

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 21, 2023

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, correspondence has been received from the President of the Senate dated March 29, 2023, which states as follows:

“Dear Speaker,

Re: Change in membership of Joint Select Committee

Reference is made to the subject at caption.

At a sitting held on Tuesday March 28, 2023, I made the following announcement:

In accordance with Senate Standing Order 98(2), Mr. Nigel de Freitas was appointed to serve on the Joint Select Committee on Government Assurances in lieu of Ms. Christine Kangaloo with effect from January 18, 2023.’

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

Thank you.

Respectfully,

/s/ Nigel de Freitas

President of the Senate”.

PAPERS LAID

1. Economic Sanctions (Implementation of United Nations Resolutions on the Islamic Republic of Iran) Order, 2023. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC)*]

UNREVISED

2. Statement of the Her Excellency, the President, on the Economic Sanctions (Implementation of United Nations Resolutions on the Islamic Republic of Iran) Order, 2023. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]
3. Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2022. [*Mr. E. Forde*]
4. Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Securities and Exchange Commission for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation of the year ended September 30, 2014. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 4 to 7 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
8. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts for the fiscal year 2019/2020. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
9. Administrative Report of the National Training Agency (NTA) for the fiscal year 2014/2015. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian)*]

10. Administrative Report of the National Training Agency (NTA) for the fiscal year 2015/2016. [*Hon. L. Morris-Julian*]
11. Annual Report of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications for the fiscal year 2015/2016. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
12. Annual Report of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications for the fiscal year 2016/2017. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
13. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the Mental Health and Psychosocial Services available to the Population during the COVID-19 Pandemic (with specific focus on measures to curb substance abuse and suicide). [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
14. Response of the Office of the Prime Minister to the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on an inquiry into the role of the State in preserving the Cultural Heritage of the Indigenous Peoples (First Peoples) of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
15. Response of the Tobago House of Assembly 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*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

Local Authorities, Service Commissions and

Statutory Authorities (including the THA)

Administration and Operations of the Land Settlement Agency

in Relation to Squatter Regularisation

Mr. Esmond Forde (*Tunapuna*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I

have the honour to present the following report:

Eighth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA) on a Follow-Up Examination into the Recommendations contained in the First Report of the Committee on the Administration and Operations of the Land Settlement Agency in Relation to Squatter Regularisation, Eleventh Parliament.

Shipping Bill, 2020

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Shipping Bill, 2020, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament.

Fisheries Management (No. 2) Bill, 2020

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Brian Manning): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Fisheries Management (No. 2) Bill, 2020, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament.

Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Procurement Regulator

(Details of)

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Attorney General: Given the recent announcement by the Attorney General that the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act has been fully proclaimed, will the Attorney General state whether Mr. Moonilal Lalchan is still the Procurement Regulator and if not, who is currently performing this key role?

Madam Speaker: The Attorney General.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you, Madam Speaker. In answer to the question, I say three things. The question is incorrectly premised. It states that:

“...the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act has been fully proclaimed...”

The media release which I issued yesterday, said that the Act will be proclaimed on Wednesday the 26th of April. That is next Wednesday. So that is an incorrect premise.

Secondly, Mr. Moonilal Lalchan was first appointed as Chairman of the procurement and—as Procurement Regulator on January 12th and his term of office came to an end on January 11, 2023. The Procurement Regulator’s office has issued public advisory No. 18 and that advisory states that the Procurement Regulator having retired, his office is being discharged by the Deputy Procurement Regulator until further notice. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Attorney General, supplemental. Thank you for your follow up. Could you state why Mr. Moonilal Lalchan, as the original Procurement Regulator, was not reappointed to this post?

Madam Speaker: Member, I will not allow that question as a supplemental question. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Water Deficit in Cumuto/Manzanilla

(Measures to Address)

Dr. Rai Ragbir (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Public Utilities: In light of absence of a regular supply of pipe borne water to the citizens in several parts of Cumuto/Manzanilla especially Guaico, Tamana, Caratal, Carmichael among others, will the Minister state when will the authorities be able to address this growing water deficit in these areas among others? Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the areas stated in this question are served by the North Oropouche Water Treatment Plant whose maximum capacity or production is 20 million gallons of water per day. Because of dry season conditions, Madam Speaker, currently, the plant is producing 18 million gallons of water per day which obviously is impacting on communities on the extremities of that particular plant.

In fiscal 2022 to 2023, Madam Speaker, as the hon. Member would confirm, we have commenced a number of programmes in this particular area, including the reconstruction of a booster station in the Manzanilla area which assisted a number

of communities on the extremities of that North Oropouche system.

We have also commissioned, Madam Speaker, a new Tamana well which is currently producing 90,000 gallons of water per day, again improving water supply to this particular community. And we have also commissioned, Madam Speaker, a new booster station in the Tamana area, bringing water supply to a number of homes for the very first time.

In the coming months, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities, working in collaboration with the Water and Sewerage Authority, will continue to harness groundwater resources in the Sangre Grande area. We intend to drill three additional wells in the Aripo area, as well as in the Turure Road community. We have already started the refurbishment of the North Oropouche Water Treatment Plant which will bring stability in the water supply to many of the communities mentioned in the question.

And therefore, I wish to assure the hon. Member that despite the success of some of the projects that I mentioned in fiscal 2022 into 2023, the Ministry of Public Utilities, in collaboration with the Water and Sewerage Authority, will continue to pursue projects and programmes to improve the water supply in the communities mentioned in the question.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, again, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Public Utilities: When would we see it likely that the Turure dam, which is in National Quarries, may be commissioned? Thank you.

1.45 p.m.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, the plans for the winning of new water sources in the Turure area are well on the way. We have already commenced discussions with all of the state agencies, the Environmental Management

Authority, et cetera. We are also planning to drill additional wells in the Turure Road area and as those wells come into operation the people in Cumuto/Manzanilla and all of the areas mentioned in the question, will see and continue to experience a gradual improvement in their water supply. So we will not await until the completion of that new water treatment facility in the Turure Road area, but as wells come into operation the people in those communities will see and experience an improvement in their water supply, as they have been enjoying at this present time.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister. Minister, in light of the answer that you provided, recently the chairman of WASA spoke about a water trucking racket, and many of these communities in rural areas like—

Madam Speaker: Member. Member, you have 15 seconds to ask the question, so kindly ask the question.

Mr. Padarath: Minister, the question is, in terms of this being a short-term relief measure, can you indicate how this situation with WASA with respect to the water trucking issue has been impacted in terms of bringing short-term measure relief through water trucking to these communities?

Madam Speaker: Member, having regard to the question asked and the answers given, this question is about pipe borne water, I rule your question out of order.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are 21

questions for oral response because we are notified that one of the questions is no longer being asked, and we will be answering all those for oral response. There are 20 questions for written response, we will be answering 16 of those, we are asking for a deferral of questions 79, 97, 99 and 106.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members by correspondence dated April 18, 2023, and in accordance with Standing Order 29(14), the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre requested that the House of Representatives question No. 132 listed on today's Order Paper be withdrawn. So the first question I now call upon the Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 29(1)(13), which deals with the deferral of questions, and I note that question No. 79 to the Minister of National Security was deferred for two weeks, on January 23, 2023, February 10, 2023, February 24, 2023 and again on March 22, 2023, and it was not answered today. After three months of deferral, Madam Speaker, I am requesting that you kindly write to the Ministry of National Security seeking reasons for the delay in answering.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Noted, Member for Naparima. So I call upon the Member for Oropouche West.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority

(Consultant/Consultancy Firm Hired)

94. Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the Minister state the name of the private consultant/consultancy firm hired to develop a strategic plan for the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue

Authority?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The TTRA has advised that the firm of Ernst & Young was hired by the TTRA via a broad-based tendering process to develop the TTRA's strategic plan.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, can you advise what was the cost of this contract awarded to Ernst & Young?

Hon. C. Imbert: I do not have that, Madam Speaker. I did not anticipate that. I have the names of the firms who tendered, but he did not ask for cost. So, if he poses the question I will answer it in the usual manner.

Mr. Tancoo: Further supplemental, Minister. Given that the TTRA is now in the process of hiring staff, can the Minister advise what is the time frame for the submission of this strategic plan?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I am very confused. As a Member of this honourable House I distinctly remember in persona laying the strategic plan for the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority in this House some time ago, so I do not understand why the Member has asked me that question. The question makes no sense.

Constituency of Couva South

(Water Supply Schedule)

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

In light of the 2023 dry season, will the Minister inform this House whether citizens of Calcutta Nos. 1, 2, 3, Central 28.03.2023 Park, Balmain village, Dow Village (both old and new settlements), California, Windsor Park, Indian trail and other surrounding villages within the constituency of Couva

South will be subjected to a one in every nine-day water supply schedule?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, a policy decision has been taken that where there is a need to adjust water schedules to impose more restrictive conditions in the light of changing supply conditions, no adjustments would be made to schedules in areas in receipt of a level of service of 24/3 and under. This would include areas in the constituency of Couva South which are in receipt of a one in nine schedule in some of the areas.

However, areas with a more consistent and regular supply may experience some curtailment to allow for a more even distribution of the resource. Where there are revisions to schedules as was the case a few days ago when WASA implemented its 2023 dry season water schedules for Trinidad and Tobago, effective April the 17, 2021, the new schedules will be published on the authority's website and its social media pages.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to advise the hon. Member for Couva South that on the completion of works currently in train for the drilling of three new wells in the Freeport aquifer, and the equipping of another at California, communities in the constituency of Couva South that are in receipt of a water schedule or water supply of one in every nine days, will experience a significant improvement in their supply of water.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, could the Minister inform this House the initiatives which he just referred to, when they would be actually implemented by WASA in the constituency of Couva South?

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, I am sure the Member for Couva South is fully cognizant of all the activities taking place in his constituency. That being

said, Madam Speaker, the drilling of those wells has already commenced and I expect them to be completed in one month's time.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, given the road apples response of the Minister of—

Hon. M. Gonzales: The what?

