

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, February 16, 2024*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members I have received communication from Mr. Esmond Forde MP, Member for Tunapuna, and Dr. Lackram Bodoie MP, Member for Fyzabad, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**CONDOLENCES  
(BOODRAMJATTAN)**

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, information recently received advises that former Member of Parliament, Mr. Boodram Jattan, passed away on Friday, November 03, 2023. I now invite Members to offer tributes. Member for Diego Martin Central.

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

**The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister – Communications (Hon. Symon de Nobriga):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise today to offer tribute on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to former Member of Parliament for the constituency of Naparima, Mr. Boodram Jattan, who departed this life on November 03, 2023.

Madam Speaker, a life of service is a life to be honoured, and Boodram Jattan lived a life of service rooted in his community and in the labour movement where he rose to be a prominent leader in the United Labour Front whom he represented as an Opposition Member in the First Republican Parliament from

Condolences (Mr. Boodram Jattan)  
Hon. S. de Nobriga

2024.02.16

September 24, 1976 to September 18, 1981.

Madam Speaker, during his time as an elected representative, he continued to contribute to matters near and dear to his heart. It should be noted that among the key parliamentary debates to which he contributed included the debate on the Report of the Committee to Consider the Rationalization of the Sugar Industry, Finance Committee Report, 1979, and the Motion for an enquiry into the Trinidad-Tesoro Petroleum Company.

Madam Speaker, we on this side recognize Boodram Jattan for his service of the country and offer our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones at this difficult time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Naparima.

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

**Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to bring condolences on behalf of the Members on this side. Boodram Jattan was born on 25 January, 1933, and he died in New York, where he resided, on November 03, 2023.

MP Boodram Jattan served in the First Republican Parliament from September 24, 1976 to September 18, 1981, representing the constituency of Naparima as an Opposition MP under the banner of the ULF. As such, he belonged to that illustrious and iconic group of MPs who represented the constituency. These included those like Lionel Seukeran, Nazim Muradali, Narine Dookie, Alloy Lequay, Doveton Sullivan, who served when the constituency was divided into Naparima North and Naparima South. MP Boodram Jattan was the first to be elected to what we may call the “unified Naparima constituency”. He was followed by Emanuel Hosein, Raymond Palackdharrysingh, Subhas Panday,

Condolences (Mr. Boodram Jattan)  
Mr. Charles

2024.02.16

Ralph Maraj and Nazim Baksh.

As an MP he contributed to many debates, as my colleague said, including those dealing with rationalization of the sugar industry and the Motion calling for an enquiry into Trinidad-Tesoro Company.

Madam Speaker, I attended the function at the New York consulate on August 30, 2013, where he, along with the likes of Mighty Sparrow, Calypso Rose, Mohan Jaikaran and the former Olympian, Edwin Roberts, were honoured for service to Trinidad and Tobago and the diaspora in the United States.

MP Boodram was not averse to controversy and as a cane farmer, he had a keen interest in promoting the welfare of the working class. He, as a Member in the Lower House, represented the interest of the cane farmers. His senatorial colleague at the time, Dora Bridgemohan, was an actual cane cutter and they both reminded all and sundry about the roots of this party and the need never to forget from whence it came.

His working class background led him to align with the more progressive faction within the ULF called the ICFTU, Island Wide Cane Farmers' Trade Union, led by the former army officer, Raffique Shah, and on whose executive sat members from the explicitly Marxist United National Independence Party, the ULF, which won 10 seats in the 1976 elections and control of most local councils that shortly after split into two factions, one led by Raffique Shah and the other by the more pragmatic Basdeo Panday. MP Jattan was a front seat witness to these political convulsions within his party and these led to his departure from active politics in 1981 and his return to cane farming.

When Caroni (1975) Limited was closed in 2003, his cane farming career came to an end and he migrated to the United States where he served spiritually to

**UNREVISED**

Condolences (Mr. Boodram Jattan)

2024.02.16

Mr. Charles

the diaspora as a pundit. He lived a full and satisfied life. He served his country well. He was an eminent and vocal MP for the constituents of Naparima. He continued the service to our diaspora. He was a founding member of the ULF and the UNC. In short, he fought the good fight, even to the very end.

On behalf of the political leader of the United National Congress and those on this side, we say, “Om Sadgati” to our illustrious former Member and colleague.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I too would like to pay tribute to Mr. Boodram Jattan who was a Member of this honourable House during the First Republican Parliament from 1976 to 1981.

Mr. Jattan was the representative for Naparima as an Opposition Member of the United Labour Front, the ULF. Mr. Jattan was a living embodiment of the trade union movement. Prior to his active involvement in party politics, he held the office of Vice-President of the Local Chapter of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, ICFTU, which is an international organization with the primary objective of defending the rights of workers. It therefore almost naturally followed that he would have joined the labourist political party, the United Labour Front, on its coming into existence in 1975, and he ran for and successfully captured the Naparima seat in the general elections of the following year in 1976.

Hon. Members, Mr. Jattan made contributions to key debates during his tenure but he remained firmly focused on matters close to the trade union movement. In 1976, he spoke on the debate of the Report of the Committee to Consider the Rationalization of the Sugar Industry, during which he advocated for

Condolences (Mr. Boodram Jattan)  
Madam Speaker

2024.02.16

agricultural expansion as a bulwark against food insecurity.

Hon. Members, in 2013, Mr. Jattan was honoured with a lifetime achievement award by the Consulate General in New York at its annual Independence Award Ceremony for his service to the sugar workers, his constituents, and by extension, his country.

I take this opportunity to express my sincerest condolences to the Jattan family and pray that they may be granted peace and comfort as they adapt their lives without his presence and that they find consolation in his legacy of service to the defenceless. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

*The House of Representatives stood.*

**Madam Speaker:** May his soul rest in peace. Hon. Members, an appropriate letter will be sent to convey our condolences to the family of the late Mr. Boodram Jattan.

### **PAPERS LAID**

1. Notification of Her Excellency, the President, in respect of the nomination of Mr. Curt Simon, for appointment to act in the Office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2020. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

**UNREVISED**

3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]  
*Papers 2 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*
5. Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre Management Company Limited as at September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Annual Report of First Citizens Group Financial Holdings Limited and its Subsidiary for the year ended September 30, 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. One Hundred and Thirteenth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. One Hundred and Seventeenth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (TTPOST) for the fiscal year 2014 to 2015. [*The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales)*]
10. Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (TTPOST) for the fiscal year 2015 to 2016. [*Hon. M. Gonzales*]
11. Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (TTPOST) for the fiscal year 2016 to 2017. [*Hon. M. Gonzales*]
12. Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation (TTPOST) for the fiscal year 2017 to 2018. [*Hon. M. Gonzales*]

11. Annual Report of the Environmental Management Authority for the year 2022. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Penelope Beckles)*]
12. Administrative Report of the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago for the period October 01, 2019 to September 30, 2020. [*The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly)*]
13. Administrative Report of the National Energy Skills Center (NESC) for the fiscal year 2017/2018. [*Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly*]
14. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2010 to September 2011. [*The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh)*]
15. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2011 to September 2012. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
16. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2012 to September 2013. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
17. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2013 to September 2014. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
18. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2014 to September 2015. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
19. Administrative Report of Queen's Hall for fiscal year 2021. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]

20. Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Fair Trading Commission for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
21. Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Fair Trading Commission for the financial year ended September 30, 2018. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
22. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the Fourteenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited (EMBD) for the Financial Year 2015 and follow-up on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Committee's Seventh Report from the 11th Parliament. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
23. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the Tenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA) on an inquiry into the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Inspectorate. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
24. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Seventeenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of the Management and Operations of the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
25. Second Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Seventeenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of the Management and Operations of the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]



26. The Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the Seventeenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of the Management and Operations of the Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited (SRRIC). [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
27. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Fifteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on a follow-up inquiry on the maintenance of community swimming pools by the Ministry of Sport and Community Development. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
28. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
28. Response of the Auditor General to the Eleventh Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT) for the financial years 2014-2018. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
29. Response of the Auditor General to the Thirteenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on a follow-up examination on the implementation of the recommendations in the Fourth Report of the Committee on the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheet and other Financial Statements of the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) for the financial years 2009-2014. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

30. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Thirteenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on a follow-up examination on the implementation of the recommendations in the Fourth Report of the Committee on the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheet and other Financial Statements of the Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) for the financial years 2009 – 2014. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
31. Ministerial Response of the Thirteenth Report of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on a follow-up examination on the implementation of the recommendations in the Fourth Report of the Committee on the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheet and other Financial Statements of the Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) for the financial years 2009 – 2014. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
32. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Twelfth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited (NIDCO) for the financial years ended September 30, 2015 to 2017 and follow up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Committee's Omnibus Report, First Session, 11th Parliament and Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises on an inquiry into the operations of NIDCO including its compulsory land acquisition in relation to major projects. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
33. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Trade and Industry to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an

- examination of Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
34. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
  35. Response of the Office of the Prime Minister to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
  36. Response of the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination of Food Security in Trinidad and Tobago in alignment with Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
  37. Response of the Office of the Prime Minister to the Eleventh Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT) for the Financial Years 2014-2018. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
  38. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Sport and Community Development to the Eleventh Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (SporTT) for the Financial years 2019 to 2020 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations in the Committee's Second Report from the 11th Parliament, Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

39. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to the Eighteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Provision of Flood Relief Grants by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
40. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the Eighteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Provision of Flood Relief Grants by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

**URGENT QUESTIONS**  
**Oil Spill in Tobago**  
**(Status)**

**Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: As it relates to the recent catastrophic oil spill in Tobago, will the Minister inform this House what is the present status of the sunken vessel and whether it has been capped off from leaking oil into our territorial waters?

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Stuart Young)**: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the oil flow from the vessel has not as yet been capped off, but from the word go when the authorities were notified with respect to it, they did get resources to the point of the vessel. Unfortunately, where the vessel is currently lodged, it is in a reef area and the existing sea conditions have made it very difficult.

Intertwined with the low visibility, the divers who were sent to inspect the vessel to see where the leaking is taking place from—two sets of divers have gone down including experts in this area and have been unable to be able to provide any capping at this stage. The area has been boomed off. They are in the process of

containing the continued oil spill. All of the experts are being brought to bear. We have had Heritage, we have Woodside, BP, we have Petrobras, we have PDVSA, all offering their technical expertise, and I can assure the population that all is being done to assist in dealing with this catastrophe.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. To a follow-up question to the Minister. Minister, based on what you just said about the vessel still leaking oil or pollutants, could you state, what is the plan based on what you would have been told by the experts in capping off this vessel to prevent further ecosystem destruction?

**Hon. S. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the experts in—the technical persons, I was briefed just before coming here, they are putting in place the necessary plan to find a way to drain the contaminants from the vessel. Unfortunately, this has proved very difficult because as at this stage we have not been able to get the schematics for the vessel. The divers have not been able to provide the necessary information as to how many compartments there may be in the vessel. The ROVs that were also sent down to survey the vessel were unable as well to provide any useful information at this stage. So we are currently looking at the employment of, for example, sonar detection and that type of technology to be able to come up with a better plan. But at this stage what they are looking at is how to drain safely the contents of the vessel and to dispose of it safely, and in that aspect they are getting all of the technical expertise that we can.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Another follow-up Minister. Based on the content that is leaking presently, have the authorities have been able to test and confirm what exactly are the contents that are leaking into the waters?

**Hon. S. Young:** Madam Speaker, at this stage we are still waiting for 100 per cent

fingerprint identification from the IMA, but at this stage what we are working on the basis of—because there have been a few labs that have provided their preliminary information, it is a fuel bunkering-type substance.

**Overtured Oil Tanker “Gulfstream”-Tobago  
(Tracking of Vessel)**

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: Given the catastrophic oil spill in Tobago linked to the overturned oil tanker, “Gulfstream”, will the Minister inform this House whether the Government has been able to track the origin of the vessel?

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Stuart Young)**: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the first point to be made is at this stage there has been absolutely no confirmation that we are dealing with an oil tanker. The second point is the use of this word “Gulfstream” and the speculation that is rife in the public is something that this Government is not engaged in. Our information from the Maritime Division, and the Ministry of Works and Transport, and other experts, there are over 350 vessels that are named Gulfstream. We have to deal with facts.

We have engaged the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, and are engaging with a number of intelligence agencies as well as various coast guards throughout the region. We are pursuing via diplomatic channels. All of the leads that we have gotten so far as to where we believe this fuel may have been going, we have made the necessary request of the authorities, for example, in Guyana, in Aruba where we believe the fuel was picked up from. What I would like to tell the population at this stage is to ignore the rife speculation that is taking place—

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

**Hon. S. Young:**—especially in the realm of social media, it is just meant to

disrupt, it is meant to affect their psyche.

The Government is doing all that it can and we have to work with facts, and until we get 100 per cent verification, we are unable to say what vessel this is exactly and who the owners are. But I can assure the population that at this current minute, all investigations are being pursued including dealing with the necessary international agencies where the vessel may have or may not be registered.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Given the aggressiveness of the Government, could the Minister inform this House if the Government has made contact in its attempt to trace the origin and the owners—contact and sought the assistance of the international Maritime organization?

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

**Hon. S. Young:** The answer is yes, Madam Speaker. That would have been one of the first places that the Maritime Division in Trinidad and Tobago went.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, in keeping with the 1992 Protocol of the International Convention and Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage, could the Minister inform this House what immediate steps are being pursued by the Government on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Hon. S. Young:** Madam Speaker, as I just took the time to explain and to the public, and I will repeat it, the Government is using all of the resources at its fingertips, all of them, to be able to track and to trace the origins of this vessel who the currently owner or owners may be. What I may say at this stage is the mere fact that no one has come forward to take responsibility for this vessel speaks a thousand words, and it shows us that whoever is responsible is not, at least at this

stage, prepared to take the liability that is associated with what has happened. But the Government using all of its international connections, and diplomatic channels and means, is in the process of trying to trace this vessel and identify the owners and those who are responsible.

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

**2.00 p.m.**

### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson Regis):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. There are three questions for oral response and we will be answering all three. There are no questions for written response.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre

### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

#### Siparia East Secondary School

#### (Construction update)

**30. Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Further to the response provided to House of Representatives Question No.85 on February 03, 2023, will the Minister provide an update on the construction of the Siparia East Secondary School?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Siparia East Secondary School is 48 per cent complete. The last contractor on this project, Mootilal Ramhit and Sons Contracting Limited, was terminated on December 09, 2015. There has been no further progress on this project to date due to lack of funding. It is note-worthy that the cost of



implementing the school construction projects left incomplete by the previous government in 2015 was in excess of \$3 billion and funds have simply not been available to that extent for this purpose to date. However, the Ministry of Education is cognizant of the difficulties being experienced by the students, parents and staff and consideration will be given to resuming this project in fiscal 2025.

### **D'Abadie Avenue ECCE Centre**

#### **(Construction update)**

**31. Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Further to the response provided to House of Representatives Question No. 60 on November 20, 2020, will the Minister provide an update on the construction of the D'Abadie Avenue ECCE Centre in Avocat?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you Madam Speaker. D'Abadie Avenue ECCE Centre in Avocat is 78 per cent complete. The last contractor, Pricemaster Hardware & Electrical Limited, was terminated on May 13, 2016. There has been no further progress on this project to date due to lack of funding. It is note-worthy to also mention that the cost of school construction projects that were left incomplete by the previous government is in excess of \$3 billion and funds have not been available to that extent for that purpose up to this time. However, the Ministry of Education is cognizant of the difficulties being experienced by staff, students, parents, and will give consideration to resuming this project in fiscal 2025.

**Madam Speaker:** The Whip.

### **Solomon Hochoy Highway Extension to Point Fortin Project**

**(Update on Mon Desir Interchange to Pepper Village Link Road)**

**32. Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Lackram Bodoé (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister provide an update on the link road from the Mon Desir Interchange to Pepper Village of the Solomon Hochoy Highway Extension to Point Fortin Project?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister for Works and Transport.

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

Thank you Madam Speaker. The link road from Mon Desir Interchange to Pepper Village, which is a segment of the Solomon Hochoy Highway Extension to Point Fortin, falls under the contractual obligation of package 6C. Package 6C includes the construction of approximately 2.2 kilometres of a four-lane highway that stretches from the La Brea Interchange to the Southern Main Road, as well as from the Fyzabad Road to Mon Desir Interchange. This project, which began in June 2019, has reached 65.8 per cent completion. Currently, the progress of this project is on pause while we await the finalisation of an essential agreement with BPTT and NGC and the Phoenix Park Gas Processing Limited, which is necessary to allow the highway to cross the gas lines' corridor at two points, including Fyzabad.

Once this agreement is concluded, construction activities will resume with a six-month duration to completion. However, alternative routes for connectivity from Fyzabad have been identified for use in the interim and these interim routes do not affect to flow of traffic from San Fernando to Point Fortin, a journey which now takes approximately 20 minutes during peak periods as a result of the purposeful and determined work of this Government. I thank you.

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Minister, could you give an update on a part of this highway in the vicinity of course of Fyzabad and Mon Desir Interchange? The part of the highway on the Mosquito Creek, commonly called the “Mosquito Crack”, that has been in a state of disrepair for some time and requires refurbishing and I think for technical work as well. Could we get an update on when that work will begin, end, and the possible cost of it?

**2.05 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, the question was specific from the Member for Fyzabad so I did not walk with that information. However, I want to just inform this House that the piece that he is speaking about, as he called it the “Mosquito Crack”, cracked several times under his administration and they never corrected it.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** So we are in the process—the Ministry of Works and Transport and through NIDCO, is in the process of finding a permanent solution for the crack that they actually left. Thank you.

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

**Dr. Moonilal:** Minister, are you aware—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, one minute please. I recognize the Member for Oropouche West. Sorry. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mr. Tancoo:** [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** Means that you are not asking a question?

**Mr. Tancoo:** No.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Member for Oropouche West. Minister,

could you also indicate whether this is the final design for this highway given that this highway flamboyantly opened is really a four-piece highway put together? Is this the final design for the highway that the highway will move from Debe to La Romaine?

**Madam Speaker:** So Member for Oropouche East, in accordance with the Standing Orders, I rule that question out of order. This is not a general discussion on the highway. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much. As a follow-up to the initial first supplemental that was approved, could you indicate the possible cost of repairing the area along the “Mosquito Crack” or Creek.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, again, that question of the Mosquito Creek was not part of the original question. However, if the Member poses a specific question pertaining to that, I am very comfortable to give him whatever answer is required. Thank you.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes, thank you very much. Minister, along the highway of course in that area, Fyzabad area as requested by the Member for Fyzabad, could you indicate whether the safety devices, equipment and so on, along the route have been properly installed at this time?

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So Member, you know, the question is a bit nebulous for me. Are we talking about the Link Road Mon Desir Interchange to Pepper Village? Because I will only allow it if it is that.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes, we are talking about the Link Road and the build-up to the Link Road. So before you go to the Link Road, there is also an area there that was

without safety devices and so on, whether they have been properly installed.

