

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 22, 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 Mr. Faris Al-Rawi, MP, Member for San Fernando West, who has requested leave of absence for the period March 22 to April 07, 2023; Dr. Lackram Bodoë, MP, Member for Fyzabad, who has requested leave of absence for the period March 22 to 29, 2023; and from Dr. Rai Ragbir, MP, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, who has requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

TRIBUTES**(MR. JARRETTE NARINE)**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as you may be aware, Mr. Jarrette Narine, a former Member of Parliament, passed away on Wednesday, February 27, 2023. Mr. Narine served as the Member for Arouca North and as a former Minister of Agriculture; Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transportation during the Fourth Republican Parliament; Opposition Member during the Fifth and Sixth Republican Parliaments; Minister of Local Government during the Seventh Republican Parliament; and as Minister of Local Government and Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources during the Eighth Republican Parliament.

I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes on the occasion of the passing of Mr. Narine. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No.

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Tributes
(Mr. Jarrette Narine)

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Madam Speaker: Oh, I am sorry. Member for Diego Martin Central—Member for Diego Martin North/East.**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The simplest way that we can describe Jarrette Narine is a humble, dedicated, committed, hard-working servant of the people. Jarrette was born in 1944, in Arima, and left this earth, unfortunately, on February the 27th of this year. He was educated at the Arima Boys’ Government Primary School. He also attended Holy Cross College in Arima and the Cipriani Labour College. I think it is safe to say that Jarrette was a true “Arimanian”. He came from a well-known Arima family and I always remember him speaking about the fact that he was born in a PNM house, and his father made sure that he attended political meetings to hear the then Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams.

He became active in politics in 1981, during the general election, and then jumped into the fray to contest the local government election, which he won, in the then St. George East County Council. He won again in 1987 in the elections of that year—local government elections. He was an excellent county councillor, well-respected, and having gained that experience, he put his name forward or his name was put forward to become a candidate for the general elections of 1991.

And I remember our hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley, telling me in 1991, when I was also a candidate in that election and I saw and heard Jarrette Narine on the campaign trail, I remember asking Dr. Rowley about Jarrette. And what Dr. Rowley told me was that Jarrette was so impressive as a councillor, and such a legendary speaker on the platform, that he was thought to be an excellent candidate for the general election. He won his seat in 1991, the Arouca North seat. He was made Parliamentary Secretary with me—I was then appointed Minister of Works and Transport, and he was made Parliamentary Secretary in that same Ministry.

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And, later on, when I was appointed Minister of Local Government, at the same time, Jarrette was also made Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government. And, in fact, I had so much work to do that I gave Jarrette the responsibility for managing the local government affairs and also the Unemployment Relief Programme, at which both tasks—at which he was a tremendous success.

He continued his electoral success scoring victories in 1995, 2000, 2001, 2002, again, coming back into this Parliament as the Member of Parliament for Arouca North. And there was even a calypso about him, where Lord Kitchener warned the Opposition in song:

“If you thinking about Arouca brother, change yuh mind, that whole area belong to Jarrette Narine.”

Jarrette was a giant, short in stature, but a giant of a man. I remember him fondly. He was a true representative of the people, humble, sincere, hard-working, served every one regardless of their political persuasion. There was so much to the man. He was a trade union representative. He was a Vice-President of the National Union of Government and Federated Workers—Deputy Secretary General, actually, of the National Union of Government and Federated Workers. He was also head of the Allied Workers Section of the NUGFW. He was a shop steward in the Botanical Garden section of the union. He also had his religious side. He was related to the then Dharmacharya of the Maha Sabha. Jarrette was a great singer of bhajans and other religious Hindu songs.

He received many awards for his community service: first place in the Indian song category in Best Village in 1974, 1975 and '76; awards from the Bon Air Gardens Community Council, the D'Abadie, Arouca, Lopinot, Five Rivers and Red Hill Village Councils to name a few. He was a true exemplar and a patriotic.

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We will not see someone like Jarrette again, in the future, not easily see somebody like Jarrette. He was honoured with the Chaconia Silver at the National Awards, last year, and he also received the Dr. Eric Williams gold medal from the People's National Movement with gratitude. He was a man of many talents. He represented this country across the globe at election observer missions. He was a great man. May he rest in peace. And on behalf of the Government and the People's National Movement, I wish him Godspeed as he goes off on his next journey to another place. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I take the opportunity, on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia, and my colleagues, to extend our deepest condolences to the family of the late Jarrette Narine on his passing. We remember him for his service to Trinidad and Tobago, and the very fact that he would have served the people of this country in differing categories, if I should use that phrase, because I had the opportunity to meet him on a number of occasions during my tenure at the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers' Trade Union, when he was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. And as you would have heard from the Member for Diego Martin North/East, he reflected on his career in different portfolios.

And I could remember, in my very young days, listening to his voice and remembering him as an officer at the central executive level of the National Union of Government and Federated Workers Union; a man of simplicity who had his own style, whether in the trade union arena or in the political gayelle, so to speak. And we remember him for having served the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago as the Member of Parliament for Arouca North between 1995 to 2007, and for his

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service to Trinidad and Tobago as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources; Minister of Local Government; and the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport.

We also take note of the fact that he served on key committees, such as the Joint Select Committee on the equal opportunities legislation, as well as the planning and development JSC. And taking into consideration, Madam Speaker, whilst we would have differed politically, we will all find common ground with his passion and his determination and his devotion to duty.

And in my interactions with him, I found out that he was a fan or, should I say, a lover and a practitioner of East Indian classical singing, and one who did Ramayan reading and so on, on differing occasions in Arima and surrounding areas. So he understood his religious commitment also. So today, as we mourn his passing, we reflect on, not only his service to country but his service to community, and his service to the ordinary people of Trinidad and Tobago.

And we pray that Lord Krishna will bless his soul to continue his journey and comfort members of the bereaved family on his passing. Om Sadgati. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I too wish to pay tribute to Mr. JarretteNarine. Mr. Narine was indeed a powerhouse politician, a man of numerous accolades who served the people with humility. His introduction to the political arena started at the tender age of 10, when his father insisted that he attended political meetings to hear, and I quote:

“...the great speeches...”—from the—“then prime minister Dr. Eric Williams.”

It is from his attendance at those meetings that Mr. Narine developed a

fervour for politics. That fervour was the springboard for his entry into politics at the county council level. Mr. Narine was tremendously popular during his tenure as a local government representative, and that experience and stock of goodwill paved his way to becoming an elected Member of Parliament in 1991. Any question regarding his popularity is clearly answered by his overwhelming victories at the polls for four consecutive general elections. That popularity, coupled with his penchant for work and service delivery to his constituents, earned him the affectionate alias, “The Short Giant”.

1.45 p.m.

During Mr.Narine’s tenure as the representative for Arouca North, he was credited with several projects which enhanced the quality of life of and advanced the educational opportunities for his constituents. Among those projects were the rebuilding of the Arima West Government Primary School, the construction of the D’Abadie Government Primary School; the Bon Air high school; the Arouca Police Station; and the Youth Training Centre on Golden Grove Road; Squadron clubhouse and pavilion on Henry Street, Arouca, as well as the laying of three hard-surface sporting facility courts.

For his meritorious service to community, Mr.Narine was awarded the Chaconia Silver National Medal. Mr.Narine was also a giant in other respects. He was regarded by his political counterparts as a powerful voice, a great speaker with a voice which commanded the attention of all during many debates in the House.

Mr. Narine contributed to numerous Bills and Motions, and served on many committees during his time in this Parliament. Notable were his contributions to the debates on the Maxi-Taxi (Amdt.) Bill, 1994; the Animals (Diseases and Importation) (Amdt.) Bill, 1997; the public sector (Amdt.) Bill, 1998; and the Plant Protection (Amdt.) Bill, 2001. He contributed to Land Tenants (Security of

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Tenure) (Rent Review) Order, marketing facilities for vendors, scavenging services, transfer of funds and illegal dumping on Cedar Hill Road Motions. He also served on many joint select committees and special select committees, among them being the Public Accounts Committee, the Joint Select Committee on public holidays, and on the equal opportunity legislation, the National Chutney Foundation (Inc'd) Bill, Abundant Life Ministries (Inc'n) Bill, and the Planning and Development of Land Bill, 2001.

His contributions in Parliament in his various portfolios and in his constituency are testimony to his commitment and dedication to the improvement of the lives and interests of different groups in our society. Mr.Narine would always be remembered as a humble and committed man pledged to the service of his fellow men and fellow women. I take this opportunity to express my deepest condolence to his wife, Grace, and to the members of the Narine family during this time of mourning, and I pray that the Almighty God grants them peace and consolation during their time of bereavement. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

The House of Representatives stood.

Madam Speaker: May his soul rest in peace. Members may kindly be seated. Hon.Members, an appropriate letter will be sent to convey our condolences to the family of the late Mr. Jarrette Narine.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES
(CHANGE OF MEMBERSHIP)**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, correspondence has been received from the President of the Senate dated March01, 2023, which states as follows:

“Dear Speaker,

Re: Change in Membership of Joint Select Committees

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Reference is made to the subject at caption.

At a sitting held on Tuesday February 28, 2023, the Senate agreed to the following resolution:

‘BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate agree to the following appointments to Joint Select Committees:

1. On the Joint Select Committee on National Security:

Mr. Richie Sookhai in lieu of Mr. Nigel de Freitas;

2. On the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises:

Mr. Richie Sookhai in lieu of Mr. Nigel de Freitas;

3. On the Joint Select Committee on the Fisheries Management (No. 2) Bill, 2020:

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon in lieu of Mr. Nigel de Freitas; and

Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklall in lieu of Dr. Mohammed Yunus Ibrahim.’

Accordingly, I respectfully request that the House of Representatives be informed of this decision at the earliest convenience please.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Nigel de Freitas
President of the Senate”.

PAPERS LAID

1. Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Ombudsman for the period January, 2021 to December, 2021. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]
2. Twelfth Annual Report of the Police Complaints Authority for the period October 01, 2021 to September 30, 2022. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]

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3. Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements of the First Citizens Investment Services Limited and its Subsidiaries for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
4. Report of Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2019. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Agricultural Development Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2018. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Proceeds of Crime Act, Chap. 11:27 Seized Assets Fund Account for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 4 to 6 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
7. Report on the Management of the Seized Assets Fund for the financial year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. Annual Report of First Citizens Depository Services Limited (formerly First Citizens Asset Management Limited) for the financial year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Annual Report of the Ministry of Public Administration for the period October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
10. 2020 Annual Report on the Operations of the National Forensic DNA Databank Custodian Unit. [*The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds)*]

11. Defence (Pensions, Terminal and Other Grants) (Amendment) Regulations, 2023. [*Hon. F. Hinds*]
12. Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation (Vesting) (Amendment to the First Schedule) Order, 2023. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
13. Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Extension of Period for Payment of Fifty Percent of Fixed Penalty) Order, 2023. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan)*]
14. Land Acquisition (Requisition) Order, 2023. [*The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and Acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Kazim Hosein)*]
15. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 2) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
16. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 3) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
17. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 4) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
18. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 5) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
19. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 6) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
20. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 7) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
21. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 8) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
22. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 9) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
23. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 10) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
24. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 11) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
25. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 12) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
26. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 13) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
27. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 14) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
28. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 15) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
29. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 16) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
30. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 17) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]

31. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 18) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
32. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 19) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
33. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 20) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
34. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 21) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
35. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 22) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
36. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 23) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
37. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 24) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
38. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 25) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
39. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 26) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
40. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 27) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
41. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 28) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
42. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 29) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
43. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 30) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
44. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 31) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
45. Land Acquisition (Requisition) (No. 32) Order, 2023. [*Hon. K. Hosein*]
46. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Sixth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheets and other Financial Statements of the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited for the financial years 2012 and 2013. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
47. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Sixth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial years 2014 and 2020. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
48. Second 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*]

49. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure on an inquiry into the impact of landfills on the environment of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
50. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure on an inquiry into the impact of landfills on the environment of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):

Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following reports:

Implementation of the 2021 Budget with Emphasis on the “Green Economy”

Ninth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination of the implementation of the 2021 budget with emphasis on the “Green Economy”.

Factors Contributing to Clinical Outcomes of COVID-19 Patients

Tenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the findings of the Report of the Committee Appointed to Investigate the Factors Contributing to Clinical Outcomes of COVID-19 Patients in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Island Wide Power Outage and Blackout

Eleventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the Island Wide Power Outage and Blackout that occurred on February 16, 2022.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Manzanilla By-Pass Road (Remedial Works Executed)

Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*): Question No. 1 to the Minister of Works and Transport: In light of the recent protest which blocked parts of the Manzanilla By-Pass Road, will the Minister indicate what remedial works have been executed to resolve this issue?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Manzanilla Mayaro Road connects the communities of Sangre Grande, Caigual and Manzanilla to Ortoire, Mayaro and Guayaguayare. It is bounded by the Nariva Swamp in the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east, approximately 26 kilometres in length. Over the period, between 21—28 November, 2022, there was a structural collapse of the roadway as a result of consistent and heavy rainfall.

2.00 p.m.

These failures also occurred in 2014 and twice prior to that. Investigations have indicated that these failures were as a result of excessive water flowing from the swamp. The Nariva Swamp is the largest swamp in the country and currently there are 11 catchments, with eight points of entry into the swamp. Due to global warming, this flooding event is likely to increase in frequency. It is also a very highly sensitive area.

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A temporary diversion of an unpaved road, using mill material, was built in order to restore connectivity between the respective communities in the shortest possible time frame. The diversion has a speed limit of 40 kilometres per hour. However, due to motorists not adhering to the speed limit and the heavy vehicles using the roadway to access the energy facilities in the Mayaro area, from time to time damage to this roadway will occur. However, the Ministry of Works and Transport continues to check the roadway weekly and undertake maintenance work when required. Up to two days ago, the roadway was checked—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, your time is now spent.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, taking note of the temporary nature of the road, are you willing to provide an update on the progress of the proposed 10-kilometre new roadway that the Ministry has indicated that they are pursuing at this time?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, up to two days ago, the roadway was checked and deemed to be in a satisfactory conditions based on the challenges of the area. However, the Ministry, at the moment, is undertaking the designs and all the studies to facilitate the construction of a new road.

And I want to indicate, as the Member will be aware, that is a very sensitive area, and what we do not want to happen is what happened in 2014, where over \$40 million was spent and a couple years after, again, we have to go back and rebuild the road. It is a very sensitive area and the studies have to be done. We are working now with the IMA, the EMA, the University of the West Indies and different units at the Ministry to ensure that when we construct the road in the future, the road can withstand and does not damage the Nariva Swamp. Thank

you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, are we still on target for a September/October delivery time, taking note of the rainy season, that is the period when we get the most heavy torrential downfalls?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Again, Madam Speaker, I can give the assurance to the Member that the Ministry is pursuing this task. However, we have to satisfy several requirements to ensure that the Nariva Swamp is not damaged in the process. The Ministry does have a structure to ensure that we should be able to get out of the ground before the rainy season but it is not a road that we would just have to repave. As you have recognized, we have to rebuild the road and we have to make sure that the conditions that prevail on that part of the island, the road can withstand the pressures that are anticipated going forward. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

**Children in Unlicensed Homes
(Alternative Accommodation and Care)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, question 2 to the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister: In light of the upcoming proclamation of legislation governing the licensing of Children's Homes, will the Minister indicate whether the Government has secured alternative accommodation and care for children who are in homes that will not be licensed?

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Government has been engaging key stakeholders to ensure that all homes meet the requirements to be licensed in readiness for proclamation. This matter is expected to be discussed at the monthly meeting of

the Standing Committee on child protection tomorrow, March 23, 2023, and I will provide a definite statement on this matter shortly thereafter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister: Minister, can you indicate how many homes and how many children will be affected?

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, the matter will be ventilated at the Standing Committee's meeting tomorrow and definite statement will be provided shortly thereafter. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister: Would the Minister indicate whether this development is a result of the continuous understaffing and under-resourcing of the stakeholders in the area of child protection and care by the State?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, if that is the Member's perception, that is his perception but, as far as I am aware, Government has been doing its best to resource this sector. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

**Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day
(Funding for Celebration of)**

Ms. Michelle Benjamin (*Moruga/Tableland*): Thank you, Madam. To the Prime Minister: Will the Prime Minister state when the various Spiritual Baptist Organisations will receive requested funding to facilitate this year's celebrations of

Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day on March 30, 2023?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. For the Member for Moruga/Tableland, the responsibility for funding religious and non-governmental organizations for national days and festivals falls under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts. That Ministry has been working with the various Spiritual Baptist organizations.