Mr. Indarsingh: The road apples response of the Minister of Public Utilities, could the Minister indicate if he is aware that the areas I have referred to, constituents are waiting for a pipe borne water supply in excess of 15 days consistently for the last year?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, the Water and Sewerage Authority made a number of publications and public statements with respect to its inability to provide some of the water to the affected communities in the constituency of Couva South. They have made a number public press and press statements—I have mandated that they call the necessary news conference so that they can inform the citizenry. It is not only on WASA's side, a lot of the areas being mentioned are fed off the DESALCOTT plant which has reduced its production capacity as a result of challenges on that plant by three or four million gallons of water. And when you have those challenges taking place outside of WASA's control, Madam Speaker, it impacts upon the authority's capacity to adhere to the schedules in those areas. And we are working with DESALCOTT and all our stakeholders, including the Ministry of Public Utilities, to pursue a number of initiatives that will give the authority the ability and the capacity to present and to provide the people of Couva South with a more reliable supply of water.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister again: Minister, taking into consideration the current state of affairs, and that apparently

WASA has collapsed under your tenureship, could you really indicate, or are you satisfied that constituents in the areas that I have referred to have to rely on a truck borne water supply from WASA, given in the last year or two. Are you satisfied with the response from WASA?

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, let me say that WASA has not collapsed. The UNC has collapsed and collapsed a long, long time ago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: And the argument and the penchant for bacchanal and confusion on the part of the Member for Couva South has collapsed. With that being said, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Indarsingh: That is incompetence, this is not bacchanal.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South. Member for Couva South, could you kindly desist.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: “Is you in charge, not me!” “I not in charge of—” [*Inaudible*]

Hon Member: Aye! Aye! [*Inaudible*] “Yuh home!”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South! Member for Couva South, I would ask you, having asked your question, after the response, if you could go outside, take a lil five minutes and come back in. You deliberately put on your mike to say what you had to say, and you know that is not proper. All right?

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I will leave the Chamber, but under what Standing Order?

Madam Speaker: Member. Member, I am sure you do not mean that. But I also know that you are quite an experienced Member and therefore, maybe when you go outside you will find my authority. Please do not let me exercise it further.

Mr. Indarsingh: I am exercising my right to speak!

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro. Member for Mayaro!

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Manzanilla-Mayaro Road
(Solar Street Lighting Project)**

108. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Further to the response provided to House of Representatives Question No. 180 on June 30, 2017, will the Minister indicate whether the Government intends to rehabilitate the solar street lighting project along the Manzanilla-Mayaro Road, which has been decommissioned over the past year?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Indarsingh: “People eh get” water for months now.

Madam Speaker: Member! Member for Couva South, I am trying my best to deal with you in the fairest of manners. You said you will go outside, maybe then you will collect yourself and be able to come back and carry on with the decorum demanded here. I understand your passion, but please, maybe outside you will be able to contain it. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Question No. 108 to the Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in July 2018 given the non-existence of electrical infrastructure along the Manzanilla/Mayaro Road, 80 solar LED street lighting poles with battery backup were installed along the road. The installation of these solar LED street lights is consistent with Government’s plan for the development and execution of a first-scale energy conservation and energy efficiency programme for the country

pursuant to our National Development Strategy, *Vision 2030*, and our nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement. Madam Speaker, T&TEC has advised that subsequently between June 2021 and May 2022, 316 of the battery packs valued at TT \$773,488 were stolen as follows. On the 9th of June, 2021, batteries stolen, 168; poles affected, 42. On the 5th of April, 2022, batteries stolen, 60; poles impacted, 15. On the 18th of May, 2022, 88 batteries were stolen and 22 of the poles were impacted; a total of 316 batteries were stolen, Madam Speaker, and 79 poles were impacted.

Following the May 2022 incident, T&TEC removed the remaining batteries to ensure there was no further loss resulting from theft, pending the putting in place of effective security measures to safeguard and protect these assets involving the greater use of technology. T&TEC has advised that the re-design of the system inclusive of enhanced security features has been completed and that the reinstallation of the lights will be done in stages commencing by May 2023, and projected to be completed by June 2023.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Manzanilla to Mayaro Road

(10 KM Roadway Project)

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

Will the Minister provide an update on the proposed 10KM Roadway Project along the Manzanilla to Mayaro Road?

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, connectivity between the communities of Manzanilla and Mayaro has been restored by a temporary roadway which spans the breach section of the roadway destructed by the November 2022

flood event. Designs for a medium-term repair strategy are near completion, and the tendering process is expected to commence during the month of April 2023. Construction works are expected to commence in May 2023, and to be completed before the height of the 2023 rainy season.

2.00 p.m.

These works will entail repairs to the failed section of the roadway and upgrade to the existing roadway to withstand the effects associated with the overtopping of the Nariva Swamp. The long term sustainable designs for the roadway are also being planned but will be fully developed on the completion of the study of the wetland, coastlines and the interaction with the roadway. The long term design is expected to commence once the study is completed. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Minister, for the response. Based on the fact that there is no guarantee that the completion will be in this 2023, the bypass road itself has some challenges. Would the Minister consider a more permanent resurfacing of that road since it is a bone of contention with the motoring public at this time?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, I do not know where the Member got the information. Our aim is to have the road restored in 2023 and we are working towards that. So there is no need at this point in time to look for an alternative. We have to remember the wetland is the Nariva Swamp, it is a protected area and we cannot do anything permanent in the Swamp, but we are driving to have the road completed before, as I said, the height of the rainy season. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Granting of Pharmacies Licences/Practicing Certificates**(Measures taken)**

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

Will the Minister indicate what measures are in place to ensure that the issues related to the granting of operating Licences/Practicing Certificates to pharmacies and the registration of new pharmacists are addressed to prevent future delays?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: On January 15, 2023, the Minister of Health signed the Pharmacy Board (Amdt.) Regulations, 2023, which allows for practicing certificates issued to pharmacists, which were valid and subsisting immediately before January 14, 2023, to remain in force until the certificate for the period January 15, 2023, to January 14, 2024 is issued by the Pharmacy Board of Trinidad and Tobago, provided that the requisite annual retention fee was paid.

Further, on January 31, 2023, the Minister of Health signed the Pharmacy Board (Amdt). (No. 2) Regulations, 2023, which allows for a pharmacy licence issued for the use of any premises for carrying on business as a pharmacy which was valid and subsisting immediately before February 01, 2023, to remain in force until a pharmacy licence for the period February 01, 2023, to January 31, 2024, is issued by the Pharmacy Board of Trinidad and Tobago provided that the requisite renewal fee was paid. The Ministry of Health is presently collaborating with the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs to determine the legislative framework necessary to mitigate against future delays and/or

discrepancies. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: I am walking to my chair, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: We are at question 111.

Scanners at the Port in Port of Spain

(Status of)

111. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the Minister inform this House of the status of the scanners to be acquired for the use by the Customs and Excise Division at the Port in Port of Spain to replace the four non-functional mobile scanners?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Member: I hope he— [*Inaudible*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): I never am, Madam Speaker, as it relates to the status of the scanners to be acquired for the use by the Customs and Excise Division at the Port of Port of Spain to replace the four mobile scanners, the following information is appropriate.

Tenders were published in December of 2022, December 20th, with a closing date of January the 26th, 2023. However, the closing date for submission of tenders was then extended to February the 9th, 2023. Tenders were received on February 09, 2023, with seven offers, as follows: Sectus Technologies Incorporated; Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago; New Tech Company Limited; PrecisionPoint Caribbean Limited; Hiltech Services Limited; Installation Technologies International B.V. and PRD Security Services Limited.

The initial evaluation and preparation of the short list of the qualified

tenderers was then completed by March the 31st, 2023. Site visits are currently in progress to inspect and view the scanner systems proposed by the short listed firms in actual operation in a working port environment. These site visits will be completed on the 23rd of April, 2023.

The decision on the best scanner proposal is expected to be made by April the 28th, 2023. The award of contract is expected on May the 5th, 2023. And the time for manufacture of the new scanners will be determined upon completion of the exercise currently being conducted by the Evaluation Committee. But it is expected that the delivery and installation of the mobile scanners will be completed in fiscal year 2024.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, given that the fact that homicide rate currently stands at 182 and home invasions continue to occur with impunity in this country on a daily basis, you are in no position to inform this House when—

Madam Speaker: Member is this a—

Mr. Indarsingh:—these scanners will be—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Is this is a question? You have 15 seconds. This is not a time for statements. I believe you have no question?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah.

Madam Speaker: Could you kindly ask the question, 15 seconds, and we have a clock that counts down seconds.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, could you inform this House when these scanners will—the date that they would become operational? That is the issue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, my answer was crystal clear. We expect an award of contract on the 5th of May, 2023. Scanners are not shelf items. You cannot go to the supermarket and buy a scanner. So once the successful bidder is awarded the contract they will proceed to manufacture the scanners for our Port in Port of Spain. This is why I said that we expect the scanners to be installed and commissioned in fiscal year 2024. I was crystal clear.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Given that there is no urgency on the part of the Government—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh:—could the Minister inform this House if there are functioning fixed or mobile scanners at the Ports of San Fernando, Scarborough, Point Fortin and Chaguaramas?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, while I understand, I cannot allow that question under the Standing Orders in that your question referred to Port of Spain. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Minister, given the fact that you said that the scanners will become operational in 2024, does it mean that guns will come into Trinidad unchecked in the ports of Trinidad and Tobago until that time?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Again, Member, having regard to the question asked and the answer given, I rule that question out of order. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, you have given a certain indication of a number of suppliers who would have tendered for this project.

What is the average time frame—hon. Minister, I am seeing you speaking. Hon. Minister, what is the average time frame for the production of these scanners?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Young: “Nah man, how you will know how long it does take to make a scanner?”

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once the award is made that will be determined, but I am reasonably confident that these scanners will be operational in fiscal 2024.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, given that you have indicated that the existing scanners are not functional at this point in time—

Dr. Rowley: Who said that the scanners are not in operation?

Hon. Member: Who said that, where?