**Madam Speaker:** So I will allow your question in respect to the Link Road.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** So, Madam Speaker, clearly the question is when the road will be completed. The road is not completed, the road is not open so the safety devices are not necessarily in place at this time. The road is just 68 per cent completed so it is not open to the public. Madam Speaker, you know, I know the answer might be a little difficult because remember, the first segment of this highway was opened without the road being finally paved. So it is not the normal thing for us to open a road if it is not complete.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER  
(LEAVE)**

**National Emergency - Oil Spill  
(Coastline of Tobago)**

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House today under Standing Order 17 to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the national emergency due to the disastrous oil spill along the coastline of Tobago.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** The matter is definite because it pertains specifically to a catastrophic oil spill which occurred on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2024, due to the overturned 330-foot vessel identified as *Gulfstream* approximately 18 kilometres east of Tobago. The matter is urgent as public reports nationally, regionally and internationally are emerging each day of the increasing damage. The grave anxiety and vulnerability faced by Tobagonians as well as the severe disruption to the daily lives—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you have a script different to that which was

approved. I am certain the Clerk would have made available to you what has been approved.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, all I have—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I am certain the Clerk would have made available to you the script that was approved. If not, I will have the Clerk pass it to you now and you read what is approved.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, just on a point of clarification, all I have in my possession is the procedure to follow. So, Madam Speaker, do I have your permission to resume?

**Madam Speaker:** Yes but I will ask you to restart so that the record would properly reflect what has been approved. Thank you.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House today under Standing Order 17 to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the national emergency due to the disastrous oil spill along the coastline of Tobago.

The matter is definite because it pertains specifically to an oil spill which occurred on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 2024, due to the overturned 330-foot vessel identified as *Gulfstream* approximately 18 kilometres east of Tobago. The matter is urgent as public reports nationally, regionally and internationally are emerging each day of the increasing damage. The grave anxiety and vulnerability faced by Tobagonians as well as disruption to their daily lives.

The matter is of public importance because it continues to pose major health and safety challenges to the public. Further, the matter is of public importance because this oil spill has already caused and continues to cause irreparable damage to the marine life, reefs and natural habitat and harm to the economy of Tobago. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Definite Urgent Matter

2024.02.16

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have considered the Motion of the Member for Couva South and I am satisfied that this matter qualifies to be raised as a definite matter of urgent public importance.

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

**Madam Speaker:** This matter also requires the leave of the House. Is the House prepared to grant leave?

*Assent indicated.*

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, leave having been granted, in accordance with Standing Order 17(4), the debate on this Motion will stand over until 6.00 p.m.

### **STANDING ORDER 126**

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 126 and with your leave, there has been agreement to allow the Prime Minister to speak until the conclusion of his statement.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Having been so advised by the Leader of the House, Whip, okay, so that therefore I now call upon the Prime Minister.

### **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

#### **Coastline of Tobago and Caribbean Sea Oil Spill**

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much to my colleagues for the facility.

Madam Speaker, I am authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement. I rise, Madam Speaker, as a matter of duty to bring formally to the attention of this distinguished House and the nation a brief update on a matter of great importance that has been prominent in the news since the 7<sup>th</sup> of February

2024, namely, Madam Speaker, the oil spill that is currently affecting the waters and certain parts of the coastline of Tobago and the adjacent waters of the Caribbean Sea.

The nature of the oil spill and the immediacy of the need for a coordinated approach in containing, and where possible, reversing the effects of the spill, led me to declare it a national emergency on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> of February. As with all matters that threaten the welfare of our nation and in particular, given the heightened urgency of matters relating to the preservation of our biodiversity and the intrinsic importance to the health, welfare, security and economic well-being of our nation, the Government and all other relevant agencies have taken this matter very seriously and have been engaged in a focused, coordinated, strategic and rapid response in addressing, containing and where possible, preventing contamination and other damage caused by the spill and by deploying the range of resources available locally and through collaboration with regional and extra-regional partners and authorities.

Madam Speaker, the sequence of actions and initiatives undertaken by our local authorities are consistent with our National Oil Spill Contingency Plan of 2013. I refer here, Madam Speaker, to a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 2024, to the Chief Administrator Tobago House of Assembly, Mrs. Denese Toby-Quashie and this letter would have come from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries with respect to the oil spill off the coast of Tobago dated 8<sup>th</sup> of February, 2024, and I quote:

Reference is made to the matter at subject. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries wishes to advise that it was made aware by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, the TTCG, at around 9.00 a.m. on February 07, 2024, of an overturned vessel in the area of Canoe Bay,



Tobago, that was spilling an oil-like substance.

Following this notification, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries proceeded to coordinate a virtual meeting at 2.00 p.m. on February 07, 2024 to ascertain the current status of the incident with other regulatory agencies including the Tobago Emergency Management Agency, TEMA and the Environmental Management Agency, the Institute of Marine Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard and the Maritime Services Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport. Arising out of this meeting, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries offered technical support to TEMA who confirmed that TEMA was the agency responsible for managing this incident.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries followed up with Mr. Allan Stewart of TEMA at 6.20 p.m. on February 07, 2024 and 1.30 p.m. on February 08, 2024, wherein the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries reiterated its offer of technical support and was informed that TEMA is managing the response and would engage the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries if required.

In this regard—Madam Speaker—please note that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries stands ready—

And I am quoting, Madam Speaker, so I should rephrase that because “Madam Speaker” was not mentioned in this. I quote:

In this regard, please note that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries stands ready to provide technical support to TEMA as TEMA coordinates the response to this matter. Further, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries wishes to advise that it is deploying a team to Tobago and expects to have these individuals on the ground tonight, Thursday 08,

February, 2024.

**2:20 p.m.**

Should any assistance be required, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries' point of contact will be Mr. Marc Rudder, Chief Technical Officer, who can be contacted at 462-7175.

Signed by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, the following key agencies were activated in an emergency response meeting among the following key agencies: the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard; the Institute of Marine Affairs; the Environmental Management Authority, the EMA; the Maritime Services Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport; Tobago Emergency Management Agency, TEMA, and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

This crisis management meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries at 2.00 p.m., on Wednesday, 07 February, 2024, during which the Tobago Emergency Management Agency indicated that the Tobago Oil Spill Contingency Plan was immediately triggered, and that TEMA would be leading and managing the response. The MEEI, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, has informed TEMA that it is available and prepared to provide technical support to TEMA in managing this incident.

A Ministry team has been dispatched to Tobago to provide assistance should TEMA and the THA so desire. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries dispatched a team of petroleum inspectors from its Petroleum Operations Management Division to Tobago under the leadership of Mr. Rudder, Chief Technical Officer at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, to assist the Tobago House Assembly and the Tobago Emergency Management Agency with

respect to containing and managing the oil spill incident in Tobago.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, the hon. Stuart Young MP, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, and Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan, Minister of Works and Transport, met with the hon. Farley Augustine, Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, THA, in Scarborough, Tobago. Both Ministers, Young and Sinanan, offered continued support and expertise from the Ministries to the THA and TEMA. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries personnel were also present and have been participating and providing expertise in the response exercise which is underway.

Heritage Petroleum Company Limited sent resources to Tobago, including personnel and equipment, to assist in the response to this ongoing situation. This follows the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries initially requesting assistance from Woodside Energy and their approval of the use of a private service contractor, Kaizen Environmental Services (Trinidad) Limited, that Woodside Energy had in Tobago with the expertise to deal with containment and clean-up operations.

Further, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has been in contact with the leadership of both bpTT and Shell Trinidad Limited, both of whom have offered to provide assistance, through the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, in dealing with the situation.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries continues to provide support and assistance in this matter. All the correspondence provide a comprehensive and accurate account of all that has taken place in a multidisciplinary, multisectoral team approach, and should help to dispel some recent inaccurate, irresponsible and misleading commentary that there has been an attempt to conceal information from the public, particularly the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly on

the matter of the oil spill. Madam Speaker, there has been no hint of any cover-up.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, as soon as it became clear that there was a serious problem brewing on the Tobago coastline, I was informed and I immediately directed that the relevant Ministers not only assume their responsibilities, but that they be physically present in Tobago as often as required in order to ensure that the functions of the central Government are faithfully and comprehensively discharged to the people of Tobago, in conjunction—

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—and collaboration with the relevant officers in Tobago.

To this end, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Works and Transport, among others, have made several visits to Tobago. Additionally, Madam Speaker, I myself, as Prime Minister, travelled to Tobago on the morning of Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> February and reviewed the situation with technical staff and the THA officials there. This visit provided opportunity on Sunday afternoon for a joint press conference which featured the Prime Minister and the Chief Secretary and all relevant department heads before the local media.

At this event, all the information available to the Government was presented to the public and to the Tobago House of Assembly. It is therefore quite disturbing and disappointing to hear the head of the Tobago Executive, the Chief Secretary, introduce to the public that the Government had pertinent sensitive information which was being withheld from the Tobago House of Assembly. Madam Speaker, nothing is further from the truth.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** This is an unnecessary gratuitous slur on the many

professionals who are currently engaged in this process. A major multipronged investigation is currently underway accompanying the physical activities. Under these circumstances, new, even unconfirmed information and reports are constantly being unearthed, both here at home and from many sources in many different countries outside of Trinidad and Tobago.

What is even more alarming, Madam Speaker, is the statement from the Chief Secretary which attempts to link this tragedy and its liabilities to the Petrotrin Refinery and any of the many companies that do business with or are interested in any of its subsidiaries and their assets. The Government, Madam Speaker, knows of no such existence of any such interest or conflict and view this assertion as patently ridiculous.

Madam Speaker, while we have made good progress and have identified many leads which are being followed up in the ongoing investigations, there is, as yet, no definitive identification of operators or ownership and confirmation of the offending party or parties. We have also not yet determined the nature of the operation which resulted in the wreckage drifting to our shores.

What is a fact, Madam Speaker, is that notwithstanding who is responsible, we have to protect, preserve and restore the environment. We will also relentlessly seek to find out who is responsible and hold them liable for all that they are required to indemnify us for.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I have made it quite clear to the people of Tobago and the rest of the nation that this event was not budgeted for in the annual allocation—

**Hon. Members:** [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, could you protect my speech from the

Member for Naparima, please?

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, all Members, could you abide by Standing Order 53 and listen in silence, please? Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have made it quite clear to the people Tobago and the rest of the nation that this event was not budgeted for in the annual allocation but the costs of dealing with it must be assumed by the Ministry of Finance as an extraordinary inescapable expense.

The Ministry of National Security, in particular the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, immediately reached out to other local and regional agencies, including the Maritime Services Division, I.R. Consilium through an expert consultant, CARICOM IMPACS, and the Guyana Coast Guard in an urgent effort to identify the vessels and their owners and operators. As new information comes to hand, we may need to talk to other jurisdictions, including Venezuela. At the moment, we have offers of help from major oil-handling nations, Brazil and Venezuela. The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs is in contact through the established protocols and will continue to advance these discussions.

The vessel is, as of now, still stuck on the reef at Cove and continues to pose a major threat as it continues to foul the coastline and surrounding seas. Our major task now is to empty the contents of the vessel in a controlled operation and neutralize the threat. We are assessing the scope of what is required and are seeking the pertinent expertise where we do not have it. Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is not only a hydrocarbon-producing nation, but we are also a maritime nation surrounded by waterways which are open to a wide range of international maritime traffic. These circumstances always expose us to certain risks like oil spills. I have seen a lot of uninformed commentary about closure of our borders and the use of permits for passage through our territorial marine space.

Suffice it to say, Madam Speaker, that unlike our airspace, there is no international law which requires non-military vessels from exercising the right of innocent passage through our waters. This being so, we have always had to anticipate unwelcome events like these, and it is for this purpose that the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan is in place and is currently activated to Tier 2, meaning that we are handling the situation according to plan, but may require a bit of outside help. However, we have not yet declared a Tier 3 emergency but that may be forthcoming.

Madam Speaker, all the protocols are in place and are being followed. It requires that our professional teams be resourced and be allowed to do their jobs and that all parties, local and national, respect the breadth and borders of their own responsibility and authorities, work in a cooperative and collaborative way, and at all times refrain from mischievous, unhelpful and damaging speculation.

At this stage, Madam Speaker, we believe that the whole situation was triggered by a towing operation gone bad. In assisting with the investigation, CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security, IMPACS, contacted the authorities in Panama and Aruba for photographs of the tugboat and the other vessels and in response, the Dutch authorities in Aruba provided images of both vessels which can help in confirming the identity of one of the vessels. The nature and legality of the operations are still to be unravelled. We undertake at the level of the central Government to do all that is necessary to deal with this threat which came to us from outside—and it is outside of our own activities—and to hold responsible all who polluted our environment. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

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

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 24(4). Prime Minister, given your statement and given that the oil spill from the capsized vessel is now beyond 144 kilometres in length—based on the information supplied by the Tobago Emergency Management Agency, TEMA—and fuel continues to leak from this vessel, could the Prime Minister inform this House if the Government has given due consideration and liaised with the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, Mr. Farley Augustine, as it relates to raising the disaster level tier from Tier 2 to Tier 3 based on the impact to the island’s economy and the environment?

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

**2.35 p.m.**

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I would have taken that my statement would have made the point that our operation is collaborative and all agencies, local and national, are engaged and expected to engage in a collaborative approach.

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

### **Standing Order 126**

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very kindly once again, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 126 and with your leave, there has been agreement to allow the Minister of Finance to speak until the conclusion of his statement.

### **Salaries Review Commission (113<sup>th</sup> and 117<sup>th</sup> Reports)**

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am authorized by the Cabinet to make this statement on the laying in this honourable House of the 113<sup>th</sup> and 117<sup>th</sup> Reports of Salaries Review Commission.



With respect to the 113<sup>th</sup> Report of the SRC, the President of the Republic Trinidad and Tobago, by letter dated March 13, 2020, conveyed her approval for the Salaries Review Commission to undertake a general review of the terms and conditions of service of officers within its purview. In that 2020 review, the Commission considered the economic challenges that the country was facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the economic challenges that the country had faced since 2014, which was the last time there was a general review of the terms and conditions of service of offices within its purview. After consideration of all the circumstances, historical precedent and the factors prevailing at that time, the Commission recommended in its 113<sup>th</sup> Report that the existing salaries and allowances of offices within the Commission's purview be maintained for the period 2014 to 2020. In other words, that there should be no increases in salaries and allowances for the six-year period 2014 to 2020.

With respect to the 117<sup>th</sup> Report of the SRC, the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, by letter dated April 14, 2023, conveyed her approval for the Salaries Review Commission to undertake a review of the terms and conditions of service of offices within its purview based on the results of the job evaluation exercise and compensation survey, which was undertaken by the Personnel Department in respect of such offices.

In the course of conducting the general review, as reported in the 89<sup>th</sup> Report of the SRC, undertaken in June 2009, almost 15 years ago, a large number of office holders requested changes in the relative positioning of their jobs within the existing salary structure. At that time, the SRC expressed the view that an assessment of the duties and responsibilities attached to the various offices should be carried out and considered that it might be appropriate for a job evaluation exercise to be undertaken. Cabinet, in July 2009, agreed to accept the

recommendations of the SRC for the conduct of a job evaluation exercise to evaluate offices under the purview of the Salaries Review Commission and for the conduct of a compensation survey to be undertaken.

Given the diverse occupational groupings which fall within the purview of the SRC, it was considered prudent that a diagnostic exercise be conducted to provide guidance and considerations for the conduct of the job evaluation exercise and compensation survey. Upon identifying a suitable consultant, the diagnostic exercise commenced in 2012 and was completed in January 2013. Thereafter, Cabinet's approval was obtained in August 2014 for the conduct of the job evaluation exercise of the offices within the purview of the Salaries Review Commission and the conduct of a compensation survey.

It was intended that the job evaluation exercise and the compensation survey would be undertaken between August 28, 2014, and the general review immediately following the 98<sup>th</sup> report. Subsequent to Cabinet's approval for the conduct of the job evaluation exercise and compensation survey, through an open tendering process overseen by the Central Tenders Board, Korn Ferry Limited, formerly known as Hay Group Limited, the consultant, was formally contracted in December 2015 to provide consultancy services for the conduct of a job evaluation exercise and compensation survey for the offices within the purview of the SRC.

In approaching the conduct of the compensation survey, the SRC developed a compensation philosophy, which was guided by the draft compensation policy of the public service. Key elements of the philosophy included:

1. The need to attract, motivate, retain and engage individuals committed to public service.
2. The need to differentiate appropriately among differing levels of experience, knowledge, skills and abilities.

3. The need to utilize a total reward framework in assessing appropriate compensation for offices falling within its purview.

The conduct of job evaluation exercise was facilitated by the establishment of a job evaluation committee, comprising members of various backgrounds representing each of the occupational groupings within the purview of the SRC. The committee consisted of office holders from among the family groupings of elected and appointed offices, top managers in the public service and statutory bodies, commissions and boards, the legal service and representatives of the Personnel Department.

In instances where members of the committee were no longer serving in their respective offices, provision was made to maintain continuity. Committee members were expected to have a thorough understanding of the work of the offices being evaluated, including the context in which the offices operate to be open-minded and to take an objective view of the exercise. To that end, the committee received certain relevant training by the consultant. The committee's mandate was to work in collaboration with the consultant and stakeholders to produce, test and validate the evaluation of the offices.

The SRC has noted that in the conduct of the job evaluation exercise for all offices, other than judicial offices, the job evaluation methodology utilized was the Hay Methodology Point Factor System, the Hay Guide Chart-Profile Method. With respect to the evaluation of judicial offices, representation was made by the Judiciary of the Republic from as early as May 2018, that the Hay Methodology was unsuitable.

In consideration of the concerns raised by the Judiciary, the SRC agreed in September 2020, to approve the development and implementation of an adapted job evaluation methodology, which included criteria and descriptors specifically

developed to address the complexities of the unique duties and responsibilities of the judicial offices. These offices represented 7.6 per cent of the offices subjected to the evaluation exercise. Consequently, a bespoke methodology, outside of the Hay Guide Chart-Profile Method was developed with input from the consultant, the Judiciary and the Personnel Department to assess the positions which fall within the category of the judicial offices.

The compensation survey was undertaken by the consultant in 2019. The objectives of the compensation survey was to understand how comparable jobs in the private sector were compensated when compared to certain benchmark offices under the purview of the SRC. Underpinning the conduct of the compensation survey was the desire to examine and compare total compensation, defined as a combination of basic salary, allowances and benefits. Some key benefits of the public services noted by the SRC included the value of pension, vacation leave entitlement, tax exemptions on motor vehicle purchases and tax-free income by certain office holders.

The remuneration packages have therefore been determined by the SRC, based on what it considers to be a fair comparison with levels of remuneration paid within the private sector for broadly comparable jobs, taking into account differences in other conditions of employment, including but not limited to security of tenure, medical benefits for full-time offices, non-contributory pension arrangements, enhanced vacation leave eligibility and the intrinsic value of public service versus lower job security, more volatile wage compensation and variable benefits in the private sector.

