospital and Multi-Training Facility (Non-COVID-19 Patients)

93. Dr. Rai Ragbir (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Will the Minister indicate when will the Couva Hospital and Multi-training facility be available to receive patients who are not diagnosed with COVID-19?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet ended and as such, the Couva Hospital and Multi-Training Facility is still being used to treat COVID-19 patients. It is thus not possible at this time to give an update as to when the facility can be used for other purposes.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, is there a government steering committee that would be involved in the transition between UWI and Ministry of Health?

Madam Speaker: Member, I rule that question out of order having regard to the Standing Order related to supplemental questions.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO NETBALL ASSOCIATION

(INC'N) (AMDT.) BILL, 2023

Bill to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Netball Association (Inc'n) Act, 1979 [*The Speaker*]; read the first time.

**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (ESTABLISHMENT OF THE
BOROUGH OF DIEGO MARTIN AND THE BOROUGH OF SIPARIA)**

BILL, 2021

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

That a Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04 to establish the Borough of Diego Martin and Borough of Siparia and to make consequential amendments to the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01, the Interpretation Act, Chap. 3:01, the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act, Chap 25:50, the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations, Chap. 48:50, the Central Tenders Board Act, Chap. 71:91 and other written laws, be now read a second time.

2.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to pilot this Bill. The Bill itself is a mere six clauses long. Short title at clause 1; the commencement at clause 2; the interpretation at clause 3; and then, the substance of the Bill being clauses 4, 5 and 6. Clause 4 amends the Second Schedule to the Municipal Corporations Act; clause 5 amends the Third Schedule to that Act and clause 6 makes the

consequential amendments to the five pieces of law, both primary and secondary laws in nature.

Madam Speaker, the relevance of the amendments before us lies in an historical appreciation of where we are having come along a journey of history and time markers and where we are headed to. Madam Speaker, it is a matter of fact that the People's National Movement, this Government, has determined, by way of action in the Parliament and by way of operationalization of law, that local government reform must be a feature of our independent and Republican country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: In fact, Madam Speaker, as you are well aware, this Bill articulates around several amendments to the Municipal Corporations Act which we passed into law and which we partially proclaimed. In fact, Madam Speaker, the parent law, the Municipal Corporations Act in the amendments that we caused, which articulate with this Bill, allowed us specifically to turn on the system of local government reform, and we have done that. We partially proclaimed recent amendments and specifically, in giving ourselves time for local government reform which is what this conversion to borough status is, we specifically committed the Proclamation in moving from a triennial term to a quadrennial term for the life of a council.

Today, Madam Speaker, this Bill speaks to what the reform looks like in context, but, Madam Speaker, fortunately we are not alone. Minutes ago in the Court of Appeal we just won the law, the challenge that was brought by the UNC against the Government to try and strikeout amendments that we had put in.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: So we have just won that, Madam Speaker. And the Court of Appeal has agreed with the Government that it was proper to put into effect the

four-year term for councillors and aldermen as opposed to a three-year term. Thank the Lord God for the independence of our Judiciary.

Permit me, Madam Speaker, this moment to take a small deviation with your leave. Today, in the Court of Appeal, as a matter of fact just prior to the delivery of that judgment that has now echoed, we lost a public servant past of note. Mr. Neil Byam collapsed and passed away literally in the Court of Appeal today and permit me, Madam Speaker, having worked with Mr. Byam for many years in my capacity as Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs and years prior, to offer deepest condolences to his family and loved ones, because surely today he did not wake up with the intention of departing us that soon. May the Lord God rest his soul in eternal peace and may the Lord have mercy on him. Dear Lord, we pray for that.

Madam Speaker, the Bill before us represents the Government's commitment to bringing to life the desire of the people of the Regional Corporation of Siparia and the Regional Corporation of Diego Martin. In the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04, Madam Speaker, it is important to note that section 2 of the parent law defines what corporations are. A:

“‘Corporation’ means the body corporate constituted by the Mayor, Aldermen, Councillors and electors of any of the cities, towns, districts or places to which this Act is applied by or under section 5;”

Madam Speaker, section 3 of the Municipal Corporations Act says:

“The Municipal Corporations established under the provisions of the written laws set out in the First Schedule and known by the corporate names mentioned in that Schedule are continued under this Act.”

And, Madam Speaker, section 4 of the parent Act says:

“The several new Municipal Corporations bearing the names and having the

respective officers, memberships and descriptions set forth in the Second Schedule are hereby established.”

Section 5 of the parent Act says:

- “(1) Subject to subsection (2) and section 6, this Act shall apply to—
- (a) the City of Port-of-Spain;
 - (b) the City of San Fernando;
 - (c) the Borough of Arima;
 - (d) the Borough of Point Fortin;
 - (e) the several Municipal Corporations referred to in section 4; and
 - (f) such other towns, districts or places to which the provisions of this Act are applied pursuant to subsection (2).”

And subsection (2) says:

“(2) The President may, by Order, subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament, apply the provisions of this Act to any town, district or place for the purpose of incorporating the electors thereof.”

Madam Speaker, I have taken the time to read the substantive provisions of the parent law, the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04, to say that in 1990 and then again in 1992, it was the specific intention that there would be created certain cities, boroughs and regional corporations. And I will go in a moment into some of the history of that as it is relevant to what a borough actually means. But in doing that, Madam Speaker, we see that a corporation, a borough and a town, a city are in fact all municipal corporations under the law. In other words then, if you look to the parent law there appears to be no distinction between a city, a borough and a regional corporation.

That distinction, Madam Speaker, is actually to be found, and there is some “telltale-ing” of it in the consequential amendments that we make to the law.

Because in the consequential amendments, in clauses 4 and 5, particularly if you look to the Schedule of this Bill and you see clause 6, you will understand where some of the dynamics come. There are other dynamics outside of the parent law which are relevant to why we ought to take up the request of the Siparia Regional Corporation and the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, to have them located as boroughs in law, Madam Speaker. Permit me a moment to reflect upon that latter part.

So, Madam Speaker, we did not arrive here by whim or fancy of the Government. Indeed, the Government has an obligation to make laws for the peace, order and good governance of its society pursuant to section 53 of the Constitution. We must do so by laws promulgated in the supremacy of our Parliament, section 2 of the Constitution, and today we stand here with that capacity to amend the laws that we do, but where does it originate from? It originates, Madam Speaker, from the express desires of the people of Siparia, that Regional Corporation, and the people of Diego Martin Regional Corporation.

Diego Martin Regional Corporation is comprised of three constituencies. Those constituencies are: Diego Martin West, Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin North/East, they border on the Port of Spain City Corporation in terms of boundaries. Their boundaries are defined in the Schedules to the Municipal Corporations Act. The Siparia Regional Corporation, Madam Speaker, is also one which comprises a very large landmass. Now, there is the tendency to confuse the name Siparia Regional Corporation just with Siparia. In fact, Madam Speaker, that would be a mistake in fact, as Siparia is much broader in terms of regional corporation in its geography, than the name lends itself to understanding. Siparia, in fact, Madam Speaker, comprises parts of Point Fortin, Fyzabad, Oropouche East and West, if you look at where boundaries and borders go to, et cetera, and it

borders on the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. It is a very large landmass, Madam Speaker, that we are actually looking at. And it was by way of specific resolutions coming from the respective municipal corporations that we found ourselves here.

For the record, the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the Siparia Regional Corporation submitted to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government two Motions, one each, approved at their statutory meetings held in the case of Diego Martin Regional Corporation on 02 May, 2019, and in the case of the Siparia Regional Corporation on the 21st of January, 2019. And those resolutions were passed by the sitting members of the respective corporations. The members are, the representatives of the electoral districts and the aldermen comprised there and therefore, the people of the regional corporations entrusted their representatives to bring these Motions forward. Each of these resolutions called on the Government to declare the municipalities as boroughs.

The Siparia Regional Corporation, in terms of its context, Madam Speaker, and the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, those resolutions came forward and the Cabinet saw it was necessary and prudent to establish ministerial committees to investigate certain parameters. These parameters were in fact not parameters set out in law but by convention and practice coming from the United Kingdom, in particular, and you know as a commonwealth jurisdiction that we take careful note of conventions and practice. By convention and practice, there are certain indicators in moving from a town to a borough to a city. It is not only a matter of honour or respect that these cities are born or boroughs are born, but there is in fact a degree of prestige and in fact there is a degree of organization which is different. And you will see that in clause 6 of the Bill, whether you can reverse, how you park, indicators, et cetera, you will see that in clause 6 of the Bill.

But the Cabinet saw it fit, Madam Speaker, specifically to establish an interministerial arrangement to go and investigate and carry out certain enquiries of the corporations. For the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, the subcommittee was headed by the hon. Colm Imbert, the Minister of Finance. It comprised, Ministers Stuart Young, Allyson West and Sen. The Hon. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal as well as the Chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, Mr. Sigler Jack.

The Siparia Regional Corporation was investigated and interrogated by a subcommittee which is chaired by Sen. Clarence Rambharat, as he then was; the hon. Stephen Mc Clashie; Sen. Paula Gopee-Scoon; Sen. Kazim Hosein; the hon. Brian Manning, the Member for San Fernando East; and Alderman Christopher Encinas of the Siparia Regional Corporation, who in fact was the author of the resolution supported by the Siparia Regional Corporation.

In investigating these aspects, Madam Speaker, we have here for the record that whilst we have 14 municipal corporations at present, two cities, three boroughs. And the boroughs are: Point Fortin, Chaguanas and Arima, Chaguanas being created in the year 1990. Therefore, we now stand 33 years away from the last creation of a borough. Whereas we have these 14, we are now able to say, by way of local economic development, by way of comparison with the Elections and Boundaries Commission, by way of data coming from the field, that Diego Martin and Siparia have cemented themselves in a significant growth pattern.

Let us look at Diego Martin Regional Corporation. It has a total electorate of 88,151 persons in 10 electoral districts. It boasts growing business sector; state agencies are located there; Diamond Vale Industrial Park; Diego Martin Sporting Complex; multi-sport facility; four health centres; new state-of-the-art Diego Martin health centre being built as we are well aware; headquarters of the Trinidad

and Tobago Defence Force; West Park Recreational Savannah; Diego Martin administrative complex soon to be opened in a matter of weeks. The municipality boasts of commercial nodes: Westmall; Highland Plaza; Starlite shopping centre; Alyce Glen shopping plaza; Diego Martin Consumers Corporative; Ellerslie Plaza; Shops of Maraval, et cetera, et cetera. It is home to a whole lot, whether it is bounded by the beauty of the sea, the calmness of safe harbour, the industry in the city, in the regional corporation itself now proposed to be a borough.

2.30 p.m.

In terms of the Siparia, we can compare that. It is a much larger geography in terms of its spread. Siparia Regional Corporation has a total electorate of 71,802 persons. Now, I know sometimes in the Opposition there is a bit of confusion, they say Siparia is larger than Diego Martin is. It is actually not, in terms of number of electors and therefore, the density. We have nine electoral districts in the Siparia Regional Corporation. There is a growing business and agricultural sector. It has a robust cultural identity, festival of La Divina Pastora. It has a significant amount of tourism, in terms of destination; historic sites; pitch lake; mud volcano; Trinidad's oldest resident, the Banwari man, which we became very familiar to in the protest against the Point Fortin Highway; archaeological sites, some 5,000 BC in origin. It is a municipality with an administrative hub for government services: the magistracy; the Board of Inland Revenue; the NIB; Social Development and Family Services; South Western Division for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is located there. There is a dynamic cultural centre, large sporting complexes there as well nearly side by side.