Madam Speaker: So, Minister, Minister, we are allowed an opportunity to answer the question. Please allow the question to be asked. I will determine if it will be allowed. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Hon. Minister, given that there are now four nonfunctional scanners and the Minister has indicated that we are looking at fiscal 2024 for the operationalization of new scanners, can the Minister indicate what has been put in place to address the security deficit that has been caused by the absence of these scanners?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I believe it is a matter of record that we have fixed scanners operational. We are speaking here about mobile scanners. In addition, as I have said before, in Trinidad and Tobago we physically inspect as much as 20 per cent of containers; the world average is 5 per cent. So there are

many other mechanisms that are in place for the inspection of containers.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Schedule of Water Supply

(Implementation of)

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

Given that the Trinidad and Tobago Meteorological Service has declared the commencement of the dry season, will the Minister state whether the Water and Sewerage Authority of Trinidad and Tobago has implemented any water supply schedule for areas throughout the country?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In announcing the commencement of the dry season, 2023, the Trinidad and Tobago Meteorological Service underscored inter alia the likely reduction in surface water flows as a result of reduced precipitation. Such a situation negatively impacts water availability as reduced precipitation results in a decrease in reservoir levels at WASA's main impounding reservoirs, that is, Caroni, Arena, Hollis, Navet, Hillsborough and Courland, as well as reduced river flows throughout the country. In this regard, Madam Speaker, it is to be noted that most of the water that WASA produces, which is approximately 60 per cent, comes from surface water sources from its impounding dams, reservoirs, rural intakes and springs.

Madam Speaker, at the onset of the dry season 2023, the country experienced higher than normal levels of rainfall as a result of which during the first three months reservoirs level remained close to their long term averages and river flows did not decline significantly. The water supply situation also benefited

from the improved management of the leaks, innovation and technology, as well as from the rehabilitation of wells in several areas around Trinidad and Tobago. It was not necessary to implement water restriction schedules at the onset of the dry season as is normally the case.

However, as the dry season enters its peak period, reservoir levels have begun to decline below their long term averages, particularly at Hollis and Navet, with levels falling to 42 per cent and 51 per cent respectively. Madam Speaker, it is against this backdrop that effect April 17, 2023, WASA implemented its 2023 dry season water supplies schedules for Trinidad and Tobago to manage the supply as reservoir levels recuperated during the rainy season. The new schedules were published on the Authority's website, *www.wasa.gov.tt*, and all its social media pages. And to minimize the impact of the dry season, Madam Speaker, WASA customers, a decision has been taken that for the remainder of the dry season until the end of June all domestic customers who receive a scheduled pipe borne supply of two days or less per week can place a request for truck borne supply with all conditions waived for same. No matter their financial standing with the authority, all domestic customers will have access to truck borne service at no cost to them and the Authority's truck borne service can be requested through all of its technological platforms, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Given the long-winded response of the Minister, could the Minister give this House the assurance that WASA will indeed stick to the published water schedules and where it goes beyond the prescribed water schedules there would be a focused truck borne supply of—provision of a concerted or focused truck borne supply in constituencies that have been suffering as a result of your incompetence.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, let me say first that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will not agree with the hon. Member for Couva South. As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, if we have to see incompetence we can just look at the conduct of the Member for Couva South.

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

Hon. M. Gonzales: That is—his conduct in Parliament is the epitome of incompetence as a Member of Parliament.

2.15 p.m.

And that being said, Madam Speaker, let me say again, and remind the national population, that despite the challenges, we are doing everything that is possible to ensure that communities that are unserved and underserved—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales:—especially during these difficult conditions, that we have waived the water trucking policy of WASA to ensure that all domestic customers of the authority will have access to a truck borne water supply despite their financial standing with the authority. It is the very first time in this country that has ever been done—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales:—and I am proud to say that this Government, working in collaboration with the Water and Sewerage Authority, despite the challenges on its grid and on its network, will ensure that communities that are unserved and underserved will have access to water in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, given the second road apples response of the Minister this afternoon, could the Minister—having reduced WASA and the citizens of this country to the point where we will have to depend on a truck borne water supply, could the Minister inform this House what has he done in WASA to overhaul the call centre to ensure that truck borne water is delivered to suffering people in less than 24 or 48 hours?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, having regard to the original question and the answer, that question is out of order. Member for Chaguanas East.

Income Support Grants

(Details of)

114. Ms. Vandana Mohit (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Service:

Further to the response provided to House of Representatives Question No. 75 on March 01, 2022, will the Minister indicate whether all Income Support Grants under the Ministry's Phase I Covid-19 relief support programme were processed and distributed to applicants?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, the Ministry has processed all Income Support Grants. However, there is a total of 417 Income Support Grant cheques that remain uncollected. The Ministry has taken appropriate measures to notify the persons in question that they should come to collect their Income Support Grants. This was done via advertisements on the Ministry's social media and website platforms, as well as in the print media over the periods July 17 to 26, 2021; October 07 to 20, 2021; November 22 and 23, 2021; January 26 to February 02, 2022; and November 10 to

16, 2022. The Ministry will continue to reach out to the persons whose cheques remain uncollected in an effort to complete this initiative. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, based on the Minister responding—her response as it relates to uncollected cheques versus processed applications, Minister, can you state whether these 417 outstanding Income Support Grants to be collected are a part of the 1,154 applications—outstanding applications as at—who have outstanding applications, rather, as at October 2022 coming from the Phase 1 COVID-19 relief?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, with regard to the Phase 1 COVID-19 relief intervention, income support was given for retrenched, terminated, income reduced, for an initial period not exceeding three months. Fifty thousand and eighty-seven households were paid to date, and the expenditure was \$154,896,020.

Income support for persons who were current beneficiaries of the Public Assistance and Disability Assistance Grants, we paid 42,451 households and the expenditure was \$22,520,250. We also paid for Phase 1 income support for retrenched, terminated, income reduced, for an initial period not exceeding three months for Tobago, and that number was 1,749 persons for an expenditure of \$5,290,500. So we paid 94,287 households for a total expenditure of \$182,706,770. With regard to income support for Phase 2, we paid 1,306 households for a total of \$3,571,930.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, the total number of beneficiaries was 95,593 for Trinidad and Tobago, for a total sum of \$186,278,700, and this total represents the total expenditure for Trinidad and Tobago. And consequently, Madam Speaker, all the processes were done to ensure that those persons who applied and could get the

grant, were eligible for the grants, were in fact processed. And all those persons have been paid, all who were eligible.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, thank you, again. Given the Minister's response, Minister, can you clarify—in your first response you stated 417 Income Support Grants are outstanding, can you state whether these are processed grants or these are uncollected cheques for the purposes of the members of public?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I was very clear. I said there were 417 uncollected cheques and we keep advertising, asking people to come in to collect their cheques. We have done so from 2021 to 2022 and we keep reaching out to these persons to collect their cheques—417 processed cheques available that were uncollected.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, given the Minister's response, Minister, based on information given by the Social Development and Family Services Ministry, can you state or are you in a position to state whether there are any particular reasons as to why as at October 2022, a total number of 1,154 individuals were awaiting Income Support Grants from the Ministry's Phase 1 COVID-19 and this does not relate to uncollected cheques according to the Ministry's information?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, we do not have that information. I do not know where the Member for Chaguanas East has got that information. I have indicated that there are 417 processed cheques that have been uncollected since

2021.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Speaker, given the Minister's response, Minister, are you in a position to give this country the commitment that based on this information of 1,154 given by the Ministry, whether you would check with the Ministry to give an appropriate timeline as to these persons who are awaiting when they will receive their cheques?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I have indicated that the Ministry has been processing persons. If there are any persons who have not yet been processed, it would be passing strange. However, if persons remain unprocessed, they will be processed and once they qualify, they will receive their cheques.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Scheduled Maintenance Work

(Watercourses)

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

Will the Minister inform this House of all the watercourses that are schedule for maintenance work during the dry season in the areas of Las Lomas, El Carmen, St. Helena, Kelly Village and Warrenville, by the Ministry?

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, scheduled desilting works for the area listed above are as follows:

“Palm Drive Outfall Drain	Las Lomas Road #1 going downstream
Governor Trace Drain	Governor Trace to Las Lomas Road #1

Pandora Ravine	Mc Clean Trace, Las Lomas #1 to Caroni South Bank Road Las Lomas #2
Cascabelle Ravine	Las Lomas Road #1 to Guayamare River
Cunupia River (D/S) & Tribs	Savary Road Extension Las Lomas #1 to Fairmount Garden, Chin Chin Rd
Crystal Drive Outfall and Tributary	Caroni Arena Road to Arena River, Las Lomas #3
Guayamare River (U/S)	Madras Road to Ministry of Agriculture Livestock Station, El Carmen
Balata Ravine	Caroni South Bank Road El Carmen #2 to Madras Road.
El Carmen Main Drain & Tributary	Bisnathsingh Trace, El Carmen #2 to Constantine Road, St. Helena
St Helena Main Drain, Downstream and Tribs.	Madras Road to Seunarine Trace, St. Helena
Tributaries to Balata Ravine	Upstream Madras Road, St Helena
Caroni River Embankment	Caroni River Embankment, Steel Work Lane, La Solita Road to La Solita Flood Gate, Kelly Village
Caroni River Embankment Outfall	La Solita Road, Kelly Village
Caroni River Embankment	Caroni Embankment, Church Street Kelly Village
Guayamare River (U/S)	Southern Main Road to Kelly Irrigation Caroni
China Man Ravine	Seunarine Trace, Kelly to Guayamare River

Guayamare River (U/S)	Kelly Irrigation Channel to Herrera Trace
Guayamare River (U/S)	Hererra Trace to Madras Road
Genspec Drain	Warren Road, Cunupia to Guayamare River
G.S.B Canal & DI Irrigation Drain	Guayamare River to Bejucal Road, Warren
Bovel Channel	Warren Munroe Road to Ajodha Road, Warren
Bovel Channel	Ajodha Road, Warren to UBH S/B
Munroe Road Outfall Drains	Munroe Road to Bejucal Road, Warren
Warrenville Main Outfall Drain	Robert Trace Warrenville to Guayamare River”.

And that is just for your constituency. Lots of work going on. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the time allotted for questions for oral answers has expired. The unanswered questions will be postponed to the next sitting in accordance with Standing Order 29(10). And upon the request for the Member of Naparima, the appropriate letter regarding question 79 shall be written to the Minister. The other questions are deferred for two weeks.