Additionally, the compensation recommendations of the SRC are based on the results of the evaluation exercise and the compensation survey and represent an objective assessment of what holders of the offices should receive. The SRC has

noted that the exercise was not based on a performance review of office holders, but rather on a job evaluation exercise and a compensation survey conducted in accordance with recommended best practices.

During the process of developing a core salary grade structure, the consultant recommended, and it was accepted, that five families be established to assign the occupational groupings, with each family having 12 grades. Benchmark positions were established in each of the five families. The families established are elected and appointed officials; judicial offices; legal offices; top managers in the public service and statutory bodies, and appointed officials to commissions and boards.

Further, the consultant recommended, and it was accepted, that the offices of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Prime Minister are unique offices and should not be included in the family groupings. Similarly, the SRC recognized that the members of the higher Judiciary, the Chief Justice, Justice of Appeal and Puisne Judge also occupy a unique position in our society and as such should not also be included in the family groupings.

In addition, 10 offices were categorized outside of the family groupings listed in the previous paragraph and placed in a no-family alignment group. These offices are regarded as standalone. A listing of the offices in the various categories outlined are set out in Appendix I of the report. The SRC noted by legislation certain offices under the purview of the SRC were reclassified with the result that the terms and conditions applicable to such offices were amended. These offices included the Master of the High Court, Chief Magistrate, Registrar and Marshal of the Supreme Court, Court Executive Administrator, and Registrar General. The impact of the legislative amendments was not considered in the conduct of the job evaluation exercise.

Finally, the SRC has acknowledged in its 117<sup>th</sup> Report that the completion of the job evaluation exercise was substantially delayed, and in fact it took over 14 years from the time that the Cabinet agreed in June 2009, to accept the recommendations of the SRC for the conduct of a job evaluation exercise to evaluate offices under the purview of the SRC and for the conduct of a compensation survey to be undertaken, and has given reasons in the report for the delay. The 113<sup>th</sup> and 117<sup>th</sup> Reports of the Salaries Review Commission have thus been laid for the consideration of Members of this House. Thank you.

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

**CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) BILL, 2024**

Bill to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

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

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam, Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

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

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

*And whereas* section 123(4) of the Constitution provides that the President

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
Hon. F. Hinds

2024.02.16

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

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

*And whereas* the President has on the 2nd day of February, 2024 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

*And whereas* it is expedient to approve the Notification;

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

**2:50 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, Curt Gerard Simon, is a long-standing police officer attached, of course, to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. By way of his educational achievements, he holds a Master of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice from the University of the West Indies. More particularly, he researched and developed a project entitled:

“Retired Homicide Investigations’: Perceptions of Factors Impacting the Investigations and Solving of Homicides: a phenomenological study..”

And that was acquired in 2021. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Criminal Justice: Police Science, from the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago; and he acquired that in 2017. He achieved in 2014, an Associate of Arts in Criminal Justice with high honours from the said College of

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
Hon. F. Hinds

2024.02.16

Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago.

He boasts of particular skills and abilities including, but not limited to, developing, implementing, and evaluating policies using research to guide decision-making, the high motivation of team members, the capacity to identify problems and seek solutions to them—policing solutions. He boasts of excellent communication skills, and working with and building teams in the fight against crime across Trinidad and Tobago. He has received some particular awards including the Police Science Outstanding Academic Achievement, an award for excellence in research from COSTAATT, and a Certificate of Appreciation from the Homicide Bureau of Investigations as far back as 2005.

Insofar as his professional experience is concerned, Madam Speaker, at the executive level of the police service he functioned as Deputy Commissioner with responsibility for intelligence and investigations, and that began in December of 2022, and continues to the present day.

**2.55 p.m.**

He, as an Assistant Commissioner, was responsible for the police North Eastern Division in 2022, November—from 2022. As Assistant Commissioner, he was as well in charge of the White Collar Crime Division of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. He was responsible for the command and control of the Central Division between 2020 and 2022, and of course, as Superintendent of Police—and as Assistant Superintendent of Police from 2018 through 2019, he led the Fraud Squad of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. He was as an Assistant Superintendent between 2014 and '15, a Homicide Investigator, leading investigations in the Homicide Bureau, and he served in that capacity in the



Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
Hon. F. Hinds

homicide division from 2006 right up to 2015 through the ranks of Corporal, Sergeant, Inspector and Assistant Superintendent of Police.

Even before that, as far back as his beginnings in the police service in 1990, he served doing general police duties in the Southern Division and as a police detective between 1992 and 2005.

**Mr. Young:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Yes. Madam Speaker, he has demonstrated increasing responsibility in all of that, as I indicated, leading to his current—well, his recent appointment to act as Deputy Commissioner, Intelligence and Investigations, and that continued.

Madam Speaker, in light of this and in keeping with my responsibility, in accordance with the Constitution, I commend this candidate for our consideration, and I beg to move.

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

*Question proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East.

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

**Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to make a few brief comments pursuant to the Motion piloted by the Member for Laventille West and Minister of National Security.

Madam Speaker, just for absolute clarity and for the parliamentary record, on the Order Paper that was provided to me, the Motion that gives rise to an acting appointment pursuant to the constitutional provisions in the name of Mr. Curt Simon, this Motion is in the name of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister, who is present in the House today, has delegated this to the Minister of National

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

Security, and the Minister of National Security, I think it must be stated for the record, has piloted this Motion on behalf of the Prime Minister since it is not stated in his name.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Simon is no stranger to the Parliament, and indeed is no stranger to those in law enforcement. He has had a very distinguished career as a police officer, has given invaluable service to the police service and to the country, and it is not the first time we are debating Mr. Curt Gerard Simon for an appointment to act as Deputy Commissioner of Police. In fact, an anomaly arose that it is stated in the curriculum vitae provided to us that Mr. Simon is currently the Deputy Commissioner in the TTPS for Intelligence and Investigations. I believe that there was a break in the service some time when Mr. Simon traveled abroad, and that necessitates our return to the Parliament to continue—to have a continuation of Mr. Simon in the position of Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police.

Madam Speaker, I wish not to go through in detail the résumé and read at length an impressive resume of a committed public officer, but to state that one of the valuable traits of Mr. Simon, of course, is his work in operations. And at a time when we face enormous challenges, managing crime, managing the brutality of the criminal elements and the sheer trauma faced by citizens—and I can indicate, Madam Speaker, those of us on this side, because of the work of the Leader of the Opposition, we are exposed to persons in this society who report to us at our very successful anti-crime symposium—

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** —organized by the Leader of the Opposition. I believe the next one would be on Monday coming, 19<sup>th</sup>. Where?

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

2024.02.16

**Mr. Hosein:** At the Chaguanas Borough Corporation.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** At the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. And, Madam Speaker, those anti-crime symposia, citizens come and, you know, bear their chest and speak of the trauma, the brutality of being victims of crime. And it is heartening that Mr. Simon would have experience in operations because one of the challenges with the TTPS over the years, with great respect to officers and their service, is one has the innate belief that experience in operations should, in some way, carry a different weight than someone who, no fault of their own, would have spent decades in more administrative services, in offices doing, you know, administrative work, as opposed to the police work, so to speak. But I mean it in no disparaging way, only to state that it is welcomed that Mr. Simon has this type of exposure.

Madam Speaker, I am also in a favourable position to speak on this because Mr. Simon himself has appeared, I believe, not at one, but at two or three—possibly three meetings of the Joint Select Committee on National Security, chaired by the Member for Port of Spain South. And Mr. Simon has presented himself as Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police and presented himself with commendation in responding to very serious issues surrounding the operations in the police service, surrounding equipment and some of the problems that the police service would face, some of the challenges, and he has been forthwith attending and forthright in his response to questions and comments and so on.

Madam Speaker, I also want to ask a question: How long would Mr. Simon be serving for? Since I have no argument to raise against his appointment, I wanted to ask if Mr. Simon will be serving in this position for 10 minutes, 15 minutes, two hours, three hours, because, Madam Speaker, there are three Motions again on the

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

Order Paper calling for substantive appointments to the three offices on the establishment for Deputy Police Commissioner. There are three and only three.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** There are no four offices as Deputy Commissioner of Police. So when we deal with this matter now and we speak in glowing terms of Mr. Simon to act, what is the Government saying?—either Ms. George, Mr. Benjamin or Mr. Lucas do not have your confidence?

**Madam Speaker:** Just be careful with the rule against anticipation. Okay?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Sure.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** So, Madam Speaker, I will leave—yeah, I will leave that for later in the day to speak. But I am hoping—and I want to return to Mr. Simon. I am hoping that Mr. Simon's appointment is not a farce, that two hours from now he ceases to be Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police. Because one cannot understand how you can have four Deputy Commissioners of Police.

**Mr. Charles:** Correct.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** How will that work?

**Mr. Charles:** Correct.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** [*Inaudible*]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Excuse me?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Mr. Norton.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Oh yes, I have a note. And, Madam Speaker, this Government is now becoming infamous for declaring that something is important and critical and we must do it now, and then they adjourn the House to a date to be fixed.

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

2024.02.16

Madam Speaker, we have had this situation where a gentleman by the name of Andre Norton was on the Order Paper. A notification came to appoint him in 2021 or thereabouts as a Deputy Commissioner of Police and the Government left it on the Order Paper, that Mr. Norton, who was an outstanding applicant and got the confidence of the Police Service Commission, got his nomination here and was just dismissed by this Government and never even bothered to reapply given that, you know, problem. And it raises an issue that I will put to Mr. Simon, because we need to come back to Mr. Simon, of course. Simon says.

Madam Speaker, what happens—one of the crises that we face in this society and in the TTPS, because we interact with the TTPS often in the Joint Select Committee and so on, is morale. And we cannot have a situation where it becomes now, with monotonous frequency, that persons who top—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Member, give way, please?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** No, I am not—call the Standing Order. Madam Speaker, it cannot be that persons stop a process and then they are discarded for someone who came lower down in the order, and the person who is lower in the order then appear and give instructions and directions and commands to someone who they topped in a process.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And Mr. Simon himself is now moments away, I imagine, from being approved to act in this position, to act as a Deputy Commissioner of Police, while his colleague, Mr. Andre Norton, who topped the process, got his name on an Order Paper in this Parliament and it was left to wither by this very administration that say, “Filling all the positions are important in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.”

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

Madam Speaker, there are also one or two other matters pertinent to Mr. Simon's career that I would just like to touch on. And Mr. Simon—of course, the Minister has already pointed out the skills and ability and so on. Mr. Simon has also worked in the community, in terms of engaging community representatives, local government, Members of Parliament and so on. He has an excellent track record of initiating structured responses to gang violence, and so on, and so forth. Mr. Simon is also, Madam Speaker, one possessed of management and executive training and has done a lot of work in training, in conducting lectures in the communities and so on.

When we made our enquiry—I do not want to say we did intelligence report—but when we did our enquiry on the officer in question today, one received commendable reports of his work, of his interfacing with members of the public, of his accessibility in certain crises, and in moments when we have to depend on quick responses from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, he had responded to many in local government, in parliamentary politics and so on, in a very professional manner. He has also been out in the front, working on the ground, on roadblocks, on dealing—as I said, dealing with the operations part of policing which is welcomed at this time. It is a pity, of course, that Mr. Simon is, in a sense, before us to act as a Deputy Commissioner of Police, rather than a substantive—

**Hon. Member:** Confirmation.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—confirmation, given his service and given the reports that we have received. So, Madam Speaker with those few words, I thank you.

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

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Saddam Hosein** (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to join this debate. Madam Speaker, the exercise that we are engaged in today is for, really, the appointment, the confirmation of the selection of the Police Service Commission, the new Police Service Commission that was collapsed due to political interference by high-ranking public officials in this country. And that is the first point I wish to make, Madam Speaker, that these Service Commissions ought to exercise their function in an independent manner, free from political interference.

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

**3.10 p.m.**

**Mr. S. Hosein:** So, we are here now, with a fresh Police Service Commission, and this Police Service Commission has—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48 (6) please.

**Madam Speaker:** Member overrule. Please continue.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, I just wish to raise one issue, with respect to the exercise that we are engaged in here today, and I say this in the context of a letter that was received on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, 2024. And this letter is addressed to the Leader of Government Business in the House of Representatives, Member of Parliament, the hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, under the hand of Kristy Mohan, attorney-at-law, and Madam Speaker, I wish to read this particular letter into the record, because it is important as—

**Hon. Members:** [*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** One minute, in terms of—before I let you go any further, what we are dealing with here is the nomination of Mr. Curt Simon to act as Deputy

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

2024.02.16

Commissioner, so that if you are doing something that relates to this—now this is not a general debate on the Police Service Commission. If what you are going to read is related to this nomination that is before us, it is okay. I just want to warn you, I do not know what it is, but I heard you made a very broad statement about the exercise that we are engaged in. Okay, so just be cautious, so that I will not have to rise and stop you, if you are off the point.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** I am so guided, Madam Speaker. This particular letter deals directly with the appointment of Deputy Commissioner of Police and there is—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** The appointment or the nomination?

**Mr. S. Hosein:** The nomination please, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, okay.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** And, Madam Speaker, this is in relation to a claim that has been filed in the High Court of Justice, CV 2023-3004 Zaheer Riaz Ali—

**Mr. Young:** Madam Speaker, 48(2), by definition the Member just confirmed that this matter is sub judice, and that is why you should not talk about it.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** So—Member for Siparia, if it is a matter that is sub judice, we know the rule, okay. So, that while I will allow you to mention, we are not going into this matter, so let me see where you are going, but be careful.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** We wish not to traverse any of the issues, facts, whatsoever into that particular matter. All I wish to say is that, what we are privy to, in terms of the letter, is that a decision is forthcoming in this matter on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February, 2024, and I wonder whether or not this is a proper exercise of a parliamentary debate, having regard to this matter being actively before the courts, right now the



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

High Court of Justice. Madam Speaker, and I wish that the Government gives us some clarification with this particular matter, there being an active matter before the court, ready for the decision on the 29th of this month in relation to the nomination of persons for the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. Those are the few points I wish to make with respect to process that we are engaged in Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. S. Hosein:** We have a Standing Order? No. Madam Speaker, with respect to the appointment of Mr. Curt Simon, this Parliament has already approved an acting appointment for Mr. Curt Simon.

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

**Mr. S. Hosein:** I wish to also add my voice to some of the points my friend from Oropouche East would have raised, in terms of Mr. Simon's qualifications, having engaged with respect to studies in criminology at the University of the West Indies, in terms of, particular studies where cases based on what we provided for, that where officers who retire, how they impact the criminal justice system. And I think that is really something useful to have, in terms of an individual serving in the Police Service, Commissioner, especially at that high management level.

It is a pity, Madam Speaker, that Mr. Simon is not one of the names to be nominated as a substantive Deputy Commissioner of Police, having regard to the fact that he has served in this position before—he has made himself available to joint select committees of this Parliament, and provided whatever information he can, in terms of the strategic way forward for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

We understand the crisis that we are in, with respect to the criminal

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

situation Madam Speaker, but Trinidad and Tobago and this Parliament being a creature of the constitution, must act within the four corners of the law, and we must respect the separation of powers, in terms of the executives, the judiciary and the legislature.

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

**Mr. S. Hosein:** And the exercise we are engaged in, Madam Speaker, without anticipating anything that may happen in the future, I hope that this is not an exercise in futility, as it is before active consideration before a high court judge and I thank you very much Madam Speaker.

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

**3.15 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Arouca/Maloney.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am concerned because I have received no such correspondence and I do not know what the Member is talking about. In addition to that, Madam Speaker, by his own words, the Member is trying to delegitimize the process of—

**Hon Member:** —of the Parliament.

**Mr. Hosein:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, you are. The Member is trying to delegitimize the process that we have agreed; it is the process for these members of the police service to be nominated and to be brought before the Parliament, because he is questioning the role of the Service Commission. Madam Speaker, if that is so—

**Mr. Hosein:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes. You stood there and just questioned the role of the Service Commission. Madam Speaker—

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
Hon. C. Robinson-Regis (cont'd)

**Madam Speaker:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Sorry, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, the court has not injuncted the Parliament from speaking about this matter. We do not even know what this matter is about before the court and yet the Member has tried to insert the court in this entire process—

**Dr. Rowley:** Led by his leader.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:**—by saying that we should not be dealing with this matter, led by the Member for Siparia. Madam Speaker, it is not fair to the Parliament when we have a certain job to do, the court has its job to do, and the Service Commission has its job to do, to try and stop us from doing what is legitimately our job—

**Mr. Young:** Correct.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:**—in relation to the governance of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, this is a constitutional remit—

**Mr. Young:** Correct.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:**—of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and it is passing strange that on this occasion the Member for Barataria/San Juan would want to injunct us from dealing with this matter. Madam Speaker, this is a matter that is legitimately before the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. The nominations have come; the notifications have come through the Service Commission to the President. The President has sent it here and we are here to debate legitimately, Madam Speaker.

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
Hon. C. Robinson-Regis (cont'd)

**Dr. Rowley:** “Doh know what he is talkin’ about”.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, I am totally—

**Dr. Rowley:** Dumbfounded.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** —dumbfounded, flabbergasted, totally unaware of what the Member of Parliament speaks, and if he has information then he needs to give it to me. Madam Speaker, Thank you very much for this opportunity.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Madam Speaker, just as the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney asserts her right, and the right of that side, to do what they think best, legitimately do so. e on this side have a duty to bring matters to the attention of the Parliament and to the public—

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

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—if these are matters of concern. So if the Government has one view—we always say, “Let the Opposition have its say, the Government will have their way”, that is the legitimate business of this Parliament, and if matters come to our attention—I have seen a copy of the email. Maybe the Member did not read her emails, I do not know. I have seen it copied to the Chief Whip. It was copied to the Clerk of the House, and it is our duty, if there is something that may be remiss—this judgment is due on the 29<sup>th</sup>, it is two weeks away.

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

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Why is it that we could not wait?

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Madam Speaker, the Member spoke of the matter and the court matter, I am not going to the merits of the case, but we have a duty and we will live to regret what is happening here today—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Tell us.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—because you are—you really want me to go into those details, Madam? You really do? Then I will read the letter.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Well, go ahead.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I got the letter on the email.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** It was copied to the Chief Whip. It was Chief Whip. The Chief Whip leads our—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Listen. Listen. Listen.

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

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Temper—the others will have a chance, Madam. I think and I reassert that we have a duty on behalf of the public for the good governance of T&T—

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

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—to raise concerns that we have, and that is what we have done and we will continue so to do. I thank you for your time.