The subcommittees, Madam Speaker, made sure that they went through a checklist, and the checklist involved looking at economic indices, looking at geographic development, looking at density, et cetera. And suffice it to say that

the report that came back to the Cabinet was that it was prudent to proceed with the desires of the people of Siparia and the desires of the people of Diego Martin, and I am speaking about the regional corporations comprising several constituencies in collaboration. Madam Speaker, what we can say is that we are not without precedent. In getting to this particular juncture, we had cause to have a look at the conferment of borough status in several other jurisdictions.

Other laws permit a move for the change of names, i.e. to change from borough to city, municipality to borough. This law actually proposes a continuing way to do that, this Bill. But prior to this Bill, Madam Speaker, the only other time we had in conferring a borough status was in 1990 when we birthed the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04. In looking at comparative context, international context, legislatively, we looked at the United Kingdom, there the borough status is done by Royal Charter. It is purely honorary in nature. There is no attachment of special powers to the council or inhabitants of a district.

Borough status in the UK is granted under section 245 of the Local Government Act, 1972. What we can say, Madam Speaker, when we move away from the United Kingdom—we looked at Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland city status or other status is conferred similar to the UK, with the status having no special right other than the right to be called a city. In Canada, again, a dominant of the United Kingdom, Westminster system, unitary state much like Trinidad and Tobago, but I am talking about Westminster and Whitehall models. In Canada, municipal governments are subdivisions of a province and they have the ability to cause amendments in accordance with the Municipal Government Act, 2020.

We looked at New Zealand, and in New Zealand, much like Trinidad and Tobago, unitary state, devolution of responsibility, anchored in better form, which will be achieved by us when we bring into full operation our proclamation

schedule for the local government reform. Under section 27 of Local Government Act of 2002 in New Zealand, there is the ability, and it was here that we found in this comparative context what the subcommittees actually performed in coming to this Bill. They look at population size; they look at whether it is urban or rural; whether there is a distinct entity; whether it is at the point or cusp of development.

Right here in the Caribbean, we looked at Jamaica, we looked at the Local Governance Act, 2016, and we saw that there was precedent there as well. So our subcommittees, in making recommendation to Cabinet, which caused the development of this Bill in 2021, when I had the pleasure of drafting the Bill in a different capacity, now I have the pleasure of piloting the legislation in another capacity, we took into account the proverbial run up to the wicket.

Now, Madam Speaker, what we are effectively doing today is we are continuing our drive return Trinidad and Tobago, quite interestingly, to where we were arguably in terms of devolution of power, in terms of autonomy for local government. We are, quite interestingly, rolling back the clock almost to the context of a cabildo arrangement. You know, Madam Speaker, that in 1768, Trinidad and Tobago under the Spanish governance managed the cabildo system. We know in 1784, we saw the cabildo moved from St. Joseph across to Port of Spain. We know in 1897, the British took a hold of power in Trinidad and Tobago. We know in 1840, we saw the Municipality Ordinance Act, No. 6 of 1840, and that converted the cabildo into the town council, the Port of Spain town council. In 1853, we saw the Municipal Corporations Ordinance Act, No. 10 of 1853, where we saw Port of Spain and San Fernando become town councils. In 1888, we saw Arima take a hold of the United Kingdom law and seek from Queen Victoria the ability to become a borough by Royal Charter. Because in the United Kingdom, as I have alluded to, the law allows the prerogative of the crown to create a borough.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1). Whilst I am grateful for the historical lesson here this afternoon, I am not seeing the relevance to this particular piece of legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Minister, I will give you a little leeway but, you know, I think shortly you should bring us to the present time.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: After 14 years in here if I do not know what relevance is, Madam Speaker, I will be guided.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: But suffice it to say, Madam Speaker, I am anchored in the context of the sixth clause of the Bill, and the fifth and fourth clause. I welcome my colleague back to the Chamber. Clearly, he was outside in terms of paying attention, but I welcome him back.

So let me connect the dots, Madam Speaker. In bringing the borough status in the amendments that we choose, we are bringing the autonomy, similar to our historical antecedents, and that is why the cabildo and borough status is important. It shows the relevance of the borough status still because it would be unfortunate for one to not upfront recognize that the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04 does not confer an obvious or expressed benefit to borough status in law. And therefore, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in understanding the relevance of this law, will want to know, well, why borough? Is it a rose by any other name? Is it just a label? Is it a pyrrhic circumstance, Madam Speaker? And therefore, the relevance of our historical antecedents anchors within our system of law why we are making the progression from municipality to borough, Madam Speaker.

Now, Madam Speaker, in terms of the parent Act around which this oscillates, let us look to clause 6, Madam Speaker. In clause 6 we are proposing

that any reference to:

- “(a) the Regional Municipality of Diego Martin shall be construed as a reference to the Borough of Diego Martin;
- (b) the Regional Municipality of Siparia shall be construed as a reference to the Borough of Siparia;
- (c) the Diego Martin Regional Corporation shall be construed as a reference to the Diego Martin Borough Corporation; and
- (d) the Siparia Regional Corporation shall be construed a as reference to the Siparia Borough Corporation.”

That ties back in to the amendments that we are doing to the Interpretation Act because it is important that the Interpretation Act continues to speak where other laws have reference. It ties in, Madam Speaker, the references to the Central Tenders Board Act, and the Central Tenders Board Act which makes the law applicable, the Central Tenders Board Act applicable to those items listed in the First Schedule to the Central Tenders Board Act. And therefore, it is important if you want to make procurement relevant in law that you have got to have the nomenclature correct, and that is what clause 6 does.

When we look to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations, in inserting the status of borough to Diego Martin and to Siparia, quite interestingly, Madam Speaker, it is important to remember what we are doing is ensuring that the rules and regulations of cities and boroughs now apply to more than just—now substitute what applied for corporations.

And what do I mean? It is important to note, if you look to the Regulations of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, again clause 6, if you look at regulation 38:

“Every driver of a motor vehicle shall comply with the following rules...”

Regulation 38, which is issued pursuant to section 100 of the MVRT Act itself, that says that there are special rules that apply. There are different rules that apply.

“...driver of a public service vehicle shall comply with following...”—
 directions:

“(h) he shall not in the City of Port of Spain...City of San Fernando...”—or—“Boroughs of Arima, Chaguanas...”—or—
 “Point Fortin and in Princes Town draw up his omnibus on a road other than public...appointed...except for the purpose of taking or discharging passengers;”

In other words then, traffic regulations are going to be different. Pull up and parking are going to be different. The ability to reverse on main roads will be different. The ability to reverse around corners will be different, Madam Speaker.

If you look to the further provisions, you will see that we are amending in clause 6 the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act, Chap. 25:50. The last time we amended that was when we causing the move, expressed move in Tobago, from 12 seats to 15 seats. I want to state right now, absolutely nothing in this Bill will cause any move to boundaries or other changes as a result of election matters. In other words then, this law does not change boundaries, it does not cause gerrymandering, it does not cause any consequence. Why? Because it is only the Elections and Boundaries Commission, under the Constitution, via their legislation that can do that after data is presented and a report is laid and debated where recommendations of the EBC are had. So let us put to bed that false argument that I have seen elsewhere that this somehow will cause jeopardy in terms of electioneering. After all, the Court of Appeal has upheld today a very important issue of when an election date will be held in local government. So let us deal with that.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, it is important to note that we are, in the body of this law, in creating borough status, we are allowing actually, through the TTALGA association, that is, the association of municipal corporations combined with their international counterparts, we are allowing for twinning of cities, of boroughs; we are allowing for the borrowing of experiences; and very importantly, for the obtaining of additional funds and revenue. Why? Because loans can be underwritten, arrangements can be provided, and where is that to be found? In the local government reform package that this Government is operationalizing. So this law, moving to borough status, allowing for outside position, take a look at the municipal corporations amendment package which we are bringing to life, which I have been assigned the responsibility to bring forward. You will see that we are providing therefore further opportunities for funding.

Now, Madam Speaker, permit me a moment in bringing that aspect of relevance to life now. It is a matter of fact, it is a matter of record that we have, Madam Speaker, provided significant increases in funding. Attached to the borough status, you will find that, Madam Speaker, if you look to the increase at the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, we have a 279 per cent increase in development plan, planning funding. Let me repeat that, nearly a 280 per cent increase. We now have, Madam Speaker, an estimate of \$24 million provided. The actual ask was \$65 million. In 2021, they got \$9 million. We have jumped now to \$24 million, Madam Speaker, a significant uptick in funding.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.45 p.m.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Let us look at Siparia. Siparia has received this year \$88 million. In 2021, they got \$10 million. That represents a 382 per cent increase in funding. What did they ask for? They asked for \$104 million. They got \$88

million in Siparia.

Now, Madam Speaker, many people have made the submission that local government does not work within the confines of this Bill because they do not get enough money. I can you tell, Madam Speaker, that is in fact only part of the case and it is a flawed argument. The process was in need of reform. This Bill, in moving to borough status, allows the continuation of process because, Madam Speaker, the evidence will show that corporations do not spend all of their money. They return money back to the central government, 20 per cent, 15 per cent, and therefore, the processes are what we are in need of change. And that is why, if you look to clauses 4 and 5 in particular, you will see that the move to a borough status, combined with the local government reform that we are championing at this point, will ensure that there is a better spend because there is a better process.

People can stand and complain from now until the cows come home, “We need more money, we need more money,” no, Madam Speaker, we needed more accountability and better systems and processes. And this move to a borough status is going to allow us that when you look at it in articulation with the local government reform package that is being aggressively implemented.

You see, Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is going to come to the point of either you are for local government reform or you are against it. Madam Speaker, in being for local government reform, as this Bill is, we are saying, elevate the status pursuant to the democracy of our country. The people of the Siparia Regional Corporation and the people of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, via their representatives and after consultation, have determined by way of resolution and by way of interrogation after resolution that they wish the status to be elevated. We have brought the Bill forward. The Bill says, let us define the boundaries.

Now, Madam Speaker, look to clauses 4 and 5. You will note that we are restating the boundaries, as they were, of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the boundaries of the Siparia Regional Corporation, now to be called boroughs. The last time that we had the vesting of assets was in fact by way of vesting orders in the year 2000 for both of these corporations. This is directly relevant to clause 4 and clause 5. The Diego Martin Regional Corporation Vesting Order, 2000 is contained in legal supplemental, that is, Volume 40, No. 207, dated the 29th of October, 2001, and that for Siparia Regional Corporation Vesting Order, 2000, it was published 9th of October, 2001, Volume 40, No. 193. Those are the boundaries that are being put here.

But I put you upon notice now, Madam Speaker, that we are in fact engaged in the updating of the vestings because there are orphan roads, there are developments that have happened in the 23 years since the year 2000, and what the boroughs will have is a wider geographic vested in law in the First and Second Schedules to the Municipal Corporations Act, which is what this Bill does. But I am putting you upon notice that that vesting order exercise is nearly complete, in terms of preparation and as Minister with responsibility for Rural Development and Local Government, I will take that to the Cabinet, and with due process, bring it forward. Why? It is far too long that people complain that their areas not being serviced by local government and the answer to that is, unfortunately, because they do not have jurisdiction over it. And that is where the amendment to the First Schedule and Second Schedule, caused by clauses 4 and 5 to this Bill, are relevant to what is coming ahead. So we are telling the good people throughout Trinidad and Tobago that vesting orders to take care of 23 years of development are afoot and are coming forward.