EXPIRATION OF QUESTION TIME

Question time having expired, the following questions (119, 122, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 138, 139, 152 and 153) were not dealt with:

Upsurge in COVID-19 Cases (Measures Taken to Protect Vulnerable)

119. Given the current upsurge in the number of COVID-19 cases, will the hon. Minister of Health state what urgent measures will be taken to protect the vulnerable in our population against Covid-19? [*Dr. Seecheran*]

**Commencement of Remedial Works
(Cunupia River, Southern Main Road)**

122. Will the hon. Minister of Works and Transport state when will remedial works commence on the retaining walls that were removed from banks of the Cunupia River, in the vicinity of the Southern Main Road? [*Dr. Seecheran*]

**Registered Fishing Vessels
(Mandatory Life Jackets)**

126. Will the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries state whether the Ministry is exploring mechanisms to make life jackets mandatory for all registered fishing vessels as part of a comprehensive strategy to save more lives at sea? [*Mr. Charles*]

**Criminal Activity Behind Bars
(Prevalence of)**

127. In light of the Minister's contribution on February 3, 2023, that persons are carrying on business from within the prison system, through contacts on the outside, will the hon. Minister of National Security state why the Government has not been able to address the prevalence of this criminal activity behind bars? [*Mr. Charles*]

**Secondary Road and Rehabilitation and Improvement
Company Limited
(Status of)**

128. Will the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government inform this House of the status of the Secondary Road and Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited? [*Dr. Ragbir*]

T&T Citizenship Application

(Tests for Laws and Rules of Governance)

129. Will the hon. Minister of National Security state whether foreign nationals, who apply to obtain Trinidad and Tobago citizenship, are tested on their knowledge of our laws and rules of governance? [*Mr. Charles*]

Dragon Gas Field

(Negotiations with Venezuelan Government)

130. Given the Minister's statement in the post-Cabinet briefing as reported in the Trinidad and Tobago Newsday on February 23, 2023 that, "in the second week of March he will be visiting Caracas to continue negotiations with the Venezuelan Government on the Dragon Gas Field deal, will the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state:

- a) the Members of the Venezuelan Government who were present at the negotiations;
- b) whether the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Venezuela have agreed on any terms of payment to monetise the Dragon Gas Field in light of the Government of the United States of America stipulation; and
- c) the commodity that has been offered or highlighted to be used as payment in lieu of money, in light of the stipulations by the United States of America? [*Mr. Lee*]

Development of Dragon Gas Field

(Commencement Date of Licence)

131. Given that the Government of the United States of America granted a two-year license to develop the Dragon Gas field, will the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state the expected commencement date of this license? [*Mr. Lee*]

Petrotrin Refinery
(Status Update on Bids)

132. Further to the response provided to House of Representatives Question No. 94 on March 23, 2022, will the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries provide an update on the status of the following:
- a) whether any official bids or proposals have been considered by Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited or any arm of the Government for the sale, lease or use of the refinery;
 - b) the specific entities which have shown interest or submitted bids in part (a);
 - c) the expected timeframe for consideration;
 - d) the date, the last asset valuation was conducted to ascertain the asset integrity of the refinery; and
 - e) whether routine maintenance checks and repairs are being conducted within the refinery to ensure its viability for future use? [*Mr. Lee*]

New Cut Channel River Banks in Woodland

(Details of)

138. Given that Heritage Petroleum Company Limited has agreed to rebuild the river banks of the New Cut Channel in Woodland, will the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries advise:
- a) when repair works will resume to the river banks; and
 - b) the expected completion date? [*Mr. Tancoo*]

National Drainage Plan

(Status of)

- 139.** Given the Minister's statement as reported in the Trinidad and Tobago Newsday on May 24, 2020 that a National Drainage Plan was being developed with funding from the Corporacion Andina de Fomento (CAF) Development Bank, will the hon. Minister of Works and Transport provide an update on the status of the National Drainage Plan? [*Mr. Tancoo*]

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178

(Details of Detained Nationals)

- 152.** In light of Trinidad and Tobago's adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178, will the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs state:
- a) what policy, if any, has the Government implemented to treat with detained nationals who are children in Syria, Iraq and/or Turkey and whose families are seeking assistance to have them returned; and
 - b) the guidelines which are being employed by the State in considering the repatriation of children in Syria, Iraq and/or Turkey? [*Mr. Rambally*]

Foreign Terrorist Fighters and/or Designated Entities

(Details of Government's Policy)

- 153.** Will the hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs state:
- a) the Government's policy with regard to designating persons as "foreign terrorist fighters" and/or "designated entities"; and
 - b) whether this policy will be applicable to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who left to provide support to ISIS? [*Mr. Rambally*]

2.30 p.m.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES

(Extension of Time)

Shipping Bill, 2020

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Having regard to the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Shipping Bill, 2020, I beg to move that the Committee be allowed an extension of five months to complete its work and submit a final report by September 08, 2023.

Question put and agreed to.

Fisheries Management (No. 2) Bill, 2020

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Having regard to the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Fisheries Management (No. 2) Bill 2020, I beg to move that the Committee be allowed an extension of five months to complete its work and submit a final report by September 01, 2023.

Question put and agreed to.

Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Having regard to the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020, I beg to move that the Committee be allowed an extension of five months to complete its work and submit a final report by August 31, 2023.

Question put and agreed to.

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

BILL, 2021

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [February 10, 2023]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: I now call upon the Member for Arima who has 22 minutes of original speaking time left.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, before the Member debates, I would like to put on the record that this line-up of debating this Bill now was not told to me until this morning. What was arranged with my Member for Arouca/Maloney, was a different line up and I only got notice early this morning, Madam Speaker. And again, it is a growing trend by the Leader of Government Business to keep changing the process that we do business here today, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Lee: So I would just like to voice our objection of the line-up that was proposed on the floor by the Member.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I find it passing strange that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre will talk about the line-up. Madam Speaker, we did have a discussion on this and I did indicate to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre that this Bill would have been on the—

Mr. Lee: *[Interruption]*

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I can show you the WhatsApp.

Dr. Rowley: Do not waste our time please.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I can show you the WhatsApp if it is necessary.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: But let me also indicate, Madam Speaker, that this was one of the matters that I did indicate to my friend would be debated today once we had enough time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: And, Madam Speaker, let me also indicate that the Standing Orders state quite clearly that the:

“Order Paper means a document showing the business before the House in the sequence in which orders of business are called;”

Let me also indicate to my friend, Madam Speaker, that this Bill was brought from the Second Session. It was originally introduced on November 10, 2021 and the debate began on February 10, 2023. And, Madam Speaker, I am very surprised if his colleagues are not prepared to debate this Bill which started previously.

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

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: This Bill is a Bill that the debate had already started. It came on the Order Paper since November 10, 2021 so I am surprised that they are not ready to debate it. And Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping and continuous interruption*]

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, furthermore, on the last occasion that we debated this Bill, we were on our legs in the person of the Member for Arima so it is clear that we had not finished this debate and they should have been ready whenever it was called.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Beckles: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and it is my pleasure to continue my contribution. I started my contribution on the 10th of February in relation to this Bill that is before us—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Okay, so Members, let us get on with the business. I have recognized the Member for Arima. Please continue.

Hon. P. Beckles: Madam Speaker, I was saying that it is my pleasure to continue my contribution that I started on the 10th of February in relation to this Bill that is before us today to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04. This is a very important step on the road to local government reform and it is another manifestation of this Government's commitment to good equitable and transparent governance as prescribed in our National Development Strategy.

The debate on this Bill today is a movement away from talk and policy and a framework for the implementation of local government reform and it is a manifestation of the leadership and vision of the administration led by the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The clear intent is to improve every aspect of the lives of the burgesses of Diego Martin and Siparia.

Madam Speaker, I recognize that Members opposite have not been willing to give this Government credit for this very bold initiative but as Minister of Planning and Development, I fully endorse and support this decision.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Beckles: The Miscellaneous Provisions (Establishment of the Borough of

Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia) Bill, 2021 is another manifestation of the Government's commitment to good, equitable and transparent governance as prescribed in our *National Development Strategy Vision 2030*, under Theme II of *Vision 2020*, a theme titled "Delivering Good Governance and Service Excellence". This Government is committed to good, equitable and transparent governance as prescribed in our *National Development Strategy Vision 2030* under Theme III, our *Vision 2030*, a theme titled "Delivering Good Governance and Service Excellence".

Madam Speaker, I am heartened to add that our realization of the aforementioned goal as heightened in Theme II of the *National Development Strategy* is complemented by our adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. That is Goal 10 "Reduce Inequalities"; Goal 11 "Sustainable Cities and Communities"; and Goal 17 "Partnership...".

The elevation of the municipal regions of Diego Martin and Siparia to the status of boroughs as stated in this Bill being debated today is an idea grounded in the practical necessity to recognize the reality of the importance of local government as the first line of governance structure accessible to our citizens. This is another legislative step in a comprehensive suite of pieces of legislation advanced by this Government to ensure that citizens of Trinidad and Tobago enjoy better access to government services through the decentralization of central government functions to local government and the empowerment of local government to achieve more, to provide a wider scope of services to the public and of course, to develop structures for management and accountability for the utilization of the resources.

In today's Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04 outlines the hierarchy of local government

consisting of cities, boroughs and corporations and as we know, there are two cities, there are three boroughs and 11 regions at this time. A borough is a unit of local government headed by the Mayor and there is ministerial oversight for the borough through the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government which is headed by the Cabinet Minister.

Madam Speaker, the Bill entitled:

“An Act to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04 to establish the Borough of Diego Martin and Borough of Siparia and to make consequential amendments to the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01, the Interpretation Act...the Elections and Boundaries Commission...Act...and other written laws.”

—refers to the proposal transition of status for these two regions. As Minister with responsibility for planning land use, planning and spatial or physical development in Trinidad and Tobago, I can proudly say that this Bill heralds significant benefits for the burgesses of Diego Martin and Siparia. Madam Speaker, I wholly support this Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act owing to the enhanced physical, economic and social benefits which can be realized through the change in the municipal status via an elevation to borough status of Diego Martin and Siparia. From a land use and physical development perspective, the regions of Diego Martin and Siparia will now be placed in a higher level on the nation’s hierarchy of settlements. This is not a decision made in an ad hoc manner or without consideration of the holistic approach to national development.

Madam Speaker, with the passage of this Bill, benefits will accrue to the citizens and inhabitants, the new boroughs themselves and ultimately to our beloved Trinidad and Tobago. Considering land use and development to the

communities is a focus in this Bill. Advantages include enhanced site development standards that will be applicable to the borough cause or central business districts which are also known as CBDs and other areas within the new borough. Central business districts, Madam Speaker, are a key factor in land use planning because of their importance so that many interesting issues for communities such as success of local and regional economy, the movement of goods and people as well as to the contribution and life and culture of municipalities and more.