And, in fact, Madam Speaker, the process is that organizations must put in applications, request the amount of funding. It is then looked at by the Ministry's staff and they will then make the various recommendations to Cabinet for Cabinet to confirm. So due to the untimely and the late applications by some, that process has finally been completed by the various organizations, and now there is a note before Cabinet that is going to be considered this week, at which the recommendations will be considered, approved and confirmed, and the requisite financing will be done before the Spiritual Baptist holiday.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister state whether this information has been forwarded to the organizations? Because we are aware that they are telling us they have no feedback from the Government.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, as I understand, the Member for Naparima sometimes does not understand the process. It is the organizations that must put in their applications. The Ministry of Culture, Tourism and the Arts' staff had been working with them to get the various applications in well before time. Unfortunately, not all of the organizations did what they were supposed to. That process has now been completed and the requisite recommendation has been sent

to Cabinet where they will, at our weekly deliberations, be looked at, approved and confirmed, and then the money is awaiting from the Ministry of Finance to make these payments before time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Minister telling us that the fault lies with the organization and not with the sloth of the Ministry of the Government?

Madam Speaker: Member, that does not arise, having regard to the question asked and the answer given. Leader of the House

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there is one question for written response and we are asking for a two-week deferral to give that answer.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE (CHANGE OF MEMBERSHIP)

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Whereas it has become necessary to make appointments to joint select committees, I beg to move that this House agree to the following appointment:

Dr. Rai Ragbir in lieu of Mr. Rushton Paray on the Joint Select Committee on the Fisheries Management (No. 2) Bill, 2020.

Question put and agreed to.

TENTH REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION (ADOPTION OF)

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Madam Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and Acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With your leave, before I get into the Motion, I would just like to wish the Christian community, happy Lent season; the Hindu community, happy Navratri; and to the Muslim community, which begins fasting tomorrow, Ramadan Mubarak. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is provided by section 4(3) of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act, Chap.25:50 (hereinafter referred to as “the Act”) that as soon as may be after the Elections and Boundaries Commission (hereinafter referred to as “the Commission”) has submitted a report under section 4(1)(a) of the Act, the Minister shall lay before the House of Representatives for its approval the draft of an Order by the President for giving effect, whether with or without modifications, to the recommendations contained in the report;

And whereas the Commission has submitted a report to the Minister in accordance with the provisions of section 4(1)(a) of the Act;

And whereas the draft of an Order entitled “the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2021” giving effect to the recommendations of the Commission was laid before the House of Representatives on the 4th day of February, 2022:

Be it resolved that the draft of the “Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2021” be approved.

Madam Speaker, it is my privilege to represent here today for the adoption of this House the Tenth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, under the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act, Chap. 25:50, for the purpose of local government elections.

I am here today to discharge the responsibilities of this portfolio during the brief absence of my colleague, the Member of Parliament for San Fernando West, who has been aggressively leading the charge of local government reform and is currently out of the country at this time.

Madam Speaker, this report was produced by the Elections and Boundaries Commission, an independent body charged with the responsibility of defining and reviewing the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is divided for the purpose of local government elections.

The Elections and Boundaries Commission, the EBC, the successor of institutions of two bodies, the Boundaries Commission and the Elections Commission, and the responsibilities of both these entities were amalgamated by Part IV—chapter four of the Republican Constitution enacted in 1976.

Since its establishment, the EBC and its staff have demonstrated their continued independence and have worked tirelessly to ensure that they discharge their functions in accordance with their constitutional mandate.

Madam Speaker, I wish to commend the EBC for their hard work and unwavering commitment and for guarding the rights and privileges of our citizens

as entrenched in the Constitution.

2.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, to date, the EBC, in its current and former state, has conducted 16 general elections, 14 local government elections and 12 THA elections. There is none among us that can say that the EBC does not perform its role independently.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: We respect the independence of the EBC. We are aware that law allows us to provide justification to the Parliament for the changes we propose. We have considered the Tenth Report and accepted that no changes are necessary. Given the comprehensive review and analysis undertaken by the EBC, Madam Speaker, before I go into the specifics of the report, permit me a few moments to expound on the significance of this report as it relates to the new local government system under which the next local government elections will be committed and conducted.

Madam Speaker, as you are aware, this Government piloted the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Act, 2022, which came into law and was partially proclaimed with respect to certain essential features of the reform. Madam Speaker, as you have heard it on numerous occasions in this House, and I must repeat it for the benefit of the citizenry, that this reform law is a culmination of a promise we made to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a promise we made when we took office in 2015, one deeply rooted in the acute vision of our leader, the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, who was focused on delivering a modern, transformed local government system, one with greater autonomy and accountability,

improved governance and administrative structures, secured funding, more effective and efficient delivery of goods and services, balanced and sustainable local economic development, robust monitoring and evaluation to ensure value for money, and greater citizenry and civil society participation. What was envisaged was a system capable of bringing governance closer to the people and we got there by adopting a people-centred approach and putting people first.

Madam Speaker, this is what we set out to do and it is what we achieved when the law was passed. Since the passage of the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04, there have been numerous attempts at reform. But I dare to say that this PNM Government has been able to achieve the most meaningful and progressive version to date.

Madam Speaker, we have ensured that there was a wide consultation in the development of this new system, so that when the law was passed, everyone would have had their say. This Government continues to be one that operates within the confines of the law and always seeks to do what is right. We continue to rely on the fact that given our constitutional arrangements rooted in the separation of powers, the Judiciary, like the EBC, will remain independent.

Madam Speaker, currently, Trinidad is divided into 14 electoral areas, represented by 14 municipal corporations established and continued under the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04. These include two cities, three boroughs, nine regional corporations, seven which are under the PNM and seven which are UNC-controlled. Altogether, the 14 electoral areas are broken up by the EBC into 139 electoral districts. The number of electoral districts in the five municipal electoral areas of Port of Spain, San Fernando, Arima, Point Fortin and Chaguanas are fixed by law and cannot be changed. The number of

districts for each are set out in Part I of the First Schedule to the Act as follows, Port of Spain, 12; San Fernando, nine; Arima, seven; Point Fortin, six; and Chaguanas, eight.

Madam Speaker, as we are on the topic of cities and the boroughs, I am pleased to say that as a former mayor myself, that this Government, as part of the new reform system, is championing the creation of two new additional boroughs. This will occur shortly when the passage of the Miscellaneous Provisions (Establishment of the Borough of Diego Martin and Borough of Siparia) Bill, 2021 will be debated in this honourable House and seeks to elevate these regions into borough status.

Madam Speaker, what better way to usher in the reform than to recognize these two boroughs. The new borough status represents a second phase of the local government reform strategy and would see the Government making good on the Prime Minister's promise to the burgesses of these regions by confinement of the borough status as expressed in the Motion passed at their statutory meetings respectively on May 02 and January 21, 2019.

Madam Speaker, it has been 33 years since there was any upliftment in status for a municipal corporation and this Government believes that this would complement the reform initiative by creating additional opportunities for these regions given their economic and development profile.

Madam Speaker, what this means is that by the time the EBC is legally obligated to produce the Eleventh Report, they would be referring to the borough of Diego Martin and the borough of Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Madam Speaker, the changes recommended by the

EBC in the Tenth Report involve adjustments of two of the boundaries of the 12 electoral districts across the electoral areas of Chaguanas, Point Fortin, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Penal/Debe, Siparia and Mayaro/Rio Claro. It also involves the creation of two additional electoral districts in the electoral areas of Couva, Tabaquite/Talparo and Mayaro/Rio Claro, as well as changes to the names of the five electoral districts within these electoral areas.

Madam Speaker, in proposing these changes that I just referred to, the EBC was guided by rule numbers 1, 2(1), and 3 of the Second Schedule of the Act, in respect of the determination of the boundaries of the regional electoral districts and rule number 4, in respect to the municipal electoral areas.

Madam Speaker, rule 2(1) sets out the guiding principles for determination in:

“The number of electoral districts in a regional electoral area in Trinidad...” Madam Speaker, rule number two provides that:

“There shall be in every electoral area a basic...of four electoral districts. To this basic number shall be added the number obtained by...”— individuals—“of the electoral area by 15,000; but where in any electoral area the electorate is –

- (a) less than 15,000, there shall be five electoral districts;
- (b) more than 15,000, any residual...left after dividing...by 15,000...shall be treated as...15,000 and one electoral district shall be added...”

Madam Speaker, according to the commission, the electoral area of Trinidad, on which the Tenth Report was based, is 1,087,835 persons as appears on the commission’s record as at May 14, 2021. The Ninth Report was based

on an electorate of 1,063,771 persons according to its record as at April 11, 2017. This represents an increase of 24,064 persons or approximately 2.2 per cent over the previous total. If we compare the change in the electorate of each electoral area, in this case Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, we see that the electorate reported in the Ninth Report of 147,438, increased to 152,032 in the Tenth Report.

By simply adding rule 2(1), example, beginning with a basic four electoral district, dividing the electorate by 15,000 and adding one district for any residue left, we saw that one additional electoral district was required. A similar result was also obtained when applying the rule to the regional electorate of the Mayaro/Rio Claro, where the EBC reported an increase in the electorate from 29,511 in the Ninth Report to 30,141 in the Tenth Report. As such, one additional electoral district was required to be created. No changes were required in the other seven regional electoral areas as they are still within the legal threshold.

Madam Speaker, the other guiding rules in the EBC, determining electoral districts and the preparation of this report, are, rule 1, which provides that:

“The number of electors in each electoral district of a regional electoral area shall be...the number obtained by the application of rule 2, but...in no case shall the number of electors exceed or be less than the number of electors in any other electoral district of that electoral area by more than twenty-five per cent.”

Rule 3, which provides that:

“In the division of electoral districts...natural boundaries such as major highways and rivers shall be used wherever possible.”

Rule four applies to the municipal electoral areas and provides:

“The number of electors in an electoral district of a municipal electoral area shall be the number obtained by dividing the number of electors in that electoral area by the number of electoral districts shown opposite the name of that electoral area in the third...”—part—“of...I of the First Schedule, but the Commission...may vary such number provided that in no case shall the number of electors...exceed or be less than the number of electors in any other electoral district of that electoral area by more than 25 per cent.”

Madam Speaker, this is the law that the EBC used to guide the review process and as stated by the commission in this report:

“Geographic Information Systems...was also utilized to objectively determine the adjustments to electoral district...”—to avoid splitting of communities.

We commend this approach and it demonstrates that Trinidad and Tobago has made significant advancement in the use of spatial and geographical technology to ensure a more objective outcome from this review.

Madam Speaker, simply put, the EBC is required to review the 139 electoral districts within the municipal and regional areas of Trinidad and Tobago where necessary.

Proposed boundaries changes to ensure that 25 per cent threshold is maintained: this was done, Madam Speaker, and after application, the formula alterations were recommended to four boundaries within the municipal electoral area of Chaguanas, two boundaries within the municipal electoral of Point Fortin, eight boundaries within the regional electoral area of

Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, four boundaries within the regional electoral area of Mayaro/Rio Claro, two boundaries within the regional electoral area of Siparia and two boundaries within the regional electoral area of Penal/Debe.

2.30 p.m.

In all, 22 changes were proposed, and these are set out in Table 1 of the Tenth Report. In the case of Chaguanas, where the number of electoral districts is fixed by law, the highest electoral—electorate, Enterprise North/Esmeralda, was 9,833, while the lowest electorate Felicity/Endeavour was 7,632. This resulted in a difference of 2,201. The highest electorate was 29 per cent above the lowest, and the lowest was 22 per cent below the highest. This was outside of the 25 per cent threshold. Adjustments, therefore, had to be made to the boundaries of the electoral districts of Charlieville, Felicity/Endeavour, Enterprise North/Esmeralda, and Montrose to ensure conformity with the rules.

The situation in Point Fortin was also similar as the highest electorate, Egypt, was 3,522, and the lowest, Newlands/Mahaica, was 2,573. There was a 37 per cent difference between the highest and the lowest, and adjustments were made to the boundaries of two districts of Egypt and Newlands/Mahaica to facilitate conformity with the law.

After the EBC adjusted the highest electorate, was 3,298 in Egypt, and the lowest, 2,718 in Cap-de-ville/Fanny Village bringing them within the prescribed limits. Having regard to the addition of one electoral district in Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo and Mayaro/Rio Claro, respectively, adjustments had to be made to facilitate the creation of the new district in these electoral areas.

Given the new configuration, the highest electorate in Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo now stands at 10,881, Caparo/Mamoral, while the lowest is 8,884, Couva East/Balmain. Similarly, the adjustment proposed in respect of

Mayaro/Rio Claro, resulting in the highest electorate being 4,639, Rio Claro South, and the lowest 3,919, Cocal/Mafeking within the 25 per cent limit.

Madam Speaker, the above adjustments and those applicable to the regions of Siparia and Penal/Debe are all set out in detail in the Tenth Report and further particulars on commission's recommendation, including maps, each of the 141 electoral districts are contained in the appendices of the draft Order.

Madam Speaker, I can now summarize these changes by saying that there will be two new electoral districts, one in Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo known as Couva West/Roystonia, and one in the electoral district in Mayaro/Rio Claro known as Mayaro North.

Madam Speaker, we can also expect name changes in the electoral areas of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo and Mayaro/Rio Claro as follows: the electoral district of Balmain/Calcutta No. 2 has been renamed Couva East/Balmain. The electoral district of California/Point Lisas has been renamed Savenotta/Point Lisas. The electoral district of Carli Bay/Calcutta No. 3/Mc Bean has been renamed Calcutta No. 3/Mc Bean. In Mayaro, there will be two name changes. The electoral district of Mayaro/Guayaguayare has been renamed Mayaro South/Guayaguayare. And the electoral district of Rio Claro South/Cat's Hill has been renamed Rio Claro South.

Madam Speaker, in accordance with the law, the reports of the EBC are required to be submitted not less than two or more than three years from the date of submission of its last report. The Ninth Report of the EBC, for the purposes of local government elections, was submitted to the Minister on June 12, 2017. And as such, the Tenth Report became due on June 11, 2020.

Madam Speaker, as you may recall that in 2020, Trinidad and Tobago, like the rest of the world, was still reeling from the devastation and deliberations of the

effects arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic. The public health crisis necessitated the enactment of the public health regulations, stay-at-home orders, state of emergency, mandatory closure of offices, staff rotation, staff quarantine and other safety protocols, all of which had to be in effect of limiting the delivery of services and the ability of the EBC to complete the review.

Consequently, by virtue of section 22 of the Miscellaneous Amendments (No. 2) Act, 2020, dated July 03, 2020, the period for submission of the EBC report was extended from June 11, 2020, to June 11, 2021. Madam Speaker, having regard to extended date for submission of the report, the EBC acted in full compliance and submitted the Tenth Report on June 10, 2021. The Tenth Report was accepted by the Cabinet on July 15, 2021, and the draft Order was submitted to the Clerk of the House on August 18, 2021 for laying before the House of Representatives. The last sitting of the House was on July 09, 2021, and sittings resumed on August 25, 2021. Government's legislative priority and the state of emergency, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in the Order being laid on February 04, 2022. Madam Speaker, when the term of local government bodies was lawfully extended on November 07, 2022, from the triennial to the quadrennial term, Madam Speaker, the EBC has discharged their obligation and done what was required in terms of the presentation of their report.

The adoption of this report is what allows us to move the process forward. The PNM's first course of action is to ensure that all legal requirements are in place. We make sure to check all our boxes to be certain that we act within the confines of the law. Madam Speaker, the PNM Government knows that it is a right to have local government elections within the new reform local government system in place. Madam Speaker, we shared our vision with the population in 2015, and now we are ushering a modernized local government system. We have

already begun the transformation process. Full proclamation of the local government reform Act is coming. We are in high gear preparing all stakeholders for the reform. Madam Speaker, we are operationalizing the law. We are putting new systems and administrative structures in place for the municipal corporations; new systems, new roles, new processes, skilled people, new machinery, everything that is needed to deliver on our promise, to deliver a transformed system to local government. That is what the citizens voted for when they gave us the mandate in 2015 and 2020, effective representation, and we will continue to deliver.