So, Madam Speaker, in summary, I can say this, boroughs are a feature in

our history, born in the cabildo status, coming through the 1800s, coming through move from Spanish colony to British crown colony, through independence, et cetera. Boroughs were created and restated in 1990. Chaguanas was created in 1990 as a borough. The restatement of the Royal Charter for Arima was done in 1990 and the Borough of Point Fortin was done. San Fernando and Port of Spain moved out of arrangements of being boroughs and then towns and then coming to cities. But what this law does, what this Bill does is that, number one, it confers after 33 years, pursuant to the democratic exercise of the will of the people, the move by way of resolution to the borough of Siparia and the borough of Diego Martin.

Number two, there is an underwriting for financing, as I have explained. The borough status allows for an amplification of revenue beyond the property tax which we say, corporations and cities and boroughs ought to have so that they can spend it on their own people to meet the shortfall, to meet the desires of people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Beyond that, this Bill allows us borough status for an outreach in twinning arrangements, in funding arrangements, it is tied into the amendments we did in law just last year and which we are bringing to life. So that is financing.

Three, boundaries and geography. By way of summary, I restate there is nothing in here that could cause the EBC to be upset in the way it does business under the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and under the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, where boundaries and electoral districts are fashioned by way of process under the law.

Number four, in terms of requests for funding, whilst we can demonstrate up to nearly 400 per cent increase in funding for the borough of Siparia, Madam Speaker, where no other government did it before, we are saying that we will get it

even better and that our reform of processes will take us there.

And number five, I am putting us upon notice that further vesting orders to take care of 23 years of development will meet us, where we will see a restatement of the Schedules to the Municipal Corporations Act to allow for anchoring.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to contributions from my learned friends opposite. I pray it is not the same old, same old jaundice. I look forward to positive contribution and I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Ms. Khadijah Ameen (*St. Augustine*): Madam Speaker, I was caught a bit off guard because I expected more from the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: I did not expect him—I expected him to last a little longer, so excuse my disappointment.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Ms. K. Ameen: But, Madam Speaker, the inability of the Minister to articulate to this Parliament and to this nation a proper justification—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Ms. K. Ameen: —for the formation of the boroughs of Siparia and Diego Martin is reflective of a government who is rushing to pretend to care about local government because of a local government election is due.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, in governance, there is a definition for “municipality” and a municipality is government unit responsible for providing

certain types of services within a specific boundary. A municipality is a specific geographic area where the residents and the authorities are responsible for certain things. A municipality is governed by elected officials. You have a mayor, you have a chairman, you have their council members and, thanks to the UNC Government, you have proportional representation for aldermen.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Municipalities have a different degree of autonomy based on a tiered system: regional corporations, cities or boroughs and, of course, that influences their decision-making, their budget and the services that they provide. We have to examine, in the Government's proposal to change the name of a budget, whether this Bill is nothing more than a superficial attempt to pretend to do something for local government once again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: There are best practices when it comes to designation of a borough. There are examples of boroughs in the world where service delivery is top class but more so—well, regardless of the result, we have to look at the principle behind what is a borough.

In New York City, the five boroughs in New York are considered to be one of the best practices in the United States. These boroughs are responsible for providing essential services to their residents, yes, in terms of water management parks and recreation and so on. In London as well, you have 32 boroughs in London and they are also considered in terms of best practice for the United Kingdom and they also provide the services. But they are named boroughs for a specific reason.

I want to ask—the Minister did not really articulate to us why Siparia and Diego Martin were selected. What was your approach, in terms of your

methodological framework, that was utilized?

Mr. Al-Rawi: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. K. Ameen: What developmental studies and guidelines were utilized to make this decision? What consultations were conducted? The answer is none. You must have substantial development plans for an area that is designated as a borough. You must have clearly outlined objectives. You must have objectives that tie into the national agenda. You must have objectives that are sustainable, that tie into our objectives as a nation, as part of the United Nations agreements, that would also bring benefit to the national growth and economy of this own country and you failed to articulate that today.

Madam Speaker, the Minister failed to indicate to us how the change in status, from taking an eraser and rubbing off the name “regional”, replace it with the name “borough”, and to tell us how that will bring about greater economic, human, infrastructural development in Siparia and Diego Martin.

How will this change impact on the community?

3.00 p.m.

You know, I listened to the Minister and I think he had some good researchers advise him, but it is clear that he did not have a firm understanding of what would happen, what is required for the naming of a borough.

Madam Speaker, I want to just go a bit into what happens in this country and what the Minister unfortunately has governed over in his past year or so as a Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. There was a draft report—a report on the Draft White Paper on Local Government in 2003, and it documented the strengths and weaknesses of local government in Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the weaknesses that was identified still exists today. So while we

will have one thing in legislation, in practice what we can have is outside of the legislation a lack of funding for state mandates and regulations. So, for example, recently, we had in 2019, because of this Government's incompetence the EFCL was shut down. And the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, then Kazim Hosein, instructed the regional corporations to conduct maintenance—to do maintenance work on schools, a mandate that they were not equipped for, that they did not have resources for. And they—

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

Madam Speaker: Okay, I will give you some leeway. I give you some leeway.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: There is a school in St. Joseph constituency, called the St. Joseph Secondary School, that the Member who is asking about relevance should pay some attention to. It is very relevant here, Sir.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, regional corporations were mandated by the Government to maintain schools, a task that they were never given the resources for, and this is an example of where the Government's mandates and regulations can be of something negative in terms of a weakness to local government administration.

When you have a lack of cohesion from central government to local government, when it comes to planning and economic development at the local level, you have each regional corporation having a regional development plan. These regional development plans were developed under one government, adopted by another government, and they had served over several governments. And—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, may I rise on Standing Order 48(1).

Madam Speaker: So Member, I said I will give you some leeway, but I really need you to tie that in to what is the purport of this particular Bill that is before us.

Ms. K. Ameen: Certainly. The lack of cohesion in terms of planning and development and economic development has to do with the fact that the Government is presently ignoring the regional development plans, and when we speak about naming Siparia and Diego Martin from “Regional Corporation” to “Borough Corporation” it means that their development plan should be changing as well. That is not happening. We see “a lack of vision and strategic thinking by councils” being named as a weakness in that report that I mentioned before. Madam Speaker, it is important for the national plans of the country to tie in to the regional plans, whether it is a regional corporation or a borough. If you upgrade an area, so to speak, from being a regional corporation to a borough, it means that you have to upgrade the plans.

We in the Opposition have spoken about the UNC’s economic transformation plan that includes economic drivers in different regions that tie in to the recovery of the national economy. What is the economic driver to increase commercial activity? What is unique to Siparia and Diego Martin corporations—

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

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, I will allow the Member for St. Augustine a little more leeway. I think with a little patience she is getting there. I think she is getting there.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker, while the UNC has clearly articulated our economic transformation plan that ties into the regions, the Government has failed to articulate how the change in status to borough will feed into the national economy through commercial activities and local economic

development within those areas.

So, I mean, if we have to get specific, in Siparia you have a festival called the Siparee Mai festival which really is a national gem. This is something that—Siparia becomes a Mecca so to speak, around that time. And it is unique festivals like these that can be—you can build around when you speak about improving an area from being a regional corporation to a borough. Because you are now speaking about creating a space that could host a national festival. You are speaking about creating local tourism and what is required to improve that area to facilitate such. If you are talking about tourism, and it ties in of, course, to the Government's national tourism agenda.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: So it is not far-fetched at all. What are the conditions of the roads to Siparia, to go to the Siparee Mai festival? Ask yourself that. What resources have been provided? I notice that the Minister spoke a lot about the amount of money allocated to Siparia. He said that Siparia asked for \$104 million and they got \$88 million. He said that in his presentation. You did not tell us how much Diego Martin asked for. You did not tell us how much Diego Martin got.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: And I can tell you that every regional corporation got less than they requested because this Government does not see local government as important.

Mr. Al-Rawi: I can give you the answer now.

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, I want move now to sharing a real-life example. I sat as the Chairman of Tunapuna/Piarco Corporation; I was a councillor for three years there.

Madam Speaker: Member, remember this is not a full local government debate.

Okay? This is about making two municipalities the status of borough. So I have allowed you a lot of leeway, you know, to paint your picture. But I want us now to focus on the specifics. Okay? Please.

Ms. K. Ameen: Certainly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Minister would have mentioned the population of Diego Martin and the Siparia corporations. Diego Martin is roughly 89—sorry, the electorate size is 89,000 but the population size is 102,000. Siparia is a little under that. I want to share my experience with Tunapuna/Piarco Corporation, because even before I became chairman, there are several stakeholders and interest groups who were lobbying for Tunapuna/Piarco to become a borough, at least to have the Tunapuna borough and maybe the Piarco region. The Member for—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). This is about Diego Martin and Siparia.

Madam Speaker: So, Member, unless you going to show how that affects—and I will give you a little, you know, one minute to do that, but as again, a general observation, we are not debating local government in its entirety. Okay?

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes. Madam Speaker, I want share the experience that I have had with lobbying for a borough, for an area to be designated as a borough. And it brings again, the question into the Government's explanation or justification to how they arrived at Siparia and Diego Martin to become boroughs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: So I want to just explain that—in fact, the Member for Tunapuna was also, I think, part of—would have been engaged in that lobby where the Tunapuna Chamber and others and, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government spoke about several features of the Diego Martin corporation. For instance, he said it was bounded by the beautiful sea, the

beauty of the sea. He spoke about the presence of malls and plazas. All of those things are present in Tunapuna/Piarco, which comes from the north coast in Blanchissuesse, and it includes the Piarco International Airport, the only international airport in Trinidad and Tobago; it includes the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and it has the highest population of all the regional corporations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: So my question—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, please, Standing Order, 48(1), it is not about Tunapuna/Piarco.

Madam Speaker: And, Member for St. Augustine, I have to agree with the points on Standing Order 48(1). I have given you more than sufficient, you know, leeway. And really, I will have to ask you to move on and deal with the matters that are here. Please, we are dealing with Siparia and Diego Martin.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I was responding the Minister's point about the features in Diego Martin that made it qualify.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: And I am saying that there are other regions that also qualify.

Madam Speaker: I ruled that we are not talking about other regions. I have asked you to deal with Diego Martin and Siparia, please.

Ms. K. Ameen: So, Madam Speaker, the reasons given by the Ministers are rendered mute because they also apply to other areas that the Government has not made into boroughs today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: So, Madam Speaker, I thought the reasons given by the Minister were really weak and therefore, if we are to go by those reasons, to me, I think the

most densely populated regional corporation should be first on the list to become a borough.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Now, Madam Speaker, a borough is usually an area that is a concentrated area of targeted development. It is usually a commercial centre with supporting services. So when we think about the size of an electoral district at present, at present in the regional corporations the electoral districts are about 10,000 electors, and you can have up to 20,000 residents. In a borough, however, you have about 3,000 electors. You, however, have a huge population of persons who work and operate businesses and so on within the boroughs. The electorate in a borough is usually less than half that of those in the regional corporations. So the boroughs are usually smaller because they are focused, concentrated areas of development.