The idea, of course, of amending the Municipal Corporations Act to establish the boroughs of Diego Martin and Siparia has an important connection in the area of job creation. Central business districts are often a major source of employment for a city or town. Their formation creates a home for a concentration of businesses, which in turn can have a significant impact on a region's economy while providing many residents with valuable jobs.

Madam Speaker, with the amendment of this Municipal Corporations Act with reference to residential development, there, of course, will now be higher residential densities typically, medium and high-rise apartment building in urban locations, higher building heights and improved buildings and of course, site coverages. What this allows is a means of facilitating more living and commercial spaces which are not allowed at this time within these communities. So, Madam Speaker, what we are looking at is the opportunity to enhance living spaces for families, breathing more life and liveliness into these spaces. Regarding, of course, the issue of commercial development within the Diego Martin and Siparia boroughs will be entitled to appropriate high-density commercial activity attracting greater commercial activity leading to improved local economic development. As I indicated before, job creation and improved economic

circumstances for the burgesses.

Madam Speaker, through this Bill, a higher level of community services can be developed to include the issues of public infrastructure, recreational and other community services. Overall, increased property values and improved quality of life and well-being for burgesses can be achieved as a result of the improved circumstances that are intended.

2.45 p.m.

The passage of this Bill will undoubtedly promote the emergence of political traditions that we are familiar with as it relates to boroughs, and that is to say that in relation to Diego Martin and Siparia, they will now be headed by mayors whose roles, of course, will include greater engagement with the burgesses and the establishment of traditions built on the unique natural, cultural, historical and/or social features of their boroughs. These traditions are likely to reinforce the affinity that burgesses have for their respective boroughs and promote, of course, a sense of identity, a healthy development that will result in greater engagement with the borough corporations and foster greater citizen engagement in the democratic process.

Madam Speaker, the *National Development Strategy: Vision 2030* articulates the broad policy framework for the development and the overarching national vision to 2030. The national development priorities in the form of short-term goals, along with the main strategic initiative for achieving the thematic area, which is “Putting People First, Nurturing our Greatest Asset”, acknowledging that citizens are central to the development, in fact, are our greatest assets.

Madam Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, being, of course, a party to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is

committed to the achieving of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. And we talk about Goal 17, which I think is very important for the—which would be now the boroughs of Chaguanas and Siparia, which is the issues of sustainable cities and communities, which aims to make cities and human settlements safe, resilient, and sustainable.

As the Diego Martin and Siparia regions are growing urbanized centres, upgrading the borough status will facilitate the sustainable development line, as it relates to Goal 17. The transition to borough will enable the targeted delivery of more public goods and services, which will serve to stimulate economic activity and enhance the quality of life and preserve the environment.

Furthermore, it will facilitate sustainable urban planning and development through the provisions of relevant infrastructure, for example, transportation, sanitation, waste management, disaster risk reduction, and access to information as well as information.

Madam Speaker, we also understand that the emergence of climate threats and considerations, the evolution and elevation of local government in these two boroughs, offers a chance to manage development sustainably, whilst improving preparedness and response capacities of the local authorities who, as first responders, are key to the building of resilience in the communities within their boundaries.

Madam Speaker, as Trinidad and Tobago marches boldly into the 21st Century, the establishment of the boroughs of Diego Martin and Siparia is a timely and welcome development that augers well for our brothers and sisters who reside in these two respective areas. They too are about to begin to enjoy a more intimate relationship with local governance, and the successful passing of this Bill is key.

It behooves us, Madam Speaker, every well-meaning Member of this House, every patriotic citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, to give our unconditional support to a Bill that benefits our fellow men, women and children, regardless of creed, race and political affiliation. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Michelle Benjamin (*Moruga/Tableland*): Thank you, Madam Speaker for acknowledging me as I rise to make a contribution on this Bill before us here today.

Madam Speaker, as we are about to—well, the Member before me would have restarted the debate. Madam Speaker, much would have happened in Siparia when last this debate would have been started, and I would have heard the Member before me say it is a movement away from talk and to policy. Madam Speaker, but I would say this Bill is just mere endorsement of continued talk and nothing concrete.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, the Member before me said it is an evolution of local government. But anyone that reads the Bill before us here today will conclude, and I will illustrate as I develop my argument, that it is a mere name change that comes with nothing for the regions of both Diego Martin or Siparia; as my colleague would have stated, rank without bank. And when she said that, when the Member for Chaguanas would have said that, Madam Speaker, that stayed with me, because basically this Bill is basically that Madam Speaker, a name change; nothing more than a name change.

From the onset, Madam Speaker, I would like to state that I would have proudly served my country as a local government councillor. Local government is

important, because all politics is local. Politics to me is service, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Politics to us on this side of the House is service, service to the people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: My time in service as a local government practitioner made me first understand the importance of empathy and humility in public life.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: It is necessary to appreciate that the landslip threatening a family home; a pothole damaging a private vehicle, something the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago know all too well because of this administration and their failure in office; or mosquitoes plaguing a village, is the greatest importance to burgesses, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this administration sometimes neglects their duties and that they were put there to deliver the people from the problems that are faced. People in local government, they care not about your ability. They care not about your qualifications. They care not about your status quo, because this Bill is about status quo. What they care about is your ability to deliver them from their problems. And it is in that context of bringing solutions and that context only, any reform to local government legislation ought to be contemplated. It should be, Madam Speaker, built on solutions.

This Bill seeks to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap.25:04, to establish the borough of Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia. Unfortunately, instead of bringing forth solutions, Madam Speaker, this Bill appears to be cosmetic in nature.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Cosmetic; and as the Member that spoke before me would have listed out the rest of Bills that would be amended. And, again, that is basically a name change in those Bills. A number of operational problems have been identified in local government, from inception to date, problems that stem from excessive political direction, from this administration, this PNM Government, Madam Speaker, who is responsible for denying the people their constitutional right, not once but twice, Madam Speaker, all in the name of local government reform.

In 2006, for a period of four years, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago were denied their rights. This was done again in the name of local government reform in 2022. Madam Speaker, persons again were denied their right to vote.

The recommendations and proposals for the introduction of changes within this Bill continue to be mere buzzwords. I heard the Member said it comes with benefits, Madam Speaker, and I would have run back through the Bill and I still did not see what benefits, Madam Speaker, it comes with. Probably when the Minister winds up he would indicate some of these benefits.

The Bill, in essence, seeks to request two name-changes and for the House to approve the two name changes, from the region of Diego Martin and the region of Siparia, to the borough of Diego Martin and the borough of Siparia. Therefore, Madam Speaker, unanswered questions and lack of transparency as to how we arrived here today. Regional corporations are dependent on central government for funding. There can be support for the borough initiative, Madam Speaker, as we on this side have no problem with supporting, once it is substantive and improves the quality of life of the people.

The decision must be transparent and in accordance with the principles and standards of open and good governance. But Madam Speaker, we on this side, as I

said, we refuse to accept this cosmetic and superficial change.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Therefore, we seek answers, and these questions were asked by my colleague. And I want to commend her on her contribution, the Member for St. Augustine, when she asked: How were Siparia and Diego Martin chosen, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, I heard the Member before me say it comes with benefits, and again we need to ask, because it is not stated. It is not written out in the Bill, if this Bill would improve garbage collection. Would it improve, or does it come with enough financial allocations to improve footpaths, a recreational ground?

Madam Speaker, police service—because the municipal police, Madam Speaker, is housed in both these regional corporations, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the fire service—and when last we met to now, Madam Speaker, a great tragedy would have taken place in Siparia, and that is because the fire station was not outfitted with a fire appliance, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, for me to stand here and not mention, because of the lack of one Minister, with regard to the allocation, and we would sit here during the Appropriation Bill and they would say we could allocate—

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

—or we could remove funds when funds are needed, Madam Speaker. But because no specific allocation was listed out, when we sat with regard to providing the tender for the fire station in Siparia, a mother and a daughter would have lost their life.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a situation that we have to address here today. So, again, what benefit comes with this Bill, when the Member before said it

comes with improved services? The fire station provides a service. So I would like the Minister, in his winding up, to say what services will be improved.

We in the Opposition say that the reform or change, as some would prefer to call it, is not being proposed for the purpose or aim of local government reform to contribute to the realization of a greater Trinidad, and by extension, Tobago, by promoting meaningful decentralization of significant aspects of the local government system. What the local government Bill seeks to do is to reorganize the governance structure of the regional corporation.

3.00 p.m.

In principle, I have no real difficulty with this. Again, we on this side have no difficulty with this. The difficulty, however, is that we cannot reorganize and rearrange the governance structure. We can do this as much as we want, but if we do not deal with the fundamental problem of the lack of resources, we are “spinning top in mud”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: When we speak of resources, a key component of cost would be the allocations from central government, Madam Speaker, and this Bill does not lay out any increases with regard—Mr. Deputy Speaker, my apologies—it does not lay out any improvement with regard to the allocations that would be given to both Siparia and Diego Martin.

Local government is integral to everyday life, as every service is mostly a local government service, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the citizens depend on the services that the municipal corporations give or provide on a daily basis and, again, this Bill does not itemize any improvement of these services. But I say this Bill is another failure in an opportunity for real reform. We could have, in this Bill, stated that a borough would get X amount of

allocations, which would set them apart from a normal regional corporation, but we did not do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Instead, we are basically amending the Act, 25, to provide a name change, a status, rank without bank.

Persons in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, would have loved to see that this Bill speak to—Mr. Deputy Speaker, persons would have loved to see that we use this opportunity to localize the fight on crime.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Each municipal corporation is assigned municipal police that have access to resources. Resources that could have been improved within the realms of this Bill. That was not done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: We could have localized the fight on crime. So I call this Bill a missed opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: The municipal police section in the municipality of Siparia and the municipality of Diego Martin could have been used to assist the Praedial Larceny Squad in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: We missed the opportunity. Persons in Trinidad and Tobago, when the House would have convened after the symposium, would have loved to hear that amendments were coming to the Bill to localize the fight on crime. So, again, I call this a missed opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: When I noticed, Madam Speaker, that this Bill was just a name change, I was taken aback because the Bill did not fix the root problem.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, and when you look at various newspaper articles coming out from October last year to as recent as February this year, each article would have spoken to the lack of funding, insufficient allocations, shortage in staff. Madam Speaker, and one of the articles that came from a *Guardian* headline on Friday, October 07 was a Councillor from the Siparia corporation which stated the:

“Siparia corporation”—is—“plagued by equipment shortage”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, this Bill does not address that. It does not speak to the root problem within the soon-to-be borough of Siparia, neither does it speak to the borough of—well, soon-to-be borough of Diego Martin.