Madam Speaker, the Government moves to uphold the recommendations of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, an independent body acting in compliance with the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago. We will hold the next local government election in a reformed system of local government. We will hold the next election within the borough of Diego Martin and the borough of Siparia, lawfully in existence. With the adoption of this report, the way will be cleared for an election and I encourage those on the other side to support it. We expect that an election will be held, not before it is due. And so, with these words, I recommend the adoption of this report.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Ms. Khadijah Ameen (*St. Augustine*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I begin today in the name of most mighty and most merciful God, I bring greetings to the Muslim community here in Trinidad and Tobago and around the world who begin fasting for the holy month of Ramadan. It is believed that the Holy Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Mohammad during the holy month of Ramadan. It is a month of self-reflection, improvement, true devotion to Allah

when Muslims fast, pray and give charity. Ramadan Mubarak to our Muslim brothers and sisters in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, it is said by Sydney J. Harris that:

“Democracy is the only system that persists in asking the powers that be whether they are the powers that ought to be.”

Today, the House of Representatives debates the approval of the draft Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2021, which was laid before this House on the 4th day of February, 2022, just over a year ago.

Madam Speaker, I thank the Minister, who is the Acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, for reading the report into the record during his contribution. It was an inert contribution given in a sphere or a bubble that really failed to acknowledge that it was under the tenure of the said Senator, the hon. Haji—Sen. The Hon. Haji Kazim Hosein, as Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, that a major blunder occurred where this report is concerned.

The Ninth Report, the last report previous to this one, was submitted in July 2017. The Tenth Report was then due in July of 2020. As permitted in the Act, the EBC requested an extension of one year and so, the report became due in July of 2021. It is our understanding that the EBC submitted the report to the Minister, as required by law, on or before August 18, 2021, but it was not laid in Parliament. As the Minister explained, Parliament was on recess. But the Parliament resumed in September of 2021, the report was not laid. October, November, December, January passed and no report was laid under the said Minister, Sen. The Hon. Haji Kazim Hosein. And he made his contribution—I do not know if maybe he expected us to forget because it was some time ago. But we cannot forget these

things as this Bill is an important part of the process that guards the democratic rights of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: It should not be taken lightly. Madam Speaker, it was only when the Leader of the Opposition threatened legal action against the Government that a Supplemental Order Paper was circulated, and the Motion—the report was laid on the 4th of February.

2.45 p.m.

So we as a Parliament, as responsible guardians of democracy in this country, Trinidad and Tobago, cannot pretend that it was just a normal administrative laying of the report. There were errors, errors that should not occur. And at the time, the Opposition asked, what was the reason for the delay? What was the reason for the oversight? What was the reason for not double-checking that this very important report is in fact laid as is required by law? We said it might be incompetence. We said maybe, you know, they just forgot, they do not know the job too well and maybe it just slipped them. We said it might be that they just do not care. The PNM has a history of not caring for local government elections, or we said that it might be that the Government is attempting to suppress democracy. Today, Madam Speaker, we know what the answer is.

Back then, the public did not know that the Government intended to postpone local government elections and suppress democracy in Trinidad and Tobago. That reality, that fact has now been revealed. And the manner in which the announcement came was really unfortunate, but it does not matter what the explanation is. The fact is that the history of the Government, when it comes to keeping local government elections on time, is terrible.

Under the Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, the elections were postponed

four times. Under the current Government, there were at least two occasions when the Opposition had to either take legal action by sending pre-action protocol letters or threatened to take legal action for by-elections to call where local government seats became vacant, where a councillor passed away and so on, and it shows that the PNM continues to have a disregard for allowing the voice of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to be heard.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: On this occasion, I am certain that that fear is based in the discontent that the population is expressing towards this Government, the dissatisfaction with so many failures, on crime, on food prices and so on. But, Madam Speaker, I do not want to digress too much from the report, eh.

Why is this report important? The report is important because it sets out the boundaries for seats in the regional corporations. If any changes are made or proposed by the boundary—in boundaries, of course, it has to get further approval. But it is critical for citizens, first of all, to know where they are being placed to vote and the impact that might have on their choice. It is critical for political parties to plan their strategy for local government elections. And if an election is due and a government has that report under cover, not being made public, of course, they are at unfair advantage to the rest of the population, because this information would be with the Government and not with the Opposition, other political parties or with the citizens themselves.

What does it do? The commission usually would define and review the boundaries of each electoral district, each electoral area, and make recommendations for changes. The Minister who spoke before me has saved me from reading into record the process by which the number of electors are determined. Any one of us could read that online. But what I find curious is that

the Minister mentioned the new boroughs of Siparia and Diego Martin being created. And he put it forward as though it was an achievement of the Government. Madam Speaker, the change of name is a superficial change and it is just a ploy to pretend as though the Government has an achievement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: It is nothing else. When I first heard of the move to have two new boroughs in Trinidad and Tobago, as a person coming from local government, I was excited. I do believe that there are so many areas that require that development focus to create a borough, to take the town centre and develop it in a way to support local economic development, to support development—

Madam Speaker: So, Member, I will just remind you of Standing Order 48(3). Okay? Now, I know you will be saying you are rebutting. Mention was made of these boroughs that will be created but I am not going to allow you to debate something that we just finished debating.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Okay? So please be reminded.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I will rush to the part now where I am tying it into the EBC report. The creation of a borough is, in terms of the EBC's jurisdiction, very relevant because the EBC has a role to determine the size of the electorate in the three tiers of local government, that is, the size of the electorate for a city, the size of the electorate for a borough and the size of electorate for a regional corporation. The Minister did not seem to express that appreciation, the role of the EBC in allocating the electorate in a borough, town and region. The EBC, in my view, should have been a key stakeholder in consultation, just as when the Municipal Corporations Act would have been—

Madam Speaker: Member, again, I remind you of Standing Order 48(3).

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: We are not here debating the creation of any borough.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Okay?

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: So I will ask you to, please, not continue along that track—

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker:—and let us get on with what we are dealing with here, please.

Ms. K. Ameen: Okay. Thank you. Madam Speaker, the EBC report that came out after new boroughs were formed would indicate the size of the electors. The most recent instance of that we had was in Chaguanas Borough, when Chaguanas became the new borough. And so, the subsequent EBC report reflected the new boundaries as well as the Municipal Corporations Act at the time, which was amended to indicate the new boundaries. The size of the electorate would also have been different.

Now, Madam Speaker, while I expressed the—I acknowledge the Minister indicating the formula that the EBC uses, what I did not hear is a connection in terms of how that formula will apply in this instance. All of us are stakeholders in democracy, all of us have an interest in ensuring that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have a say in who is selected to be representatives. The size of the electorate, as outlined in the report, does have an impact on who the citizens end up with as their local government councillor or as their Member of Parliament. The size of the electorate in the regional corporations, outlined in this Tenth Report of the EBC, shows the continuation of a disparity that has been highlighted more and more in recent times and that is the size of the electorate—we acknowledge that the size of the electorate in a city, in a borough and in a region will be

different—vastly different.

What is still happening currently is that the size of the electorate in certain regional corporations are very different to the size in other corporations. Notwithstanding that the EBC has guidelines which were read out here, the size of the electorate now impacts on how many votes are required to win that seat. And whereas you may have—I want to compare two boroughs for illustration, the size of the electorate outlined in Chaguanas Borough, where one of the changes in this report is recommended, compared to an established Borough of Point Fortin. I am taking these two for illustration because in the report, an explanation, a justification is made for the change in Chaguanas Borough, an adjustment in the seat based on the number of electors there. And I am taking Point Fortin because it is also a borough.

The size of the electorate in one seat in Point Fortin is tremendously smaller than that of Chaguanas. If we would want to have a fair and a consistent assignment of the number of electors, I would expect that effort would be made to ensure that all the boroughs have a similar number of electors. What happens now is that in Chaguanas, where one seat has as many as 8,000 voters or electors and councillor in that seat would be required to get about 4,000 votes to win, in Point Fortin, if they were contesting there with that number of votes, they would win about three seats with that number of votes. The Member for Point Fortin is smiling because he was a Mayor of Point Fortin and he knows and understands that the size of the electorate in that borough is much smaller than the size of the electorate in Chaguanas. So what happens is that when the PNM wins in the Borough of Point Fortin, whether the EBC report gives them six seats or eight seats, had the electorate been the same size in Chaguanas, the UNC would have won about 15 or 18 seats.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: And the PNM would continue to boast about how many seats they have and then when we examine the number of votes, it is possible for the PNM to win more seats or more regions and get less votes. And that has, in fact, happened. Is that a true reflection of democracy? Is that a true reflection of the voice of the people, the choice of the people? It is not. But it has worked to the advantage of the PNM for many years and so, they continue to encourage and endorse and encourage it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, the EBC, the Elections and Boundaries Commission, is, by law, an independent body; by law, an independent body. And so, it should not be subjected to political whims of whoever is in government. But certainly, even if a person is serving in the EBC based on whatever recommendation—they are serving in EBC, right? The question has to be asked about association.

Madam Speaker: All right. I have given you tremendous leeway. We are debating a particular report.

Ms. K. Ameen: Sure.

Madam Speaker: Okay?

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: This is not about justification about whether you should be a borough or you should not be a borough. It is not about that.

Ms. K. Ameen: No, it is not.

Madam Speaker: Okay? There are very specific recommendations.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: You have—your ordinary time ends at 3.10—your ordinary

time. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. I would ask you kindly to condescend on the report—

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker:—for the rest of the time that you have left.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: I am not going to warn you again.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: I have been really patient.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes. Certainly. Madam Speaker, when I said the word “association”, if it was interpreted—

Madam Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: I have already ruled. If I did not use that word, I am telling you I am ruling now.

Ms. K. Ameen: On the word “association”?

Madam Speaker: I am not talking about “association”. I am talking about the track you are going on.

Ms. K. Ameen: Certainly.

Madam Speaker: Please find your way.

Ms. K. Ameen: Certainly. Madam Speaker, I have moved past the point of the size of the electorate of the—

Madam Speaker: And, please, do not answer me back. Just move on.

Ms. K. Ameen: And I am—[*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Please move on. Do not answer me back.

Ms. K. Ameen: I am now moving on to the independence of the EBC, the Elections and Boundaries—

Madam Speaker: And that does not arise under this report. Please move on.

3.00 p.m.

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, the EBC makes recommendation on boundaries. And some of the boundaries recommended I—because of my practical knowledge on the ground, I wonder how pragmatic some of the recommendations in this Tenth Report are. And the—you know, there is a theory that persons who are serving in independent offices, whether it be judges and so on, ought to keep themselves disconnected from—

Madam Speaker: Member, determine whether you want to take your seat or you want to use the rest of your time. Make that decision now.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I would just very quickly summarize to say that the boundaries recommended in the report, there is an opportunity for review to make them more practical. More practical in that, traditionally, natural boundaries, such as rivers or major roads would have been used. I have observed and I have outlined in my notes a number of instances where small villages are split by a boundary that puts half of the village in one electoral district that is not socially a part of that area, compared to—and if I have to be specific I will use a boundary in the Tunapuna/Piarco region, where previously the boundary would have been the Mausica River and that separated the D'Abadie and Mausica areas from the Carapo area. And when the change was made—I am explaining for illustration—

Madam Speaker: Member, in this report, no change is necessary to Tunapuna. So you are not talking about this report—

Ms. K. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: No, we are talking about this report.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Okay?

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: So you are giving, by example, this report.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes. Because I want to compare a change that was made in a previous—in the Ninth Report and compare it to a change that was made in the Tenth Report. So that change that I have described in the Carapo area, where a road was used instead, a road that falls and splits a village, now puts a little sliver of a community—

Madam Speaker: Member, we are not talking about the Ninth Report, the Eighth Report.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Please develop your point on the Tenth Report. As I have indicated to you before, my reading of this, if you are taking about Tunapuna/Piarco, no change necessary. That is what I see. So maybe you might like to guide me to the particular page because maybe I missed the page.

Ms. K. Ameen: No, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Ms. K. Ameen: That recommendation—

Madam Speaker: So just be guided on what I said. We are not going back. You would have had your opportunity then. If you did not use it—

Ms. K. Ameen: Right. So thank you. Madam Speaker, thank you. I was just using that for an illustration because I wanted to talk about a change in the Tenth—

Madam Speaker: As I have told you already, just get on with it, with what you are referring to in this report, please.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the EBC has a care of duty to ensure that electoral areas for local government elections preserve local

representation in its truest form. For that reason, I would really like to see, for consideration, a moving away from that splitting of communities, as I observed happened in the Chaguanas Borough in this Tenth Report, and allow—because we speak so much about local government being about strengthening communities and so on, but the changes do not really reflect that. The changes made in the Borough of Chaguanas, where we have—the new boundaries, where we have small communities being split and, in fact, we have a polling division that was actually divided—subdivided—of course that happens because the population has grown in that polling division. But what we have to, I think, implore here in Parliament, for the EBC to take note of areas where communities are split.

And, Madam Speaker, while the EBC must remain free from political influence perhaps it—of course it remains open to input from stakeholders and citizens. I am aware that the EBC does meet with political parties because it conducts elections, and political parties are stakeholders. And the United National Congress did meet with the EBC, as the PNM did, and this matter would have been pointed out to the EBC. And I am disappointed—because I was part of that meeting. I am disappointed that those recommendations are not reflected in this report. The recommendation from the Opposition United National Congress is not to tell the EBC where the boundary should be. It is a principle that the boundary should allow communities to stay together. It should allow communities to have representation in a way that boosts their development and would also have an impact on, for instance, where they have specific things that are organic to that community when it comes to local tourism and local economic development opportunities and so on.

So that, Madam Speaker, is the point I was making when I drew the illustration of areas being split around, what I think are unnatural boundaries.

Some of the recommendations here are similar to recommendations in the previous reports where there could have been smarter choices when it comes to the road or watercourse that is selected for the demarcation—the different boundaries.

Madam Speaker, I spoke on the issue of—in the Bill for the creation of the boroughs, and I am not going into the principle of creating a borough as in terms of the political decision. I mentioned before that the decision to create boroughs will have an impact on what the EBC does. Of course, I do not know if the Government may be in a position, but later on the EBC will have to be engaged now to consider whether the electorate of the new boroughs will be—come in the next report.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member, member. Member for St. Augustine, you have found yourself there again. Please, not again. We are not talking about that today.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: He said it several times.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: He said it several times.

Madam Speaker: Members. Member for Siparia. Member for Siparia, Member for Naparima, Member for Arouca/Maloney, I am sure if you all wish to join the debate, when the time comes you will catch my eyes, you will certainly get the time.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker, the issue of the number of persons in each electoral area recommended in this report will also have an impact on the decisions that the Government make when it comes to funding—well, it should be

a guideline. We see in each borough, city and regional corporation, the Borough of Point Fortin has a total electorate of 17,344. In the Tunapuna region, the electorate there is 179,435. So roughly, 180,000 electors. The Tunapuna/Piarco has 10 times the size of the electorate in Point Fortin. That, of course, would impact on the number of seats. The Chaguanas Borough now has—sorry, the Couva Regional Corporation now has an additional seat. They too have a very big population and an even larger geographic area. The number of councillors in Couva Regional Corporation is recommended to be increased in this Tenth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

Is there any relation between the size of electorate and funding? That question is for the Government to answer. When the Elections and Boundaries makes their recommendation, as they have done in this report, when there is a recommendation for an additional seat, as they have made in several instances, in Mayaro for instance, in Couva region for instance, it indicates that there is an increase in the population. An increase in the population means an increase in the demand on the regional corporation for resources. Does the Government, does the Ministry of Finance take into consideration the size of the electorate when allocating resources?

I have done a comparison of the funding allocated to each regional corporation and this report, Madam Speaker, would now be new information to guide. And I want ask the Minister of Finance and the public servants within that Ministry to give considerations to the recommendations in this Tenth Report where there are numerous regional corporations whose electorates have increased and therefore, the need for additional resources has increased.

Madam Speaker: Member, your original speaking time is spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to complete your contribution if you wish.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, this Motion requires a simple majority. The Government, in my view, has missed the opportunity in this parliamentary term to implement a constitutional protection for local government and local government elections. The fact that we are debating this report more than one year after it was due, reminds us of the whim of the political directorate, whoever may be in government, to postpone local government elections, postpone the debate on the local government report from the EBC and so on. Madam Speaker, we do not trust the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: The Government has not accounted properly for their decision to defer local government elections.

Madam Speaker: Member—

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes?

Madam Speaker: Please get on track with this. Please.