**Madam Speaker:** The Minister of National Security.

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

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Madam Speaker, there is precious little to be said further, it has been clearly adumbrated by my friend, the Member for Arouca/Maloney. Madam Speaker, the Member for

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Curt Simon)  
Hon. F. Hinds (cont'd)

Oropouche East asked with a tone of sarcasm and usual inciting unnecessary energies in the society, that—you know, he asked how long would the appointment of Mr. Simon as Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police last. I simply want to place on the record that the Government had absolutely no hand in the notification. The Government did not set the order of business today. We came here to deal with what is in front of us. And in fact, the Police Service Commission sent Mr. Simon's notification after the notifications for the substantive office came to this Parliament. The Police Service Commission did that. So I simply wanted to put that on the record.

As for the Member for Barataria/San Juan, the duplicity in their submissions amazes me. The Member for Arouca/Maloney really clearly identified the role and responsibility of the Parliament in this case, acting precisely in accordance with the Constitution, which is why we are here, to respond to the notification of Her Excellency. So while the Member for Barataria/San Juan tells us, and I quote him, "We must respect the separation of powers", at the same time he is calling on the very Parliament to take into account some matter that is in the court coming up on the 29<sup>th</sup> to affect our business in the House today. Duplicity of the highest order. Madam Speaker, with those two simple facts behind us, I beg to move.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

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

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
Hon. F. Hinds

2024.02.16

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE  
(NOMINATION OF MR. WENDELL LUCAS)**

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

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

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

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

*And whereas* the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President the name Mr. Wendell Lucas for appointment to the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police;

*And whereas* the President has on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2023 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

*And whereas* it is expedient to approve the Notification:

*Be it resolved* that the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Wendell Lucas to the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

**UNREVISED**

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
Hon. F. Hinds (cont'd)

2024.02.16

Madam Speaker, Mr. Wendell Hernandez Lucas now holds the substantive position of—well, the position as Acting Assistant Commissioner of Police. Mr. Lucas, in the course of his 26 years of dedicated service, currently heads the White Collar Crime Division of the police service. He was once the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service representative on the National Anti-Money Laundering and Combatting the Financing of Terrorism committee, NAMLAC as we call it. He is a former Director of the Financial Investigations Branch of the police service having been appointed as Director in **2019**. Some of Mr. Lucas' key achievements, Madam Speaker, include the first officer to use the Unexplained Wealth Order legislation, which we passed some time ago in Trinidad and Tobago, and he is touted as having developed standard operating procedures for the White Collar Crime Division of the police service.

Madam Speaker, he represented the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service as part of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, Mutual Evaluation team, that assessed the Bahamas. And, of course, in the course of his policing career, he investigated and solved one of the largest cases in Trinidad and Tobago, the so-called Balo Maharaj case, which led to the extradition of several Trinidad and Tobago nationals to the United States for trial. Insofar as his educational achievements are concerned, Madam Speaker, Mr. Lucas from the Anglia Ruskin University, acquired a Master of Law degree in International Business Law with distinction. Mr. Lucas, from the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, acquired qualification in terrorism and security studies, and from the University of Virginia, a certificate in Criminal Justice Education, and, of course, Mr. Lucas is a mutual evaluation assessor in the FATF and CFATF arena.

Mr. Lucas is as well an attorney-at-law, having graduated from the



Deputy Commissioner of Police  
 (Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
 Hon. F. Hinds (cont'd)

2024.02.16

University of London with a Bachelor of Laws degree, and acquired from the University of Westminster, a legal practicing certificate, LPC as the lawyers and others would identify it. He acquired a diploma in Industrial Relations from the then Cipriani Labour College. He has active participation as a police service executive member and, of course, belongs to the National Academy—well, he is a National Academy associate of the FBI, several elements of specialized training in investigation, asset forfeiture, special investigative techniques and money laundering. Madam Speaker, a very illustrious resume, and with these, I commend this notification to the House, and I beg to move. Thank you.

*Question proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East.

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

**Dr. Roodal Moonilal** (*Oropouche East*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, having moved on to a second name before us for approval, I just want to spend a couple of minutes—a few minutes to speak to the nominee before us, Mr. Wendell Hernandez Lucas, LLB, LPC, LLM, now looking for “J-O-B”. Madam Speaker, the candidate, of course, as the Minister before me indicated, has given years of service to the Trinidad and Tobago police and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, has a track record of accomplishments, certainly of qualifications, participation in professional membership across the board, has been involved, as the nominee before, as a leading figure in training, in presentations, and so on, on a host of topics related to law enforcement, and has also some significant experiences abroad in participation at international fora, and, of course, is another candidate before us with some experience in operations.

**3.30 p.m.**

**UNREVISED**

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2024.02.16

Madam Speaker, my first observation is that we are presented in this Parliament with the CV or curriculum vitae of candidates. Those of us on this side may not have a lot of capacity to test a CV or résumé. We will not have the— certainly we will not have the organizational resources to enquire into a CV as to— if someone says, for example, they participated in a seminar in Atlanta, we may not have any way of knowing whether that is true or not but we operate on a certain principle that what is presented to us on a résumé is accurate. It is accurate and it is not something that we ought to stand and question. So when you look at the résumé, it is a résumé that has significant participation at international events and so on across the board in several issues involving terrorism, cybercrime—which is, as we all know, a major issue to face us in the 10, 20, 30 years or so—cybercrime, gang investigations, prosecutions, economic crime, financial crime and so on.

Now, Madam Speaker, Mr. Lucas has an impressive CV and I just wanted for the record again to indicate that this appointment—this process to lead to the appointment of a substantive Deputy Commissioner of Police is also the subject— there is also a question as to the procedure used by the Police Service Commission.

Now, when a candidate comes to us in a four-page CV, we reflect on the CV. If the candidate is before us as a physical body, as they do with the congressional system in the United States, we can look to the candidate and ask questions, and that is a way of interrogating, examining a candidate in full public glare. In the absence of that process that we do not have and maybe one day we will, we can ask certain questions to the candidate and to the Parliament based upon the CV.

Now, there was a time, Madam Speaker, when the Police Service Commission was mandated by law to hire consultants and international experts and

**UNREVISED**

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2024.02.16

so on to assist with their process, their interview process, their assessment process, their stages, their recruitment and so on. That has gone. They have changed that upside down, so that it is the members of the Police Service Commission now—it is those members who really undertake this task almost by themselves, with some administrative help and so on, but they decide.

Now, we have raised on public record already, we have raised matters of the process involving the appointment of Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police. The appointment of Mr. Lucas, or the pending appointment of Mr. Lucas is predicated on the work done by the Police Service Commission in arriving at this name as opposed to somebody else. Now, we do not know the process. We are not provided, and maybe we should be provided with further materials as to the interview, as to the assessment—

**Mr. Hosein:** The application form.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—the application form, role-playing, management of communications and so on, which they are assessed on, so that the Parliament has an understanding of the process used, who were the other candidates, where they line up in terms of marks and so on.

Because, Madam Speaker, quite recently in an interrogation before the Joint Select Committee on National Security, involving no lesser person than the Commissioner of Police, there were questions raised in the aftermath in the public domain as to what really was this process that arrived—that gave the arrival of a candidate. That was a serious question raised in the public domain. So much so that the Prime Minister, not on one but on two occasions had to go in the public and issue statements in the public to the effect of, one ought not to be condemning a Commissioner of Police, or Deputy Commissioner of Police for that matter, one

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2024.02.16

ought not to be making critical remarks that way, but one should give support and so on. But there was an avalanche of statements in the press in the aftermath of the JSC Meeting on National Security that raised serious concerns about this process that Mr. Lucas has gone through to arrive here, and that is something that requires further thinking. Because, Madam Speaker, it is not only this process of Mr. Lucas.

In a particular matter, the Attorney General is named as a party in a court matter. He sits in the Parliament and cannot tell the Leader of Government Business about a matter that is before the court involving the appointment of Deputy Commissioners of Police, that is now the subject where persons are challenging the legality of the procedure. And the Attorney General remains quiet, but he is named the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago—

**Mr. Hosein:** As a defendant.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—as a defendant. And, Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** I have given you some leeway but I think we should get back to Mr. Lucas.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** So I leave that there. I leave that there.

Madam Speaker, back to Mr. Lucas. Now, there are certain questions—and I want to say that I raise this with great respect to Mr. Lucas, to Mr. whoever it might be, it is a matter that we raise in the public interest. Had Mr. Lucas been before us, there are questions we can put to Mr. Lucas. So we can put questions based on his CV. Now, in the CV, it deals with his work in investigations, particularly as it deals with white-collar crime, particularly as it deals with enforcement of law relating to serious criminal activity and so on.

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2024.02.16

Now, Mr. Lucas is an attorney-at-law. Is it correct that Mr. Lucas as an attorney-at-law at any time sought to represent persons while still being a police officer? Is that correct? When we conducted our enquiry, so to speak—because those of us on this side, when we prepare for these debates, we conduct an enquiry and so on. Mr. Lucas is known to me. In fact, I think he interviewed me already in his capacity as a Trinidad and Tobago police officer. He was part of a team that interviewed me. He wanted me to tell him a lot more about the Member for Diego Martin West and we had a meeting at a lawyer's office in Port of Spain somewhere and we had an interview. So I am aware of the gentleman and his professional—oh, sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East, you know, I have given you some latitude. You are all about the place. We are debating the nomination of this particular candidate. Please let us keep within the confines of this nomination, please.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Thank you. So, Madam Speaker, my point really—to hit the point and then we, you know, support the point. I will first make the point and then sharpen the point that Mr. Lucas—the issue we will like to raise is the complete fitness for this office, if it is that Mr. Lucas, as an attorney-at-law and a member of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, at any time sought to represent persons who were at least accused, if not arrested, of serious criminal conduct—

**Mr. Hosein:** In matters of financial investigation.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—in matters involving financial investigations and we would just like that to be clarified. I am sure it is a matter that can be clarified easily. Madam Speaker, in our enquiries, we learnt that it may not have been on one occasion but may have been on two occasions.

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2024.02.16

Now, Mr. Lucas may have acted properly—he may have acted well properly within the law. I am not at any time suggesting that Mr. Lucas may have violated any law. What I am suggesting is that the information reaching us is that at some time, on two occasions, we believe that Mr. Lucas sought to represent persons who were themselves suspects in certain matters involving serious criminal activity and some of those persons are known to Members opposite; are known. They know them. “Dey go on dey boat and lime”.

So, Madam Speaker, these are some of the questions you raise when persons arrive—and I have this strange feeling now that I am speaking on a nominee who may well be acting as Commissioner of Police by the 01 June, 2024. I have this feeling. So there are serious questions to be raised and we would want to put on record as well that persons in these positions ought to insulate themselves from political influence—

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—one way or the other. And Mr. Lucas has a long track record of service, 26 years of dedicated service straight across the board, experience, training and so on, and I am sure that Mr. Lucas himself would want to protect his own professionalism, his own track record, his own reputation, and not have that reputation soiled by members of the Executive who may seek to push him in one direction or another, given what I raised earlier about certain concerns.

So, Madam Speaker, those are just some of the remarks I will raise on this critical appointment because we view this as a very, very critical matter. And this matter is critical because—not only Mr. Lucas, anyone else, but I will not anticipate another debate—when you are a substantive Deputy Commissioner of Police, it is obvious that circumstances will arise in which you can act as

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

Commissioner of Police of this country, and this is why I want to indicate that we do not support at this time—the Government is on its last legs. They are in their few months of office.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** There should be no attempt to change this process, from hiding the names of persons to act or to fill substantive offices in the hierarchy of the TTPS by removing the jurisdiction of the Parliament, because we heard that whispering somewhere in press releases or public media conferences and so on. We do not support that. We know we will have to come time and time again to deal with sometimes the same person, but that is not a problem. We will not make it a problem now because we are dealing with a Government that cannot be trusted on these matters.

**Hon. Member:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Because Mr. Lucas is here today as Deputy Commissioner of Police. As I said, there is something to happen in May and he may well be the Acting Commissioner of Police thereafter, for forever. For how long? We do not know. And it is a matter that we are very, very concerned with and, Madam Speaker, I may have more to say on another candidate later, but thank you very much.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

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

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you.

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
 (Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)  
 Hon. F. Hinds (cont'd)

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

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

**Dr. Moonilal:** No answer at all.

*Question put.*

**Hon. Member:** Division.

**Madam Speaker:** So is there a call for a division? Did I hear that?

**Hon. Members:** Yes.

*The House divided:*        Noes 20

NOES

Robinson Regis, Hon. C.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Young, Hon. S.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

Beckles, Hon. P.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Cudjoe-Lewis, Hon. S.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Gonzales, Hon. M.

Mc Clashie, Hon. S.

Cummings, Hon. F.

de Nobriga, Hon. S.

Leonce, Hon. A.



Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Wendell Lucas)

2024.02.16

Manning, Hon. B.

Morris-Julian, Hon. L.

Scotland, K.

Munroe, R.

*The following Members abstained:* Mr. D. Lee, Mr. R. Charles, Ms. K. Ameen, Mr. B. Padarath, Dr. R. Moonilal, Mr. S. Hosein, Mr. R. Ratiram, Mr. D. Rambally, Mr. A. Ram, Dr. R. Ragbir, Mr. D. Tancoo and Dr. R. Seecheran.

*Motion negatived.*

**3.45 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE  
(NOMINATION OF MR. JUNIOR BENJAMIN)**

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

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

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

**UNREVISED**

*And whereas* the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President the name Mr. Junior Benjamin for appointment to the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police;

*And whereas* the President has on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2023 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

*And whereas* it is expedient to approve the Notification:

*Be it resolved* that the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Mr. Junior Benjamin to the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Junior Benjamin has over 33 years' experience in the business of policing. During this period he commanded several divisions and branches. Some of the roles in that capacity would have involved the formulation and establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago polygraph unit and the formation or formulation and implementation of police and departmental orders which governs the community policing secretariat. Insofar as his professional experience goes, Madam Speaker, he joined the police service in the year 2000, and he continues to the present.

He was a Senior Superintendent of police from September 2020 and served as Acting Senior Superintendent in charge of the complaints division and as head of the tribunal and then the head of the administrative office. He also held office in the Court and Process Branch, led it, and the Tobago division from September 20, 2021 to November 2022, and in both cases planned and directed the several anti-crime initiatives and operations across the Tobago division and otherwise. He was a Superintendent of police from the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, 2019, and served in the Court and Process Branch. He was promoted to superintendent in December of 2020.

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin)

2024.02.16

He was promoted to the rank of Assistant Superintendent in 2018, and served through the ranks as corporal, sergeant, inspector all through those years, doing a lot his service in the polygraph unit, and he was the Deputy Chief Polygraph Examiner. He is also a member of the Canadian Association of Police Polygraphists from 2010 to the current date.

Mr. Benjamin began his policing career as a Special Reserve Police and I suspect that this would be a great inspiration to the young people and Special Reserve Police officer across Trinidad and Tobago. He served 11 years as a Special Reserve Police officer from 1989 to the year 2000, and during this period he served in the Traffic Branch, in the office of the Strategic Services, in the Special Reserve Police office Tobago division and more and in 2000 did the regular service exam and matriculated into same.

Some of his other experiences, very widespread I might say, assistant general youth director of PAWI, that is, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies, and of course, he was the national youth director from 2008 and for many years.

By way of his education, Madam Speaker, he acquired a Bachelor of Science degree in business management in the year 2008 from the University of the West Indies. In 2014, he acquired a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of London. In 2017, he acquired a postgraduate diploma in legal practice with high commendation, and that was acquired in 2017, and more belatedly from the University of Bedfordshire, he is now engaged and pursuing an MBA.

He as well acquired a diploma in business management as far back as 1994 from the John Donaldson Technical Institute and followed that in 1998 with a Bachelor of Theology degree. So this is a man, Madam Speaker, who mixes

**UNREVISED**

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin)

2024.02.16

policing with a spiritual element and base, which he has gotten from his studies in theology and otherwise. Madam Speaker, with those few things said about Mr. Junior Benjamin, I commend this nomination to the House and I beg to move. Thank you.

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

*Question proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Naparima.

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

**Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*): Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Today is an example and the process that we are adopting today is an example of why we are a Third World country and we will never progress under this Government.

Madam Speaker, one would have anticipated that if we were coming here today, we would be looking at the nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin and we would be saying that he would be nominated to fill a particular post in the TTPS. Now, the post is that, the nomination is in regard of the Deputy Commissioner of Police. But hear something, Madam Speaker: According to the updated public statement of the Ministry of National Security in 2023, as required under the Freedom of Information Act, the TTPS has three Deputy Commissioner of Police. These are the Deputy Commissioner of Police Intelligence and Investigations, Deputy Commissioner of Police Administration and Operational Support, and thirdly Deputy Commissioner of Police Operations.

We should be told today that that Mr. Benjamin given his track record has been nominated for one of these positions, so that we would be in a better position to see his adequacy for the particular post that he is appointed to. This is how it is done in serious organizations; serious organizations. You are appointing Rodney

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
 (Nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin)  
 Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2024.02.16

Charles to be an MP, but the MP for Naparima has the specificity that is required, but you will not know about that on that side. You would not know about—I am not surprised to say that if we were looking at Mr. Benjamin and we were saying that he would be in intelligence and investigations, then we would be able to have a better picture of whether this applies to the position.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** All right. I know the Member for Naparima usually creates some excitement, but I will ask all Members to listen quietly, those who cannot maybe then can take a little walk and return and please allow Mr. Charles to make his contribution.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for your protection.

**Madam Speaker:** I am sorry. Thank you. The Member for Naparima.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, it is appreciated. So, Madam Speaker, it speaks to in my view, it speaks in my view a measure of, I do not want to use the word “disrespect” for those on this side and in the Parliament in general. What we are given is a CV. Now, Madam Speaker, I was in management up to 40 years ago, as in management in National Petroleum, we were told that a CV is an inadequate tool. [*Member displays a book*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, we do not want to display—

**Mr. R. Charles:** “Yes, put down de book.” It is an inadequate tool for making a judgment, and we understand that the Police Service Commission they have their processes and their procedures and the requirement for us is to trust what the Police Service Commission, but we have a fundamental duty, we were elected by citizens of this country to fulfil our responsibilities, and I cannot in good

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
 (Nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin)  
 Mr. Charles (cont'd)

conscience look at a CV and tell me that this is a basis for which I could make a judgment on the suitability of the candidate. Madam Speaker, it speaks—no aspersions on the characters of these people. They are all qualified men. They worked hard and long and dedicated service in the public service, but I am saying that I have a—we on this side have a responsibility to speak to the suitability of these individuals for a particular job, given the fact that crime in Trinidad and Tobago is out of control. So every decision we make must be made in good conscience on the basis of the best information we have.

I need not remind my friends opposite about the inadequacy of a CV. I could speak to the international recruitment agency called the Raw Talent Academy and they point to several downsides to using a CV for making appointments, Madam Speaker. They tell us that:

“Stereotyping causes unconscientious discrimination.”

You see someone who has a Masters and we assume that he is better than a person who has a Bachelor’s degree. Somebody who went to Cambridge, we assume that he is better than if he went to Anglia Ruskin University; unconscious. So we are sitting here and making a judgment based on those kinds of assumptions.