Madam Speaker, the current state of Siparia as it is right now—and Madam Speaker, this assessment came from the Council of Siparia. Siparia is plagued with potholes, as is the rest of Trinidad and Tobago; 25 landslips in urge of—Madam Speaker, it is in urgent need of repairs as it is hindering families and communities from accessing jobs, accessing school safely. It is preventing commuters, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in the corporation of Siparia, as it is to date, they do not have a Road Officer I or a Road Officer II. Madam Speaker, and if—me, coming from the belly from local government, will know how important these two officers are in the general scheme of things with regard to doing PSIP projects, submitting estimates, with regard to getting funding. And you would have heard the Minister state that corporations would have allowed funding to return, and that is because, Madam Speaker, they do not have the necessary technical staff to perform the duty to submit the necessary documents in order to get the allocations in a timely

manner.

Madam Speaker, and this Bill does not speak with regard to amending or fixing the labour shortages that exist within these corporations. And one of the main things that were highlighted in doing my research to prepare for this debate, Madam Speaker, when you speak to the council, no consultation was done. Madam Speaker, but we are here today to debate and to agree on the way forward.

The reason why, Madam Speaker—and I will put some historical context, the reason why citizens must be excused for concluding that this legislation is nothing but cosmetic name change.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: In Trinidad, history has been that major and strategic towns over time can evolve to borough status based on the level of economic development and population. The population both works and lives within this municipality or town that is itemized. The Regional Corporation of Siparia includes several major towns, such as Siparia, Fyzabad, Cedros, La Brea and other towns in their own right, Madam Speaker. Therefore, this goes against the grain in terms of history of Trinidad and Tobago. This history has taught us that there is a natural progression from major town to borough status, and ultimately to city status. The name change of Siparia and Diego Martin abandons the course of history. Ultimately, it would make no material difference in the lives of the citizens as it amounts to a cheap gimmick.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, and this gimmick is similar to when this Government would have changed the name of a bus stop to a transportational hub.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Chaguanas, for example, grew to a major town before 1990

when it was granted borough status by the then NAR Government. Today, Chaguanas has all the trappings to become a city. What makes an area a borough? There usually is a more dense population, Madam Speaker. The development pattern is trending towards urbanization and away from traditional farmland. On these two principles alone, it is very difficult to see that the Government is taking on board the principles of physical development in their determination.

When Chaguanas was created, the largely urban area was cut out of the County of Caroni, with only adjoining rural areas included, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, and you saw the foresight of the then government, but here we are today discussing a mere name change, Madam Speaker, a name change that does not eliminate the main problem which is the access to funding.

This Bill does not treat with, as I stated before, allocations. Madam Speaker, just last year we would have seen existing boroughs, and I will go back to the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. They were in the news, Madam Speaker, because they had existing problems, and problems that they did not have the financial capacity or the necessary allocations at the time to fix the problems and issues that arose in the market. These issues were not just only plaguing the vendors, but also the patrons because it was a health risk. A health risk because it dealt with regard to the sewer, and also with regard to the chillers in the market.

Madam Speaker, and I am raising this to show that the Government made no effort or that they do not—Chaguanas does not have any special allocation, because it is a borough, with regard to fixing their current issues. So before we fix the issues of our current boroughs and corporations, we are here today to elevate two more corporations to borough status, giving them no more amenities. They would have—according to this Bill, there is no special funding. It does not state that their budgetary allocation would increase. There is no way that they will be

able to fix their existing problems, Madam Speaker. And this is a problem.

Madam Speaker, but as each problem, there are solutions, Madam Speaker. It is time that funding arrangements for local government bodies are fixed, preventing arbitrary changes by the whim of any government. Madam Speaker, and I cast no aspersions on any Minister, but to say that just as it is done in Tobago, where a set percentage of the fiscal allocation must go the THA for the benefit of Tobago, similarly there should be a set percentage for municipal corporations in Trinidad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: The winner of this will be the people, the burgesses across the land. Madam Speaker, and the Member of Siparia would have raised on several occasions, and has been advocating for local government spending to reflect the funding needs based on population size, economic activity and physical land space.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: The issue of corporations, such as Siparia Regional Corporation, not receiving their approved funding is something that seems, Madam Speaker—and it has to be stated because it is written in numerous newspaper articles that I could draw to your attention—it affects UNC-led corporations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: You constantly hear of the challenges that the UNC-controlled corporations are facing with respect to releases versus allocation. Madam Speaker, and when it comes to releases versus allocation, we could sit here and allocate X for Chaguanas, but we do not get that in reality with regard to releases.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, this can be addressed with fixed percentage as allocations based on criteria. And as I stated, just as it is done for the Tobago

House of Assembly, it could be done for our municipalities. We need local government reform to ensure what is promised to the people in the Appropriation Bill, Madam Speaker, that that becomes a reality and we are not hoodwinked, that we would sit here in the month of September or October and discuss certain figures, and during the fiscal year that does not materialize. Madam Speaker, if that is laid out in this Bill before us here today, we on this side will gladly raise our hands in support.

When the allocation of funding cannot be adequately distributed in a timely manner to deal with the serious issues in existing boroughs, what then is the point of upgrading, as the Member that spoke before me said—

3.15 p.m.

What is—well, she said, well, sorry, the Member for Arima said with regard to the upgrading and the elevation of the two municipalities, Madam Speaker, but I do not regard it as an elevation as it comes with no benefits. Madam Speaker, and the fix to all of this is, as the Prime Minister would have stated recently:

A little tax will fix this too.

And I paraphrase Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, but how much more taxes can the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago bear to pay? I wish to remind this Government that it is the final straw that breaks the camel's back. How much more taxes can we afford to pay? We are already paying taxes—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Just in terms of again, so far I have been understanding what you are doing. This is not about taxation unless you are going to tie it to the Bill. Okay? So, I am just, you know, giving you an early warning.

Ms. M. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, if you would allow me, it is in response to the Member for Diego Martin Central, when he began his budget contribution, Madam Speaker, he referred to tax and, if you will—this is page 57, of the *Hansard*.

What is the purpose of reform?

The Member is talking about legislation—

Madam Speaker: But Member, we are not talking about reform here, eh. We are talking about the two municipalities and if you are quoting the *Hansard*, the proper way, you quote the date of the *Hansard* and the page, you know, I do not know what date.

Ms. M. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and forgive me. Madam Speaker, this is the 10th of February, 2023, page 57, and the Member is quoted as saying, “What is the purpose of reform?” The Member is talking about legislation coming, that is the purpose of local government reform. That is the purpose of property tax to address all these issues, Madam Speaker. But Madam Speaker, I am saying, how much more can we tax the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: And as I was itemizing taxes—the citizens are currently paying tax on online purchases. The so-called environmental tax, also known as the tyre tax, Madam Speaker, the removal of the fuel subsidy that affects every aspect of our daily lives with regard to the cost of food, because gas fuels everything, Madam Speaker. But the most recent price increase due to the cost in fuel Madam Speaker, we would have seen recently that a \$3 increase in the wholesale price of eggs, Madam Speaker, resulting from the transport cost—a dozen eggs now costs \$30 on a daily basis, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, and this was taken from a newspaper article and I could quote the date. Madam Speaker, and also we would see the increase in the Green Fund and this is just a

couple of the taxes that the citizens have to pay and now they have to deal with the dreaded property tax whenever it is reinstated.

Madam Speaker, the impact of this Bill on the two municipalities, I cannot say that it will be one that will alleviate the problems of vehicle shortage, the fact that Siparia on some days cannot afford fuel. And in my closing Madam Speaker, I would just like to say once more, I ask: Why were Diego Martin and Siparia chosen?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Was this a case of politics over governance?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Does the population density of these two areas warrant a mayor? Will having a mayor ensure that resources more adequately reach the people?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: The Members on the opposite bench have tirelessly denounced the Opposition's argument that there is lack of consultation but in this case, there was none.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. M. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, the Government continues to make decisions contrary to the principles of democracy, this is not a caring government—

Madam Speaker: So, hon. Member, your original speaking time is now spent, you are entitled to 15 more minutes to wind up your contribution if you so wish.

Ms. M. Benjamin: Yes, Madam Speaker, thank you.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Ms. M. Benjamin: Madam Speaker, as I was stating, this is not how a caring government operates. A government listens and then, Madam Speaker, it sets

policies to alleviate the problems in society. And I thank you for the time, Madam Speaker, that you would have given me to respond and to participate in this budget—Madam Speaker, in this borough debate, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Tunapuna.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Esmond Forde (*Tunapuna*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As the Member for the constituency of Tunapuna, I am grateful to enter this debate this afternoon, this very important debate in order to bring about the borough of Diego Martin, and also the borough of Siparia.

As I rise to make my contribution in this debate to amend the Act of the Municipal Corporations, Chap. 25:09, which will establish the borough of Diego Martin and the borough of Siparia and the consequential amendments that will go with this particular amendment—Madam Speaker, you know, the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland, kept trying to say that, why was Diego Martin chosen? Why was Siparia chosen?

But it would be as a result of long outstanding preparation, documentation that has been provided in order to justify what we are doing here this afternoon, Madam Speaker. As a burgess, as a previous local government practitioner and a local government councillor at the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for a period of five years, within that five-year period, I was fortunate to be the Vice-Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation so, I believe I have a say here this afternoon, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. E. Forde: I represent and I am a Member of the People's National Movement and it is my sincere desire that at the conclusion of this debate, I will join with my

colleagues of this honourable House in congratulating the burgesses, councillors, aldermen, community, staff, and all individuals of both the Diego Martin borough and the Siparia borough at the end of this particular debate.