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I know you have ruled but I was going to raise the sub judice rule. That matter is before the court right now.

Madam Speaker: So, Member, you are familiar with that. Please move on.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do not intend to get into the matter further. Madam Speaker, it is my opinion that this Government is really afraid of calling the local government elections.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Local government elections are due, and not bringing this report on time, to me, was an indication that they planned to postpone the election.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Governments in Trinidad and Tobago have to move away from interfering with local government just because it does not have constitutional protection. We in the United National Congress had elections. Win, lose, or draw, they were called on time. And that preservation of democracy is something that the PNM has failed to do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, there was a little quote I wanted to share. I found it was interesting. It says:

“A man without a vote is a man without protection.”

And Trinidad and Tobago needs protection from this PNM Government. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South.

Mr. Keith Scotland (*Port of Spain South*): Madam Speaker, as I approached the podium and listened to the hon. Member, who preceded me, complaining that the local government elections have been delayed, I recalled, Madam Speaker, that an incarnation, when the hon. Members on the other side were in government, they delayed the national general elections for over five months.

Hon. Members: What?

Mr. K. Scotland: Yes.

Mr. K. Scotland: So, Madam Speaker, that being said, Madam Speaker, I would like Madam Speaker—

Ms. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Scotland: Madam Speaker—

Ms. Ameen: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine—

Mr. K. Scotland: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker:—please do not disturb the proceedings, continue.

Mr. K. Scotland: Madam Speaker, what we are about today, having regard to the nature of this debate and the subject matter, and its significance, as it relates to the strengthening of our democracy and constitutional arrangements, I would like to take an approach to this debate in a non-traditional manner. Consequently, Madam Speaker, I would seek to give some context to this Order that we are debating now, so that the public can be meaningfully engaged and apprised of how this Government is undertaking its sworn duties pursuant to the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, and its constitutional arrangements. Madam Speaker, I will attempt to go through the various stages and provisions in order to bring an understanding and appreciation of this Order that we are debating today, and how we have arrived at this juncture with the recommendations of the EBC.

Madam Speaker, I start on the premise that the Elections and Boundaries Commission is not just a creature of statute, but it is a creature of the Constitution established under section 71 of the Republican Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. And most importantly, Madam Speaker, when I looked at the Tenth Report, it is in line with the provisions of section 71(1) and (2) of the Constitution, which gives for the composition of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, one chairman and four others.

Madam Speaker, if one examines the Tenth Report, and the final page, XXIX, you will see Madam Speaker, that it was a plenary commission that signed this Tenth Report that led to the bringing to this House of the Order. The Tenth Report of the EBC was submitted to the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government on the 10th of June, 2021. And Madam Speaker, this is very

significant because what we can say about the submission of this report, and we say it both, in fact, and intent, that the EBC is an independent entity enshrined in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, and protected by the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, contrary to what is being bandied about, and what was bandied about by the hon. Member who spoke before me, Madam Speaker.

The members of the EBC are appointed in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition. And it is supposed to be and it remains to our mind an independent body, devoid of any political connections, and devoid of any nepotism that was being shrouded in a submission by the hon. Member who spoke before me.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland: It is unfortunate Madam Speaker, because without a shred of evidence, these irresponsible statements can be made, and go unnoticed. I want to put it on record that in order to appoint the EBC, there is a process of consultation that happened. The next point I would want to make Madam Speaker, about this report, is that this report is the work of an entity who was responsible for its own agenda. The EBC carries out its re-division relative to electoral boundaries in accordance with the election boundaries and commissions Act. This is just one of their key mandatory functions under the Act. And Madam Speaker, one of those key mandatory statutory functions was responsible for the presentation of the Tenth Report, which led to the creation of the Order that is being debated today. Section 4(1), Madam Speaker, of the Act, is very apposite to this debate. Because Madam Speaker, it gives the remit of the EBC in undertaking the exercise that it did in order to arrive at this point. Madam Speaker, section 4(1) reads as follows:

“The Commission shall define and review the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be, divided and shall submit to the Minister reports either—

- (a) showing the constituencies into which it recommends that an electoral area should be divided in order to give effect to the Rules set out in the Second Schedule; or
- (b) stating that, in the opinion of the Commission, no alteration is required to the existing number of boundaries of electoral districts in order to give effect to the said Rules.”

So, what is important, Madam Speaker, in my respectful view, is this. Section 4(1) makes it mandatory for the EBC to have two functions, which it did in this matter, define and review, and this Order is the product of a definition and a review of what existed between 2017 and 2021, and this is what the EBC did. They defined and reviewed and thereafter, Madam Speaker, when the process was completed, in order to be faithful to section 4(b) of the Act and (a), the EBC reported its findings to the hon. Minister. When it is reporting the EBC had an option. They could have made no recommendation under section 4(1)(b) or they could have given, or they could have opined that alterations were required to the electoral boundaries and that is what they did in the Tenth Report. There is nothing occult, there is nothing hidden, there is nothing Madam Speaker, that is sinister, nothing that you can say do not trust the PNM Government. There is no basis for that, because this was an independent report pursuant to the statutory duty of the Commission.

Madam Speaker, section 4(2)(b) required the report to be submitted within a three-year period. Madam Speaker, a lot of griping was made about the hon. Minister's submission to the report in Parliament, maybe three or four months late. But what they did not say, Madam Speaker, is that the last report the Ninth Report of the Commission, which is dated the 12th of June, 2017, that report was due on the 11th of June 2020. But Madam Speaker, contemporaneous events did not make that possible. And in keeping with the rule of law, what did this Government do?

The miscellaneous (Amdt.) Act of 2020, extended the time for the submission of this report to the 11th of June 2021. Madam Speaker, if I may just refer to the front page of this report, it is dated June 10, 2021, within the time allotted for the submission of the report to the hon. Minister. So for avoidance of any doubt whatsoever, the report which forms the basis of this Order being debated today, was submitted on time in keeping with the legislative remit.

In this Tenth Report, Madam Speaker, the Commission made 15 recommendations; I will break it up into 15 recommendations. And what is important, Madam Speaker, is this because I now want to do a comparator with the report that was submitted and the Order that we are debating to show that the hon. Minister and this Government is faithful to the report submitted to him on the 10th of June. Madam Speaker, I would turn, and for reference for those who want to be edified and who want to follow and be serious about the business of this House, I turn, Madam Speaker, respectfully, to page—Roman numeral—let me remember my Roman numerals, Madam Speaker, XXVIII. And at XXVIII, these are the recommendations in the report:

“i. Creation of an additional electoral district in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo by virtue of the application of Rule 2(1) of the Second Schedule of the Act aforesaid; and, that this new electoral district be called Couva West/Roystonia.”

Madam Speaker:

“ii. Creation of an additional electoral district in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Mayaro/Rio Claro by virtue of the application of Rule 2(1) of the Second Schedule of the Act aforesaid; and, that this new electoral district be called Mayaro North.

iii. Changes in the boundaries of:

- a) four (4) electoral districts in the electoral area of the Municipal Corporation of Chaguanas;
 - b) two (2) electoral districts in the electoral area of the Municipal Corporation of Point Fortin;
 - c) eight (8) electoral districts in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo;
 - (d) four (4) electoral districts in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Mayaro/Rio Claro;
 - (e) two (2) electoral districts in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Penal/Debe; and
 - (f) two (2) electoral districts in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Siparia.
- iv. Changes in the names of:
- a) three (3) electoral districts in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo; and
 - b) two (2) electoral districts in the electoral area of the Regional Corporation of Mayaro/Rio Claro.”

Madam Speaker, when I looked at, when I did the comparator, and I looked at the Order, if we look, Madam Speaker, at the third recital in the Order, the third recital, the third recital in the Order is in pari materia, it mirrors exactly the recommendations made by the EBC in its Tenth Report at page XXVIII, paragraph 14. What it means, Madam Speaker, what it means is that the Government, because Madam Speaker, I have looked at the legislation and it seems to my mind, that there may, that there may for good reason that will be explained to the House, a deviation if there is not agreement, but, Madam Speaker, exactly what was submitted, as the recommendations by the EBC on the 10th of June, 2021 are

exactly what has been submitted in this Order before this honourable House. So, I wonder then, what is the purpose, what is all this brouhaha being bandied about by the hon. Members on the other side?

They will not tell the country that the hon. Minister was faithful to his mandate. They will not tell the country, Madam Speaker, that what was exactly what was recommended by the independently, constitutionally established body charged with the duty of elections and boundaries, exactly what was recommended is what this Government has brought to this hon. House. Why would they not say that?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland: Madam Speaker, you know why they would not say that—because they always want to attack institutions. Bearing in mind the sub judice rule, bearing in mind—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland:—bearing in mind—and I will not be pointed at.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland: Madam Speaker, bearing in mind the challenges that this Government has to face in court every Monday morning. I know the sub judice rule, but just to say, Madam Speaker, just to say, that all this talk about the Government being illegal and not acting in accordance or trampling on the rights of local government elections, Madam Speaker, all I would say is the matter brought against that decision was lost all the way up to the Court of Appeal, and was heard at the Privy Council on the 15th of March, 2023, and a decision from the highest court of the land will come in short thrift.

3.30 p.m.

But, as it stands now, Madam Speaker, as it stands now, as it stands now, my

answer to the spurious allegation made by the hon. Member for St. Augustine is contained in Civil Appeal No. 293 of 2022, and these are the words of the learned Justice in the Court of Appeal. The words of the judge are as follows, Madam Speaker. This is the law.

Madam Speaker: Member, may I suggest that you leave that, and let us move on.

Mr. K. Scotland: Yes, please, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay. I think you have said enough.

Mr. K. Scotland: I will move on. But for those who need edification, copies are available both hard and online. Suffice it to say, Madam Speaker, that the decision of the Government has been upheld by the highest court of the land, to date. That being said, Madam Speaker, there is an issue raised about the late submission to the Parliament of the recommendations in the Tenth Report. Not at all holding brief to defend the hon. Minister but, Madam Speaker, there were over 15 recommendations, and some had far-reaching implications. So, forgive, forgive the hon. Minister, if he took his time to consider before bringing it here.

When I was listening to the submission, I remember a word—I cannot remember who used this famous phrase. I will ask the hon. Member for San Fernando—“Hurry dog does eat raw meat”. And, yes, he may actually, Madam Speaker, all the talk coming from Naparima, he cannot answer the submission that, “Hurry dog will eat raw meat”. We needed time to consider the recommendations in order to bring it before this House to have a resolution of a most important issue; of a most important issue.

Madam Speaker, when the hon. Member for St. Augustine—at some time, they may get serious, Madam Speaker—when the hon. Member made her contribution, she did not mention to this honourable House that as soon as all, Madam Speaker, things were put in place, this Order was brought before this

House, and we are here debating it. And we are debating it, Madam Speaker, as it relates to an entity and an institution that is not just independent, Madam Speaker, but is protected under the Constitution and cannot be interfered with willy-nilly.

So, that being said, Madam Speaker, it is my respectful view that having regard to the history of this Order which I have gone through; having regard to the constitutional remit of the EBC in its establishment; having regard to its statutory function which is mandatory under sections 4(1), (2) and (3); this Order, having regard to its contents which mirror exactly the recommendations made by the EBC in its Tenth Report, that being on time; and having regard, Madam Speaker, to this, when you look at the new districts, the changes, Madam Speaker, we can make a legitimate submission that the creation of these new districts fairly represents communities and avoids—it is supposed to avoid political contentiousness, but the other side cannot avoid it, they cannot.

History teaches us, Madam Speaker, that the independence of the commissions can help avoid favouritism. We have it enshrined. We have a process. They still come here and say, “favouritism”. We say that this report is divorced from any political interference. The only reason it has gotten here, Madam Speaker, is because it was submitted to the hon. Minister with no changes. Exactly as the recommendations were made, it was submitted here, an Order, and, therefore, Madam Speaker, what is the other side really debating? What are they debating? There is nothing to debate about this other than say that the Government is doing what they are supposed to be doing, which is bringing legislation and bringing Orders, Madam Speaker, that are in keeping with its mandate of good governance, a phrase that is alien to the other side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. K. Scotland: Madam Speaker, this is my contribution to this debate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Vandana Mohit (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on this debate on the EBC's Tenth Report. Madam Speaker, as I rise this afternoon to contribute on this Motion, which is rooted on the constitutional provisions, which was also expressed by the Acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, I am a bit perturbed and disappointed by the Government's tardiness which borders on ineptitude in tabling—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—and subsequently debating the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) Tenth Report recommendations as contained herein. And you would have heard from the Member for St. Augustine, who also put this across nicely.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker and, you know, what? Karma—the Member for Port of Spain South who just spoke, indicated to this House that we should forgive the Minister who presented. But, Madam Speaker, karma is real. Karma is over real, you know, Madam Speaker. And the Acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, the hon. Haji Kazim Hosein, presided over the failure of the tabling of this Tenth EBC Report. Madam Speaker, he ran, “he hide, he duck, he bob, he weave”—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—but, Madam Speaker, karma dictates that he is compelled to table this same report today. Madam Speaker, the Minister, the Acting Minister also spoke about local government elections. Madam Speaker, it is significant to remember that given the track record, or let us say the historical practices by the

PNM Government relative to the conduct of local government elections, at best, can only be described as abysmal.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, the Member who just spoke would have stated at the beginning of his contribution that in 2020 we would have postponed the general election for over five months. Madam Speaker, let me remind that Member that his Government, his party, would have delayed the local government elections four times, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—and they would have delayed by-elections twice in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: The Member claimed we delayed general elections. That is absolutely false.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, they have, over their tenure in office, repeatedly failed to hold local government elections citing reform as stated by the Minister—a lot about reform today—measures as their justification for failing to adhere to the democratic principles enshrined. Madam Speaker, for the record, and the record speaks for itself, but I want to remind this House that within mere months of assuming office in 2010, the People's Partnership, under the visionary, democratic and insightful leadership of the hon. Member for Siparia, held the long overdue local government elections, which were postponed since 2003.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: So, Madam Speaker, we on this side can hold our heads high, since we respect the rule of law and the democratic principles letting the people decide.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: We have never scuttled local government elections under the guise of reform. That is the remit and practice of those opposite, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, before I fully delve into the substantive aspects of my contribution, I want to highlight to this House and, by extension, the population at large, that prior to 1976, that is the advent of the Republican Constitution, there existed two entities, namely, the Election Commission and the Boundaries Commission, which had separate and distinct responsibilities. However, Madam Speaker, they were then amalgamated to form the independent body, that is, the Elections and Boundaries Commission, the EBC, which to a certain point, Madam Speaker, functioned reasonably well, and I want to restate “reasonably well”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Of course, in recent times, there seemed to be some clouding of perceived independence of this body. Madam Speaker, the reason I am highlighting these things, these issues, is primarily that this Motion, in asking this House to accept the recommendations, which are as follows, Madam Speaker, the EBC Report has recommended the following. In brief, I would state: Creation of an additional electoral district in two different regional corporations. It also recommended changes in the boundaries of 22 electoral districts, as well as changes in the names of electoral districts; changes in the definitions of electoral districts; changes in the delineations, as well as changes in the distributions of polling stations.

However, before I proceed, I want to refer to the pronouncements made, briefly, Madam Speaker, in this very House, by the substantive Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, because the Acting Minister made mention

of Siparia and Diego Martin. I am not going into that. I am just referring to the pronouncement made by the substantive Minister wherein in the aborted debate on borough status of Siparia Regional Corporation and Diego Martin, on February 10th, the Minister stated categorically, and I quote from the *Hansard*:

“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.”

Madam Speaker, but the very Motion we are here to debate, referenced the Siparia Regional Corporation—which are as follows.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Siparia, nine electoral districts; a total electorate of 72,946. To transfer, Madam Speaker, 566 electors in PD 4800 from Erin to Cedros, thereby reducing Erin to 7,561 and increasing Cedros to 7,554. Madam Speaker, the records will reflect that Erin is a safe PNM electoral district, whilst Cedros is a UNC held electoral district. Madam Speaker, and as I relate to that, indeed, I want the Minister, the substantive Minister, to remember that this report was available to the Government some time aback, and if he had properly undertaken his research, such a statement in February of this year would not have been advanced whether by accident or design.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: For the time being, I will give him the benefit of the doubt. Therefore, he is now aware of the facts and I hope such an error does not reoccur. Madam Speaker, those opposite, over the past few months, have been advocating, or let me say, linking this EBC Report with the promotion of local government reform agenda. Therefore, the questions begs, Madam: What is the correlation with service delivery, productivity, greater resource allocation and general local government improvement, with the creation of the additional electoral districts in

Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation from six electoral districts to seven; Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, from 14 electoral districts to 15? Would the powers that be, or the Government, equate this with commensurate increase in financial disbursements, since the mere acknowledgment that an increase would definitely redound to increases in demand?