I give an example of Arima, which is a borough, which is surrounded by the Tunapuna/Piarco region, but it is a small focused area. If you took the town centre of Tunapuna and created a borough it will be surrounded by the outlying areas, such as Blanchissuesse and Paria and so on, which would remain, in theory should remain, as part of the regional corporation and you still maintain that tiered system of local government. But to take an entire regional corporation that has focused areas, such as commercial centres, rural areas, and everything, and lump it all into one, and name it a borough defeats the purpose of it being a focused development area and it means that the Government really does not know what it is doing by bringing this superficial name change.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, the Minister mentioned as far back as the Royal Chartered Borough in terms of giving us history, and the most recent area to be

granted borough status in Trinidad and Tobago would have been the Chaguanas Borough Corporation in 1990. Again, this is was granted because there was tremendous growth, there was increasing population, there was commercial activity, there was rapid infrastructural development in an area and therefore, it could be identified as a clear growth pole.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: And that would have been the justification at that time for a focused, centralized area to be named a borough. And therefore, the borough corporation would have the amenities to support that. There were clear indicators that led to the decision unlike what we are seeing today.

Madam Speaker, I do not know if the PNM at that time supported the change of status in Chaguanas but it might be useful for the Members opposite to look at the contributions from the House at that time to see what the rationale and the thinking was behind the creation of the Borough of Chaguanas back in 1990. It was not just a name change. There are changes in terms of the administrative practices and so on. But, Madam Speaker, my distinguished colleague and sister, the Member for Chaguanas East, was—served with the distinction as the Mayor of Chaguanas at some time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: And when she comes in her contribution, she may go more into Chaguanas Borough. But I beg the Members opposite to just look at the contributions, if you can access it, of what the Members at that time in the Parliament contemplated to create the Borough of Chaguanas.

3.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, very recently, in this week, you had a situation where the Prime Minister, I think—local government sort of hit home for the Prime Minister.

Ms. Ameen (cont'd)

I saw where he had indicated that his house was threatened because of a regional corporation that did not have cement and gravel to do construction of a box drain. The very thing that the PNM likes to make fun of the UNC about, constructing box drain, and “all yuh Prime Minister house nearly fall down”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Ironically, the regional corporation that was chastised is the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and today, this Diego Martin corporation is set to become a borough. Would granting borough status to Diego Martin ensure that they have the finances and they do the work?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: If that is the case, then why not grant borough status to all the regional corporations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: I thought the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government would have taken the opportunity to account for the failure of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government that caused the Prime Minister’s home to nearly collapse. I ask the question, why does Diego Martin Regional Corporation have no sand and gravel? Is it because of your failure, Minister? The regional corporations—

Madam Speaker: Member, please let us get on—let us get on with the debate, please.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes. Madam Speaker, I think the Minister, very cleverly in his presentation, sort of addressed it because he indicated that some people do not know that regional corporations have no jurisdictions in certain areas. And he may have been referring to the gated community where the Prime Minister lives, so maybe the Prime Minister was wrong to blame local government.

Madam Speaker: Member, I have warned you a number of times, please get back on track. If not, I will have to invoke my powers.

Ms. K. Ameen: Certainly. Madam Speaker, I spoke earlier—I mentioned earlier about having a specific focused area of development and for strategic plans to tie in with the national plans. In 2010, the UNC adopted the 14 strategic plans, one for each regional corporation, and each of these had specific items and plans to be developed. The question is whether the Government has reviewed the strategic development plans, and if so, who they have reviewed it with, because the strategic development plans were not formed by sitting and talking to the council members. The consultants at that time was Kairi Consultants and they spent a lot of time speaking to many stakeholders. So if you are looking to upgrade an area from being a regional corporation to a borough, certainly, their strategic development plan has to be upgraded as well. Do you plan to do the upgrade after you make the change—the superficial name change in law or before? It should be that these things should inform the legislation. It should be that there is consultation, there is a strategic development plan that says, let us focus in this area and therefore, let us upgrade it to a borough status. So the Government is putting the cart before the horse at this time.

I want to ask, Madam, whether the Government has done any consultation at all with the—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Now, I want to just put on the record, eh. A Minister of government going and meeting with a council is not proper consultation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: A Minister can attend any meeting of a regional corporation at any time. And if then, Minister Kazim Hosein found himself visiting Sipiaria to

mention to them, “Oh, by the way, it is on the agenda for you to become a borough,” that is not consultation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: You must engage communities, you must engage village councils, religious organizations, the chambers for—the business chambers and business owners, taxi driver associations, sporting groups, cultural organizations and so on.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, when Siparia and Diego Martin becomes a regional corporation, the Minister in his presentation mentioned that, you know, one of the things that will change is in terms of the traffic regulations that they will be subjected to.

The boroughs usually have a greater complement of staff. So, for instance, municipal police. The boroughs usually have more municipal police because they have to do more enforcement. They usually have, in terms of building code enforcement and particularly with the new legislation with the local government reform that gives the regional corporations more power. Because, again, the borough is supposed to be subject to different planning codes and so on, to encourage commercial development and so on. You may have, for instance, the zoning of, in terms of the whether you have two-storey, three-storey buildings, the setbacks and so on would be different and therefore, the complement of staff and the expertise of the staff to enforce building codes within a borough would be or should be different.

Boroughs usually have more resources because they are required to do much more in terms of the standards of the infrastructure.

What are the conditions of the pavements, the roads, the potholes? If an area is designated as a borough, it is expected that you will have better quality roads, parks, bridges. You should not have Siparia, High Street—the bank having to close because High Street floods.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: It means, just saying that we are going to change the name and give you more money is not enough. You must have had a strategic plan to inform the change of status. You must have a specific designated area that is called a borough so that you can focus your development there. Your situation where—I noticed that the Government is very sneakily, in mentioning the—

Madam Speaker: I would ask you to withdraw the word “sneakily”, please.

Ms. K. Ameen: Oh, okay.

Madam Speaker: Just withdraw that word.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. I withdraw the word “sneaky”. Madam Speaker, I noticed—

Madam Speaker: Just withdraw the word and do not say it again. You withdraw—**Ms. K. Ameen:** Withdrawn, withdrawn.

Madam Speaker: Please.

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, I noticed that the Government has made mention a couple of times of property tax. And again, it seems as though they continue to push the agenda that the Government—that the people of this country must pay for their incompetence. The—

Madam Speaker: I rise to tell you have two more minutes of original time, you are entitled to 15 more minutes, if you wish as extended time. Again, I ask you, please, to keep in focus the legislation that is before us. I also wish to advise, for your going forward, to be careful about tedious repetition. So, thus far, there are

Ms. Ameen (cont'd)

two points that you have really developed. So that in going forward, please develop something else other than the strategic plan and also, the issue with respect to the small focused area. Okay?

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I want to, in spite of the Minister indicating in his presentation that this Bill does not interfere with the boundaries, I want us as citizens, us as Members in this House to be on alert, because it is very likely that the Government will come today and say, “Do not worry, there is no need for a boundary change,” and then later on, they will come forward to say that there is need for a boundary change.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Because it is normal for regional corporations and boroughs to have different sizes of electoral districts, in terms of the numbers of persons. And therefore, the boundaries of those boroughs will have to be approved by Parliament, but then the EBC will step in to decide on the electoral districts. So we must not relax, we must keep this Government accountable, and we must not relax and take their word that there will be no changes—boundary changes and EBC will not intervene in the future, even though not in this legislation.

Madam Speaker, so what is there for this Parliament to do? I honestly would love to see some of the present regional corporations upgraded to borough status, but I would like to see them done properly. I am sure—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1) and 55(1)(b), she has traversed this issue several times.

Madam Speaker: So, Member, I believe you are going on to another point. So please go on. Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are several Members of Parliament in this current Parliament who would have had experience as local government representatives, either as elected councillors, aldermen, head of municipality, chairman or mayor, and I think that we have enough expertise available amongst the Members as well as persons in society who are willing to contribute. And there is no shame in saying, let us develop this Bill properly and let us develop it further.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Because what is presented here, really, is not—to me, it is not acceptable to just have a superficial name change. So the options that the Government would have is to completely withdraw it and go back to the drawing board.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: And, of course, come back with something more holistic. The Government could also send this Bill to a joint select committee and that would allow—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: —proper deliberation. I mean, the intent may have been good, but the result what we have before here is really unacceptable. A JSC would allow for consultations to take place, for expertise to be brought in. It would allow for properly constructed legislation to be brought forward, or, Madam—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Members, you know, I know generally in the country, we might be in a very relaxed mood at this time, but I will ask the Members to recognize where we are and respect the contribution of their colleague. Continue.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. So, Madam Speaker, in conclusion, we have three options before us. The Government can withdraw and go back to the drawing board and come with proper legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: The Government can send this Bill to a joint select committee—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: —and allow that Joint Select Committee to properly deliberate and have consultations with stakeholders and experts in the field, or we as a Parliament could allow this Government to use its majority to bring into law, poorly drafted legislation—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: —that would make a superficial name change and when the UNC comes in government, we will have to fix it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, the record shows that the local government fares better under the United National Congress.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: We have had proportional representations, we have had offices for secretaries and councillors, we have had more money and resources and expertise to all regional corporation—

Madam Speaker: So, again, remember, I have said repeatedly, we are not doing a general local government debate.

Ms. K. Ameen: And, Madam Speaker, all of these are things—areas where the Minister has suggested to become boroughs, should be benefiting from, regardless of name change or not. Madam Speaker, I am looking forward to the Members really being mature about making boroughs out of regional corporations in

Trinidad and Tobago, but I am not hopeful because we have seen what really is an abuse and undermining of local government by the central government of this People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: With those few words, Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

3.30 p.m.

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Symon de Nobriga):

Thank you, very much. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to join this debate to debate a Bill which, when implemented, will see the current regional corporations of Diego Martin and Siparia being elevated to borough status. Madam Speaker, to be very honest, it is bewildering to me that this is even a debate. I thought that we would have come here, we would have seen Members of this House come to congratulate these two regional corporations on this elevation of status. And when the mover of the Motion said that he hoped that it would not be “the same old, same old”, I have to say—in my mind, I said that was never going to happen. Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine, did not disappoint and, of course, we went right back to the same old, same old.

Madam Speaker, it comes back—and I know this is not a debate about local government—but it comes back to this two-sided argument, this circular argument. The Member is specifically speaking about weaknesses that exist in local government right now, while, at the same time, crying down local government reform and property tax. What is the purpose of reform? The Member is talking about legislation coming, that is the purpose of local government reform, that is the purpose of property tax, to address all of these issues that the Member has put

forward somehow, as a reason, to not elevate Siparia and Diego Martin to the status of borough.

Madam Speaker, and for the public that is listening, I just want to take the time. The Member found a way to say that the EFCL was closed down due to incompetence by this Government. I would invite anybody who would listen to that statement to simply Google “EFCL”, and see the myriad of accusations made against the persons who were in charge and tasked with leadership of the EFCL and this country at that time.

Madam Speaker, I am a proud former local government practitioner, and I was a sitting member of the council at the Diego Martin Regional Corporation at the time that this Motion was signed. I am now the sitting Member for Diego Martin Central, one of the three Diego Martin constituencies, and the last member, notwithstanding, today is a historic day for me and one that gives me great pride.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. de Nobriga: It is unfortunate, Madam Speaker, that the current Chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, Alderman Sigler Jack, clearly, not being able to sit through the last contribution, has left the gallery, but we are still joined by two members of the regional corporation, Councillor Alina Renn and Councillor Keeda Pantin, who are here to bear witness to this historic day, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. de Nobriga: Madam Speaker, Chairman Jack is not here, but I do want to make special mention of him. He was one of my earliest mentors in local government and I wanted to thank him, specifically, for taking the time to be here. I could only imagine the pride that he would have felt, and his fellow councillors felt, in seeing Diego Martin, this next step, along the evolution of the region. And

I am certain that that pride is shared by Members on this side who have also come through the regional corporations, of course, MP Forde from Tunapuna, MP Morris-Julian from Arima, MP Monroe from Toco/Sangre Grande, MP Richards from Point Fortin and, of course, the mover of this Motion, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, who would have come through the Port of Spain Regional Corporation as well.