The Bill before us is a Bill entitled an Act to Amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04, to establish the borough of Diego Martin and the borough of Siparia. It was laid in this august House by the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

Madam Speaker, over the years the People's National Movement have committed to bring meaningful reform to local government. This administration has a vision of local government that is freed of the red tape that hinders local government bodies from carrying out their work in an effective and efficient manner and today, we are adding another piece of the puzzle, which is the local government reform. Yes, we have been hearing a lot about local government reform and we know, Madam Speaker, it is the way to go. It is definitely the way to go in order to ensure that we bring the necessary amenities, as we always say, all politics is local so, we need to ensure. So, whether it is that you may be able to say that Siparia is doing that right now as a corporation, Diego Martin is doing that right now as a corporation, why then should we elevate them to a borough status? Yes, over the years, they would have shown the varied aspects and justification as to why we are here today in order to make the necessary amendment. While the other side would speak about local government reform, we are actually doing the work—

Hon. Member: Exactly.

Mr. E. Forde:—laying the foundation, putting the necessary legislation in place to ensure that we operationalize the reform. That is important. We can talk local government reform but it must be operationalized and this is one aspect why we

are here today, in order to amend the legislation to ensure that we bring on two additional boroughs, which will then take us from three to five boroughs within Trinidad and Tobago.

The Miscellaneous Provisions (Establishment of the Borough of Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia) Bill, 2021, was introduced in the House by the hon. Minister. The Bill seeks to amend the corporation Act in order to establish the particular borough. Why the case for Diego Martin? That is the question we need to answer: Why the case for Diego Martin? The Diego Martin Regional Corporation had submitted a proposal to government to be named as a borough. Diego Martin is one of the fastest growing regions in Trinidad and Tobago, having over 150,000, burgesses or people as we would say, living within the particular boundaries, and all of Trinidad and Tobago's resources within its space. While some people may say there is no oil in Diego Martin, one prominent representative in the region, Chairman Sigler Jack, countered:

Off Monos Island—and I quote—from time to time, you can see oil rigs out there.

We are in close proximity to oil and we have all benefited. The borough's boundaries will geographically include Diego Martin West, North East and Central constituencies. These constituencies are represented in Parliament by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the Minister in the office of the Prime Minister, respectively. Diego Martin Regional Corporation Chairman, in an interview with the *Express* newspaper on Tuesday 24 November, 2020, was optimistic on what the region's elevation to borough status meant for its overall development; we are overqualified to be a borough.

The main bases of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force is in the Diego Martin region. Tetron to be exact, Staubles Bay for the coast guard, the Trinidad

and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce headquarters is in Westmoorings and the Diamond Vale Industrial Park, are examples of commerce within the Diego Martin region. It is further said in order to meet the agricultural needs there is establishment of a food processing plant for farmers in the Diego Martin region. Yes, we also have agriculture in the Paramin region, which is also inclusive of the Diego Martin area, all in its way to Chaguaramas. We are heavily fortified with some of the best residential areas in Trinidad and Tobago—Westmoorings, Maraval, Petit Valley—

Mr. Padarath: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b), the hon. Member of Diego Martin Central, I believe when he spoke, traversed a lot of this and I think the Member needs to spare us the histrionics and the repeat for 55(1) please.

Dr. Moonilal: Good observation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Okay, so, thank you, Member for Princes Town for so inviting me. Please continue.

Mr. E. Forde:—we could also speak of—thank you, Madam Speaker, we could also speak of the opening of the Carenage Fishing Centre—not sure if he mentioned that hon. Member—the new Carenage Health Centre, the University of Trinidad and Tobago Campus in Chaguaramas. All are modern health and educational facilities within the Diego Martin region—

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. E. Forde:—I am coming to Siparia, just all hon. Members, do not worry, I am dealing with Diego Martin first. When all these components are put together, it is clear Diego Martin can attain borough status.

3.30 p.m.

We can now move on to hear what is in store at Siparia. Probably, we may

not get any objection from on that side. I see the Member for Siparia is smiling.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. E. Forde: Siparia Regional Corporation passed a resolution to upgrade its status to borough. You know that? The Borough Council actually passed a resolution in 2019, in order to elevate Siparia to a borough status. The Siparia Regional Corporation.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. E. Forde: Hon. Members, Tunapuna/Piarco will come shortly. Do not worry. We are taking our time. Do not worry, it is coming. It is coming. Madam Speaker, the Siparia Regional Corporation is just over 51,000 hectares in size, and ranked sixth among the corporate areas in the country. There is a mixture of land use in the Siparia region. Settlements of varied sizes.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Could we have some order, please, and comply with Standing Order 53. Member for Tunapuna.

Mr. E. Forde: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, settlements of varied sizes. We have onshore areas and bases for offshore oil production in the Siparia region. We have ports in Siparia, industrial areas in Siparia, fishing centres in Siparia—none of these things were mentioned previously—forestry areas, swamps, agriculture and numerous beaches stretching along the hundred kilometre coastline southwest of Trinidad and Tobago. Its western extremity is Icacos point to the Serpent's Mouth Channel, and it lies between the waters of the Gulf of Paria and the Columbus Channel. Its eastern boundary is with the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation area, of which they share a lot of the communal space.

Madam Speaker, there are 62 communities in this region; three of them shared with the adjacent Point Fortin municipal corporation region and three with

the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation. It is estimated that around 88,000-plus persons live within the region, and places the region as the seventh place among the corporation areas, but only 11th place in the density population with 1.6 persons per hectare, only two-thirds of Trinidad and Tobago average, Madam Speaker. This low overall density is due, largely, to the extension areas of forests, swamps and oil production lands in the region with virtually no residential population, but a lot of benefits are gained from the necessary forests, from the swamps and the oil production.

In Siparia, there is a growing economic activity in the region. There is an established industrial sector in the Siparia region, comprising the three major companies described. Apart from the direct contributions through jobs and spending on goods and services, the companies contribute to the community life, perhaps not as much as before, or in the same manner, but in the more productive partnership arrangements—companies like the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago, Lake Asphalt and the National Energy Corporation. Through these economic activities, it has positioned the Siparia region great for economic growth and development and blusters the argument for its transition from a municipality corporation to its borough status.

Madam Speaker, these demands extend greatly beyond the areas of employment, numbers and types. The skill sets: The highest standards of delivery and goods and services spanning this spectrum from infrastructure, public health, spatial planning, community, youth, sports and social development and beyond, all within the framework for national development among these two boroughs that are proposed this afternoon; the Siparia and the Diego Martin Regional Corporations.

Madam Speaker, as previously mentioned, this development today was not arrived at overnight, but by careful continued planning and building over the last

number of years. Prior to demitting office in 2010, the PNM party had planned consultations; both local and foreign, with every municipal corporation, and in their stakeholder's population, it developed regional development plans. Each of the 14 regional corporations have their own regional development plans, and coming out of these plans, the various recommendations would have been made, based on the strategic development for each particular regional corporation.

So, it has been said: Why not Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation? Right? Why not?

Mr. Charles: We want Princes Town.

Mr. E. Forde: All right. You want Princes Town, Member for Naparima? No problem. But based on the developmental structural strategic plans, the justifications will have to be made and, at this time, Madam Speaker, the justification before us is for the Siparia Regional Corporation to become a borough and the Diego Martin Regional Corporation to become a borough. Who knows, I would like Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation to be next. So, to the Minister and to our Cabinet team, that is one of the next operations that we can be looking forward to, Tunapuna/Piarco being a borough corporation and probably Naparima's request—the Member for Naparima's request might be able to make the grade.

Madam Speaker, these plans can be used as a starting point for the development of each municipal corporation throughout Trinidad and Tobago, for each particular one. It is not by "vaps" or by the whims and fancies of anyone. Long outstanding planning has been taking place in order to bring us to this day in April 2023.

It must be noted that the amendment to the Town and Country Act, also resulted from this exercise, forms part of the infrastructure for the improved

delivery of services at the local government level. We complain daily about the services not reaching the communities, not reaching the burgesses and we anticipate that, as a result of achieving the borough status, much improvement can take place between these two particular boroughs; the Siparia and the Diego Martin Regional Corporations. The proposal for the boroughs of Diego Martin and Siparia today is not a sudden development but part of a well thought-out plan for the development and for the progress of the Government's desire to ensure improved delivery of goods and services to its population and to the burgesses of these regions.

Madam Speaker, at this time, I would just like to make mention that we currently have three existing boroughs: The Arima Borough Corporation, the only Royal Chartered Borough in the western hemisphere. We have the Chaguanas Borough, which was established in October 1990.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Speaker, I hate to do this to my friend, 55(1). We have heard that from every speaker, the whole history. It is tedious now.

Mr. E. Forde: Point Fortin was mentioned?

Madam Speaker: So, Member for Tunapuna, I have to uphold the objection in terms of the three existing boroughs. I think we have traversed that ground sufficiently. So maybe you could develop another point in your contribution.

Mr. E. Forde: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Features of a borough? Let me try features of a borough. Boroughs will be chaired by mayors and deputy mayors. They will have the powers to set up and control special Mayor's Fund. You all know that mayors can serve as Justice of the Peace. I do not think anybody mentioned that. Right? So, therefore, we will have the Mayor of San Fernando, of Siparia and Diego Martin—you mentioned it, Member?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. E. Forde: Lead regional coordination, committees that include a range of stakeholders, not limited to local government system. Another feature: Concerning the hierarchy of settlements in Trinidad and Tobago, a town with a borough status falls just below what is a city, as it relates to population size and the quantity level and the types of services to be provided. A borough will be able to have enhanced living spaces and communities. A borough will be able to operate with more economic development and progress.

Ms. Ameen: Madam Speaker, again, 55(1).

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, again, Member, part of the difficulty of coming late in the debate—and this goes for everybody who will speak after—is that a lot of the ground would have been traversed already. So, I advise you to develop on another point with respect to this Bill. I think we have traversed what is a borough, what boroughs have and so on in the general context. So, I invite you to maybe deal with a point with Diego Martin and Siparia.

Mr. E. Forde: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Siparia region accounts for only 4 per cent of commercial business activities. Again, we anticipate that as a result of achieving this new borough status, that further development would be able to take place in order to ensure that that percentage of commercial development would improve. Again, we can talk about the Siparia Chamber of Industry and Commerce that is in place. We can talk about Siparia having one of the largest number of schools in any community, and they also have three secondary schools within that particular region.