They say that the third downside:

“A CV doesn’t guarantee that you will find what you are looking for.”

This is not Rodney Charles talking. This is global recruiting institutes.

**Madam Speaker:** So, Member for Naparima, I fell into that trap. Member for Naparima, I “doh” mind that you are referring to yourself in here, the Member for Naparima.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Oh. When I refer to myself. Okay. I apologize, Madam Speaker.

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin)  
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2024.02.16

“A CV doesn’t guarantee that you will find what you are looking for.

CVs display the same information - exam results, where a candidate went to school or university and where they used to work. They’re therefore unlikely to provide a true feel for how much the role is right for the individual.”

It continues:

“A CV won’t tell you how customer orientated a candidate is, what drives them, if they have the right attitude, can they work in a team, or if they’re open to developing. They don’t cover those all-important soft skills, vital for employers in making sure they are investing in right candidate. Attributes like problem solving, abstract thinking and motivation are difficult to quantify or prove with a CV,”—so—“we suggest finding alternative ways to discover what an individual...”—could do.

I am just saying this in the context of an institution and an agency that is operating on best practices.

**4.00 p.m.**

We know that the Constitution calls for the Police Service Commission to do their processes, come up with some names, send it to the President, the President sends it to the House, and it comes to the House for analysis and verification. There is nothing to stop us, for example, like in the United States to have Mr. Benjamin come here for five minutes and tell us about his vision for the TTPS, his track record, and how he intends to actualize, to make this vision a reality. Five minutes. We could even say that we would not ask him questions, but at the end of the day I would know that this gentleman spoke to a vision for the TTPS in the context of the problems we face and therefore I have a justification for approving

**UNREVISED**

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin)  
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2024.02.16

his appointment. What is to stop us from being creative in these appointments?

I continue with respect of the intentional institutions. It says:

“CVs don’t show potential.

Unfortunately, CVs don’t provide an indication of the true potential held by a candidate. They show where they have worked and where they’ve studied.

They are not a reliable predictor of future performance.”

So we have institutions telling us how it is you go about making appointments. My colleague referred to the US Congress where the secretary for national security, when he comes they speak to him, they ask him about his vision, they ask him about his plan, his track record and what would be his short-term, medium and long-term achievements in the service. Why can we not do the same? We are given a—

**Mr. de Nobriga:** [*Inaudible*] It is not the process we are here to debate, it is the person's appointment.

**Ms. Ameen:** What is the Standing Order?

**Hon. Member:** Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so the Member raised 48(1). Member for Naparima, I think I have allowed you sufficient leeway on a process that you would like to see and therefore let us get on to the process that exists.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Right. Madam Speaker, so therefore, I have to operate within the constraints my friend from Diego Martin Central pointed out. So I will operate within the constraints. We have here Junior Benjamin, and he has 33 years’ experience in the police fraternity. During the period he worked in several divisions and branches, and some of it speaks to preparation of duties as well as monitoring and measurement of performance appraisals. Now, again, I would



Deputy Commissioner of Police  
 (Nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin)  
 Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2024.02.16

have liked to see some measurable indicators of this performance.

So when I read about conducting polygraph examinations I have no measurable matrix, index, in which to say this is the “kind ah fella “we want for the TTPS at this time. When I look at monitoring and maintaining, in fact, any bachelor in management studies know that these words are loose words. Right? The preparation of duties, the monitoring and maintaining of all records, conducting polygraph examinations. It would have been better, and I am just saying. And I am just saying this I cast no aspersions on. I recognise but I think in Trinidad and Tobago we have reached a different level and I would commend, in future—as I said this is my last term in Parliament, and I would like in future—

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

**Mr. R. Charles:** Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know.

**Hon. Member:** And then higher office. Might be some of theirs last—[*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** We have past the point about what we would like to see.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Excuse me?

**Madam Speaker:** We have passed the point about what we would like to see, so, yes.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Yes. And I would like—and in closing, I would like to see a better approach to commit in the nominations—of the approval of the nominations submitted by the Police Service Commission. Madam Speaker, we are better than this. We will have to go by this, what we have today, and this is the reason why the TTPS is in the position that it is in today, and there is a crisis of leadership. Thank you.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin)  
Hon. F. Hinds (cont'd)

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** I thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, again for the record, and for the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and the world, I want to say to the Member for Naparima, he would not have been here in 2007 when there was significant reform of the Constitution and elements of the Police Service Act at a time when issues around crime, burgeoning crime, challenged the society, and the police service was called upon by the public through the Parliament to do more. Questions of its establishment, its structure arose. In those discussions, Madam Speaker, leading to amendments to the Constitution, at that time the Prime Minister had a veto on the nomination by the Police Service Commission of the Police Commissioner.

The United Nations Congress, recognizing the constitutional changes that the PNM Government in 2007 wanted to effect, and the UNC, recognizing that we needed their parliamentary support with a special majority in order to achieve that, made demands of the Government. Two of the demands it made: One, was the removal of the Prime Minister's veto, which was done in private and all quietly, and demanded that that Parliament play this role that we are playing here today, and it is that that the UNC demanded. So when I hear the Member for Naparima here today criticizing the process, he is standing on the UNC riverbank and talking the very UNC bad.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** But he said that this is his last time term. I will put it differently, he is politically half dead, ready to go, and spent a lot of time here today telling us about résumés, as though we need to hear that from the Member. It is the UNC that created this process—

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
 (Nomination of Mr. Junior Benjamin)  
 Hon. F. Hinds (cont'd)

**Mr. Young:** This mess.

**Hon. F. Hinds:**—and this crisis. And, further to that, Madam Speaker, just for the record, not even the Police Service Commission in its constitutional responsibility for the appointment of the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioners of Police delve or engaged in which posting the eventual success would be. They deal with the Police Commissioner, and they deal with Deputy Commissioners, all three, and they appoint in those terms. So it is the Police Commissioner who will decide on the particular posting, whether it is investigations and intelligence, or operations, or admin. That is for the Police Commissioner, well-known, well-established.

**Mr. Young:** Constitutionally entrenched.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** And constitutionally entrenched. When the Member for Naparima gets up here today to tell us that we are here discussing without knowing whether it will be admin or intelligence and operations and that sort of thing, that, Madam Speaker, is as good as the Member himself, half dead, politically, notwithstanding.

Madam Speaker, with those two simple facts behind us it gave me and it gives me great pleasure to commend this matter for the consideration of the House, and I beg to move.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Madam Speaker:** The Minister of National Security.

**DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE  
 (NOMINATION OF MS. NATASHA GEORGE)**

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Ms. Natasha George)  
Hon. F. Hinds

2024.02.16

much again, Madam Speaker. I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

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

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

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

*And whereas* the Police Service Commission has submitted to the President the name Ms. Natasha George, as the person nominated for appointment to the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police;

*And whereas* the President has on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2023 issued a Notification in respect of the nomination;

*And whereas* it is expedient to approve the Notification:

*Be it resolved* that the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Ms. Natasha George, to the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

Madam Speaker, the candidate, well the nominee before us, through this notification, is recorded as a leader in strategic transformation, bringing over 20

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Ms. Natasha George)  
Hon. F. Hinds (cont'd)

2024.02.16

years' experience in security analytics, business transformation, management and delivery of highly complex and cross-border services. This nominee possesses expertise in artificial intelligence, transnational operations, business economics, global corporate finance, and, of course, very familiar with local legislation, particularly as it applies to the police and policing.

The candidate describes herself—the nominee—as also being very passionate about delivering value to the citizens of the country and a strong believer in artificial intelligence and machine learning, ML as it is called in that industry, in that sphere. Machine learning, which is the business of machine learning from data with minimal human intervention. Insofar as education acquisition is concerned, Natasha George, from the John Hopkins University, acquired certification in Data Science in 2020. In 2005 from the University of the West Indies an Undergraduate Degree in Criminology, and, of course, conducted training in police development from the University of São Paulo in Brazil, and that was in 2017. Ms. George acquired postgraduate qualification having completed a postgraduate degree from the London Business School in the Business of Artificial Intelligence in 2021. Ms. George acquired as well a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology and Human Resource Management from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus in 2009, and is engaged in an MPhil programme beginning in 2022 at the University of the West Indies, leading, of course, to her further qualification in this regard.

Insofar as her professional career is concerned, Madam Speaker, Ms. George would have led at the Police Academy as head recruiter between 2010 and 2013, recruiting hundreds of police officers into the police services. Between 2010 and 2015 she headed the school department for induction training at the Police

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Ms. Natasha George)  
Hon. F. Hinds (cont'd)

Academy, and as well was the inspector of human resources between 2016 and 2017 in the police service. As well, Madam Speaker, Ms. George was attached to, as a police inspector, the Professional Standards Bureau, which we all know, is involved in the business of keeping police officers whole. Keeping them true to their oaths and keeping them true to the laws that they operate and govern the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

**4.15 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, as an Assistant Superintendent, she was the Divisional Area Supervisor engaged in routine and regular police work. She was promoted to Superintendent of Police and she headed the Child Protection Unit, following the establishment of the package of children's legislation that we now observe in Trinidad and Tobago, and boasted in this regard, of creating an operational policy for interaction of police officers with children, very important of course, and having developed a partnership between the organization and the United States National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, resulting in access to their cyber tip line database, among many other such achievements.

Madam Speaker, there is much more that can be said from this r sum  on Natasha George, but with those things said I commend this nomination to this House and I beg to move. Thank you.

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

*Question proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are here to approve the nomination of Ms. Natasha George for appointment to the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police. And I would just make a few points. The first is,

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Ms. Natasha George)  
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2024.02.16

that if we approve her appointment today there still would be an outstanding position of Deputy Commissioner of Police since we will have, assuming we approve this, we will have two substantive DCoPs and one acting DCoP, Mr. Curt Simon, a measure of confusion in terms of the leadership and the filling of slots in the top management positions of the TTPS. As another minor point we have a situation where we have Mr. Simon who is acting, who was acting before and his position was not terminated, but we have approved him to act again. I say no more on that.

Ms. George has over 20 years' experience in security analysis, we note, business transformation; management; cross-border services; artificial intelligence; transnational operations; business economics; corporate finance and local legislation. She has degrees in psychology and human resource management. I will make the point that I have no doubt that she will make a good Deputy Commissioner of Police but I would have preferred if today I had comfort in terms of a statement in the CV that would have told me that she would have reduced the murders by 20 per cent. We say all this in the context—I have heard nothing that give me comfort that all these appointments can reduce the figures on home invasions, robberies and murders.

Madam Speaker, in November 2023, we had:

“230 cases of home invasions, break-ins, car larcenies, robberies...aggravation”—occurred—“across the country...”

*Express*, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Since I am told that the Police Service Commission does not make appointments, recommendations in terms of positions in the TTPS, then I have to assume that the Commissioner of Police if, for example, they do not make on that

**UNREVISED**

Deputy Commissioner of Police  
(Nomination of Ms. Natasha George)  
Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2024.02.16

basis it means we could get all of them with expertise in operations, we could get all of them in HR, we could get all, and then the Commissioner would have now to reallocate base on a misallocation of the human resource available to us. I say no more on that, I say no more.

I would have liked to see, Madam Speaker, SMART goals and achievements: Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and anchored within a Time frame. I would have liked to see her measureable achievements, she went into the police service and she reduced crime in a particular area of her expertise by 20 per cent over a four year period. Madam Speaker, but this is what we have and we have to go with it.

Madam Speaker, on the basis of her CV, which is before us, her qualifications, she has expertise in, she was Superintendent of the Police Academy from 2023 to the present, so that is one year. She was Superintendent of the Police Academy, one year as a Superintendent at the Academy and a Superintendent of Police at advising Divisional Commanders, which involves, but not limited to, managing the analysis of data to inform key decision-making, prepare annual draft estimates of expenditure, function as a tribunal officer in disciplinary matters.

In 2020, she was head of the specialist section, Superintendent of Police, Child Protection Unit. I would have liked to see that while she was head of the Child Protection Unit, there were so many convictions or there were so many significant measureable improvements in child protection because we know that is a significant problem with our young people today and the fact that the problem remains. And I would have preferred to see, to hear, or read or be informed of what measurable things she did.



Deputy Commissioner of Police  
 (Nomination of Ms. Natasha George)  
 Mr. Charles (cont'd)

2024.02.16

Madam Speaker, as I say, based on what we have here she is qualified, she is being recommended by the Police Service Commission and therefore we support her nomination.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very warmly, Madam Speaker. The Member of Parliament were relatively lengthily but added nothing that requires any response, and in those circumstances, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Notification of the President of the nomination by the Police Service Commission of Ms. Natasha George to act in the office of Deputy Commissioner of Police be approved.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members I believe now will be a convenient time to take the suspension, and therefore, I have consulted with the Whip and also with the Leader of the House, there is concurrence. Therefore, I now suspend this sitting for half an hour. We will resume at 4.50 p.m., at 4.50 p.m.

**4.22 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended*

**4.50 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS  
 (TESTING AND IDENTIFICATION) BILL, 2022**

[Second Day]

*Order for resuming adjourned debate on question* [November 01, 2023]:

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** The Members who have contributed to this debate thus far are as follows: Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP, Member for Laventille West; Mr. Saddam Hosein, MP, Member for Barataria/San Juan; Hon. Stuart Young, MP, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West; Mr. Rodney Charles, MP, Member for Naparima; Hon. Keith Scotland, MP, Member for Port of Spain South, who has seven minutes of original speaking time remaining. The Member for Port of Spain South.

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

**Madam Speaker:** And Member might I ask as you have seven minutes of original speaking time remaining, you are also entitled to 15 minutes extended time, do you intend to take that?

**Hon. K. Scotland:** Yes, please, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay.

**Hon. K. Scotland:** Thank you very kindly.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes. So you may proceed—

**Hon. K. Scotland:** I am indeed obliged.

**Madam Speaker:**—I would not stop you.

**Hon. K. Scotland:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes.

**Hon. K. Scotland:** Madam Speaker, the key to this Bill is the concept of the regulatory framework. In other words, Madam Speaker, all fears ought to be allayed because it is not a carte blanche power given to persons that will allow them to do lie detecting, drug testing, collection of biometric information. What it provides, Madam Speaker, is a regulatory framework for that to be done. And what that will do is ensure that critical members of the protective services and certain offices in the judicial and legal service and civil service and Financial

Intelligence Unit bear some scrutiny with respect to these enquiries to ensure the integrity of these important office holders. That, Madam Speaker, in my respectful view is one of the keys to this Bill.

The objectives of this Bill are to bolster national security efforts. The first casualty of this will be, Madam Speaker, crime. Because if this is implemented it will help to reduce crime, to identify rogue elements in the protective services and government departments and to tackle corruption head on and create public confidence in this country and our systems. Madam Speaker, we cannot underestimate the significance of the public having confidence in our institutions that are there to protect them.

And that being said, I would like to provide this country, Madam Speaker, through you, with some empirical data that will show the requirement for this public confidence.

**4.55 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, 2023, the First Report of the Joint Select Committee on National Security, the Fourth Session of the Twelfth Parliament, was presented to this Parliament, and it was an enquiry into the criminal justice system, trying to elucidate and trying to find methods of reducing crime, and very critical information came out of that. And, Madam Speaker, let me—I am not at all singling out the police service, but the data collected, some of it emanated from the police service. Madam Speaker, you would be surprised to note that the public confidence in the police's ability to address crime was down, and in fact, 37.6 per cent of those who were interviewed said that they were very dissatisfied, and in fact, only 10 per cent indicated a feeling of satisfaction of confidence.

We are here, not to denigrate, but we are here to try to bolster, to try to improve the morale of these servicemen, these people who dedicate their lives to the country. One of the ways of instilling public confidence in these institutions is to ensure the public that persons who hold these high positions, these sensitive positions, are and have been subjected to the highest scrutiny. That in and of itself, Madam Speaker, must inspire public confidence. It is not to be used as a sword, but it is to be used as a shield in order to ensure that the persons who occupy these sensitive offices are of the highest integrity.

Madam Speaker, I ask rhetorically: What can be wrong then with such a process, a process that will ensure that the public will know that there are checks and balances in place for these persons, for these office-holders as they go about their day-to-day functions? That must inspire, in all the institutions that I have mentioned, some form of greater confidence in these office-holders. It will go across the board. It will go to the protected services. It will redound to the benefit of the judicial and legal service. It will redound to the benefit of the civil service and the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is why this Bill is so critical at this time. It is not enough—and the Government realizes on this side that it is not enough for us just to sit and talk and have plans, but we must now be proactive, and this is a weapon in the arsenal of proactiveness as it relates to the combating of crime and as it relates to inspiring confidence of the public in our critical institutions in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, there are built-in protective measures in this Bill. The President will be empowered to make the regulations subject, of course, to the affirmative resolution of Parliament, and these regulations will be for the conduct of the test on and the collection of biometric information of an officer and a person

applying for appointment to an office in any specified section or department. The storage and the maintenance and disclosure and destruction of these results will also be subject to these regulations. These regulations are then subject to the affirmative resolution of the Parliament. So, you see, Madam Speaker, it is not as if we are just saying the rights are being infringed, because they are, because some of the measures are intrusive and therefore, they may and they do infringe on section 4 and 5 of the constitutional rights guaranteed—the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, but there are checks and balances.

I now would like, Madam Speaker, to address the benefits of this Bill. It is my respectful view that the passage of this Bill could produce, Madam Speaker, several benefits in the fight not just against crime, but the fight to bring public confidence and awareness in Trinidad and Tobago by giving the relevant authorities the ability to conduct polygraph, lie detection, drug tests, as well as collecting biometric information. Law enforcement agencies can enhance their screening process for officers.

So, Madam Speaker, let me now go and be relevant. About two to three weeks ago, there was an exercise of recruitment in the police service. There was a call for persons who had information as it relates to those applicants. Madam Speaker, with this now in place, there will be a built-in process that will guide the process of recruitment. We have just gone through an exercise of confirming very high offices in the police service.

Madam Speaker, this Bill will create an atmosphere that will not allow the hon. Member for Naparima to say, well, he does not know, because there will be already prerequisite testing that would have been done and conducted to these officers. So there will be no reason to cast aspersions or to be speaking about

“douens” and “La Diabliesse” when these things are in place. There will be objective criteria used in the processes in these appointments.

Two, it will ensure that only those individuals of the highest integrity are in sensitive positions in this country. Madam Speaker, this country deserves the best and it deserves the best processes. And if the hon. Members on the other side are serious, if they have learnt from their mistake, if they are contrite about Reshmi and others like that, they will support this Bill and show the country that they are now supporting a process that allows for greater scrutiny of persons applying to be in the highest offices or in sensitive positions in Trinidad and Tobago.