3.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, what I find strange and needs to be immediately addressed is what constitutes an electoral district as it relates to the numerical composition.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, you see, when the contents of this report are digested, disaggregated and poured over, it creates a sense of confusion, bewilderment and further perplexes the brain as to what is the thought process on its submission, what is the ultimate objective of the submission. Madam Speaker, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation with a proposed increase in electoral districts moves from 14 to 15 with the creation of the new Couva West/Roystonia electoral district. This region, according to EBC figures, has a total average electorate of 152,032. Let us for ease of reference say 150,000. Thus when divided by the total electoral districts, that is 50, it means on an average 10,000 voters per electoral district. But conversely, Madam Speaker, Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, with the creation of the new Mayaro North electoral district, moves from six to seven electoral districts, with a total electorate of 30,141 voters, and for ease of reference here again, let us say, 4,500 voters on an average per electoral district.

Madam Speaker, from these figures one can clearly see a mismatch since the councillor in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation has to cater and service the needs of approximately 10,000-plus voters, whilst the councillor for Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation is responsible for 4,500 voters, approximately 100 per cent less. Madam Speaker, this anomaly must be explained and/or addressed by the EBC as well since clearly the workload and requirements are inconsistent and uneven for any prospective local government representatives.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, cognizant that the EBC report must be adopted prior to the impending local government elections, we must on both sides of the political divide review and reflect in our minds whether the fragmentation of the country in terms of electoral districts are in best interest of the country.

Madam Speaker, I want to state yet again that I am a proud product of local government—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—and I boast when I say, I am a political child nurtured in the vineyards of local government, namely the Chaguanas Borough Corporation—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—therefore when I speak it is from a platform of functioning in such a developmental environment. Why not—and, you know, sometimes one may ask the question when reading this report, “Why not expand the Chaguanas Borough Corporation from eight, to let us say 10 electoral districts”, since such

a statement or thought is predicated by the fact that Chaguanas is the fastest growing commercial activity region in Trinidad and Tobago, with the urban areas—even the rural areas now consumed by ongoing commercial activities. So it may be thought of therefore why not expand the municipality to what is commonly called “the Triangle”, nearing Chase Village, expand to Grand Bazaar and to a designated point in and around the Longdenville region.

What this would ultimately create, if thought about, is a reduction to a large portion of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation and thus allowing for a reduced electorate and service area; similarly, in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. Madam Speaker, should this be adopted one can clearly glean the commercial aspect therein. Madam Speaker, this radical outside-the-box thinking would realize in greater alignment of needs, services, and, to a certain extent, address the issues of rural/urban bias.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: And, Madam Speaker, who knows? This can be adopted in other regions, and it is not a part of the report so of course I would not state the other regions. Madam Speaker, this cosmetic tinkering by the EBC must be replaced by radical—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—realistic, pragmatic and reasoned reviews on their part. Therefore I suggest that the EBC conduct some real consultations with the population.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Let it not be similar to what the RIC is now doing; briefly I state that. Madam Speaker, as I look to bring my contribution to a closure, I have some simple advice for the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. There is much work to be done in local government, preaching reform and not implementing reform is a big issue in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Merely attempting to implement legislative changes does not address the institutional problems plaguing the system.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, there must be an awakening to a system which is much maligned and pilloried by the population at large. The apathy and disdain displayed towards local government is evident in voter turnout in the 2019 elections, whereby only 34 per cent—sorry—34½ per cent exercised their franchise by casting their ballots. Madam Speaker, this is an indictment of the entire system, hence the legislative reform packages cannot and will not address this apathy.

From my own experiences, this apathy stems from the electorate's inability to achieve results to their complaints. Therefore, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and the Government's, by extension, continued emasculation of the local government system through the denial of resources by central government must be addressed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, finally, I want to espouse the sentiments

expressed by noted local government guru in one of his pieces headlined, “Challenges for Local Government in the Caribbean”, Bishnu Ragoonath, pages 105 to 106, wherein he stated, and I quote:

“Local government, in a small state context, therefore”—is—“placed in a position of double jeopardy, unable to provide all the amenities and services on its own, and at the same time unable to stave off central government’s powerful moves to develop a clientelistic relationship with the citizenry.”

With these sentiments, Madam Speaker, I trust that the Government would recognize the potential significance of local government. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Okay. Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian):
Madam Speaker, I am by profession a teacher, so it is with a teacher’s eye I looked at the document, the EBC Report, and while I am a literature teacher, I understand that the language of God is mathematics. So to me, Madam Speaker, this was simply a mathematics data-driven report.

Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the Elections and Boundaries Commission, and the reason why, Madam Speaker, it is the single most important democratic electoral machinery. It remains neutral in all matters and it is our democratic standard-bearer because it is their duty to make sure that the data is correct. Madam Speaker, today the report was presented, in his usual

efficient manner, by the hon. Kazim Hosein, the acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, and now sitting before this House. Allow me to highlight some of the major aspects within this report and the great achievements that will happen because of this particular report.

Now, Madam Speaker, my colleague for Chaguanas East did spend some time as a local government councillor and also a very brief time as mayor, so I think I have a little more experience when it comes to local government and a little more experience in understanding the importance of boundaries, as well as understanding that EBC's aim is not to divide but to make sure communities are connected by proper representation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, I was in what would be defined a marginal electoral seat for three successive terms. In 2013, one polling division was removed from Arima central and placed in Arima north east; at no point in time, Madam Speaker, did I ask if it was a PNM polling division or a UNC polling division. What I knew, I had to represent and visit every single house in my electoral district.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: There are vast variables in electoral sizes versus representation and resources. As councillor, I would have had an area of 4,225, but my colleague in Carapo would represent 10,000 people. Madam Speaker, any councillor worth his or her salt will appreciate the division of electoral boundaries so that resources can be allocated fairly.

Madam Speaker, I noticed in the EBC's report they referred to geographic information systems; this is where the data comes in. I wish to define that the GIS system is very important. It is used worldwide. It is a tool system that captures and analyzes geographically referenced information. The framework uses data that is attached to a unique location and analyzes data that enables government, corporate entities, to study maps and learn hidden geographical patterns. It is a robust solution for communities, cities and countries. Madam Speaker, I am proud to highlight that this level of technology was a major player and an asset to the process and the results reported. And I quote item 10:

“Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was utilized to objectively determine adjustments to electoral districts...”

4.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, this was not “vaille-que-vaille”. Nobody sat in a bar and threw a dart. This was information that was collected and analysed and reported. Madam Speaker, most countries, governments and global businesses have already identified several benefits of the GIS. One, improved decision-making. The GIS has assisted governments in making decisions regarding zones, planning, urban planning, our natural resources, protecting the environment. It also helps us keep track of domestic migration. Towns grow, they expand and sometimes people move on. It is the best way to record geographical data. Again I quote:

“GIS helps in maintaining crucial geographical data and records about the old and new changes in different regions.”

So cultural geographies like population census, land ownership, administrative boundaries. With the GIS, the Government and the government organization can use mapping to engage with communities and improve policymaking. Madam

Speaker, in the very near future smart cities will be using GIS for urban planning, disaster management, transportation management. The EBC has ensured that this country is on par with the best global practice. That is why we on this side of the House celebrate this report.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to expand on the technology of geographic information systems, because it is clear that these adjustments were not decided by a drop of a hat, or by a magician's magic ball, not from any political standpoint. In fact, it is the application of the best science available globally. In our modern and fast-paced economy, this is what we need.

When you are a councillor, you need equity. You need to make sure that all the burgesses are served. When I was a councillor I thought as a councillor. When I was a mayor, I thought as a mayor. As an MP I must think for the 35,000 people under my care.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: With the information available, I would have been able to decide what area needed what, who needed support during COVID pandemic food support, who needs water trucking, food distribution, simply because I am fully aware of all—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1), relevance to the report.

Madam Speaker: Continue.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, I stand here confident that this electoral adjustment in no way has compromised our democratic system.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julien: In fact, it has added more value on how we go about serving the electorate. You see, this report is not just for the purpose of elections and representations. It is really an advanced approach on how we should move in

the future.

Madam Speaker, the Members on the other side refer to local government reform process, and they wanted to know what it meant. I did not expect them to understand what reform means, but I can explain that reform is necessary for anyone to move forward.

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, I am referring to reform because it was brought—

Madam Speaker: Continue.

Hon. L. Morris-Julien: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. For example, the selection of polling divisions was made on the electorate statistics of the electoral area of Chaguanas, ensuring that community fragmentation did not occur. Yet, Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine insisted that fragmentation occurred. The EBC has a formula. The formula is stated from the very beginning.

Madam Speaker, even when you go to Mayaro/Rio Claro, community fragmentation was observed, resulting from the settlements being expanded along major roadways, which also comprised electoral district boundaries. This is why it was necessary to make the transfer of polling divisions, 2,500 and 2025 from the various districts. Madam Speaker, it brings the average of 4,300 electors, and it is allowing the councillors in Rio Claro/Mayaro to represent much more effectively.

Madam Speaker, you cannot accuse the Government of gerrymandering, because simply this is done by an objective third party.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, we all well know the changing of boundaries in our electoral demographics is nothing new, and has withstood the test of time. History would remind us of historical ties, forcing us to transcend and

transform how we approach the democratic rights of our electorate, but this is no longer leaving the rights of the nation to any political party. This is simply the EBC doing the job that it is supposed to do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Changes have been made underneath this PNM Administration, not because of it being beneficial to the party, but being beneficial to the people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: We always place the rights of citizens. I want you to remember, I want everyone to recall, in September 11, 2013 when the UNC-dominated Peoples' Partnership had the constitutional majority they introduced proportional representation. Madam Speaker, it is proportional representation that allows individuals who graduated from Life Sport to sit on council in the Arima Borough Corporation.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48—

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Withdrawn, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, please.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Once again, the PNM will continue to put the rights of each citizen first. This is not the reinvention of the wheel, but this is a reflection of the continuous growth of our population. This is a reflection of a nation that deserves good, intelligent governance. The nation that deserves details and data on domestic migration, not human trafficking.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Madam Speaker, we deserve a well-oiled electoral machinery that serves our growing population and its needs. I therefore say it is a simple basic process. We all want the same thing—representation, service to the

people.

So, Madam Speaker, in the infamous words, “let us move on” and simply support this report. Support local governance, and do what is best for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, could we have some order, please. Member for Laventille West, Member for Siparia, Member for Naparima, could we have some order? I am sure we all would want to hear the Member for Couva South.

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker— [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Member: No, no, no, no.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Charles: “Work on de murder rate.”

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh: (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I will attempt to—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I would not like you to attempt to override that noise, so please continue.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Having listened to the Member of Parliament for D’Abadie/O’Meara and the Minister in the Ministry of Education, I will attempt to bring back some sanity and dignity to this debate here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, apparently the Minister of National Security seems to be a very disturbed man here this afternoon. He is attempting to disrupt—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: He is imputing improper motive.

Madam Speaker: Member, overruled. Kindly take your seat. Member, take your seat. Please continue, Member for Couva South.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Charles: What is the murder rate today?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara in her contribution indicated that in her previous incarnation, from an occupational point of view, she was a teacher and she looked at the report from that angle. Although being one of an English Literature background, that she looked at the report from that angle and it was a data driven report. And, from that position, it was something simple, and therefore the Opposition really had no role here this afternoon in this debate, but to simply come and support the report that has been placed before the House here this afternoon.

Madam Speaker, the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives clearly allow a role for the Opposition in putting forward our position, and questioning the contents of the report, and that is what we are doing here this afternoon.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I listened to my colleague, the MP for D’Abadie/O’Meara, and she indicated that, or she boasted, of her local government prowess in

representing the electoral district of Arima Central, and also her tenure as the Mayor of Arima. But I simply and briefly want to remind her that apparently her track record and her legacy in the electoral district of Arima Central was not an everlasting—or it was not one of a profound effect, because if I could recollect, in the last local government election, Arima Central is now controlled by the United National Congress under councillor Sheldon “Fish” Garcia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, in her delivery, that is, the Minister in the Ministry of Education, she indicated that great achievements will happen in local government because of this report. If I am to follow her argument here this afternoon, that this report was simply data driven, it was numbers, it was from a mathematical point of view, I am trying to follow her argument in relation to how great achievements will happen in local government because of this report.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no one on that side from the point of view of the Government, has attempted to create that narrative here this afternoon, and simply it was a misunderstanding, or a lack of depth on the part of the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, in relation to how the report was analysed from her point of view.

4.15 p.m.

Because I am forced to ask the question: where will the great things come out of this report, from this report that was presented by the EBC? Because if local government is supposed to represent the interest of the ordinary man of the society, will it lead to service delivery and improvement in service delivery? Will it lead to a more consultative or what we may term all-embracing process? Will it lead to an increased authority for the regional corporations? Will it lead to a boosting of the

municipal police in terms of accommodation, numbers and equipment, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And will it also lead to a greater influence of non-government organization and community-based organization in the community as it relates to the whole governance process, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, clearly, clearly, the Member of Parliament for D'Abadie/O'Meara was unable to deepen her argument as it relates to the report being a simple report, the report was based in or steeped in figures and data-driven and so on, so it defied logic in terms of the argument that she attempted to put forward, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again too, in listening, I have to listen very clearly because this is a Minister in the Ministry of Education, eh. And the Minister indicated as it relates to the boundary changes at the Mayaro Regional Corporation that it will allow for councillors to do their work more effectively. How, if you increase the number of electoral districts, so you increase the number of councillors by one or two, does that make it effective for a person to perform as a councillor? In increasing, it may reduce the size of the electorate in relation to the creation of an additional electoral district. But what is important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if that additional councillor or the burgesses in that electoral district that has been created additionally, if there is not more funding from local government, if there is not an increase in the manpower in terms of the filling of vacancies and so on within the regional corporation, if there is not an increase in what we would call municipal police, equipment, and I could go on and on. And in addition to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, timely releases, timely releases from central government to the respective regional corporation, how will the councillor be in a position to

perform effectively and to deliver to the burgesses in relation to the creation—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—of an additional district? So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister in the Ministry of Education did little to educate me in terms of better delivery and performance of councillors in relation to her argument that she put forward during her contribution. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it defied all logic. It defied all logic.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And this is why we continue to say that they are using, those on the opposite side, the Government, they are using this EBC report to pilot and to promote their propaganda of local government reform when none will come, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, Member. Again, you would have been given some leeway. Again, I want you to be careful on the track you are heading down now, so tie it in with regard to your point.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will follow your guidance and I will move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because when the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government—well, not the Minister of local, he was formerly the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government but the acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government piloted this report, to move this report here this afternoon in the House, he indicated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during his presentation he commended the staff of the Elections and Boundaries Commission for their hard work and their independence in the conduct of elections, whether the local, general and at the level of the Tobago House of Assembly.