Madam Speaker, and even though we sit on opposite sides of the House, I would have thought that the Members opposite—the Member for Chaguanas East, the Member for St. Augustine and, in her absence, the Member for Siparia, would have also shared in that pride and it would have been reflected in the contributions that we would have heard today. Hopefully, the quality of those contributions will improve from the other side and we will see voices coming forward, supporting the elevation of both regional corporations to borough status.

Madam Speaker, the mover of the Motion, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, said in his presentation that facts are facts, and here is the truth. The fact is that the Member for Siparia did cut her teeth as a member of the National Alliance for Reconstruction, as an alderman in the Siparia Regional Corporation, the very regional corporation, whose elevation, if she were here today, I am sure she would have proudly championed. The fact is, that having seasoned her political teeth in that local government arena, that she then became this country's first female Prime Minister. The fact is, that following that, she has now taken up a permanent posting as Opposition Leader for life in this Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. de Nobriga: But, Madam Speaker, let us get to the Bill and today's Bill seeks to elevate the status of these two regional corporations to boroughs. This elevation is a tangible demonstration of the Government's commitment to the

deepening of local government reform and the deepening of democracy in this country. Madam Speaker, the Bill is only six clauses long, but the brevity of the Bill should not be taken as a yardstick for its importance, nor should it be taken as a yardstick for the accumulative and far-reaching impact of its intent. The last time that this House debated such a Bill, as the mover would have said, was in 1990, 33 years ago. In doing so, the Parliament would have—the framers of this legislation would have examined the growth of Chaguanas, both in terms of population density and economic growth potential. And the NAR, at that time of which the Opposition Leader might very well be the last person standing, having looked at those two critical factors, proceeded to name Chaguanas the country's newest borough.

Madam Speaker, the support given to the proclamation of Chaguanas as a borough then, is the same support we on this side would have expected as we seek to elevate Siparia and Diego Martin to borough status. And in this exercise, Madam Speaker, the hope is that there would be no exercise in dog whistling, no exercise in race baiting and no exercise in the strategic misinformation—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. de Nobriga:—that we have become so accustomed to because there can be no claim to the—

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, again, I rise on Standing Order 48(1). The Member is failing to lift my consciousness this afternoon—

Mr. Charles: Correct, correct.

Mr. Indarsingh:—with his input.

Madam Speaker: Overruled. I am not sure that your lifting of your consciousness is a consideration for Standing Order 48(1), but be that as it may, overruled.

Hon. S. de Nobriga: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I say that because there can be no claim or no charge of the all too familiar claim of geographic discrimination. Elevation to borough status, as it happens in parallel with local government reform, brings a myriad of growth opportunities to both the burgesses of Diego Martin and the burgesses of Siparia. And in their hands, going forward, will lie the destiny of the many villages and communities; in their hands will be the determination of where moneys collected will be spent; in their hands will lie the opportunities to determine the potential and the priorities of their communities.

And so, Madam Speaker, rather, the language from the Opposite Bench for the rest of her political career, the Member from Barataria/San Juan had said that I could be the next Mayor for Diego Martin. Well, I am saying, Madam Speaker, that the Opposition Leader could have another first and become the Mayor for Siparia. And, in doing so, she could very well—

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I rise on 48(1).

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Ameen: If you have nothing to say, “sit down nah man”.

Mr. Indarsingh: What is the relevance of the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin Central to this particular piece of legislation here this afternoon?

Ms. Ameen: He is trying to score points.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, I know some of what you said is in response but, I think, having regard to the length of time of your contribution, you can now go on to your substantive part of your contribution.

Hon. S. de Nobriga: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I know the last contributor spoke about the length of the mover’s contribution, I will be brief. I will focus more on quality. I will focus my contribution on Diego

Martin now, specifically, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Diego Martin has experienced phenomenal growth over the past few years, and this step to borough status will be a culmination of a long journey to financial and administrative autonomy, alongside the increased accountability of those tasked with the awesome responsibility of leadership that local government reform will bring.

Madam Speaker, and while we have seen a population explosion in Diego Martin, history will show that Diego Martin has always been a highly sought after location for the people of this country to live. As far back as 1797, when the British did capture Trinidad, they found that the Spanish crown had granted out more land in that district than any other valley in the region. Madam Speaker, at that time, 141 people lived and had settled the area. By 1812, the population had risen to 1,655 and by 1946, it had risen to 5,700. As of today, Madam Speaker, Diego Martin, having risen, having been elevated to the status of borough, will have a population of over 100,000 people.

Madam Speaker, this country has heard time and time again of a real need to diversify our economy and, thankfully, this Government is making real strides to convert that talk to reality. And, Madam Speaker, I say this because we are looking at one of criteria being economic growth potential.

Madam Speaker, when we talk about that as an indicator of readiness for borough status, then one does not have to look much further than Diego Martin to see that potential. In this sense, Madam Speaker, the Chaguaramas peninsula is of vital importance. Already we are seeing the impact on tourism, both local and foreign, of the commissioning of water parks and animal parks and other family-friendly activities in that area. And when this is combined with the existing and potential stock of hotel rooms available in the area, we can be confident that a

major contributor to economic diversification and job creation, through tourism, is already in place and growing in its influence. Madam Speaker, again, economic growth potential as an indicator of readiness for borough status.

Madam Speaker, that potential is also reflected in the ship repair and shipbuilding industry that is now benefiting from the targeted support of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. And their support for the industry, through the issuance of grants to whom participants in that industry, all levels, are benefiting, many of whom are burgesses of Diego Martin. I believe the last figure I have was \$1.4 million being distributed to about 50 individuals and businesses to improve their operations.

Madam Speaker, we are also seeing major contributors to our ever expanding national tourism product and the ever expanding local tourism product across the region. Of course, examples such as the Paramin Lookout, alongside their parang competition, their blue devil competition at Carnival time, which are all must see and must do events and location.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, again, I rise on 48(1). Whilst the Member is the Minister of Communications, again, this debate is not about tourism and what the Member is going into this afternoon.

Madam Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. S. de Nobriga: Madam Speaker, I am not here as the Minister of Communications, I am here as the proud Member of Parliament for the Diego Martin Central, one of three constituencies in the Diego Martin region, which will be elevated to borough status, and I am putting forward the argument as to why they are ready in direct answer to the last contributor.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. de Nobriga: Madam Speaker, moving along, another major component of

our diversification activity and our local growth potential is in the sphere of agriculture. You will recall that the best of Trinidad and Tobago was showcased—

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, I rise on 48(1). What does diversification in agriculture got to do with this Bill to give them borough status?

Madam Speaker: Because I am just to rule, overruled. But I will ask all Members who are sitting here to really pay attention to the debate, all right?—just as I paid attention to the Member for St. Augustine, who spoke before. If Members were paying attention, they would maybe understand the trend of what is going on here.

3.45 p.m.

Hon. S. de Nobriga: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the interruptions only further solidify in my mind that there is no real intention to support anything to do with local government with those on the other side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. de Nobriga: The only reason they are opposing this is because it will be the working of a PNM Government and as a result of that, they are intent on opposing it. Anyway, Madam Speaker, continuing along, as I said, another component of our diversification activity and another contributor to our economic growth potential in Diego Martin is in the sphere of agriculture. And, Madam Speaker, you, Members of the House, those listening online will all remember and all recall that the best of Trinidad and Tobago was showcased to the region and to the world last year with our massively successful Agri Investment Forum and Expo. Now, Madam Speaker, I am absolutely sure I can say the best because I know for a fact that the Opposition boycotted.

Madam Speaker, one of the components of that expo was the conversations that happened across different member states in the region, and coming out of that we saw an addition to our multifaceted approach to building the agricultural sector

and that would be building it—building of capacity, and, in particular, building capacity through investment in youth. And here again—if the Member will listen instead of talking, here again we see the region of Diego Martin playing a pivotal role with the Chaguaramas Development Authority, offering practical training to over 100 participants in the Youth Agricultural Shade House Project. Madam Speaker, Diego Martin is ready for borough status. In fact, as the young people say, we have been ready. Madam Speaker, I was there. I was there as the chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation on July 02, 2020, when Prime Minister Rowley turned the sod for the administrative complex and the vehicular overpass, along with the commissioning, the West Park Savannah. And on that day the Prime Minister said that Diego Martin was ready for borough status, and that desire and readiness for borough status had been demonstrated by way of Motion. Today, we will see that desire fulfilled.

Madam Speaker, I have told you about the contributors to economic growth in the region. I have told you about the investment in tourism and agriculture and the young people of Diego Martin. I have told you about the investments in infrastructure, like the overpass and the administrative complex. I should also mention the state-of-the-art medical health centre. I should also mention that that will also be joined by the Diego Martin public library on the Wendy Fitzwilliam Boulevard in Diamond Vale, and this, along with the ongoing work to the community pool that is carded for reopening in March of this year, will make the boulevard one of the most important stretches in the new borough. And in that regard, it was only right and fitting that the Minister of Works and Transport saw it fit to request and receive funding to restore the service of the boulevard to that of which is befitting of its status.

Madam Speaker, I mentioned the library and the new library will feature

auditorium and performance spaces for our creatives in Diego Martin, which is only fitting given the cultural contribution the region has made to the nation. What is a discussion about pan without talking about Merry Tones and Valley Harps? And I hope MP Scotland who is here will allow me to add Power Stars to that list as they sit right in our constituency border. What is a conversation about calypso without speaking about Kitchener and “Rain-o-Rama”, or Sparrow’s Hideaway, or Gros Jean and the birth of calypso in Diego Martin? Madam Speaker, Diego Martin is ready, willing for borough status.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. de Nobriga: Madam Speaker, today marks the culmination of a long and arduous journey through the maze of local government reform.

The elevation of Siparia and the Diego Martin Regional Corporations to borough status has been long in coming and today we take a giant step towards that realization. As much as I hear my colleagues opposite finding a problem with every solution put forward by this Government, there are so many good things happening in this country; local government reform is one of them and elevation of these two corporations to borough status is one of them. Madam Speaker, to the extent that the elevation of the two municipalities to borough status will encourage even more economic growth and development, I offer my full support. To the extent that this will assist in job creation in these two boroughs, I again offer my full support. Madam Speaker, because this is something with which, in regard to Diego Martin in particular, I happily claim partial paternity; I offer unstinting and unequivocal support on behalf of the constituents of Diego Martin Central.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the Prime Minister for his support of the regions of Diego Martin and Siparia. I want to thank the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government for bringing this Bill to the House for debate.

I look forward to working with the Mayor of Diego Martin to the benefit of the constituents of Diego Martin Central. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Vandana Mohit (Chaguanas East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I join this debate on a Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, 2021, which in reality seeks to confer borough status on the municipal regions of Diego Martin and Siparia. Like most Members on this side and the population at large, Madam Speaker, I am and we are all perplexed by this piece of legislation since it is indeed strange and does not materially impact on the functioning of these two regions.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: And when I make mention of these two regions, I speak relative to service delivery and not status as mentioned by the Member for Diego Martin Central.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, I am from Chaguanas, the Borough of Chaguanas—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—and where I live and where I am from, we know about service delivery, we do not know about status.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: And the Member for Diego Martin Central spent a lot of time on the Opposition Leader, and in response to that, Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Member to not worry about the Opposition Leader, worry about yourself—

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

Ms. V. Mohit:—because, my dear, this is politics. And you made mention that the Member for Siparia, the Opposition Leader would have cut her teeth at the Siparia Regional Corporation. As the Minister of Communications, you ought not to mislead the population. And as the proud Member for Diego Martin Central, you ought to say the right thing and let the population know that she did not cut her teeth at Siparia Regional Corporation, she started at the St. Patrick County Council.