Three, it allows law enforcement to more effectively combat white-collar crime. Madam Speaker, white-collar crime is likened to a cancer. It is there but to combat it, you need specialist tools. It is not a normal situation, Madam Speaker, where if you go into court, you make a submission, you lie, “he lie, she lie”, that is not white-collar crime. It is technical and for that, we need technical tools in order to combat white-collar crime. This is one of the tools that can be used to combat white-collar crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

And on that point, Madam Speaker, I ask to note, through you, that white-collar crime is transnational. It does not start and end in Trinidad and Tobago. It is international and therefore, it is important that the Government and the law enforcement agencies in Trinidad and Tobago are given all the tools that are required in order to combat white-collar crimes. Also, the overall Bill, if supported by the hon. Members on the other side and passed, would significantly strengthen the country’s crime prevention strategies and contribute to a safer Trinidad and Tobago. How does it contribute to a safer Trinidad and Tobago? Madam Speaker, if persons in sensitive positions have been checked, have gone through the rigours

of these tests that the Bill is seeking to have passed and be brought into law, we would be assured that they are the persons of the highest integrity.

It means, therefore, Madam Speaker, that the public will have the knowledge that these persons are of the highest integrity. It will mean, therefore, that they will have more confidence to come forward and communicate information, because information is the key to solving crime, and solving crime creates a safer Trinidad and Tobago. So it is all linked. What is shown is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we have a plan. We need the support because this Bill needs a majority—a special majority to be passed. Having made the argument of the nexus between the results that this Bill may bring if passed, I would now want to see if the hon. Members on the other side would put their vote and put their actions into place to show this country that they are serious about making Trinidad and Tobago a safer place.

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

**Mr. K. Scotland:** Madam Speaker, there are ethical issues and accuracy issues that are associated with the proposed Bill and because of this, the robust checks and balances have been put in place, and what it ensures, it ensures a limited use of the measures in this Bill.

Madam Speaker, in light of the contemporaneous research, who can deny the importance of section 29A(1) of this Bill which gives the Commissioner of Prisons and the Commissioner of Police the power to collect biometric data for the purpose of integrity testing where a person is killed due to the discharge of a firearm by a law officer or the use of physical force by an officer of a person killed whilst in the lawful execution of their duty, or whilst detained or in custody? So I want to pause here, Madam Speaker. What this allows is, there is a situation, there is a prisoner

who is in custody and something goes array, either—the prisoner could have either been in prison or in police custody. In those circumstances, apart from cameras which may or may not exist, you have this ability now put in the hands of Commissioner of Prisons or the Commissioner of Police that will allow them to conduct integrity testing with respect to a law officer who was engaged or who was involved with that prisoner during the event, or a civilian is killed with the discharge of a firearm. Madam Speaker, this will go a long way in a coroner's inquest. It may even shorten the length of time a coroner's inquest takes in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I know as you wore another hat, you know how long a coroner's inquest will take—three, to four, to five years. If the information is there and the evidence is cogent and compelling, it will truncate the need for a drawn-out inquest and bring the matter to an end. What does that do? It gives the officer, who may or may not be innocent—he has a presumption of innocent—some solace that the matter will be dealt with quickly and with not subjective but an objective criteria, but it also gives the families, who may be clamouring for justice, clamouring maybe just for an information, it will give them the clarity of closure if all proves well with the testing that goes on there.

Madam Speaker, we understand what happens in this society. Why then is this Bill not receiving the support that it ought to? Why is it not receiving the support that it ought to? The Bill is very, very relevant. It is relevant because it will bring a sense of objectivity in sensitive areas of enquiry, persons coming to harm whilst in the custody of the State, persons coming to harm by the discharge of a firearm by an officer. Apart from all the other measures implemented by the Government, this measure will put and bring to the fore, Madam Speaker, a



concept of objectivity, a concept of transparency to these situations, and I commend the Bill for the support of the others.

Madam Speaker, this Bill is about strengthening and developing our national institutions and our critical institutions involved in the administration of justice. It seeks to address instances of corruption or perceived corruption in these institutions. When we can boast and say that, “Coming from a process of thorough scrutiny, these are the persons who are in charge of these institutions,” that, Madam Speaker, is not a wasteful boast but it is something that must inspire confidence in these institutions. The Government is committed to stopping corrupt practices in its track, especially within the protective services. There will be no snickering behind back to say, “Oh, look at what is going on there,” because there will be objective criteria, there will be biometric testing, there will be lie testing, there will be eye detection, there would be policies and processes in place that will ensure the integrity of these office-holders.

**5.10 p.m.**

The Bill will produce behavioural and psychological change in the office holders because if—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have three more minutes of full speaking time left.

**Mr. K. Scotland:** Full?

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, three.

**Mr. K. Scotland:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It will bring a behavioural change and not just physical, psychological change. When the citizens assess what is going on in this country, I submit that, without serious jurisprudential objection,

that this Bill passes the de Freitas test. And, what it does is that it enunciates that fundamental rights can be interfered with if this interference is proportionate. Madam Speaker, this interference, in my respectful view, is very proportionate, particularly, if you use the objective test, and the objective is important enough to justify the limiting of fundamental rights, and striking a fair balance between individual rights and the interest of the community and the country as a whole.

The objective of this Bill is to bolster national security efforts to identify any rogue elements that exist in the protective services and the very critical services in Trinidad and Tobago to promote public confidence and also to assist in crime fighting. The gauntlet has been laid down by the Government. It is now to see if the hon. Members on the other side—let us see what they will do, Madam Speaker. In this regard, I lend my wholehearted support to this Bill and the efforts in order to ensure that this Bill is passed and we subject critical officeholders to the highest scrutiny in this country. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

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

**Dr. Rishad Seecheran** (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to contribute on this Bill. I would thank my colleague the Member for Port of Spain South for his contribution. So we are here today to debate the Miscellaneous Provisions (Testing and Identification) Bill of 2022 which was introduced in this House by the hon. AG and Minister of Legal Affairs on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2022, and we are on now February 2024, and this Bill is still being debated.

Of note of what my friend, the Member for Port of Spain South, had said

mainly is that— What I took from his contribution was that this Bill infringes on the Constitution. That is the major point here, Madam Speaker, it infringes on the Constitution. Part of his argument was that there are built-in checks and balances for the Bill infringing on the Constitution, and it would attack white-collar crime, and persons in Trinidad and Tobago would be safer. And due to the fact that persons could now be lie tested we would have persons of the highest integrity in vital positions in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, he also went on to say that there are many issues with regard to these tests and with regard to their accuracy, but yet he is saying that we would be safer if persons were subjected to these tests as against the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

**5.15 p.m.**

So, Madam Speaker, I will deal with his statements as I go along my contribution and Madam Speaker, of note, I would like to state that the fact that we are in 2024, and this Bill was first laid in this House in 2022. So the Government is not serious about passing this Bill, right. If they were, it would be passed already. They have the majority here—sorry, the debate would have continued on this Bill. It needs a special majority. I am sorry. So, Madam Speaker, perhaps in 2025, we would still be here debating this Bill for a third consecutive year.

And during this time, Madam Speaker, we have runaway crime in Trinidad and Tobago and at every parliamentary sitting, this Bill continues to appear on our Order Paper. I would ask the Members on the other side to follow the lead of Kamla Persad-Bissessar and to hold crime talks with the public in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Dr. R. Seecheran:** Listen to what people have to say and that would be a more effective way of fighting crime here in Trinidad and Tobago and a more productive use of time here, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, this Bill seeks to amend seven different pieces of legislation: the Judicial and Legal Service Act, the Prison Service Act, the Defence Act, the Police Service Act, the Civil Service Act, the Fire Service Act and the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago Act. So it is quite an extensive suite of legislation it intends to amend and this Bill requires serious scrutiny by those on this side. Having said that, I would like to commend the Member for Barataria/San Juan as well as the Member for Naparima on their past contributions at a previous date and I support everything that they had said.

Madam Speaker, at the core of this legislation is really the balance between the State and its citizens. That is basically what this legislation is about and this Bill is asking us to take from citizens and give it to the State, give power to the State and thousands upon thousands of public servants would be affected by this Bill were it to come into legislation. And what do I mean by we are giving power to the State and taking it from the citizens? Madam Speaker, I am referring to the rights that every one of us enjoys as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago because of the Constitution that we live under; the Constitution which we on this side are being asked to protect.

So, Madam Speaker, this Bill, it seeks to provide a regulatory framework for the conduct of polygraph or lie detecting testing as well as drug testing in the public service as well as the collection of biometric data and it would affect many persons: members of the protective services, members of the judicial and legal service, members of the civil service as well as members of the FIU. Many of

these persons, when they would have taken up their jobs at these various institutions would have done so not knowing that they would be subjected to these conditions upon their tenure.

Quite interestingly, Madam Speaker, as the last Member said, this Bill is inconsistent with sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution and because of that, it requires a special majority of three-fifths of the Members for this Bill to come to legislation and once passed, it will be fixed for proclamation by the President. So they need us to support this Bill but no one on that side has made a compelling argument as to why we should support this Bill. It is a flawed piece of legislation and as I go into my contribution, I will explain what I mean by that. You know, the Minister of National Security, in his contribution, said that it was being done in the United States, but, Madam Speaker, if we were to do everything that the United States currently does, you know, we would have no need for FULs in Trinidad and Tobago. Everyone would be able to buy a gun as much as they wanted.

So the key features of this Bill would be to confer an expressed power on certain officeholders in order for an officer or a law officer to submit to a polygraph testing or a lie detecting test or a drug test and they are asking for this power to be given certain heads of department, namely the Customs and Excise Division, the Immigration Division, BIR as well as the department of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission. So we are asking that the Commissioner of Police, the Chief of Defence Staff, the Commissioner, the Chief Fire Officer as well as the head of the FIU be confer these powers. And the crux of the matter is that this would somehow increase integrity within those services and they would like for persons to be tested in:

“...any intelligence or counter-intelligence functions...where top

secret...”—information—“confidential or sensitive information  
is...stored...”

And I will get to that in much more detail later on. As well as persons involved in the investigation of an economic loss, embezzlement or some sort of money laundering issue as well as persons that have access to property information and files where they suspect there is a reasonable suspicion that the officer was involved in a serious incident under investigation. And I would like you to make note of this phrase, Madam Speaker, “reasonable suspicion” and I would come back to that much later on because that is a benchmark that we are asking laypersons without legal training to assess. As an attorney-at-law, you would understand where I would be going with that.

Madam Speaker, there is also the provision for reasonable suspicion that the officer is suspected or involved in misconduct in relation to an ongoing serious criminal offence as well as the duties performed by persons involved with top secret, confidential or sensitive information. So, Madam Speaker, these persons would be asked to submit to a lie detector test just because they work in these various departments.

Madam Speaker, the last contributor spoke of checks and balances but could you imagine the level of victimization that could happen under these circumstances should there be a breach of some sort of State secret? The head of this department could basically implement these powers on the entire department. There are no checks and balances. Basically anyone can be submitted to a lie detector test.

Madam Speaker, when I was in St. Mary’s College, as some on the other side were, as well as the Chief Whip on this side, if one class made too much noise, the entire class got strokes, the entire class, and it was very unfair. For very

quiet persons like myself, it was very, very unfair. So Peter would pay for Paul and Paul will pay for all. And, Madam Speaker, I take great objection with the fact that persons would be subjected just because a head of department said so and not because of a judge.

So, Madam Speaker, we are allowing the State to order employees to submit to drug testing, lie detector testing as well as to submit their biometric data and you know we have no idea what this biometric data involves. Is it a hair sample? Is it a blood sample? A nail sample? A urine sample? A finger printing? Eye mapping? What is it? And so, we are asked to debate about something that we have no idea what we are debating into the level of complexity in which the State may go into these tests as is done in other countries.

So this Bill, it also provides for the interpretation of the following terms: confidential or sensitive information that may cause damage to national security; the fact that a law officer includes an attorney-at-law, so an attorney-at-law that is contracted by the State in these different departments could be subjected to these tests. They are asking us to vote on that. An officer being a consultant or an expert on contract as well as they gave a definition of what is “secret information”:

“...information...”—that may—“cause serious damage to national security...”

So, Madam Speaker, the Bill, they went on to say would empower the President to make these regulations subject to affirmative resolution of Parliament and as I said, you know, I am talking blindly here because I have no idea what these various tests would entail and how detail and how invasive, Madam Speaker—invasive, please remember that word “invasive”—that these tests may be. So they said also that these tests would be treated as confidential unless

requested under the Freedom of Information Act. And nothing is really safe when we are speaking about person's private information about their bodies. We have recently seen a hacker get the Prime Minister's driver's licence and being able to post it on the web as well as hundreds of thousands of other persons. So information is not really safe, I mean how is it going to be stored. Is it a hard copy? Could it get burnt? Could it get stolen? Is it digital? Could the hacker access it? We had an issue where the hacker accessed the files of the South-West Regional Health Authority and was asking the Authority to pay back for those files, patient information. You know, I have serious reservations about some of the things that this Bill is asking us to do.

So, Madam Speaker, to begin with, this Bill is asking us for the second highest threshold in terms of a parliamentary vote where they are asking us for three-fifths majority and the question must be asked and I am asking the question: Is it reasonable to these State employees that we support this Bill? Because at the end of the day, it is not myself that will be tested, it will be these persons that are currently working in their jobs, in these state institutions and we are officers of the highest court of this land, this is the people's court, Madam Speaker, and we have a responsibility to safeguard these citizens of this country from very, very bad legislation.

And, Madam Speaker, you know this is the other side's, the PNM's side, I would like to say gimmick, latest gimmick to fight crime, if I can say that word. Whatever happened to the CARICOM symposium that crime is a public health concern and the amount of money we spent on that? There was a committee that was formed, the committee should have gotten back to us by now or have they succumbed to crime? Madam Speaker—



**Madam Speaker:** Can I ask you to withdraw that?

**Dr. R. Seecheran:** I will withdraw that, Madam Speaker, sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** So withdraw it and if you wish, find another way or just leave it.

**Dr. R. Seecheran:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, please, please.

**Dr. R. Seecheran:** I withdraw that. So, Madam Speaker, you know they have done many initiatives to combat crime, this being one of them and none of them have borne fruit including the crime as a public health concern. We must look at the fact that is this legislation fair. Is it proportional? And most importantly, is it in the best interest of citizens of this country? And again, I would like to thank my political leader for her very successful crime symposiums. We had two already. The anti-crime workshops, one being held at La Joya, the other being held at Naparima boys and we have another planned for the Chaguanas Borough Corporation coming this Monday. And, Madam Speaker, people are crying out, they need some results with regard to crime and this particular piece of legislation would not solve crime as we see it here in Trinidad and Tobago. For the life of me, I cannot understand why they are saying that you can lie detector test somebody to be able to determine their integrity and nothing could be further from the truth.

So, Madam Speaker, I have three major issues with this Bill. The first being, the first red flag is that the Bill has asked us to go against the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, the very Constitution that our forefathers have written in certain rights for every citizen of this land. Secondly is what this Bill is asking, is it even legal? Is it even legal? And we will examine the literature as we go along.

Dr. Seecheran (cont'd)

And thirdly, how accurate and how confidential are some of these tests that they are asking to impose upon the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? As I said before, this would impact thousands of state employees that took up their tenure or signed their contracts without the knowledge that this would be imposed upon them, Madam Speaker, and to me, that is a great travesty.

**5:30 p.m.**

And it is the duty of the Opposition, Madam Speaker, a very patriotic Opposition with pride, Madam Speaker, to fight for these citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—

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

**Dr. R. Seecheran:**—and we will continue to perform that duty. So, Madam Speaker, with regard to the Bill being inconsistent with sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution, and on December the 10<sup>th</sup> of 2023, Madam Speaker, the United Nations commemorated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And as Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the UN, several of these basic rights have been enshrined here within the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

This Bill from the outset is in breach of sections 4 and 5 of the Constitution, and the Minister outlined the various enshrined constitutional rights which this Bill will infringe upon and be inconsistent with. Those being, Madam Speaker, the protection to the right of privacy—and we will delve more into that as I go along, as well as the right for equal treatment from a public authority. Madam Speaker, that is a second right. Section 5(2)(d) which is the right against self-incrimination, these are all rights that we have as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago which is a legal and law abiding country.

The Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago is the supreme law. It is the

supreme law and any law that is inconsistent with this Constitution is deemed to be void to the extent of its inconsistency, Madam Speaker. And some of those rights that we enjoy, and I am allowing the Minister of National Security, I was asking him if he is going to infringe upon any of these other rights in future legislation. The right to life and liberty. The right not to be deprived thereof of due process of law, and as I will go in further on, this may infringe upon the due process of law. I will get into that a little later. The right to equality before the law, the protection of the law, the right for respect for private and family life, the right for equal treatment from state institutions, section 4(d). Madam Speaker, another right we have is the right for the expression of political views and the right to join a political party right. I could join the UNC if I want, Madam Speaker, that is my right.

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

**Dr. R. Seecheran:** Madam Speaker, the right to education, you have the right to provide a school of your own choice for your child, the right for freedom of movement, the right for freedom of religion and religious belief and observance. The right to freedom of expression and thought, and the right for freedom of assembly, and association, and of course the right of freedom of press, Madam Speaker.

So, these are some of the rights that we have in place in our Constitution, Madam Speaker, and you would have to pass a very, very, very high threshold for myself, as well as those on this side, to be able to say that we would like to infringe on those rights, Madam Speaker. Because, you know, I had a past teacher in St. Mary's and he would say, you know, be careful of your slip it might become a slide. So, let us hope we do not slip and it becomes a slide here. Mr. Mc Claude from St. Mary's, the Spanish teacher, he used to say that.

So, Madam Speaker, with regard to firstly, the legality of workplace drug tests, to begin with, can we legislate taking blood and hair samples from a state official that is currently doing their job, be it in a sensitive state apparatus or not? And, Madam Speaker, all programme workplace drug testing must operate within certain legal constraints and this is so across the world, Madam Speaker. And not all testing regimes are legally permissible right. Now, there is a distinction to be made between pre-employment and post-employment drug testing, and that is a very, very important distinction that the Minister of National Security did not highlight here.

Within government agencies and private businesses, they are freer legally to test potential employees for drug use than they are to test those that are already employed, Madam Speaker. That is a legal precedent. And the public/private distinction is important, Madam Speaker, because drug testing involves taking material from the body of a person, that is not normally exposed to the public, to public scrutiny, and thus it is considered a search. So, when you take a blood sample or a hair sample from someone that is in legal terms considered a search, and you are violating a person's right of privacy in doing so. And this is for persons that are already employed, so there is a distinction to be made between pre-employment testing and post-employment testing, Madam Speaker.

Our Constitution prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures by government agents. They are subject to certain exceptions, pursuant to a warrant upon showing probable cause. Madam Speaker, what would be the probable cause in these situations? So, we are saying that the head of a department would be able to demand these tests upon a state employee upon reasonable suspicion. Madam Speaker I am not a lawyer but I may be in the future, but I have an LLB and what I

have learnt is that you have to reach a threshold for reasonable suspicion, Madam Speaker. And that is based on legal precedent, as well as case law and common law, Madam Speaker.