And during his presentation the Minister indicated and—that when the law

was passed and when I indicate the law, that has to do with the amendment to the local government Act that is in relation to when the then Minister or the substantive Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, that is the Member for San Fernando West, Minister Al-Rawi hosted a Cabinet media conference on the 3rd of November, 2022 and indicated that the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Act was amended and that the terms of all councillors and aldermen currently in office at that point in time would have ended on the 3rd of December, 2023 and he further stated that sections 11 and 12 of the Act would be proclaimed which previously stated that councillors and aldermen would serve three terms—three years, sorry, a three-year term, and that was proclaimed now to move from three years into a four-year term, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister said that this was done with the widest possible level of consultation in Trinidad and Tobago.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind the country that the people of Trinidad and Tobago were never told that the law would be applied retroactively. And from where we stand—

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, point of order, please. 48(3).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Member, tie in the point quickly, right?—with regard to the particular report. Remember it is not a local government debate but tie it in with the EBC report quickly. Right? Otherwise I will have to ask you to move on. Okay?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided. I am merely responding to what was raised in the debate by the Minister, well, the acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. And taking into consideration your guidance, I move on. And I note that my colleague in her contribution, the Member for Chaguanas East, MP Vandana Mohit, did deal with this point also

because I thought that the Member for Port of Spain South—but it is important that we correct the records or we embellish the records here this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when during his—the Member's contribution he indicated that the Government of former Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the Member of Parliament for Siparia delayed the general elections by five months, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to reiterate that the Government led by the Member for Siparia upheld the rule of law and democratic traditions of this country to its fullest extent during our tenure—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—and whenever. Whether it was local government elections, whether it was the Tobago House of Assembly election or whether it was general election, it was all held in keeping with the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And for the Member—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. No. No. Members, please. Please. Right. Both Members on both sides, please. Right? Again, one of you all entered the debate already. The other one will have the opportunity to enter the debate. Fair enough? But not across the Chamber. Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the point I was making and I will continue to make about propaganda. Because they felt, they make statements into the public domain and they feel that it will stick. What the Member for Port of Spain South was attempting to do was to create a narrative here this afternoon that the UNC was an undemocratic government; we do not subscribe to the rule of law. And it is important for me as a Member who served under the Member for Siparia when she was Prime Minister to correct the records as I will be failing—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—in my duty and responsibility here. And that is the role of the Opposition in the context of the Standing Orders which allow the debate to be free, fair and independent, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And that is why I want to, from a time frame point of view again, reiterate because the general elections was held on the 24th of May, 2010. The first sitting of the House of Representatives took place on the—it occurred on the 18th of June, 2010 and the general elections was held on the 7th of September, 2015, all permissible under the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: So, the Member for Port of Spain South, I will guide you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I will guide you to go back, to go back as an attorney-at-law and familiarize yourself with the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence, Members.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important for all of us to be able to understand sometimes the work of the EBC because at times we continue to hear of reports that are compiled by the EBC, whether as it relates to the local government, general or the Tobago House of Assembly elections and sometimes as members of the public, the ordinary person is a bit confused, is not informed, sometimes is unable to follow the methodology and the law, as we would say, as it relates to what entails the report or what is being debated here this afternoon.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Elections and Boundaries Commission submitted its Tenth Report on the review of the constituency boundaries for the

purposes of local government elections in Trinidad and Tobago and this was dated 10th of June, 2021, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And at no point in time did any Member on this side, my colleagues who would have spoken previously or contributed to this debate, the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine and my colleague the MP for Chaguanas East, attempt to find fault with the EBC as it relates to the laying of this report.

4.30 p.m.

The EBC did its work, and in fact the report, they sought an extension and it was granted, and what the Opposition was merely concerned or attempting to get from the Minister was the tardiness of the Minister as it relates to bringing the report from what we would—how we looked at it, because the Minister was in possession of the report, and for quite a period of time. And we must always remember that having had the report it was not laid in Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And it was the Opposition's role and responsibility to put this into the public domain, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it was only when the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member of Parliament for Siparia brought this into the public domain on the 1st of February, 2022, then the report suddenly appeared and made its way to the Parliament on the 4th of February, 2022. So if it was not for the work of the Leader of the Opposition and the United National Congress the report would not have surfaced, and that was a grave concern for the Opposition in the context of getting the Government to adhere to the rule of law and subscribing to democracy and the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that regard we on this side having perused the report we are very familiar with the provisions that facilitates

the review as it relates to section 4(1) of the Act which specifies that:

“The Commission shall define and review the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be, divided and shall submit to the Minister reports either—

- (a) showing the constituencies into which it recommends that an electoral area should be divided in order to give effect to the Rules set out in the Second Schedule; or
- (b) stating that, in the opinion of the Commission, no alteration is required to the existing number of boundaries of electoral districts in order to give effect to the said Rules.”

And subsection 4(2)(b) and—4(2)(a) and 4(2)(b) of the Act require that 4(2):

- “Reports under subsection (1) shall be submitted by the Commission—
- (a) in the case of its first report after the commencement of this Act, not later than six months after the date of the commencement;
 - (b) in the case of any subsequent report, not less than two nor more than three years from the date of the submission of its last report;”

So at no point in time, as I said, the Opposition was reflecting its position here on the tardiness of the EBC.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the methodology has brought about some changes as it relates to the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, being the Member of Parliament for Couva South, I have to interact and interface with the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. And it is my duty-bound responsibility too, as the Member of Parliament, to familiarize myself with the boundary changes and so on. But what is important also is whilst the EBC has compiled this report, and there have been boundary changes, because by application of Rule 2(1) of the Second Schedule of the Act, it

became necessary to increase the number of electoral districts from 14 to 15 within the electoral area of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are number of adjustments that have taken place in order to facilitate the creation of an additional electoral district. And it is important that, yes, the EBC has done its work. Yes, we as legislators here will debate the report. But it is also the responsibility to ensure that whatever changes is done in a very—is communicated in a very, what I would call transparent, effective and decisive manner. And when I say decisive manner, sometimes, and I have seen it and I am sure, I do not want to draw you into the debate but I am sure all my colleagues here as Members of Parliament, they can attest to the fact that when there are boundary changes, especially from a local government point of view, persons are confused. Persons are not aware, and from time to time on election day, and even sometimes in the run up to elections, persons are confused as it relates to what electoral district they are in. And based on the boundary changes that I am seeing here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is the need for effective communication. And we must use this opportunity to communicate with those who are looking on and digesting this debate, and also I think it is the responsibility of the EBC too, the EBC to communicate in a very effective manner with the electors as it relates to the adjustments that have occurred. Because, for example, and I point you, 732 electors in the polling division of 3085 in the electoral district of Balmain/Calcutta No. 2 were transferred to the electoral district of Brechin Castle/Esperanza.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that after a year from today, this 732 electors in the polling division of 3085 who were in the electoral district of Balmain/Calcutta No. 2 will not be informed of their movement into the new electoral district of Brechin Castle/Esperanza, and that is what I am speaking about

in relation to effective communication. Because the EBC produces a poll card from time to time as it relates to local government elections and general elections when it is due. And I am sure from the point of view of effective communication and informing these 732 electors in the polling division of 3085, having identified them, they should be communicated with as it relates to giving the advice of what has occurred as a result of this the Tenth Report as it relates to the review of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, right, your initial 30 minutes has expired, you have an additional 15 minutes. Care to avail yourself?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was in middle—mid-flight and you rose to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I did not finish my sentence so I will.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just doing my job, sir.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that you would fulfil your duties and responsibilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, move on, sir. Move on, sir.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So as I said, and this will be the recurring position of myself, and I am sure all, as it relates to the adjustments that are being made. Because 403 electors in polling division 3185 in the electoral district of California/Point Lisas were transferred to the electoral district of Brechin Castle/Esperanza, and accordingly the electorate of California/Point Lisas was reduced to 12,712 persons, while that of Brechin Castle/Esperanza increased to 12,210, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And also that has happened as it relates to the electoral district of Balmain/Calcutta No. 2—the

numbers are there in the report—being transferred in the electoral district of Carli Bay/Calcutta No. 3 Mc Bean, and I could go on and on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, I am making that point as it relates to the recommendations or the adjustment. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is recommended also that the reconfigured electoral district of California/Point Lisas be renamed Savonetta/Point Lisas, and also in that regard that the electoral district of Balmain/Calcutta No. 2 be renamed Couva East/Balmain, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I as said, these adjustments, whether it is name changes or whether it is movements from polling divisions, movements of polling divisions from one electoral district into another electoral district, and the voters have been identified, I think it is the responsibility of the EBC to so guide and so inform, and to use something such as a poll card in terms of that communication in giving the advice to what adjustments have taken place based on this Tenth Report.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while this has nothing to do with the EBC, but the recommendations have created a new electoral district in the geography of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, and that is Couva West/Roystonia. That new district—and I know for a fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those on the opposite side have been trying hard, they have the General Secretary of the PNM who lives in the constituency of Couva South, and they have a former Minister of Labour who lives in the constituency of Couva South, and they may be licking their chops, and they may feel that with the creation of this new electoral district in Couva West/Roystonia that the PNM will gain a toe hold or a toenail hold in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. Well, I want to give service and give signal to them, whenever the local government elections are called based on the adoption of this report it will be 15—none in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, and we serve notice that the UNC

is on the road.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: We are on the march to victory in the local government elections whenever they are called. They could hide the report, they could suppress the report, they could run but they cannot hide. Time is longer than twine.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Whether it is general elections or local government elections, we are on the road to victory. We are on the march to victory, under the leadership of the Member of Parliament for Siparia. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

4.45 p.m.

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Youth Development and National Service (Hon. Foster Cummings): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am pleased to join this debate discussing the Tenth Report, Elections and Boundaries Commission, on the draft Order that we have been deliberating on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, my friend from Couva South spent some time paying attention to the changes at Couva. Of course I am also paying some attention to that area—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. F. Cummings:—and to let him know that—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings:—to let him know, I do not know anything about any 15-1, but we will deal with that when the elections are called. Today we discuss the Elections and Boundaries Commission Report and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened to the contributions from St. Augustine, from Chaguanas East, in particular, and I

do not know what the UNC has against institutions in this country. They always seem to attack our institutions.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: But you know, I understand why they were all absent on Monday while we were singing the National Anthem at the Queen's Park Savannah. That tells us a bit about their commitment to country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Elections and Boundaries Commission is an independent body, has been around and been doing very well for a very long time. I do not recall, for instance, that during the term of the last UNC government that these concerns were raised in relation to the EBC and the function of the EBC. The only thing I can see different about the EBC now is that they probably do not like the colour of the car that the new Chief Election Officer drives. Because the EBC continues to be a very independent organization doing its work as it is mandated by law to do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: And so this report is no different to what the law requires of the Elections and Boundaries Commission Act. The report is taken into consideration according to law and the Act is very specific about what the EBC shall do in relation to recommending changes to the boundaries. At 4(1):

“The Commission shall define and review the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is, or is to be, divided and shall submit to the Minister...”

And that was done and the Minister has submitted the report to us here in the Parliament for discussion. And the EBC, the Second Schedule of the Act prescribes the rules to be followed by the Commission in its review of the number

and the boundaries of the electoral districts into which an electoral area is or is to be divided in order to give effect to the rules in the said Schedule.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to the municipal corporation, Rule 4 of the Second Schedule provides that:

“The number of electors in an electoral district of a municipal electoral area shall be the number obtained by dividing the number of electors in that electoral area by the number of electoral districts shown opposite the name of that electoral area in the third column of Part I of the First Schedule but the Commission may in consideration of topographical factors vary such number provided that in no case shall the number of electors in any one electoral district of an electoral area exceed or be less than the number of electors in any other electoral district of that electoral area by more than twenty-five per cent.”

And so it is very clear, I think the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara spelt it out. There is a clear formula by law that allows the EBC from time to time to look at the configuration, to consider all the factors in terms of increases or decreases, and to make adjustments accordingly. It has nothing to do with whether they want the PNM to continue beating the UNC or the UNC to continue losing to the PNM. It has to do with what the law requires the EBC to do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the report before us suggests certain changes. And where, according to the formula that I just outlined, where those electoral districts in those electoral areas fell within what is prescribed by the law, based on the formula, no changes were advanced. So that in the area of Arima it spells out what the highest electorate, in terms of Malabar South, what—that carries the highest electorate. Arima West/O’Meara, the lowest is 4,026, a

difference of 420. So the report continues that the highest is 10 per cent above the lowest, the lowest is 9 per cent below the highest, and therefore since it falls within that formula no change is necessary. The EBC is just doing their work.

And as they continue they move on to Chaguanas. One of the earlier speakers sought to shift the debate in the direction of, well, in some areas it might be 9,000 and then in Point Fortin you are only representing 4,000. That is not relevant to what we are discussing here today. Absolutely irrelevant. So that in Chaguanas when the EBC considered the increases, for instance, in some of the electoral districts certain changes were made in order to ensure that it falls within the prescribed formula. And some of the polling divisions where the number of electors was higher, they would have removed some of those electors and placed them in other polling divisions and in some cases removed some polling divisions completely so that in Chaguanas, for instance, there was a change.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the same applies to Point Fortin. And as we continue in Port of Spain after consideration of what is here, no change was necessary. And our friend sought to take the debate in a direction as though there was some attempt by the EBC to do what, there was no clear accusation, but just that veiled statement that they will always make.

In the electoral district, in the Corporation of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of the numbers, particularly in California/Point Lisas and Balmain/Calcutta, a new electoral district was created to absorb the additional numbers on the electoral list there. And it was done, if you read the report properly, it was done in such a way although the Member for St. Augustine mentioned that there was some attempt to break up communities, if you look at the way this was done, it was the total opposite of what the Member said. Because polling divisions were moved but they were moved in such a way that the

communities were kept whole, Point Lisas, California, Esperanza, Brechin Castle, Balmain, all these villages, very familiar to all of us, but the changes were made in such a way that even with the creation of the new electoral district these communities were not dissected or separated as the case may be. And several changes took place in Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I hate to burst the bubble of the Member for Couva South, but the time for the elections will come and the PNM will continue to keep the UNC in second place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these reports are not created by the Government or for that matter by any political party. What we do, as required by law, is review the report, the draft order will come to the Parliament and as it is required by law we will do what we are required to do. Our role is to review and approve the findings of the EBC, and I do not know of any precedent where the parliamentarians have stepped in to make changes in terms of the work of the EBC. That is not our role. That is the EBC's work. And as I mentioned earlier, I do not know of any time the partnership or the UNC before that where changes were made. But it is just the normal style of the UNC, it reminds me of their approach to even the Caribbean Court of Justice where when they are in government they promote the Caribbean Court of Justice, they insist that we get the headquarters here in Port of Spain and as soon as they go into Opposition they say, "we doh want no CCJ again, we love the Privy Council". It is normal UNC style.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these changes that are being reflected here may or may not affect the performance of any political party, but that is not the basis on which the changes are made. The basis on which the changes are made is spelt out very, very clearly in the law. And when move to Diego Martin for instance, a very populated area in terms of Bagatelle/Blue Basin, the electorate there is the highest, 9,862, Diamond Vale, 8,121, but when you apply the formula, the highest is 21 per

cent above the lowest and the lowest is 18per cent below the highest. So of course no change is necessary. And no matter how many issues the speakers before me try to infuse into this discussion, this is not a discussion today about the reform of the local government legislation as somebody tried to inject, it is simply about us considering the work of the Elections and Boundaries Commission. And so we are certain, we are convinced, that the EBC has done its work.

If we look at, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Rio Claro district, Mayaro/Rio Claro, this is another area where an additional electoral district was created. Again, when you look at—there are six districts there, a total electorate of 30,000, but the EBC has recommended that the reconfigured electoral district of Rio Claro South/Cat's Hill be renamed Rio Claro South. And they have gone into detail to show how they have come up to the movement of electors from one polling division to the next and have further recommended that a new electoral district be created, and this is going to be called Mayaro North. And so when you look at the point that was made by the Member for St. Augustine about the numbers of the electorate in Point Fortin being just around 3,000/4,000, this is the same in Rio Claro/Mayaro.

In Penal/Debe, for instance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are some changes there as well according to the formula outlined. And in Princes Town there is no change; in Sangre Grande, no change necessary; in San Juan/Laventille, no change necessary; in Siparia there are some changes; in Tunapuna/Piarco one of the largest areas in terms of geography, in local government system, in reviewing all of the electoral districts no change has been proposed by the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

And so, there have been some alterations to some of the boundaries that as outlined here for us. In some of the electoral districts, there has been some movement of electors from one polling division to another.

5.00 p.m.

So in the table summary that the EBC has provided, in Port of Spain there has been no change and the 12 districts remain unchanged. In San Fernando, there has been no change. In Arima, no changes proposed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In Chaguanas, four of the electoral districts of the eight are affected. In Point Fortin, two of the electoral districts of the six are affected. In Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, one additional electoral district has been created and there are some changes and alterations in six of the existing districts. In Diego Martin, there is no change, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In Mayaro/Rio Claro, there are changes to two of the districts and one new district has been proposed. In Princes Town, no change has been recommended by the EBC. In Sangre Grande, similarly, no change. San Juan/Laventille, no change. Siparia Regional Corporation, there are some alterations in two of the districts, and in Tunapuna/Piarco there are no changes being proposed.

The report, I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is comprehensive. It falls in line with the law that the EBC is guided by, and I was looking at—there is nothing strange about this exercise. I was looking at the Electoral Knowledge Network, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I came across a paragraph which speaks to the periodic delineation of—

“...delineation of electoral boundaries...”

Or redistribution—

“...is necessary in any representative system where single-member districts or uniformly small multi-member districts are used. If electoral boundaries are not periodically adjusted population inequities develop across districts.”