So, again, Madam Speaker, again, as mentioned by you, the idea of being limited in scope, in terms of having to enhance, what again can be said within this particular debate? I know a lot has been said and, again, I would have been able to make my particular contribution. So, as I conclude, I would just like to conclude

with a quote from our hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley and I quote:

“In the PNM we see local government as bringing down authority and responsibility of service right to your doorsteps, because what you need, where you live, are local government issues.”

So, Madam Speaker, local government is serious business for serious people, and the People’s National Movement is about serious business. Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity.

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

Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me and affording me this opportunity to contribute to this debate the Miscellaneous Provisions (Establishment of the Borough of Diego Martin and the Borough of Siparia) Bill, 2021. Madam Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to join this debate on what may seem to be somewhat an oxymoronic piece of draft legislation, in that while the Bill contained only six clauses that represent a name change and the insertion of such into five other substantive Acts of Parliament, in reality, it is perhaps one of the most impactful changes to our local government system in several years. This is the fourteen time that the Municipal Corporations Act is being amended. Madam Speaker, Members opposite professed to be part of a Government that says that it is serious about local government reform, but yet we are here to advance legislation that would create history—

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now

adjourn to Wednesday, the 26th day of April, 2023 at 1.30 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: So, hon. Members, before I put the question on the adjournment of the House, on Saturday April 22, 2023, our country will observe Eid ul-Fitr, and I now invite Members to express greetings.

3.45 p.m.

Eid ul-Fitr Greetings

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): *Assalamu alaikumwa rahmatullahi wabarakatuhu.* I offer salaams and greetings to this honourable House and to the national community on the celebration of Eid ul-Fitr which is scheduled for tomorrow. Eid ul-Fitr is the smaller of the two Eids or celebrations recognized in the Islam community. The second festival is Eid ul-Adha which is the festival of sacrifice and both of these celebrations are celebrated around the globe. Rooted in the philosophy that grounds Islam, or submission to the will of God, is the concept of a community, the *ummah* as it is referred to in Arabic. The *ummah* is intended to communicate a global community and it is much more than a country, a ballad, or a form of nationhood. And in celebrating Eid ul-Fitr, the breaking of the fast, the community of Muslims around the globe, all have sight upon the moon and the end of fasting, obligatory fasting, for the month of Ramadan.

Ramadan is in fact reference to burning heat in Arabic. It literally is reflective of the hottest month of the year usually as the lunar cycle takes the month from time to time, but it is the first month—the first day of the month that follows, *Shawwal*, which is the month that begins tomorrow, that really recognizes the end of fasting. In the period of fasting, the reference to its meaning, Ramadan, burning heat, is really a play upon the depth of Arabic in and of itself, because the

burning of fasting is exacerbated or made more severe by the fact that your human desire is what is on the watch. Hunger, which reminds you of the poor and distressed in society, echoes loudly when you do not eat between sunrise and sunset.

When you think of thirst, the thirst for knowledge, the thirst for life, the thirst for satisfaction, the human sacrifice in fasting, which is common to all religions, as all religions practise fasting, it becomes something that again binds the *ummah* in Arabia, *ummah* in Muslimeen, the community of Muslims. And dare I say that Islam, being a religion which is recognized very synonymous to Christianity and Judaism in the belief of one God and in the practice, all being good books as the *Qu'ran* itself recognizes, for it says effectively to respect the synagogue and the church for their good worship is done, these religions harmonize the meaning of community.

If we look to the principles of Islam, which Trinidad and Tobago embraces and which the Government embraces together, we recognize certainly that we are dealing with the five pillars in common to all of the community of Trinidad and Tobago. The five pillars of Islam, of course, are: *shahada*, which is the declaration of belief in God; you look to *salat*, which is prayer, which every religion in Trinidad and Tobago recognizes, be we Hindu brothers and sisters, Muslim brothers and sisters or Christian brothers and sisters, Shouter Baptists. If we look to the principle of *zakat*, which is the giving of alms, every religion practices giving of alms. If we look to *sawm*, which is fasting, again we find commonality in this *ummah* in Muslimeen, the community of Muslims which tomorrow recognizes and binds the community of Trinidad and Tobago. And lastly, that pilgrimage of Hajj or making the journey to a holy place, and again there is that community and commonality in Hinduism, in Christianity, in so many of our

religions.

Madam Speaker, the Government recognizes the importance for our Muslim brothers and sisters, but today, from my own part, I recognize how in common it is to the *ummah* or the community of Trinidad and Tobago. Certainly, Eid ul-Fitr, the breaking of the fast and the mandatory giving of alms tomorrow, that mandatory *wajib*, the duty that is upon you to give to the poor and more distressed, it could not be more relevant in our society than now, where kindness is what is appreciated, where giving is what is appreciated, where compassion is what is appreciated. And on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to celebrate the *ummah*, the community to say Eid Mubarak or congratulations on the Eid festival to our Muslim community; to have wished a Ramadan Kareem or a kind Ramadan where reflection and prayer was had; and genuinely, on behalf of us all, to wish Trinidad and Tobago a better future having passed through a month of fasting and prayer.

Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Prime Minister for recognizing in early succession the support that the Government has offered traditionally to the Muslim community during this time, as well as how equal that has been to our other religious sectors. The Government wishes Eid Mubarak to Trinidad and Tobago, and I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. *Assalamu alaikum*, I greet you with the universal greeting of peace. I begin, in the name of Allah, the most beneficent and most merciful. Eid ul-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, a month of immense sacrifice,

prayer and charity. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims from all over the world engage in fasting which is one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam. Allah says in the *Holy Qu'ran*, Surah Al-Baqarah, Chap. 2, Verse 183:

“*Yāayyuhā alladhīna āmanū kutiba ‘alaykumu l-ṣiyāmu kamā kutiba ‘alā alladhīna min qablikum la ‘allakum tattaqūn.*”

O ye who believe, fasting is prescribed to you, as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may become God fearing.

Muslims refrain from food and drink, bad deeds, action and thoughts from dawn to dusk. Fasting is not meant to make us hungry or thirsty, but rather it is meant to increase our *taqwa*, our God consciousness. It is meant to be a shield for us as Muslims. It teaches us about being grateful for the mercies of your Lord. It makes us experience what a person without food or drink faces on a daily basis. And whether you are rich or powerful, fasting humbles you and causes you to experience what a hungry person feels like. The difference is many of us anticipate that at the end of the fast in time for iftar we are guaranteed something to eat or drink but that hungry person does not have the same luxury, and as Muslims we believe that those who fast will have a special gate, the gate of Rayyaan in Jannah to enter, and I pray that we are given that reward.

During Ramadan, we often look forward to iftar time where we enjoy spending time with each other and sharing a meal to commemorate the breaking of the fast. Several mosques from all over Trinidad and Tobago would have hosted iftar and dinner, and today, I wish to pay special acknowledgement to those who were involved in the preparation and distribution of meals. Iftar is a time of togetherness, fellowship and prayer. In the night, we perform a special night prayer called *Tarawih*. Many of us would engage in this prayer and some were fortunate enough to have listened or recited to the entire *Qu'ran*. I am grateful to

all of the Imams who have led us in prayer.

Ramadan is divided into three parts: the first 10 days we ask for the mercy of Allah, the second 10 days we ask for the forgiveness of Allah, and the last 10 days we are asking for the freedom from the fire of hell. One of the odd nights in the last 10 days of Ramadan, we also try to attain the blessings of the night of power, Laylat-al-Qadr, which is better than 1,000 months. These are all the mercies of the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is a bittersweet moment, and as we wish farewell to the holiest month in the Islamic calendar, our hearts are heavy. It is a time where we reflect whether we have another opportunity to witness and reap the rewards of the blessed month. We have seen many close friends and family members who have lost their lives. I attended five funerals in this holy month of Ramadan which brought home to the reality of how fragile life is. I pray that we live to see many more Ramadans.

Muslims seek out the new moon at the end of Ramadan to mark the celebration of Eid ul-Fitr and today many of our Muslim brothers and sisters who are celebrating Eid, I say, Eid Mubarak. Tomorrow there are other Muslims who will celebrate Eid ul-Fitr, inshallah. We are taught in Islam to be respectful to each other. And today, while many of our Muslim brothers and sisters are celebrating Eid at the masjid or at home, we are here. We must be mindful of respecting each other. It should not be that you should be told to absent yourself or abandon your duty in order to practise your religious beliefs.

Muslims have faced our challenges in Trinidad and Tobago with having to fight for the right to wear a hijab, or more recently being able to wear a beard in keeping with the tenets of our religion. Muslims have played a critical role in the development of Trinidad and Tobago. We have served in many capacities from the Head of State, in the Parliament, in the Judiciary, and all other aspects of the

public and private sectors. Ramadan teaches us to continue to give and be charitable. Eid is a time of celebration, so while we enjoy that nice cup of “sawine” and curried goat, let us remember there are those who are in need and we must give to them. Let us be our brothers and sisters’ keepers. Let us build our country together.

I pray to Almighty Allah that he gives us the reward of our sacrifices in this holy month of Ramadan. I especially pray for our safety, peace and harmony in Trinidad and Tobago considering our prevailing circumstances. I stand proud as an elected Muslim Member of Parliament, and on behalf of the Opposition, I wish Trinidad and Tobago, Eid Mubarak. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I am honoured to offer greetings to the Muslim community of Trinidad and Tobago as its members celebrate Eid ul-Fitr. Eid ul-Fitr is a joyous celebration traditionally lasting three days. Muslims mark the occasion with private, commemorative efforts, such as cleaning and preparation of their homes; the preparation of and eating of special delicacies, and wearing new clothes; and community events, such as communal prayer, giving of gifts and visiting friends and family. During this time, Muslims also engage in giving of alms to poor and the vulnerable. Hon. Members, Eid ul-Fitr is the culmination of the holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and observed worldwide by Muslims as a month of fasting, abstinence, prayer, reflection and community.

Indeed, Ramadan demonstrates the balance between endurance and human fragility as this is a great time of personal, physical sacrifice for many, but it is also a time of spiritual reflection and contemplation aimed at drawing closer to God. Therefore, hon. Members, as we observe Eid ul-Fitr this weekend, let us reflect on

Eid ul-Fitr Greetings
Madam Speaker (cont'd)

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the sacrifice, discipline and resilience of our Muslim brothers and sisters which they have endured during Ramadan and apply these principles to our own lives. I therefore take this opportunity on behalf of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and on my own behalf to extend Eid Mubarak to the Muslim community.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.59 p.m.