So, how can a head of department, be it a layperson that may not have a law degree, that may not be an attorney-at-law, be able to assess that? And, Madam Speaker, you yourself as an attorney-at-law would understand, it takes a certain level of knowledge to be able to know what is reasonable suspicion. There is a threshold, there is a line. Below the line it is legal and above the line it is not. Madam Speaker, it is almost like I am presenting to you a radiograph of someone's teeth and saying should we do a root canal? Should we? And saying let us do the root canal or let us not. It has nothing to do with you as a person, it is about your knowledge. It is about your skillset, Madam Speaker.

So, we are asking these heads of department to make a legal decision, right. It is a very serious legal decision, Madam Speaker, because as I just said, workplace drug testing without suspicion obviously fails to satisfy the warrant and probable cause requirements. And thus, what are the interests of these searches achieving with its—by the fact that it is so intrusive, Madam Speaker, and it is unreasonable.

The Minister, as I said before, has not indicated if among these tests there would be a monitored urine test, how extensive these blood tests would be, what they are testing for, how would they store these data, who would be doing the tests, how qualified do we need these persons to be, would we be doing oral swab tests, would we be doing hair follicle tests? You know, we have no clue. We have no clue we just—they asking us to sign a blank cheque here, Madam Speaker, right, and it is infringing on person's rights.

So, Madam Speaker, any citizen of Trinidad and Tobago that works in a state company—I mean not even a state company, they could be a private person as well. They must enjoy their right of privacy. Employees have the right of privacy and should not be subjected to unreasonable searches or invasions of privacy. In most cases around the world that have instituted blood testing, you must have a valid reason for the drug testing, right. Is there a suspicion of drug use? You cannot conduct tests without reasonable cause, right. What is the nexus? You are just going to test people just so? Everyone? Madam Speaker, as well as fairness, secondly fairness. Employees have the right for fair treatment, right. Employers, being the State, should also ensure that the testing process is accurate and reliable, and they have spoken nothing about these tests.

We have no idea which are the labs that would be conducting these tests as well as would persons have an ability to conduct an appeal against a positive result. Many tests are inaccurate, would a person be able to ask for an appeal, Madam Speaker? That is a very important objection as well, as well as due process. Madam Speaker, employees have a right for due process and should be informed of their employers' drug testing policy and the consequences of an—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Caroni East, you have three more minutes of original time left. You are entitled to 15 minutes extended time to wind up you if you wish. So you would be taking the 15?

**Dr. R. Seecheran:** Yes, Madam Speaker, I would need more than 15.

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

**Dr. R. Seecheran:** Madam Speaker, so employees need to have an idea, they need to have an idea of what their employer's drug testing policy is, and the consequences of a positive drug test. We must take into consideration that we are

changing the terms of employment of these state employees while they are still in their jobs, Madam Speaker. That is what they are asking. And, Madam Speaker, the question would have to be asked, would they have started on that particular career path knowing that they could be subjected to these tests? That is what we have to evaluate.

Madam Speaker, there is also the right of confidentiality as well as the right for their information to be private, right. Nothing has been said of how we are going to secure their private information, Madam Speaker, and the fact that they may only be shared with an authorized personnel. Another major issue we have to be concerned about is notice. Employees have a right of notice, to be informed of their employers' drug testing policy in advance.

In many cases around the world, employers have to give a written notice one week in advance of a drug test. Nothing in this legislation says anything about that, Madam Speaker. So, we have no reference to any notice here. So, Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Security should at some point state what is the purpose, what is the major purpose of these measures that they wish to implement. And to say that it is to maintain integrity is farcical, Madam Speaker. It is truly farcical. Promotions to vital positions should be on merit not on party affiliation across the board, Madam Speaker. And that is how you would get integrity at the highest levels, right.

They also have not defined the scope of these tests and how many tests somebody would have to undergo. They are saying you have to submit yourself to tests. So after you submit yourself to one blood test, and they come back and they say, you have to do a next blood test, and then they come back and they say you have to do a next blood test, Madam Speaker. What is the scope of these tests?

And under what circumstances they would be conducted? What are the testing methods, what are the types of drugs that they would be testing for? What are the cut-off levels for positive results, tests results? Madam Speaker, we know nothing of that and we are asking to vote on this.

Madam Speaker, it goes down—it is simply an issue of employee's rights. The legality of this Bill is all about employee rights, the right to privacy, the right to fair treatment, the right to due process, the right to confidentiality, the right for notice, as well as—we have nothing about consequences. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said, you know, they would not be subject to criminal proceedings. I think that is what he said—I am not sure if I am misquoting.

But what are the consequences of a positive test? How would that impact someone's career in these jobs, Madam Speaker, that they entered without even knowing that they would be subjected to these? Are we instituting any employee assistance or rehabilitation programmes to assist these persons should they test positive for marijuana? Is that one of the tests, Madam Speaker? Because marijuana is apparently legal in Trinidad and Tobago right now.

So, you know, it is very confusing. It is confusing to me, right. If someone tests positive, what is the disciplinary action that would be initiated? Suspension, termination, demotion? Would that person lose their job? Would they be able to continue working in the position that they are in, a safety-sensitive position or would they have difficulty in finding employment across the government sector now? Would this information be shared among all state agencies, Madam Speaker?

**5.45 p.m.**

We have the issue of criminal charges. What if someone tests positive for



cocaine? What if someone tests positive for cocaine? What are you going to do then, Madam Speaker?

Persons are liable, obviously, to lose benefits. Many persons would lose their retirement benefits, their insurance benefits. Would employers be able to initiate legal action against these persons, Madam Speaker? So there are many, many issues that the Minister did not delve into and he is asking for us on this side to vote with him. He came, you know, with basically the exact same opening that he did the year prior, Madam Speaker.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, with regard to the accuracy of drug testing, the reliability of drug-testing techniques has been noted by many courts around the world. By far, the most common illicit drug that is tested for is marijuana. What I have learnt in the literature, Madam Speaker, is that this provides almost no deterrent value when you drug test someone in the workplace, whether it is a drug-testing programme or whether it is a drug consumption programme, Madam Speaker.

So arbitrators, in many instances around the world, have struck down drug-testing programmes on grounds that the tests were not accurate, on grounds that the tests were not within the employer's prerogative to test for, Madam Speaker—and that is where I am getting at, we have no idea what they are asking to test for—as well as the lack of evidence of a workplace drug programmes. Many of these cases have been struck down. Because if a person has no indication of prior drug use, why are you drug testing them, Madam Speaker? And that goes back to the issue of victimization.

So many of these policies that they are asking for here are ethically wrong, Madam Speaker; ethically wrong. Just on a whim you are going to test somebody

and they have no indication they may have drug use or a drug history and you are just going to subject them to drug tests?

As I said before, Madam Speaker, pre-employment screening is allowed, but not post-employment in many, many cases in many countries around the world where no job-related nexus can be shown. And, Madam Speaker, it is wrong to invade the privacy of many just to screen a few. It is wrong, Madam Speaker. We do not do that.

So, Madam Speaker, drug testing must be done in a reasonable and in a non-discriminatory manner, and it must be based on a legitimate need, and it must be conducted with respect to the privacy and the constitutional rights of these workers in our state institutions, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, there have been a lot of changes over the last few years, you know, with regard to the perspective of many drugs. One of those, obviously, is marijuana. You know, nothing was said if someone tests positive for marijuana. What if someone tests positive for marijuana and they have access to private and what?—secure and top-secret information? What would be the consequences then?

So, Madam Speaker, moving on with regard to the legality of polygraph testing. And my friend, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, he spoke about cases within our Commonwealth jurisdiction and the UK case law, Madam Speaker. But since the Minister of National Security has quoted the US in so many instances, the FBI and whatnot, I will quote some US law for him. And the Supreme Court, which is the highest court in the United States, has issued guidance on whether a polygraph test could be admitted as evidence.

In the 1993 case of *Daubert v Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals*, the justices set

that the rules of evidence as the standard for admitting expert testimony in a trial is left up to local judges and in many cases, they have struck down the legality of polygraph testing, Madam Speaker. So the Minister is coming here saying that this is his saviour, to do polygraph testing, Madam Speaker, because the US does it, and the US is saying, it is not admissible in court.

In fact, Madam Speaker, in the US military, across all branches of the military, they have banned polygraph testing altogether. And I ask the Minister of National Security to go and check on that. Madam Speaker, in the United States, we also have the Employee Polygraph Protection Act and in 1988, the US Federal Government stepped in and banned all private employers from using polygraphs as a means of hiring persons in the United States. That is how serious they were about this test, Madam Speaker. So the Employee Polygraph Protection Act does not allow employers to use a polygraph test with regard to hiring persons in new positions, Madam Speaker. And the tests can only be done when investigating a theft or crime, but only after written notice in the Federal Government, Madam Speaker. So if you have passed the reasonable suspicion that they suspect you of a theft or crime, only after written notice, you can submit yourself for a polygraph test, Madam Speaker. Not what we have here. That is not what is before us right now.

With regard to the accuracy, Madam Speaker, of polygraph testing, it has been widely, widely criticized. And that is because, Madam Speaker, according to the literature, what they are saying is that as human beings, we tend to lie and as we get older, we become habitual liars and our brain becomes desensitized to lie.

So the American Psychological Association has issued a statement stating that polygraph testing is inaccurate. And, Madam Speaker, what they went on to

say is that:

“...‘an honest person may be nervous when answering truthfully and a dishonest person may be non-anxious.’”

And what they are saying is that these polygraph tests are not accurate. So if the American Psychological Association is saying polygraph testing is not accurate, why are we using it here to test for integrity, Madam Speaker? Why is that before us?

What this association has said, Madam Speaker, is that due to:

“‘Fear, rage, embarrassment at having been asked a personal question...even the tone of the examiner’s voice can all cause the exact same reaction that the polygraph examiner would brand as a lie.’”

So, Madam Speaker, there is no accuracy in this test whatsoever.

Moving on, Madam Speaker, and most importantly for national security, in 2022, the National Research Council of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine in the United States stated that polygraph testing should not be used:

“‘...to identify personnel who may jeopardize national security.’”

So the National Research Council of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has said that they:

“‘...should not use...’—polygraph testing—“‘...to screen or clear employees or to identify spies because the evidence shows that lie detector work ‘is scanty and scientifically weak.’”

And the Minister could go and check this as well. Go and check it, please. So, they are saying it cannot be used for spy work in order to determine if someone has lied or not.

And they went on to say:

“...‘the inherent ambiguity of...’”—these measures—“...used in...polygraph’”—testing—“suggest that further investments in improving polygraph technique and interpretation will bring only modest...’”—advancements—“...in accuracy.’”

So this is the National Research Council of Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine.

And, Madam Speaker, what are the factors that can influence a polygraph test? Madam Speaker, how much more time do I have?

**Madam Speaker:** You have approximately four minutes left.

**Dr. R. Seecheran:** Thank you. I do not have much time. I have a lot more here. I really needed some more time because I have to rush as usual. But,

Madam Speaker, what are the factors that can influence a polygraph test, Madam Speaker? Guilt. You may not necessarily be lying, Madam Speaker, but because you have guilt of some sort—so polygraph testing is more a deception detector. So it picks up on your guilt and when you are feeling nervous. And guilt does not necessarily mean that you committed a crime, but guilt may be that you are withholding information from the person that is conducting the polygraph test. As well as certain drugs and medications can affect polygraph testing, Madam Speaker, and these include antihypertensive medication, medication that alters the normal rates of your heart rhythm, Madam Speaker, as well as anti-anxiety medications that alter your emotional state, as well as illegal substances that lowers your blood pressure and heart rate.

And, Madam Speaker, one of the major concerns of the polygraph testing is unprofessional examiners. There was nothing in the Bill that stated that these

examiners are qualified or have been certified by international bodies, as well as the test environment on how imposing that area may be, as well as if the persons themselves may actually be suffering from a mental illness of some sort, be it paranoia or delusional disorders, Madam Speaker.

Now, with regard to biometric data, Madam Speaker—and I know that I am running out of time—that is an ethical issue. That is a totally ethical issue and it involves individual privacy and self-autonomy within a person. And the possession of someone's biometric data, it has a moral issue with regard to that, Madam Speaker, because you basically own that person. You know, you can track that person around the world. That person can, in no possible way, be able to hide from law enforcement. So it is the freedom from big brother or intrusive surveillance. And that is what they are trying to impose upon these citizens here, Madam Speaker.

There is the issue of identity theft, Madam Speaker. You would be able to take someone's identity because you have all the biometric data about them. It is about the power and the imbalance of power between a government and its citizens, and it must be justified—this Bill must be justified in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness with regard to safety and security of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And it must be, Madam Speaker, subject to accountability mechanisms and to guard against misuse.

So having said that, Madam Speaker, I support everything that the Member for Barataria/San Juan, as well as the Member from Naparima had said previously on this debate. Our major issues would be with regard to who is this data monitoring, what is reasonable suspicion and what triggers it, what is the threshold, what are the sanctions, if someone is positive with regard to self-incrimination and

the fact that you have subjected persons to these tests, is it proportionate?

We have no idea about the special reserve police officers. Would they be subjected to this? Has the Law Association been consulted? The evidence is not admissible in court. These are all things that the Member for Barataria/San Juan had highlighted, and the fact that these polygraph tests are not reliable and accurate. And, Madam Speaker, in no way can these tests test integrity. The only thing that tests integrity is integrity itself, Madam Speaker. And with those few words, I thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Arima.

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Penelope Beckles):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And let me say what a pleasure it is to join this debate on the Miscellaneous Provisions (Testing and Identification) Bill, 2022, and just to address some of the statements made by the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Caroni East, who indicated that no one has made a compelling argument as to why the Opposition should support this Bill. But what is also clear is that the hon. Member himself has made absolutely no recommendations, no suggestions.

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

**Hon. P. Beckles:** I have taken note that there is a practice to simply come and criticize the recommendations of the Government. But we would think that an Opposition that is claiming that they are going to be the government—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Arima, it is now six o'clock.

**Hon. P. Beckles:** Okay.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER  
(LEAVE)**

**National Emergency - Oil Spill  
(Coastline of Tobago)**

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, we shall now deal with the Definite Matter of Urgent Public Importance. Member for Couva South.

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

**6.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I move this Motion under Standing Order 17—

**Hon. Member:** A strong move.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—to discuss a matter of urgent public importance namely, the national leave emergency due to the disastrous oil spill along to coastline of Tobago. Madam Speaker, in 1979 Trinidad and Tobago experienced one of the world's largest ever oil spills, or tanker spills in our waters after two tankers collided and discharged approximately 287,000 tonnes of crude oil. And in 2024, oil or some oil-like substance is spewing in Tobago's waters, and we must take note of the commentary or the concerns of the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly namely, Chief Secretary Farley Augustine, and I quote him when he said:

“Tobago was never ever ready for this kind of spill; you’re talking about an island that does not have sufficient amount of booms, an island that doesn’t have storage, adequate storage capacity for this kind of oil or toxic material. We never prepared for this as an eventuality.”

And Madam Speaker, the facts are very clear, it has been established that on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2024, a mystery vessel began leaking an oil-like substance on a reef



Definite Urgent Matter  
Mr. Indarsingh

2024.02.16

off the coast of Tobago, namely in the vicinity of the Cove Eco and Industrial Business Park. And the Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West, today in this very said House, in this very said Chamber, stated that and I quote:

“That the nature of the oil spill and the immediacy of the need for a coordinated approach in containing, and where possible reversing the effects of the spill, led me to declare a national emergency.”

On Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2024, four days after the oil-like substance began spewing from this vessel—it is important to take note that this occurred four days before. And the resulting spill, based on information coming out of the Tobago Emergency Management Agency, TEMA, is in the vicinity of approximately 144 kilometers in length and growing, and now, is threatening the shores, or the shoreline or the coastline of our neighbours such as Venezuela and Grenada. And there is a sense of anxiety, apprehension, concern within the population of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. Because when citizens continue, and stakeholders continue to rely on the national newspapers, we have been greeted with headlines such as:

“Tobago oil spill mystery deepens as tugboat vanishes.”

“Fisherfolk warn of increase in Tobago fish prices after oil spill.”

“IMA warns against selling”—eating—“toxic fish”—dead animals found at site affected by oil spill.

### **6.05 p.m.**

And also, a headline, whether there are any facts, cover up:

“Farley accuses Government of hiding info on oil spill.”

Oil threat widens, Grenada on alert for possible Tobago oil spill fallout

And:

“Venezuela”—ready to—“offer support”—if needed.

**UNREVISED**

Madam Speaker, it is also important to note that this particular spill has gained the attention of the international press. The major news networks have carried this spill to the point that BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, has reported on it, its existence, and its possible implications for the economy of Tobago and so on. And I was taken aback when one of the international correspondents at CNN, one, Max Foster lamented, and I quote:

“The Government doesn’t know who owns the vessel, where it came from, or what’s even in it.”

This is the international press coverage that we have been exposed to as a result of this scenario that has unfolded since the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2024, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we are on the verge of 10 days into this disaster and having listened to the Member for Diego Martin West, and with all due respect to the office of the Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, we are no better informed when the Prime Minister made his statement in this honourable House and there is no light at the end of the tunnel. All I can say is that God help the people of Tobago based on the current intervention of the central government of Trinidad and Tobago.

But Madam Speaker, we on this side, we want to take the opportunity to express our sincere thanks and appreciation—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—and commendation to all stakeholders and volunteers who have been involved in the cleanup operation or the salvage operations at this point in time. Because it is very clear that the fisher folk or the fishermen from Scarborough, from Lambeau, from Buccoo, Black Rock, Mount Irving, Plymouth, amongst other areas have been impacted upon in terms of their ability to ply their trade and to earn revenue streams or an income. From a geographical point of view, the Scarborough Waterfront, Lowlands in and around the Magdalena Beach

Definite Urgent Matter  
Mr. Indarsingh

2024.02.16

and Golf Resort and I could go on and on in terms of the areas that have been impacted. It is also important, Madam Speaker, I see the Members for Tobago West and Tobago East smiling broadly but for some reason there has been deafening silence—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —coming from Tobago East and Tobago West as it relates to what has transpired in their geographic domain if I should use that particular phrase, I thought they would have been first out of the starting blocks—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —and being part of the volunteer system or the cadre of volunteers to render assistance—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —to the people of Tobago in their hour and in their plight of need, Madam Speaker. But more importantly too, we must focus on where we are, because the mangroves have been impacted and they are important from an environmental point of view, and they are important, the mangrove, from the point of view of the assets of Tobago tourism thrust and current existence and so on.