Additionally:

“...delineation of electoral districts is most commonly associated

with plurality and majority electoral systems...”—such as ours, and—
“...districts must be...periodically...redrawn...to reflect changes in the
population.”

And that is the extent of the exercise that the EBC was involved in, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is simply looking at the population movements, upward or downwards in the various districts. On this occasion we are treating with local government, and therefore according to the law it must not—there is a formulas as I have outlined earlier on, and where there are changes the EBC will reflect those change in their report. And that is what we are about doing today.

I do not intend to prolong this discussion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, except to say that in reviewing the report, all of the conditions where changes were necessary fall firmly in line with what the law requires the EBC to do. And we as a government, we are—we as a government, we are firm in our support for the work of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my friend from Couva South spent some time speaking about the changes in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo district. I happen to live in that area, and when I look at the numbers in relation to the changes that were made, there is nothing sinister about it. There is no intent by anybody to try and benefit anybody politically or otherwise. And as a matter of fact, I am quite pleased with the way that this has been presented to us, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I just wanted to point to one other area here. Yes, we have gotten very clear information in terms of the different electoral districts from the EBC, and these reports, Mr. Deputy Speaker, look at statistical information. It is data-driven as one speaker said earlier on, in terms of the boundary management. The boundary management is scientific, scientific instruments are utilized and this is undertaken by the independent EBC. And it looked at, and not only in terms of the numbers,

but specific as you know, boundaries you will use either major rivers, you may use major roadways, highways and so forth. But then there are times when you may have on the rare occasion, a particular road within a community being used as the boundary and that might have or may allow part of the community to be in one electoral district and the other. But that is not the norm and that may come only in very rare situations.

As I said, the EBC by law must change electoral districts according to the legislation governing the Municipal Corporations Act, 21 of 1990. And in that particular Act, Chap. 25:50:

“There shall be in every electoral area a basic number of four electoral districts. To this basic number shall be added the number obtained by dividing the electorate of the electoral area by 15,000; but where in any electoral area the electorate is—

- (a) less than 15,000, there shall be five electoral districts;
- (b) more than 15,000, any residual number left after dividing the total electorate by 15,000 shall be treated as if that number were 15,000 and one electoral district shall be added in respect of such residual number.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the changes are not political in nature or not tied to any political party vying for any seat. The EBC by law must exercise after their independent review of the delineation of the districts and the boundaries. And that is very clear in the report that has been submitted for consideration today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are 141 electoral districts in the five municipal corporations, and nine regional corporations in Trinidad. The distribution of the polling divisions by electoral districts are clearly outlined in the Tenth Report which is before us today.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, the EBC has done its work and we as the Parliament are considering the draft order today, and I once again want to commend the EBC for the work they have done and to say and to lend my support to this draft order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Tenth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall not be very, very, long. There are a few points that I would like to raise before this debate ends. What I can say is that the EBC has compiled within the relevant laws, and in presenting this report with recommendations based on its geographic information systems, the analysis of population movement and other statistical reasoning that they would have used to come up with this report. As is expected, the EBC has explained its methodology and have spoken of what it called community fragmentation. Now, the Commission is singularly positioned to undertake the study and to make its recommendation for the creation of new electoral districts and the revision of certain boundaries. And I have noted the creation of an additional electoral district within the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, and its changes to the boundaries of four of its local districts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to agree to an extent that it is important that we got a seventh seat at the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation to avoid a situation that we had many years ago when you have ties. And when you have ties what we would have found at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation last time, to

avoid ties you make sure you put an odd number in terms of the seat. So having the seventh seat in the district, in the municipality it would avoid having that problem in the future which is one of the positives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the clinical work of the EBC is one matter but the context and circumstance in which the work has been done is another. And this is why I want to anchor my short contribution today. The issues I would raise relate to the environment in which the EBC has been prepared and presented. With respect to the EBC, I state again, that it has the relevant resources and the legislative mandate to conduct an exercise for which no one else is sufficiently equipped or properly assigned.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, we could make comments in this debate based on anecdotal matters but we are not resourced to carry out a holistic review of the national electorate and its geographical location and, you know, its subtleties. But we must trust the work. We are expected to trust the work of the EBC even though we are deeply troubled at times by the Government's general ongoing perception of this whole, what the hon. Member who spoke before me, spoke about the undermining of independent institutions. It is a perception that it is out there in the public domain.

But Mr. Deputy Speaker, the nation should expect more from the Government than just presenting this report in an abstract setting. A debate on the EBC report is a constitutional requirement and we welcome it. We on this side we welcome the debate. But it should not be an exercise in isolation. That is the key issue before us today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we debate the provisions of the report.

The report is being tendered by the Government without making it relevant in my respectful view to the urgent needs of the society for an enhanced role by the

local government sector. The Government is treating this EBC report in the same cold and detached way in which it has been responding to several pressing social and economic issues of the day as well.

So local government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is ideally about direct, immediate, and measurable support for the people especially the common man. So Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is about doing so as well in a tangible manner and not about making promises. It is about a meaningful devolution of power from central government. But today in this report it is being presented and debated in my view again, in a very sterile, sterile, manner, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, the presentation of this Tenth EBC Report is taking place in the context of the postponement of the constitutionally due local government election. This report also comes almost eight years after the ruling People's National Movement promised comprehensive reform in the local government sector. But I want to stress that as a routine constitutionally mandated report of the EBC is not an aspect of the reform of local government.

The Government cannot use this report to take a high ground on the whole issue of local government reform. The matter before us is simply the fulfillment of the EBC—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, point of order 48(1), this is not a matter that deals with reform in any form or fashion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So again, Member, I would have given you some leeway so either tie it in very quickly now, or you move on to the other point. I think you would have highlighted some local government reform which is not part of this Tenth Report.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. R. Paray: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you for the guidance. So as I continue, it is really the Government's constitutional role and responsibility to give life to the EBC's work which has been presented today, which I do not think they have done sufficiently in the debates from those on the other side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to just touch quickly on the issue of the EBC's work and I just want to make mention to a bit of some of the data that was presented. So we are told, in reference to this Tenth Report, that the electorate in Trinidad has grown by 24,064 voters or 2.2 per cent. But we have not been advised how they would obtain better benefits from the local government sector. In fact, as we debate this EBC recommendation today, budgeted allocations to various corporations continue to be delayed and that is something that, you know, you hear every day from all municipal corporations. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the state of affairs would not change after the passage of this Motion today and it paves the way for 141 electoral districts in the five municipal and nine regional corporations.

The creation of the new Mayaro North district, to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a bit of mere paperwork, outside of the fact that we are getting the seventh seat and the report has not stated exactly where having this seventh seat outside of breaking the deadlock is going to benefit the constituency on a whole. That has not been, you know, provided.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to just touch base on a bit of what is happening, you know—in looking at what we are doing here with the EBC report, one must understand what is happening in other modern jurisdictions as well in order to give a comparison. So I have one or two points to make based on what I have observed in my research in preparing for this Bill. In other countries, local government has really a critical role in the delivery of health care, housing, planning, social

welfare, education, public service functions, sports and other vital areas. They use the local government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, really as an anchor for the economic development and strategy and as an agent for transformation.

In Britain, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my research, the local government has been fortified to become a front and centre in providing essential services to businesses and residents. This is what, you know, we are hoping that all these things—in terms of what EBC has prepared for us. Because we have to trust them, they are the ones who are specialized, they have been given the tools. We must trust what the report is saying but we want to see these things.

In post-COVID-19, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the British authorities, they utilize local government to support small businesses, you know, and really to provide some structure through these very troubling times. They also utilize, you know, the local councils. They work with the schools, the universities, other institutions to promote business, entrepreneurship and so on, employability. So here we see a stark contrast at times.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is very important that, you know, we continue to look closely at ensuring that whatever we do, coming out of this report in terms of the new districts that they are bringing on stream—this is really the anchor, because the EBC is a body that has been given the authority to make that decision. I do not think anybody here can challenge the EBC. I do not think anybody on the Government's side can challenge the EBC's report. We cannot, we have to accept what they are saying. But we must also ensure and we remind them that, you know, there must be a need or there must be an allowance for innovation and enterprise in anything that is coming out of the EBC at the end of the day. Because I do believe that local government is really the engine for re-energizing our country, and the Government will be well positioned to ensure that whatever

changes are happening at the local government level is really to where we must kick-start our economy, must kick-start our, you know, post-COVID growth back in Trinidad and Tobago. In terms of even, you know, local government, assisting with the issue of crime, getting our municipal police force, getting it going. You know, there were some promises of 1,400 municipal police officers. That is so important, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, please, not local government reform. We are dealing with the particular report, please.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall not be any longer. You know, the time for change is now. We have no issue in terms of driving the proper change that we need to move Trinidad and Tobago forward at a local government level.

So the EBC report, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in closing, it must be taken for what it is. It is really a function of the bureaucracy that is required to get this going. The local government sector must be brought closer to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and become empowered, properly funded and an administered institution where the competence will improve the quality of citizens' lives. The Government must deliver on this agenda, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So we urge the Government to make this happen before the nation goes to the polls; before, you know, we get anywhere close to an election and hopefully, we will get local government going to get our country going, get our engines going and we can start putting back Trinidad and Tobago back on a track to prosperity, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, Member. Before I call upon the Acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, I would just like to

suspend the sitting for two minutes in order that the Speaker can resume the Chair, please. So sitting is now suspended for two minutes.

5.21 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.24 p.m.: *Sitting resumed*

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and Acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and Acting Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I wish to thank all the Members who have contributed to this debate today. Before I conclude, I would like to respond to an issue raised by those on the opposite side. Madam Speaker, in my contribution, I gave the timeline for the submission of the report to this Parliament and I would have shared the Tenth Report that was submitted to the Minister on June 10, 2021. The same Tenth Report was accepted by the Cabinet on July 15, 2021. The draft Order Paper was submitted to the Clerk of the House on August 18, 2021, for laying before the House of Representatives. Madam Speaker, there was absolutely no delay.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Chaguanas East referred to the boundaries being changed by the boundaries referred to, was the national boundaries, not boundaries of the electoral districts within the electoral areas. On this point, I think the Member was misconstrued that——what was contributed and I wish for this to be made clear.

Madam Speaker, they have not advanced any real reason why they will not approve the report. And so, I can say all this talk is mere fluff to distract from the point that the Government—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:—has acted within the law. Madam Speaker, I will not go further except to say that our job today is simply to approve the Motion put before this honourable House. As my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain South, said, we have not changed any recommendations in the report. We have accepted, the rules have been applied and that the outcome has been satisfactory.

Madam Speaker, we are satisfied that the EBC has discharged its responsibility as an independent body and presented the Tenth Report and all that is required for this honourable House to approve the Motion, paving the way for the next local government election. This is a requirement of the law and the basis of which the report is prepared, and factual.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I wish to respond to the comment made by the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East pertaining to karma in a negative light. Madam Speaker, I am happy that karma has brought me here today—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:—because it allows me to finish what I have started.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: I am a firm believer that life is a circle and what goes around eventually comes around.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein: Madam Speaker, it is fitting that I conclude this debate with karma in mind. This opportunity allows me to make good on the purpose for which I have been selected when I first became the Minister of Rural Development

and Local Government in 2016. My purpose then was to deliver the local government reform, which I did all through the Joint Select Committee sittings to the presentation of the Miscellaneous Provisions (Local Government Reform) Act, which was passed in July 2022, mere months after I left the Ministry.

Madam Speaker, I want to recommend to this honourable House the adoption of the Tenth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the Municipal Corporations Act and the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Act for the purpose of local government elections.

Also, I want to encourage those on the other side, the Opposition, to support the Motion and there is nothing for them to oppose. They want an election and this paves the way. Having said this, Madam Speaker, I could speak about my role as a daily-paid worker at the San Fernando Corporation for over 20 years, as a councillor for over nine years, as a Mayor for three years, as a Minister of Rural Development and Local Government for six years, and I could go on, but today is a day, Madam Speaker, I have come here and I beg to move to this Motion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft of the “Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2021” be approved.

5.30 p.m.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Madam Speaker: The Prime Minister?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Ma'am, I had indicated that we would not be moving on to Bills second

reading to the Clerk, not this Clerk.

Madam Speaker: So Leader of the House?

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Yes, thank you very kindly. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, the 27th day of March, at 1.30 p.m., and at that time it would be Private Members' Day, and I would ask the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre to indicate which matter we will be dealing with.

Mr. Young: The 25th.

Mr. Lee: The 24th.

Mr. Young: Sorry, the 24th.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The 24th. Yes. Sorry, Ma'am. Friday, the 24th of March, at 1.30 p.m.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Opposition would be doing Motion No. 6 on today's Order Paper brought by the Member for Chaguanas East.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there are two matters that qualify to be raised on the Motion of the adjournment of this House. I now call upon the Member for Chaguanas East.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Young Persons with Physical/Developmental Challenges (Access to Medical Care)

Ms. Vandana Mohit (Chaguanas East): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I stand to raise a matter on the adjournment, which reads as follows:

The need for the Government to address the pressing issues related to access to medical care for young persons living with physical/developmental challenges.

UNREVISED

Madam Speaker, let me from the onset firmly state that the highlighting and piloting of this matter to the public via the audiences available through this august House is clearly not intended or designed to score any political points, but rather seeks to awake the authorities from their institutional slumber. Madam Speaker, therefore, its intent and purpose is for the Government to acknowledge and urgently institute measures, systems, processes or whatever is immediately required in order to, at best, ensure the plight of those young people afflicted with physical or developmental challenges.

Madam Speaker, referring to matters, physical or developmental challenges encompasses physical or developmental disabilities. The current social trend, however, to avoid the reference to disabilities, I would rather use the term “challenges”. Therefore, in this context, I wish to provide a definition of disability or challenge as follows:

The inability to affect an activity within the acceptable normal prescribed range for a human being.

Madam Speaker, I want to reference an article in the *Trinidad Guardian* dated Tuesday, June 02, 2015, wherein Mr. David Bratt categorized disabilities into the following. Madam Speaker, he made reference to physical, which he described as visual, auditory and mobility. He made reference to medical, which he described as diabetes, epilepsy or cancers; psychological, which he described as mental retardation, emotional disturbances, dyslexia and other learning disabilities and phobias; developmental, which he described as autism, attention deficit hyperactive disorder; and he also made mention of hidden disabilities which he described as mild forms of the above.

Madam Speaker, some may ask: What is the trigger event for raising this matter? Madam, in recent times, my constituency office was approached by a

number of parents whose children exhibited and were afflicted with such conditions which were enunciated above. However, what really stirred my emotions and brought utmost astonishment, coupled with anger and helplessness, was a particular case. A child was referred by the general practitioner at the Chaguanas Health Facility to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, paediatric development unit, on August 22, 2022, for suspicion of autism, Madam Speaker.

They visited Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex on the said August 22, 2022, got an appointment for Monday, 17 July, 2023, almost 11 months after the initial visit, and was told that they are speeding up the process. In the interim, on February 15, 2023, this child was knocked down in front of her home because she tends to run off. Right? And suffered injuries to head, shoulders and upper body, with greater damages to her legs, hospitalized on February 15 to March 01, 2023.

At a scheduled clinic visit on March 20, 2023, the parent was advised that due to the complication arising from the broken leg, that no surgical procedure can be undertaken at present and for a possible three to four months, thus coinciding with her future appointment. Would this, Madam Speaker, not impact on her scheduled autism determination appointment for Monday, 17 July, 2023?

Despite all of the above, she still has not been evaluated for autism and only this morning, I received a letter concerning same from the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, regarding her disability grant approval. How brutal, Madam Speaker. How inhuman, callous and barbaric. Whoever is responsible for this debacle, I hope they shed a tear or even wept for such atrocities to these potentially physically, developmentally challenged children.

Madam Speaker, this is not a one-off situation. I want to quickly make

mention of another article which is headlined, “Rejected and forgotten by society”, with an opening line:

“Decades of abandonment for developmentally disabled persons...”

I am pleading with this Government, Madam Speaker, have a heart. Please do something that will benefit these affected individuals. Are we shedding a tear for some issues? Whilst that is indeed noble, what is required in this situation is a cascade of never-ending torrential teardrops because of this horrible, inhumane-like devoid of compassion? There are no adjectives, Madam Speaker, to describe these shambolic experiences by challenged young persons.