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

Ms. V. Mohit: So give the correct information.

Madam Speaker, as I continue, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government in his opening—in his introduction, as he began with his presentation in this debate, the Minister stated this Bill tells us where we are and where we are heading. But, Madam Speaker, after listening to the contributions and looking at this Bill, my question is, where are we really heading? Where are we really heading as it relates to local government, as it relates to this Bill and the status of these two regional corporations moving from regional to borough? Madam Speaker, given the Minister's pronouncement in his opening salvo wherein he would guarantee local government, or words to that effect, Madam Speaker, to this day, despite his claims, why has local government not been given constitutional guarantees to date?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister must be commended for standing on his feet for the entire time, and fulminating for the entire time of his presentation, however, Madam Speaker, what does it mean for Diego Martin or Siparia?

Madam Speaker, this Bill in actuality speaks of whether you can reverse on

High Street, reverse on Siparia or Sobo Road in La Brea, and that is all, because what actual direct benefits arise to the people of these two regions, Diego Martin and Siparia? None.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Even the Minister cannot identify any. In the Minister's presentation we heard a lot of fluff but no substance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, I did not hear the Minister make mention—the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government—or state anything about any consultation or even quoting one person from Siparia or one person from Diego Martin, saying, “I want this. I want borough status within my region. I am ready for this.” Madam Speaker, a few PNM Ministers or representatives sitting in a room with a council is how we have reached here today, based on what was explained. But, Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague for St. Augustine—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—because she has also a lot of history in local government—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—and I speak for myself as well, as someone who comes from the heart and belly of local government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: I want to tell the Minister to stop blaming corporations—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—for moneys being returned—for moneys being returned at the end of the financial year. Stop it. Just stop it, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Because when you go borough status—and I want to relate to this

a little bit on staffing and the operations. When you as a Minister can ensure that corporations have proper staffing, they have the right technical officers to do the work to send it to the Ministry to get the money, to get the projects on board; when you can ensure that you can work with the Minister of Finance on a timely basis to make allocations a reality in the form of releases—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—and not allocations in black and white, on paper; when you can make allocations—

Mr. de. Nobriga: Madam Speaker—

Ms. V. Mohit:—a reality in the form of releases—

Mr. de. Nobriga: Madam Speaker—

Ms. Ameen: What Standing Order?

Mr. de. Nobriga: Madam Speaker, 48(1)—

Ms. Ameen: What Standing Order?

Mr. de. Nobriga: 48(1)—you always rush to speak. Listen.

Madam Speaker: Just—one minute. Have a seat.

Mr. de. Nobriga: Sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member, I think you are forgetting where you are sitting. Okay? I ask all of us to be tolerant. It is nice for us to have a camaraderie on little, you know, badgering and so on, but I think this is going beyond what is acceptable. Member for Diego Martin Central, you have a Standing Order?

Mr. de. Nobriga: Madam Speaker, 48(1), the relevance of this.

Madam Speaker: Overruled.

Ms. V. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When you can make allocations a reality in the form of releases, then you can come and play the blame game.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, as I move on, in terms of this Bill, this Bill is being held out as the panacea to the woes currently experienced by all municipalities, inclusive of both Diego Martin and Siparia Regional Corporations. Madam Speaker, at the recent opening of the refurbished \$131 million Skinner Park facility, the Prime Minister referenced to Sangre Grande, where it seems this region is earmarked for the same at one of its facilities.

4.00 p.m.

But what is ironic in these comments is simply that the corporations, inclusive of Diego Martin and Siparia, is starved of funding for recurrent expenditure, such as gasoline, as stated in the article just three days ago. However, Madam Speaker, the Government's approach to circumvent the operations of the corporations, then award to UDeCOTT millions of dollars to upgrade facilities whilst starving corporations of their pittance, funding on an annual basis.

Madam Speaker, as I stand here today, the Prime Minister, from the information highlighted in the public domain in 2020—I think the Member for Diego Martin Central made mention of that as well, where the Prime Minister, I think, Thursday 19 November, 2020, it was reported in the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, informing that Diego Martin and Siparia—we:

“...will soon get two new boroughs – Diego Martin and Siparia...”

And it was not even stated at that time that it will come to the Parliament or it will be taken to the House for debate. And it begs the question, why are we here to even debate? Because it seems as though since then it was a done deal.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, and when I say that, I say that in the sense of, even though the Prime Minister would have stated such in 2020, not taking into consideration the residents of Diego Martin—because, Madam Speaker, on

Tuesday 01 December, 2020, a newspaper article states that:

“Diego”—Martin—“residents unimpressed by plans for borough status”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Some residents, Madam Speaker, even stating—a retired Carenage resident, and I quote:

“...‘Peters’ said the move resembled a smokescreen.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:

““There have been infrastructural works in Diego Martin (but)...can’t seem to get things right...like traffic, flooding and crime...”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: But, Madam Speaker, despite this chilling reality, I will do my duty and voice my concerns on behalf of the people of Chaguanas East and the country at large, since it is never our intention on this side to shirk our enshrined responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, as it relates mayor versus chairman—and the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government spoke of TTALGA, and one of the things mentioned by the Prime Minister in 2020 was that of the fact that Diego Martin and Siparia will see mayors. So, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government made mention of TTALGA in his contribution. Madam Speaker, is it that someone prefers to be addressed as mayor rather than chairmen—or chairman, sorry? Because a newspaper article dated December 01, as I just stated, 2020 reported:

“The upgrade from region to borough status will see Diego Martin and Siparia instal mayors.”

Madam Speaker, if this is the reason, then simply amend the legislation to

call all 14 municipal heads, mayors, and simply end the story.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Because the Minister spoke of TTALGA, and as a councillor, I recall—I am not sure if the Member for Diego Martin Central will recall, but I am sure the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara would recall this. Sitting in many TTALGA meetings, it was always recommended by TTALGA that all 14 corporations, we should remove calling these persons “chairmen” and install them as mayors of regional corporations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: So take the recommendations of TTALGA. Madam Speaker, as I move on to another point, in terms of this particular Bill, Madam Speaker, why at this eleventh hour the Parliament is in session to debate conferring borough status on Siparia and Diego Martin Regional Corporation whilst this Government has unilaterally deferred the conduct of local government elections 2022 via a media briefing by the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government? This sleight of hand, Madam Speaker, to the local government bodies and population at large clearly demonstrates a lack of respect and value towards local government institutions.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, how can this be fair and okay to the local government population, and today you are coming with this Bill? Yet, this very Government, Madam Speaker, pontificates to the high heavens about caring and respecting democratic institutions.

Madam Speaker, the Municipal Corporations Bill. Moving to borough status, the Government, through this myopic act to amend the Municipal Corporations Bill, attempts to hoodwink and mesmerize the population and

residents of Siparia and Diego Martin with this borough status mantra. However, Madam Speaker, the fundamental question is, what improvements in local government services would this change create?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, at this time, the answer is simply none based on what we were told here today. The challenges affecting local government operations across the spectrum of this country will not change. Madam Speaker, and I will touch a little bit, would this change, which is merely on paper, result in improved drainage for Diego Martin and Siparia? Would it result in reduced flooding for Diego Martin and Siparia? Any improved roadways for Diego Martin and Siparia? Would it result in road stabilization for Diego Martin and Siparia? Reduced or elimination of landslips? Would it result in better sanitation control for these two regional corporations? Would it result in improved garbage collection and disposal, Madam Speaker, or even better planning control, even vegetation control? Would it result even in eradication of major problems facing burgesses, citizens and residents within municipalities, and in all other service delivery areas?

Let us be practical and realistic, Madam Speaker. Does Arima, Point Fortin and Chaguanas, as mentioned here today, effectively discharge the previously articulated concerns that I mentioned, better than other regional corporations? Let us face reality. Madam Speaker, the empirical data and cursory information would surely indicate that it does not. Madam Speaker, as it relates to—

Mr. de Nobriga: Madam Speaker, 48(1), again. This is an argument about local government reform?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. de Nobriga: This is not a debate about local government reform.

Madam Speaker: No, no—

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2021
Ms. Mohit (cont'd)

10.02.2023

Mr. Hosein: You talk about 1812.

Mr. de Nobriga: 1797.

Mr. Hosein: Oh lord.

Ms. Ameen: Hello, “yuh bring ah”—[*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Member—Member for St. Augustine, I will ask you to leave the Chamber, you can come back after five minutes. I think by then you will control yourself, and just leave quietly. All right? Please continue, Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, all of what I mentioned is a part of efficient local government service delivery for every regional corporation. Madam Speaker, the boroughs and other municipalities, as it relates to road infrastructure, are further institutionally destroyed when the Government of day, for their own personal reasons, establishes a Secondary Road and Rehabilitation Company. And I want to relate this to the corporations, wherein secondary roads, Madam Speaker, would be restored by another state entity who will be properly funded and staffed. Madam Speaker, this creation is a slap in the face for municipalities. A slap in the face for Diego Martin—

Madam Speaker: Okay. Member, I have allowed you as you were going you were showing the difference between a municipality and a borough and showing how it will change, just keep along that because what you are developing into right now, I am not going to allow.

Mr. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, I think if you have a particular concern, you can always go outside, compose yourself and come back. Thank you.

Ms. V. Mohit: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, just to complete that point, this particular company would have taken away and messed

with the potential of the municipalities, inclusive of that of Siparia and Diego Martin. Because you now put in the hands of a company to dictate which roads are to be fixed, and you do not give that opportunity to regional corporations. Therefore, if Siparia and Diego Martin move to borough status how does this impact them? How does boroughs status impact these corporations? And I am just mentioning it specifically because I myself in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, as it relates to boroughs status, would have made several requests for a particular street called Gaston Street. And because of the fact of inadequate funding, you know, they are now faced with having to submit it to this company. So you take away from the corporations. Madam Speaker—**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Madam Speaker, Standing Orders 48(1) and 55(1)(b).

Madam Speaker: So I overrule 48(1). I will give the Member a little more leeway for 55(1)(b).

Ms. V. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I move to my other point of financial allocations and funding. Madam Speaker, a government is portraying to upgrade to borough status for these two regional corporations as a significant and dramatic developmental tool based on what was explained here today. Madam Speaker, in terms of funding allocations, this is like hearing the local saying, “rank without bank”. Madam Speaker, this simply means that you have elevated the rank of two municipalities without the commensurate resources as it relates to funding. In other words, Madam Speaker, these two corporations, yes, okay, they are going to become boroughs, but they remain broken. Broken in terms of the pocket.

Madam Speaker, because we have to ask the question, what are the financial benefits in terms of funding and are there any financial incentives for these two corporations moving to borough status? Madam Speaker, in terms of facilities development, I have heard Members mentioned the health centre and whatnot.

Madam Speaker, moving to borough status for these two corporations, Siparia and Diego Martin, is it that people will still have to trek to Port of Spain General Hospital from Diego Martin, and San Fernando General Hospital from Siparia? Because remember, people from Los Iros in Siparia will now become burgesses. And this is something which I would have learnt in local government, when you are in a city, you are referred to as citizens; in a regional corporation, you are referred to as residents; and in a borough corporation, you are referred to as burgesses.

So, Madam Speaker, I just thought I should mention that a bit in terms of hospitals and facilities, such as senior activities, centres, et cetera. Administrative complexes as it relates—I heard the Minister mentioned Diego Martin. What about Siparia in terms of administrative complexes? We did not hear much about those, whether any new activity centres, fire stations, courthouses, et cetera, which are all requisite for the elevated status of a borough.

With that being said, Madam, I move to, how will borough status improve the lives of residents, burgesses? Madam Speaker, if we confer borough status on these municipalities, can Government provide assurances that there will be no bad roads, better drainage, no flooding, and clear and desilted watercourses? Madam Speaker, how will the attainment of borough status improve, isolate and compensate those persons so badly affected in the Siparia Regional Corporation from last year's flooding in November? Flooding impacts boroughs and municipal corporations alike. But, Madam Speaker, the solution to all of this is greater resource allocation.

4.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, and when I say greater resource allocation, the Prime Minister recently made mention of his house facing some difficulties, facing

collapse because of no funding at a corporation. Madam Speaker, today I say that there are many persons in this country like the Prime Minister, facing the collapse of their home. There are many persons in this country whose homes have already collapsed. So the solution is really greater resource allocation as it relates to borough status and having them to operate efficiently.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch a little bit on how did we arrive here, in terms of borough status for these two regional corporations. What were the factors used to arrive at the action—at this action? Was consideration given to the any of the following? And I state: what was the yardstick for qualification as a borough? What type of administrative status defines a borough? What type of legal status defines a borough? What historical status defines a borough? Well, we heard some of that today.

Madam Speaker, since the PNM Government or the Government did not conduct any quantitative studies nor used any data-driven mechanism to arrive at this amendment, once again, this is manifestation of administration by “vaps”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, further, can the Government state what developmental studies and guidelines were utilized in arriving at this decision? Clearly, Madam Speaker, there is no established formula for funding and financial resource allocation amongst current and proposed boroughs. Madam Speaker, if this amendment is carried and we analyze the disparity in funding, as mentioned by various Members here today, the Government has provided no sound reasoning to justify the basis of this elevation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—for these two regional corporations. Therefore, this is a mere smokescreen to the population. Just like the resident in Diego Martin said, in

2020, this is a mere smokescreen.

Madam Speaker, as I move on, I want to point a little to the issue of staffing. The challenge is not only staffing but the provision of technical and public health staffing, and furthermore, staffing in general despite years of clamouring for pertinent staff. The Ministry, in respect of the nine regional corporations and the Borough of Chaguanas, continues to stymie their progress in terms of personnel allocation. And I speak of this because this will relate to Diego Martin and Siparia. Would they face these same issues of staffing within these corporations?

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is noteworthy is both Diego Martin and Siparia Regional Corporations are affected by this lack of staffing. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would have said this before in a previous contribution and I am saying it again, the inherent challenges of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission and the Public Service Commission, relative to staffing arrangements, continue to be a significant debilitating factor in municipal corporations' ability to respond to external demand. And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question begs, can the Minister offer assurances that with borough status, the age-old problem of staffing issues would be dissipated or at least be regularized?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I conclude, I want to offer some brief advice on what ought to have been done for these regions on this matter. The Government should have or can still do: establish a working community to gather relevant data in order to arrive at an informed decision and not just a resolution. If we all know how things are done these days, a resolution is a part of the process. I can recall us trying to move Chaguanas from borough to city status and, yes, we moved a resolution and, yes, we had many consultations held with our burgesses. So it is not just a resolution.

Consultations with the stakeholders within the designated regions, inclusive of NGOs and academia whose interest converge with those of the council, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

A creation of a formal technical committee encompassing membership from a cross-section of Ministries and relevant agencies. Development of a comprehensive working paper which should be then communicated to residents of the regions for their comments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your initial speaking time has elapsed. You have an additional 15, you care to avail yourself?

Ms. V. Mohit: Avail.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Ms. V. Mohit: In addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, assimilation of feedback into compilation of a final document. Then from that, transmission of final document to the line Minister, meaning the Minister with responsibility for Rural Development and Local Government. And finally, tabled to the Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, from what we have gathered on this side, no such process was undertaken, hence the convulsive diverging views on the proposed amendment. Finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to inform this House that good local governance is not just about providing a range of local government services but must extend to open democratic participation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that being said, therefore, the Government should hold the local government elections. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I close, I want to state that and make it clear that we on this side are not against progress—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—but this amendment significantly lacks a thorough consultative

and transparent approach.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that being said, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Penelope Beckles): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And, of course, I start by congratulating my Cabinet colleague on his presentation of a timely piece of legislation that further advances the development of Trinidad and Tobago by bringing democracy, representation and accountability closer to the people of our great nation, Trinidad and Tobago. And before I get into my contribution, let me respond to just a couple items raised by my colleague from Chaguanas East and to first of all indicate that my colleague ended by saying that they are not against the process but it lacks impact, it lacks development. And I would like to make it very clear that this Government is about action.

My hon. colleague from Chaguanas East mentioned that her advice would be to have further consultations. The hon. Member for Chaguanas East made reference to the fact that there was a resolution passed to take the Borough of Chaguanas from borough to city status. And the hon. Member recommended that what should actually take place is a comprehensive working paper, a final document, take it to the line Minister, table it before the Parliament. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think all of us would recall that over the last, I am sure it is safe to say, about 30 years, we have had consultations after consultations, we have had white paper, we have had green paper, there have been so many documents on local government that speaks to the same process mentioned by the Member for Chaguanas East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Beckles: So this impression and suggestion that this initiative is some initiative of “vaps” and that the hon. Prime Minister, in speaking recently about the fact that Diego Martin will now be a borough and Siparia—the hon. Member is giving this impression that the Prime Minister pulled that out from some hat, but what is clear is that these discussions have been going on for some time. And the hon. Member is also giving the impression that the Prime Minister cannot make reference to Diego Martin and Siparia being boroughs without it coming to the Parliament. It is very clear that when a leader, when a Prime Minister has vision and it is clear about the direction he wants to take his Government and his party, that reference can be made even before it comes to the Parliament.

The hon. Member also made reference to the fact and asked questions, what will be the benefit if Siparia is made a borough? What will be the benefit if Diego Martin is made a borough? And the hon. Member went on to ask the question, will all roads be fixed? Would all drains be fixed? And will the garbage collection be fixed? And is it that all the issues that would come up in these two areas be fixed? And we all know that whether you are from a First World country, a Third World country and whether or not you are from Siparia or whether you are from Diego Martin, whether you are from Arima, you would have issues from time to time. And it is not a question where the Prime Minister or the Government is saying that because you would now have a borough—Diego Martin is a borough and because Siparia is a borough everything single thing is going to be fixed. I never heard any Member from on our side say that. And what I understand this process to mean is, yes, you have greater expectations; yes, you will be expected to deliver, but this is not to be taken in isolation. This is also to be taken in the context of local government reform. And therefore, this Government, led by Dr. Keith Rowley,

has made it absolutely clear that we are doing local government reform, and the issue of making Diego Martin and making Siparia boroughs has definitely to be taken in that context.

The hon. Member also spoke about whether or not you are going to—there will be a situation where the Siparia, now borough corporation; the Diego Martin, now borough corporation will have all the resources and will have all the staffing. The question almost gives an indication as though the minute that these decisions are made, these things will be automatic. And in so doing, the hon. Member spoke about being from in the belly of local government. The truth is that the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central is a former chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation. The hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara is the former mayor of the Arima corporation. And I can say, as it relates to myself, that I was a local government councillor way back in 1992.

So the situation is there are several members of the People's National Movement and the present Government that have had extensive experience in local government. And I think to give the public the impression that it will just be natural, that everything is just going to fall into place automatically, that is not the case.

We understand, and I think every one of us who are here and who have served in a Ministry and who have served in local government in any form understand that it is not that simple. And I think that impression that is created, that it is going to be automatic and that is what the Government has said, that is not the case. But, of course, with the local government reform, with the payment of your property taxes and with local government reform, yes, the expectation is that services should improve.

What is contradictory is, on the one hand, you had the Member for St.

Augustine indicating that, as a former chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, that corporation more than likely should have been a corporation that qualified for borough status.

4.30 p.m.

So there is a clear contradiction. So if on the one hand you have a Member saying, well, yes, maybe the area that should really qualify is Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation and maybe not Siparia, and maybe not Diego Martin. So that on the one hand, one seems to be suggesting that you would not have better services, things are not going to be better and we are misleading the public, and on the other hand you have another one saying, if this particular area is made a borough then clearly you would have great improvement.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to say that this Bill before us today, this Miscellaneous Provisions (Establishment of the Borough of Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia) Bill, 2021, is really another manifestation of this Government's commitment to good, equitable and transparent governance as prescribed in our *National Development Strategy: Vision 2030*.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Mr. Deputy Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 50(3), I beg to move that the debate on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Establishment of the Borough of Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia) Bill, 2021, be adjourned.

Question put and agreed to.

FIREARMS (AMDT.) BILL, 2022

Senate Amendments

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister of National Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

UNREVISED

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, will your discourse be taking more than five minutes?

Mr. Hinds: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So I would prefer that you use—

Mr. Hinds: Much obliged.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—the cubicle, please.

Mr. Hinds: Thank you much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your very thoughtful guidance in all of the circumstances. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move:

That the Senate amendments to the Firearms (Amdt.) Bill, 2022 listed in Appendix II be now considered.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 10.

Senate amendment read as follows:

Delete.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, when these measures were presented in the Senate, there was, of course, a clause 10 which that House agreed should be deleted. Very briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to indicate that, in my view, there was and remains a—and I am saying this on the basis of considerable public comment upon it and even comment from Members of the House where it was, in my view, wrongly felt that the measure was intended to allow the Minister to look into the operations of the police service and to decide that a licence or licences in any particular case or cases should have been extended. That was the clearly

explained as not being the case.

What was proposed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was purely a matter of law, and the Commissioner of Police is not the one who makes law. It is the Parliament that does that. What was proposed was to extend the validity of the period of the licence but the licence had to exist. And by that I mean it had to be granted by one person, and one person alone, under the Firearms Act and that would be the Commissioner of Police. And if the licence had to exist, it means it ought not or it would not have been revoked, and the one person who has the authority to revoke a licence is the Commissioner of Police.

So it had nothing to do with the power and the application of that power by the Commissioner of Police. What was proposed was merely to extend the period, the life of the licence in particular cases which were explained. One example that was given was a situation where COVID-19, we learned from it and we saw that there were many examples in our society, administered under law, where we had to extend the validity of the period of these licences to cope with the reality of COVID-19 when we could not circulate, and interface, and do business, in the way we had previously done. And, of course, the point was made that COVID-19 still exists and we do not know what would happen in the future.

So, for example, we extended the validity of the period for driver's licences; we extended the period of validity for paying fines and penalties to the court; we extended the period that would have ordinarily been allowed for pharmaceutical or pharmacy licences; for matters arising out of the Registrar of Companies administration, filling returns and that sort of thing. We learned that in the COVID experience and the measure was purely and innocently intended to deal with that. Some of the persons who had a misunderstanding of it, we had the opportunity to speak with them and clarity came to the extent that an amendment or two was

offered.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, finally on that matter, we have seen in this country, for an example, when we were transitioning from paper-based Caribbean Examinations Council exams—or CXCs—to electronic exercises and therefore, no longer paper-based, that had to be postponed for years for various reasons, whether technological, or administrative, or otherwise. In the measures before the Senate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had proposed the movement from the paper-based firearms user's licences booklets that people now have with a photograph and their name and information and so on, that could easily be torn, get wet under your clothes, in your shirt pocket, which you were supposed to have been going around with; by the very folding over the years the paper gets worn on the creases, it is torn, people corrupted by changing photographs and tampering with signatures, a wise proposal was offered to go to an electronic card with all of the security features that that would accord and we anticipate just like with the CXC example I just shared and for other reasons.