Madam Speaker, what are the facts? Approximately 18 per cent of the children in Trinidad and Tobago have some sort of disability or challenge, which represents 60,000 at any given time. What is available in the system to address their learning and behavioural problems? Many of them cannot read or write and therefore, we in this Chamber, by allowing it to fester unattended, are therefore responsible for condemning them to a life of failure, misery and hopelessness. Madam Speaker, we should not shed a tear. We should be “suskying” for something like this, if we understand what that means.

Madam Speaker, my objective for raising this matter is for the Government and authorities to urgently review and implement some short-term strategies, thus ameliorating this fiasco. I call upon the Government to immediately establish a task force with the requisite cross-functional competencies to undertake a critical comprehensive review. There is no time to waste, Madam Speaker. We cannot continue to squander away valuable human capital in this land because of incompetence and negligence, as palpably demonstrated by this PNM Government. Madam Speaker, with that being said, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Just to confirm, I have 10 minutes, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: You have 10 minutes.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, it is a pity that the Member took such an important issue and politicized it. It is regrettable and it does not serve the public nor the parents nor the patients that the Member so cares about. If one reads the Motion:

The need for the Government to address pressing issues relating to access to medical care for young persons living with physical and developmental challenges.

Let me state from the onset there is absolutely no barrier to anybody in Trinidad and Tobago accessing medical care, as the Motion—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I could respond to the Motion. Trinidad and Tobago adheres to the principles and practices of universal access for health services as a standard policy throughout the length and breadth of this public free health care system. There is no barrier due to physical and development challenges or any other barrier of that matter. Anyone, including young persons with physical and mental challenges, can access a range of primary, secondary and tertiary services across their lifespan.

We start to treat and look at these issues from conception via scanning, gestation, neonatal care, infant care and so on. And it is the Government's responsibility, working through the Ministry of Health; other Ministries, as I will elucidate like sport, social development; and NGOs to adopt an integrated approach to treating and making sure that there is barrier to medical care. In this system, one does not need insurance as other systems. There is no co-payment, there is no cap. There is

no discrimination stigma, but there is societal discrimination and stigma and that is something we have to overcome.

Madam Speaker, development disabilities can be classified as autism spectrum disorder, behavioural disorders, brain injuries, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, intellectual disability, spina bifida and others, and they could affect the patient's physical development, cognitive development and emotional development.

The Ministry of Health acknowledges that we need an integrated approach to treat with these children as opposed to people like myself and people without those challenges—more integrated. Some of the services available at our health institutions free of charge are: child development clinics, paediatric clinics, child guidance clinics, mental health clinics, dental services and medical social workers.

And, you see, the Member lost a golden opportunity, because she focused on—the Member focused on one or two cases. What about the other thousands of cases that are treated? And I will give you the figures. Do you know we do things like swallowing rehabilitation, to teach these children simple things, how to swallow? Because we take that for granted. It is a reflex for us. That is what we do in this public health care system, auditory screening, eye screening.

Madam Speaker, through the Ministry of Health, we fund the Autistic Society of Trinidad and Tobago, 800 families, to the tune of \$500,000 per annum—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—but the Member would not say that—where persons with autistic disorders, across the spectrum, are exposed to music, drama, and more importantly, counselling for parents.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

5.45 p.m.

Does the Member know that? We also support Horses Helping Humans, \$500,000; again, autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other genetic and development disorders.

We support the Princess Elizabeth Centre. Recently, I opened the new operating theatre, new wing, new elevator. What do we treat there? Poor patients with scoliosis, orthopedic disorders. They have walk-in clinics but the Member would not speak about that. Let me give you the figures: in March, up to 2023, Princess Elizabeth dealt with 167 patients; for 2022, 846; for 2021, 857; for 2022, 777; and for 2019, 987, but the Member lost an opportunity to talk about this.

What is the whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach? The Ministry of Sport and Community Development, a programme called PlayAble Caribbean, where we have adapted physical education programmes and they go into 12 special needs schools. It is not only the Ministry of Health.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The Trinidad and Tobago Paralympics, parasport, they deal with six main disability categories; including, one, amputees, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, the visually impaired, spinal injuries and others.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, NGOs, Goodwill Industries, National Centre for Persons with Disabilities, Lady Hochoy centres of Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired, Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association, this is what Trinidad and Tobago does free of charge. You do not need insurance. You do not need co-pay.

Madam Speaker, it goes further than that. At the University of the West Indies at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, medical interns and doctors are trained in these issues. So when they come out to South-West RHA, we have a special filter clinic for children at the A&E. And in 2021/2022, we saw at South-

West, in their clinics, 1,511 patients free of charge to patients.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: At North Central RHA, for 2021/2022, total visits at their clinics, 1,247. Is it perfect? No. But which system anywhere in the world is perfect? Which system?

At the TRHA, at their speech and language therapy clinics, 2013 to 2023, 391 patients. And, Madam Speaker, each patient gets 16 sessions; 16 sessions. Let me educate the Member as to what we do again because, you see, the Member, as I said, trivialized a very important issue.

Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association, they do a lot of work with the visually impaired. I do not have time to go through the whole list. We do things like ear auditory screening. We do things like community pediatrics. We do that. We do work with children with autism. At the Ministry of Education, they also do work. Madam Speaker, the list goes on, and on, and on, and on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: South-West Regional Health Authority, psychiatric mental health services, because mental health services are important. Appointments attended at the child guidance clinic for the period, 2019 to 2023, to see psychiatric social workers—listen to this figure—1,686, but the Member would not recognize that; seeing psychologists free of charge, 378; seeing psychiatric social workers, 742. Thousands and thousands of children are benefiting. Is it perfect? No. But it is a lot better than what exists in so-called First World countries where, if you do not have insurance and you do not have money, you cannot even see a medical social worker.

Secondary care pediatric surgical services, 2019, 220; urology pediatric workshop, and the list goes on and on. So, Madam Speaker, as my time draws to

an end, I want to tell the Member, do not play politics with a serious emotional issue like this. We can do better than that. As indicated by your absence at the swearing-in of the seventh President, you do not put country first. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Couva South Constituency
(Lack of Pipe-Borne Water)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is ironic that I move this Motion on the Adjournment or this matter on the adjournment, when today is World Water Day 2023, and the headlines in today's newspapers, court orders water provider to compensate woman after leaking main destroys home, "WASA Must Pay \$2M". Madam Speaker, the reality is—this is not politics— Calcutta 1, 2, 3; Central Park, Balmain, Beaucarro, Nadira Gardens, Dow Village, old and new settlements do not have any water and an inconsistent supply since 2020.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And the Minister cannot deny what I am saying. It is not fabricated. It is not politics. I wrote him since 2023 and I have the bundle of documents to provide or to support what I am saying.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I just want to—

Madam Speaker: So, hon.Members, I know the Member for Couva South has the

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ability to drown us all out. I do not want him to show us his abilities. So I will ask Members to observe Standing Order 53 and contain the volumes and the crosstalk, so that the Member for Couva South could be gentle on all our ears.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will try to be as gentle as I can. As I said, while the global community is reflecting on World Water Day, I want to take the opportunity to put on the record, calls, WhatsApp messages, texts and emails that I have received, pleading and begging for water into their homes. Because, as I said, I will not call names but I will indicate the areas and the messages. On the 3rd of November, 2022, a gentleman from Calcutta No. 2, and I quote:

Can you find out what going on with WASA and with water in the Freeport area? No water for the past 10 days.

On the 12th of December, a lady from Temple Street, Dow Village, New Settlement, and I quote:

Hi. Good day, Mr. Indarsingh. We have no water and desperately need the same. Do you know how we can get some?

On the 23rd of January, 2023, a lady from Ablack Trace, Beaucarro:

Hi, Mr. Indarsingh. I would appreciate your assistance in getting some water. I have been without water for more than 10 days and was unable to send my kids to school today as a result.

6th of February, 2023:

Good Morning, Rudy. How are you? Sorry to bother you but Maingot Trace has no water for 10 days and our tanks are empty.

The 19th of February, 2023:

Good afternoon, my MP. You would have known of the water problems we are experiencing. We have absolutely no water. Can you assist in getting

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some truck borne water for us in Dow Village?

On the 11th of March, 2023, from a constituent of 233 Calcutta Road No. 3, Mc Bean, Couva:

Haven't received water in 12 days.

Calcutta No. 2, Freeport, another constituent:

We have been calling WASA hotline for several days but no answer.

The 12th of March, 2023, from Church Street, Calcutta No. 2, Freeport:

Good morning, Sir. I am one of your constituents of Calcutta Road No. 2. We are begging you, please, help us with the water crisis. We have absolutely no water for two weeks. We have requested truck borne for over a week and still no water delivered.

And I will read two of the last messages. I have a bundle but time would not permit me, Madam Speaker. On the 14th of March, 2023, Calcutta Road No. 2:

WASA told me we would get water today. A little bit came yesterday but it was dirty, and no water today.

And from the bordering constituency of Caroni Central, from the Swaha Preysal ECCE Centre, has no water:

Calling WASA is not profiting because no one answers the phone. Kindly requesting water for the school facility which is located at 5A Mowlah Road, Preysal. We currently have 28 children and five members of staff at school. We are kindly seeking your assistance with getting water.

Madam Speaker, that is the reality of where we are today in the constituency of Couva South and, should I say, the bordering constituencies of Tabaquite, Pointe-a-Pierre, Caroni Central, Caroni East. And I think I could definitely and categorically say, it is throughout Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—there is a water crisis. There is a water crisis, Madam Speaker. And at the end of the day, what I have read into the record here is not unpatriotic, you know, it is not uncaring. It is law-abiding citizens who have been paying—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—their bills on a timely basis to WASA and the Government of Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, and we have to understand what has happened here. Because successive Ministers—seven years—seventh into their eighth year of governing Trinidad and Tobago and the citizens of this country cannot get their basic right, in terms of water into their homes via their taps.

You had Minister Ancil Antoine, you had Minister Robert Le Hunte, you had Minister Fitzgerald Hinds, you had Minister Marlene McDonald, the Prime Minister even held the portfolio of the Minister of Public Utilities at one point in time, and then you have Minister Marvin Gonzales. I could say much more but I will keep my adjectives and my descriptive language in a very responsible manner here this evening, Madam Speaker, because the Minister must answer why this untenable situation has existed or has come to the fore. Because if you do a survey throughout all the areas that I have named in this matter on the adjournment of the House, Madam Speaker, they will tell you that between May of 2010 and September of 2015, there was water, a 24-hour supply—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—a daily water supply. And what has changed since 2015, Madam Speaker? That is the question. Is it political discrimination? Is it geographical discrimination or is it sheer incompetence—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—in terms of who is leading the Ministry of Public Utilities,

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Madam Speaker?

6.00 p.m.

You know what is misleading, Madam Speaker? And they will come and tell you, and they will want to “ramajay” and “explashiate”, but their propaganda will not work, because at the end of the day people want water, in the words of calypsonian Iwer George. If the Minister is reflective in terms of the history of Trinidad and Tobago, there was a water riot in this country previously, historically. “Ah doh” want to go into the history of this place in terms of where I am speaking on currently from, but the water riot was linked.

And today they would want to tell us—the Minister would want to tell us that WASA restores the water supply to central areas via their media releases and so on, and would probably want to quote from a headline in the newspaper, “WASA responds to Indarsingh’s letter”, and restores the water supply. That is the furthest thing from the truth, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Because up “till” today, whilst I sat in this very Parliament, constituents continue to send WhatsApp messages, virtually begging, virtually grovelling, to get a water supply, and the Minister and WASA, they have no answers. And you know what is even mind boggling?

Madam Speaker: Member, your time has expired.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Public Utilities.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is very timely that this Motion was filed, and the opportunity I have to respond to the concerns raised by my friend from Couva South, which of course are very serious concerns, especially when it comes to

water and the supply of water to citizens, and communities who are impacted by poor water supply from our only water provider, which is the Water and Sewerage Authority.

Madam Speaker, it is also timely, because today as the Member pointed out is World Water Day, and the world all over, particularly in New York, where the United Nations convened a special meeting to look at the issue of water and water sustainability to all citizens of the world, and predicting that if collective actions are not taken by all nations of the world, over three billion people by 2030 will not have access to potable water. Therefore, it is an issue that all countries must come together with their experts, professionals, et cetera, to work together collaboratively to solve the problems of water supply to all citizens of this world.

Even today, Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to give the feature address at the first ever water loss conference to be held in the Caribbean. This conference was held, and is being held at this point in time, at the Trinidad Hilton. A number of professionals and delegates from around the world are visiting our shores, over 300 of them, recognizing the commitment of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to bring about transformation in the water sector, and coming here to lend their support, to add their voice, to work with some of the professionals and the experts in the water sector, as we seek to bring about a sustainable water supply to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: As a matter of fact, I was even more heartened, Madam Speaker, to see Members of Parliament, especially Members of Parliament on this side, Members of the Senate on this side, as well as Independent Senators—and of course, I am a PNM Minister that conducts myself with dignity in public office, and I extended an invitation to the other side, and not one of them had the decency

and the dignity to attend this inaugural conference on water in Trinidad and Tobago—not one of them.

Therefore, whilst I am not prepared to say that the Member for Couva South is playing politics with the issue of water supply in his constituency, but I listened to him attentively, attentively, and I was wondering at what point in time in his contribution he would have recognized that the work of some of the workers at the Water and Sewerage Authority, who would have responded to some and many of his requests for water truck supplies for his constituents, over the period that he mentioned, and not once he mentioned it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: As a matter of fact it reminded me, of a political leader—a political leader of his party—and I never looked at the Member for Couva South in this way. I never thought in my short political career thus far, I would have seen a political “neemakharam”—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: But after listening to the Member for Couva South, I am convinced—I am convinced that we do have political “neemakharams”, we do have.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you this. The constituency of Couva South and surrounding constituencies are served by wells from the Freeport well field. They are also served from the Desalcott desalination plant, as well as water from the Caroni Water Treatment Plant. I am putting that into context. The Freeport Water Treatment Plant at this point in time produces 2.1 imperial million gallons of water, with a water deficit of two million gallons of water on a daily basis. That has been like that—unlike what the Member said—it has been like that for 15 years.

The Freeport Water Treatment has been producing water at a water deficit of two million gallons of water per day. Therefore, the water going into that Freeport area into his constituencies is being supplemented from Desalcott and water from the Caroni Water Treatment Plant. Water from the Caroni Water Treatment Plant, 40 imperial million gallons of water per day. Water from Desalcott, 25milliongallons of water per day, 65milliongallons of water. Madam Speaker, WASA is a customer of Desalcott.

Therefore, when we have issues at the Desalcott plant, where there is a reduced production, it prevents the utility company from meeting its regular schedules on a daily basis. It is not WASA's fault. WASA is a customer of Desalcott, and they know that. Desalcott is contracted to produce 40milliongallons of water per day, and if there is an issue at Desalcott, where they are producing five and 10 million gallons of water per day, unfortunately—unfortunately Madam Speaker—thousands of customers in central and south Trinidad, their water supplies are impacted, and that is an untenable situation that I as Minister, and this Government, are not comfortable with.

That is the reason why we have undertaken over the last four years to bring about wholesale transformation in the water sector. That is the reason why we went to the IDB and recently got a loan to improve water supply.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: To drill wells all over the country, especially targeting areas that are getting water under two and three days per week. Madam Speaker, I am proud to say that we have identified six wells for drilling in the Freeport area, and those wells are already being drilled. We have already identified a number of pipelines which have been disrupted over the last three weeks or so, which prevented WASA from meeting its schedules. And under the IDB programme, we

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have identified a number of strategic pipelines so that we can undertake rehabilitation to stabilize and improve the water supply to the people of Freeport and Couva South.

Madam Speaker, calls from the Member of Parliament—yes, he is right. I received over 20 requests from the Member of Parliament, and I responded to every one of them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: I responded to every single one of them, and I provided it to the water—and I demanded that they provide the people, but he stood there and he never acknowledged once. I have a report in my hands where over that period of time, over 178 water truck supplies were provided to the people of Couva South to deal with the shortfall of water supply. In that report, California, Couva, Couva, Couva, Freeport, Freeport, Freeport, Calcutta No. 1, Calcutta No. 2. Over 178 truck borne supplies were provided to the people of Couva South during this period of difficulty.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: So therefore, when the Member comes to Parliament and says that WASA did not, and is not, providing a reliable water supply to the people of Couva South, I call him a political “neemakharam”. I grew up in the town of Paramin, and I was always told that ungratefulness is worse than witchcraft.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned 6.10 p.m.