I even told the Senate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are now experiencing in this world a very substantial earthquake between Turkey and Syria, costing this world over 12,000 lives from the last figure I heard. If God forbid we had a similar experience which destroyed our recordkeeping facilities, interrupted our electronic capacity and all of that, as earthquakes do, then we will find ourselves with the now 25,000 firearm holders and booklets and many more for variations out there having a problem, and I could easily see in those horrific circumstances the need for extending the validity of the life of them until Trinidad and Tobago recovers. But more poignantly, as we move from that paper-based booklet to an electronic card, I anticipate, and put on the record that I reasonably anticipate, that we may require a period of transition, and that is all it was.

However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in light of the concerns expressed, the Government in its wisdom took the position that we would exculpate—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Hinds: Let me put it differently. We would remove from the measures that we had offered since—we listened to what was said as a sensible government and we saw the difficulty some persons would have had in the face of those facts and therefore, we decided to delete it, hence the reason that I move in this Motion the deletion of clause 10 for the consideration of this House.

And finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at clause 11, there was a consequential amendment as a consequence of what we did in respect of clause 10 and what would have been plural, then would have been reduced to a singular. And therefore, the amendment said in the chapeau, delete the word “subregulations” and substitute the word “subregulation and”, and therefore, that (ii) would have been deleted expect for the word “and”. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was as simple and as clean as that. And I am happy to say all the measures found resounding approval by my colleagues in the Senate and we are here to propose these simple amendments to this honourable House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, we need to ensure that clause—

Mr. Hinds: I beg—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. We need to ensure that clause 11 is also entered into the amendments. So I will just ask the Clerk to read it for the records because earlier we only identified clause 10.

Clause 11.

Senate amendment read as follows:

A. In paragraph (a)(ii):

(i) In the chapeau, delete the word “subregulations” and substitute

the word “subregulation”; and

- (ii) Delete the proposed subregulation (4), except the words “ ”; and”.

B. Renumber as Clause 10.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that this House agree with the Senate in the amendments of clauses 10 and 11 of the Firearms (Amdt.) Bill, 2022. Hon. Member, you have anything to add with regard to clause 11? You so proceed and then you can beg to move.

Mr. Hinds: Thank you very warmly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I indicated earlier, that in clause 11 was consequential on the position in respect of clause 10 and, therefore, in my view—and this would be outside of the Senate, exaggerated concerns were indeed, you know, heard but not to be taken overly seriously, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in those circumstances, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

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

4.45 p.m.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I can proceed?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, proceed.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on the matter of amendments emanating from the other place on a very critical Bill that received the attention of this House only a few days ago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, while the business before us deals with amendments to clause 10 and clause 11, I would concentrate first on clause 10 and then a couple of words on clause 11.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened attentively to the Minister in piloting the amendment that came from the other place and what I found most interesting is the Minister spent 90 per cent of the time at the podium still defending clause 10—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: —still attempting to market clause 10. In fact, the Minister—and I took some notes. You know, the Minister reminded us that nothing was wrong with that, that it was fully explained, no lesser person than the Attorney General explained it as a matter of law. I was a bit taken back by that approach because normally when a Minister brings an amendment from the other place, they speak in favour of the amendment which they are asking us to support.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: They do not speak in favour of the deleted clause. So here we have 90 per cent of time of the Minister still batting for the deleted clause and the clause has gone. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to remind the House that when this matter was raised last week, Members on this side of the House made the very point that clause 10 ought to be deleted.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Clause 10, to remind ourselves, because we do not want to forget it because we are here to discuss—this House is here to discuss whether or not to adopt an amendment from the other place. We may well decide we do not want the amendment, we are here to debate it, we are here to debate, so we must record what really was clause 10, remind ourselves, because the Minister was stilling speaking in favour of clause 10. But he did not speak in favour of removing it, which I believe is the objective of presenting an amendment.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: And I want to read. Clause 10 of the Bill said:

“Section 17 of the Act is amended by inserting after subsection (6) the following subsection:

‘(6A) The Minister may, by Order, extend the date of expiry specified in subsection (6).’”

The Member for Naparima was at pains when this matter was raised in the House to indicate that this is not something the Opposition is—wants to support in. By virtue of their built-in majority, “they run roughshod” and passed the Bill but in the Senate, in the other place, the Independents and Opposition stood firm against them—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal:—and they had to put their proverbial tail between their legs and run, proverbially speaking, and come back to us now with an amendment hours after, of which the Minister did not appear to be morally or spiritually in support of.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: The Minister argued today—I am quoting his words today because we are permitted to speak on his words on the one amendment or the two amendments as the case may be. He said that, you know, in an earthquake, if records are missing and we have some devastation and so on, there are 25,000 persons with FUL licences and records could be lost, you will need an emergency to extend the life of a permit. And then most remarkably, he equated the extension of a licence for a firearm, with the extension of a driver’s permit, of a permit to provide pharmaceuticals, of other—ID cards, electronic documents. I want to indicate to the Minister that someone cannot use a driver’s permit to go and shoot and kill and murder.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: “You cyah use de ID card to commit robbery”. A weapon—a firearm is a weapon. It cannot be equated with extending the life of your inspection for your vehicle and so on. And we have said before—and Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a blaring editorial in the newspaper today, February 10th, *Daily Express*, and it reads:

“Good save, Senators”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal:

“Good save...”

And we compliment and commend the Opposition Senators, led by the venerable—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal:—the honourable former Speaker—they do not like me calling his name but we will call it forever—Sen. Wade Stephen Mark who stood tall.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: I saw the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The brief, could you just kept on the podium, please?

Dr. Moonilal: What brief?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: “No, the paper yuh have in yuh hand”.

Dr. Moonilal: Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have to read this now. And I am quoting from the editorial, I am not exhibiting it.

“Senators on both the Independent and Opposition benches have served the public interest well in forcing the Government to withdraw a clause on the Firearms Amendment Bill...”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal:

“...that would have effectively allowed politicians to encroach on the Police Commissioner’s authority. The withdrawn clause would have allowed the Minister of National Security to extend the validity of Firearm Users Licences beyond the stipulated three year...”

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

And we were in shock, it was a terrible event to think of a Minister of National Security involved in extending the life of a firearm user’s licence.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: They sent texts to poke and to push and to force a former Commissioner to give firearm licences. And today, I understand the same persons they were recommending have not qualified, do not meet the criteria. They may be persons of some shady character, that to this day they cannot receive firearm licences. I do not know, I do not know.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: But the Minister told us about the earthquake, “if it happen here, “we lose all the records”, and so on. He told us about CXC, quite—I did not understand too much about that reference but I took a—

Madam Speaker: So, Member, remember, all we are looking here is not to reopen the whole debate on the Bill.

Dr. Moonilal: Sure.

Madam Speaker: All right. What is before us is to delete clause 10. And while I was not sitting here, I heard your introduction. All right? I am not going to allow this and it is not allowed under this item that we are dealing with here, a whole debate on what clause 10 was. It is a simple thing, are we deleting or not. Okay.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, am I permitted to respond to the statements made by the Minister?

Madam Speaker: Well, I will allow you a limited response. But, as I said, we are not going into a whole rehashing of the debate.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, then you have made it very easy for me to proceed because there is not much more I would want to say given those strict contours of the debate, but to remind ourselves, because I really want to end with the point that I am driving home, that the matter of the extension of firearm licences is not a simple easy matter, as the Minister made it out to be as matter of fact, as a matter that you extend other permits and so on by administrative orders and so on. Because arms and ammunition—the carriers of those licences are also carriers of arms and ammunition.

And today, Madam Speaker, as we all know, there are 25,000 holders of FULs, 12,000 illegal guns on the street. Madam Speaker, the Minister will do well—in closing, to remind him, that the latest controversy involves the disappearance of 500 rounds of ammunition that cannot be found by TTPS that seized ammunition from a dealer on the guise of conducting an audit and conducting searches and so on. And when the court ruled that the ammunition has to be returned to a dealer in central Trinidad, the police cannot find 500 rounds of ammunition, it has gone missing. And this involves the issuance of FULs, it involves the administration and management and it must never leave the desk of the Commissioner of Police and to no Minister of National Security, absolutely none, whether it is this current one, another one or even of another party should not have any power or authority over FUL, over extension of those licences.

Surely, if we have an emergency, as the Minister alluded to, there is a national emergency, there is a natural disaster, there will still be a Commissioner of Police in place. And that Commissioner has the authority in law to extend the life of a firearm user's licence. There is no need for a politician to be involved in that

and particularly at a time when there are so many stories of arms and ammunition from law enforcement entities, arms and ammunition found at crime scenes, so many.

And I would like to also say, in closing, that while the Minister indicated that there was no reason in the first place to have doubts because it was done innocently and so on, I remind this House and the country that a court of law had to rule that the process for appointing a Commissioner of Police ought not to have the involvement of a Minister of National Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: The court had to rule that when we had an earlier matter, but I do not want to say too much on that. But to say that that was a pattern and we saw it here with another pattern for the Minister, the Executive, the politician to get their claws—sorry, their hands on to that matter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, remember the strict confines.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, all I want to say is thank you.

Madam Speaker: Oh, good. Well timed.

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

Madam Speaker: Okay. Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, I will confine myself to the issues in front of us in the way that we are expected so to do. I did, however, hear about some person of shady character. I want to say that right now, under investigation by the police in this country, there is a tremendous amount of activity and investigation—

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1), please. There is a very strict debate before us.

Madam Speaker: So, Member, I will give you some leeway because I do not know what you said as yet to excite everyone, please.

Mr. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Just responding to the last speaker and the question of shady characters. Imagine, I have to listen to the word “shady” from the Member for Oropouche East but—

Madam Speaker: No, no. Please, Member. Withdraw that and let us say something that we can accept and let us go on, please.

Mr. Hinds: Yes, Madam Speaker, let me put it this way.

Madam Speaker: You withdrew it?

Mr. Hinds: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. Hinds: And I will put it this way, Madam Speaker, if I would be permitted, it is difficult for this Member of Parliament for Laventille West to listen to the Member for Oropouche East describing persons in Trinidad and Tobago as shady, without it being of great disturbance and concern to me.

Madam Speaker, and specific reference was made to persons who would have applied for firearms, members of the law enforcement fraternity who applied for firearms, and the Member was speculating that they may not have gotten them because they are shady. Well, I just wanted to say, and finally moving on, on this point that there are investigations ongoing about a lot of shady dealings and shady persons in the whole business of the administration of firearms and I will content myself with that.

Madam Speaker, in all of the circumstances, and having explained in my opening remarks as I propose these amendments for the consideration of this distinguished and honourable House, all that I heard from the Member for Oropouche East does not take away from the simple fact that the fears and the

concerns and the exaggeration and hyperbole does not reveal the facts because it was simply a question of the Government's attempt to allow, as happens now with so many other pieces of legislation, the Parliament's right to extend the validity of the period for the licence as granted by and exclusively by the Commissioner of Police. And even if that appeared in an editorial, it could be the subject, and I venture to say it is the subject of a severe misunderstanding. With that said, Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, the 24th day of February, 2023, at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, that day is Private Members' Day and I will be grateful to understand what we will be doing on that day, please.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was a bit surprised by the date for Private Members and I would communicate with the Leader of Government Business in good time.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.01 p.m.