Madam Speaker, the Opposition has seen the need to bring this Motion to this House, and based on your blessings and approval because there are a number of questions that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has to answer—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —because at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, they must not hide under the cloak or under the veil of the Tobago House of Assembly. The central government of this country has a fundamental responsibility—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

Definite Urgent Matter  
Mr. Indarsingh

2024.02.16

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —to preserve the unitary State of Trinidad and Tobago, and in the preservation of the unitary State of Trinidad and Tobago, it must take charge and leadership—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —whenever there is a crisis of national proportion, Madam Speaker. And Madam Speaker, I have been hearing pronouncements that the spill is being contained and the spill is being properly managed. But Madam Speaker, I am a logical thinking man and if my memory serves me correct, this afternoon the Member for Port of Spain North St. Ann's West, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, told my colleague, the Chief Whip, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, that oil is still leaking from the vessel, the vessel has not been plugged. So, if you do not—if you are unable to plug the leak, how could you tell me that—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—the oil spill is being contained and it is being managed? Madam Speaker, that defies logic and in another place I would have used the appropriate language, but I cannot use the appropriate language in this august Chamber, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the country has had an official National Oil Spill and Contingency Plan since 2013 and it was passed by the Government led by the Member for Siparia, Madam Speaker. It speaks of our progressive and visionary thinking—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —in terms of how we handle the affairs of leading a Government in the context of our responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, the reaction in the first few hours determines the success of any containment efforts and probably in his response, if he is inclined to join the debate, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries must tell us through

Definite Urgent Matter  
Mr. Indarsingh

2024.02.16

his Ministry, and tell the population through leadership of his Ministry, how quickly did this National Oil Spill Contingency Plan—how quickly was it activated—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —and when did this occur and who was in charge of the incident, command team, and so on, Madam Speaker? Because this is effective communication, not only with the people of Tobago, but the entire population of the unitary State—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. And in addition to this particular issue, Madam Speaker, the Government is duty bound to tell us because questions—there is a sense of anxiety, there is a concern, even fear to a lesser extent because the Government— I think the Minister of National Security, I do not know where he is at this point in time, if he is involved in active discussions in trying to locate the owners and where this ship or vessel originated from, Madam Speaker. But the Government is duty bound to tell the population how long has this ghost or phantom vessel been in the waters of Trinidad and Tobago, and, in addition to that, whether the ship—when did this vessel run into trouble and whether it was abandoned by parties connected with it, Madam Speaker.

These are the important things because, Madam Speaker, from a national security point of view, it is mind-boggling to know that a vessel could come into the waters of Trinidad and Tobago, and for some amazing or mind-boggling reason or reasons our intelligence system has failed, our radar system, our surveillance system, and we could go on and on in terms of where we are, Madam Speaker. And, as I said, the statement of the Prime Minister in this very said House today

**UNREVISED**

Definite Urgent Matter  
Mr. Indarsingh

2024.02.16

did not give me any sense of comfort and I am sure it did not provide any sense of comfort to the entire population of Tobago, and they are no better off.

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And today, we want to tell the Government of this country that there is the need for increased collaboration between the central government and the Tobago House of Assembly, if we are to arrest this spill, if we are to salvage the economy of Tobago in the interest of our unitary State. And I say this because it has been established that the spill is beyond 144 kilometres and growing in length and its impact. And the Government has said, and if I am to quote the Prime Minister very quickly, Madam Speaker, and I quote from his statement:

“The vessel is, as of now, still stuck on the reef at Cove and it continues to pose a major threat as it continues to foul the coastline and surrounding areas. Our major task now is to empty the contents of the vessel in a control operation and neutralize the threat. We are assessing the scope of what is required and are seeking the pertinent expertise where we do not have it.”

Ten days “yuh still analyzing”.

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Ten days “yuh still”—the scope and what is being required and so on. Lift the disaster tier to level three or tier three, and get the necessary expertise—

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** —and competency to deal with the issue. Because the oil continues to impact upon the coastline and the threat that it is impacting upon the economy and the environment of Tobago, Madam Speaker. So—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have two more minutes left of speaking time.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Yes, Madam Speaker. In addition to that, we want to recommend to the Government that under the 1992 protocol of the international convention and civil liability for all pollution damage, we want to hear from the Government, they must tell us what are the mechanisms, what are the initiatives which will be pursued by the Government to hold the owners liable for environmental damage to the Tobago maritime environment and coastline. And in addition to that, there must be a focused collaboration with the International Maritime Organization to find the origin and the owners of this particular vessel.

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And in addition to that, Madam Speaker, we want to recommend to the Government, because the EMA and the IMA, they seem to have gone silent. They need to tell us—10 days now they cannot tell us what is in the waters and what is contained in this vessel, Madam Speaker, that speaks of some kind of, I do not want to say incompetence, but it speaks of procrastination and I think that the line Minister need to step up to the plate and get these two institutions communicating with the stakeholders and the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Hon Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, and on the issue of effective communication, the Government must get on the ground with the fisher folk, the small businesses, the stakeholders who have been impacted upon by this unfortunate situation to do the proper assessment so that when the time comes for compensation, and to hold those that are liable, the cost implication for the ordinary people would have been costed already. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**6.20 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Energy and Energy Industries

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

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, what we have just seen as a population is a display that we should be thankful that the UNC is not the one that is managing anything associated with this oil spill.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** Unfortunately, almost every other sentence uttered by the Member for Couva South displayed a complete ignorance, a complete lack of understanding, a complete lack of logic, despite his assurance that he is a logical thinker, as to how this situation should be handled.

Earlier this afternoon, we had the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West, give us a comprehensive statement as to all of the factual steps that have taken place from the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, when this disaster first became apparent, to date. And in that record that the Prime Minister put on the table before us, it shows clearly that all of the agencies that are required to work, are working, and it has said what has to be done.

The first thing that we need to understand is that this vessel was probably overturned somewhere out in international waters. There was absolutely no debris found anywhere near to where the vessel eventually ended up, which is upside down on a reef, unfortunately, in Tobago waters. The Maritime Services Division,



the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, other intelligence agencies, including CARICOM IMPACS, have been assisting us in tracing and tracking the identity of the owners of these vessels, if such exists, because we are all very aware that there are occasions, unfortunately, in international trade where less than legal activities take place.

What we have been able to ascertain, and to put an end to the speculation that is coming, unfortunately, from those on the other side and fuelling social media, et cetera, is that this vessel contained fuel. As at this stage, what the labs has told us, it is likely to be bunker sea fuel, which is not crude oil, fortunately, and this bunker sea fuel was on its way to Guyana. It seemed to have stopped off in Aruba, which is a source of possible fuel, and the satellite imagery has picked up that this vessel was being towed. In fact, when we got on the ground, Minister Sinanan and myself—because we were the first from central Government on the ground. Now is a convenient time, Madam Speaker, just to correct the record, even though the Prime Minister's statement is now on the *Hansard* and officially out there, giving the proper timeline.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries was first alerted to this oil spillage at about 9.00 a.m. on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. The Tobago House of Assembly and TEMA have told us that they first became aware by fisherfolk around 7.20 a.m. that same day. Immediately, central Government invoked and is utilizing the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan that puts the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries as the lead agency. We have been working—the Member asked how long did it take for that to be implemented? It was immediately implemented. We

became aware at 9.00 a.m. on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February. By 2.00 p.m. on the same day, the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, the Permanent Secretary, who is the person that is the lead for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in this instance—it is not the politicians, it has to be the technocrats. It has to be those with the expertise, it has to be those with the technical experience. This is not a photo op session. I see that the UNC think they suddenly have life because they suddenly think that they have something to speak about in the national arena, but all they are displaying to the national arena, thankfully for us on this side, is their complete incompetence and a lack of understanding and a lack of caring—

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

**Hon. S. Young:**—lack of genuine caring for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So by 2.00 p.m. on that day, the first meeting had taken place under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

Another area of ignorance we are seeing here is a complete lack of appreciation and understanding of the Tobago House of Assembly Act—

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

**6.25 p.m.**

**Hon. S. Young:**—where the THA, for those on the other side who obviously have not read it, nor the schedules attached to it, to see who and what the THA is responsible for, this came under the direct purview of the THA. So the first set of correspondence you see going from central Government to the THA was Minister Sinanan and myself speaking to the Chief Secretary on that same day and immediately offering all of our expertise and assistance to stand by. Because it was made very clear by the THA who has responsibility for this in Tobago that they

were going to manage it and take the lead with TEMA. And fortunately, there is documentary evidence contemporaneously on the same day—on the next day that sets out this, that that was the action taken by the THA and TEMA with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, the IMA, the EMA, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Maritime Division, ably supporting the efforts of TEMA and THA.

The next day is the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, and that is when an assessment has to take place. They behave as though you can immediately contain the oil spill, which is still at this time impossible, but when we talk of “containment”, it is not stopping the oil from going, because the last thing you want to do with a vessel that you are not certain as to the integrity of the vessel, that is overturned and outflowing an oil-like substance, is to go and interfere with it in some way that it cracks further and there is more oil spillage. So containment in this instance, the experts will tell you, is the use of booms, and you put down booms in places where the science says that the oil will go, and that was employed.

Immediately, on that day, we got hold of Woodside that had an operator in Tobago, a service provider, Kaizen, and we got their authorization to use the booms that were there in Tobago and then we started getting more across from Trinidad. The record would reflect the THA, the Chief Secretary, and others are on record for acknowledging that immediately the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries authorized Heritage, to not only get personnel across, to get service companies across who can protect, amongst other things, the environment, but also all of the necessary experts who reside in Trinidad and Tobago to get to Tobago to add to the resources. That took place on Friday the 9<sup>th</sup> of February; Minister Sinanan and myself were in Tobago. We met with the Chief Secretary. We met with the head of TEMA, Mr. Allan Stewart. We held discussions with them,

continued to give our assurance that they had our full support. By then resources had begun to arrive.

My friends on the other side want to paint this false picture that suddenly someone can wave a magic wand and resources arrive immediately on the scene. It certainly does not work that way. In fact, on my way to Parliament today you could see, lined up to go through the Port onto the *Cabo Star*, you were seeing even more resources being sent across at this stage now; big tankers to take up the waste product, et cetera, and to have it safely disposed. All of the resources—I give the people of Trinidad and Tobago the assurance, all of the resources that were available were immediately deployed to Tobago, and the Chief Secretary, THA and TEMA can bear witness to that.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** This talk of a cover-up is completely false.

The Prime Minister has put that on the record here today. There is absolutely no reason for anyone on this Government side to cover up, because the record accurately reflects it, the facts reflect it. After the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, when Minister Sinanan and myself went across physically, again, just to lend support to make sure that our personnel who were on the ground, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has had personnel on the ground from the night of the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, and they remained there now with a rotating team of the highest level of staff who are trained with the expertise to deal with these situations.

We went across with the hon. Prime Minister, leading a delegation that included the Chief Secretary, on Sunday morning—early on Sunday morning, the 11<sup>th</sup>. Yesterday, I can tell the country, yesterday I was in Venezuela, and the day before, and we had already begun to have conversations with PDVSA. This is not Venezuelan fuel, the way I am hearing some on the other side suggesting.

Venezuela, Petrobras from Brazil also reached out. Our technical people have been in constant contact with them. BP, Shell, Woodside, and other companies have also added their expertise. So there is no area where central Government has not been in the frontline assisting to make sure that the resources are there.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** To take the cheap shots at the Members of Parliament for Tobago West and Tobago East, who were there present—the Member for Tobago East was there with us on the Sunday at the press conference. There was a joint press conference.

I understand that they would not look at TV, because on a Sunday I do not know what it is that they are doing, but there has been a national press conference on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, where the Prime Minister led, along with the Chief Secretary. Minister Sinanan addressed the community. I addressed the community. Minister Webster-Roy was there, TEMA; everyone was there. So whilst they sit here bumping their gums, because that is the only thing that they are good at doing—

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

**Hon. S. Young:**—the rest of us are there working, and we will continue to provide all of the resources that are possible.

In fact, before coming here this evening, Madam Speaker, one of the things that I was being briefed on is us getting more international resources. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries again gave the green light to one of the leading firms in oil spill response. We got a team to Trinidad, flew them across to Tobago within minutes of them landing here. They are there on the ground. I have asked that BP, Shell, they sent across ROVs. I have asked, “Let us locate who are the people, the experts in the world that can deal with the ship.” This is not a simple

task.

So, fortunately, we have boomed off the area and that is containing it. What you do is you boom around it to direct the oil to one area, but we need to deal with the vessel. Unfortunately, it has been made difficult, because whoever is responsible has not come forward. So we still do not have the schematics of the ship. As we said, they are bawling “Gulf Stream”. There are 350-plus Gulf Steams—ships that are called Gulf Stream, so we do not have the exact schematics. We have sent divers down to the vessel on at least three or four occasions, including specialized divers. They have told us due to the currents, due to the rough up and down of the ship, the conditions that they are facing, the low visibility, et cetera, there is very little they can do.

We are deploying all of the necessary resources and available resources. Fortunately for us, because we are a player in the hydrocarbon industry, globally we have had a number of leading international companies and countries reach out to us. So one of the conversations I had in Venezuela, over the last 48 hours, is what are the types of resources that they could help us with, but even before I got there—and the trip was not about that, even before I got there, PDVSA was already locked in; their technical people speaking to our technical people at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. This is not a situation where you run—I would welcome all of them. In fact, I would gladly get all of them on a flight—all of our friends from the UNC on a flight to Tobago this evening.

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. S. Young:** You are not welcome in Venezuela, that I can assure you—get on a flight this evening to Tobago and let them swim out to the vessel, because they seem to want to tell the country there is something that they can do that is not

being done.

**Dr. Moonilal:** [*Inaudible*]*—go back Caroni East.*

**Hon. S. Young:** Let them provide us with some additional support.

Let them provide the country with some suggestion that makes sense that is not already being covered, because it does not exist, Madam Speaker. The record shows and the facts show that the national oil spill contingency plan is being followed. All of the resources that can be brought to bear on this unfortunate situation are being brought to bear. Up to this moment, we are still trying to trace the vessel, but we do things properly. So the necessary diplomatic notes have gone out to the various countries, to Panama, to Aruba, to Guyana, to try and assist in tracing and finding out more about it. In the meantime, experts are working on the plan to be able to safely get into the vessel, get the liquid—the remaining liquid that is there out of it, and safely dispose of it, because the last thing you want to do is, in an operation such as that, to go and create an even worse situation where you expedite and you increase the potential oil spill that is taking place.

So, Madam Speaker, listening here and understanding the politics, and unfortunately the politics of my friends on the other side that they are looking for a lifeline, I can assure them and the population, this is not their lifeline. They are already sinking. They do not even need a reef to be sinking on. So this is not what is going to propel them somewhere into the political spotlight. So again, as the Prime Minister has assured as the head of the Government, and the head of the central Government, and as a Tobagonian himself, he has instructed all of us to ensure that every possible resource is provided.

You heard the Prime Minister himself addressed the national community on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February and stated that he now declares this to be a national incident, and even though it was not budgeted for, the Ministry of Finance will find the

necessary resources for us to be able to pay whatever needs to be paid for us to deal with this. The first thing is containment; that has been happening. Not full containment because it is a very difficult task because of the circumstances, and clean up. It makes absolutely no sense rushing to do the clean-up in certain areas when the oil is still being spilled upon, but now what you are seeing with those booms, and the use of those types of technology, is it has not gone much further than the area. The oil streaks that you see going across on the satellite imagery, all of that could have taken place before all of this because the oil was waiting on no one, but what I can give the national community the assurance of is that this central Government has acted responsibly.

The leading Ministers have been on the ground. Minister Sinanan has been on the ground now on three occasions. I have gone twice. The Prime Minister was there. We are in constant contact with the THA and TEMA, and more importantly, forgetting and putting aside the Ministers and the politicians, the technical people who are trained, the experts from Heritage, the experts from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, from maritime, from all of these various state agencies have been doing and working assiduously to do what needs to be done, and no resource has been spared, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk humping*]

**Hon. S. Young:** So, Madam Speaker, I assure the population, as we heard from our Prime Minister this afternoon who took the time to come and give a comprehensive statement that is now on the record—

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

**Hon. S. Young:**—setting out all that has been done, that everything that we can do to deal with this oil spill and disaster, including the utilization of international expertise and assistance, is being done, and we will continue to do so until,



hopefully, the situation is brought to an end. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you have five minutes.

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

**Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, after listening to Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the only thing I am assured of is that the vessel is still leaking oil as we speak here today, Madam Speaker. Because when I asked this question to the Minister earlier, and the contribution that the Minister made just now, for the last 15 minutes, you would have thought that something—some positive answers the Minister would have given here this afternoon based on this matter of definite urgent, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Minister in his contribution here now has not—the only thing I heard, he said that the vessel was on its way to Guyana. That is what he said in his contribution, Madam Speaker. So if the Minister is aware of this particular vessel were on its way with some sort of lubrication or content, to Guyana. How come they cannot find the owners of this vessel, Madam Speaker, or even the schematics or the plan and the designer of this badge? It is a badge, Madam Speaker. It is a badge that capsized with lubricants, Madam Speaker.

After 10 days, Madam Speaker, I am shocked, and I think the population and even the international community is shocked that we are not able to cap off and stop the leakage coming from this badge, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I mean, after 10 days, and we are nowhere closer today to capping off or sealing off the leak from the badge, Madam Speaker, because I asked this question and the Minister has not been able to give any assurance of a timeline when this will be done, Madam Speaker, and that gives us trouble as a population.

I am not disputing that the Minister and the Government is not trying, but we

are not getting the assurance from the Prime Minister in his statement today, and even the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. When you look at the policy statement of the oil plan, Madam Speaker, and it is there on the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries' website, it talks about the lead people, and it is there, the policy statement—and I just want to quote:

The lead individuals in containment if there is an oil spill or a disaster is the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries as the lead agency with the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard as their response agency.

**6.40 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, the Minister said he went to Tobago two days on the 9<sup>th</sup> I think of February, two days after. I in some of the releases on his visit—and I hope it was not a photo op—was on his visit, the Minister in his press conference there with the Minister of Works and Transport, said that he had operationalized agencies like Heritage to come on board to assist in this disaster, Madam Speaker. So if I am reading the media, it took about two days when the Minister went to Tobago to activate the issue with this oil plan or the recovery plan, pollution plan, Madam Speaker. I am aghast that today still after 10 days I am asking when. When will this vessel, the barge, be capped off, the leakage will be stopped, even determine what sort of pollutants are there, Madam Speaker. I know my time is running out, one more minute, and I am just hoping that the Minister can give us some assurance that they can find the owners of this barge and make them pay based on the moneys that we will be spending as a country to recover from this disaster. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Roodal Moonilal** (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Definite Urgent Matter  
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2024.02.16

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, just to lend my support in a few minutes to the Member for Couva South for filing this very critical Motion at this time and to respond to a couple of matters raised by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who has really run up a record as being the most politicized Minister of Energy this country has ever seen. Generally, it is a technical position. Generally Ministers of Energy do not get involved in crass politics as this current Minister has this tendency to do. But I want to just ask the Minister, we are hearing so much about foreign help, BP and Shell and divers and they expended moneys already, and I will come to that just now, to have foreign help here, but when the divers were in a pipeline in Pointe-a-Pierre nobody had international help, nobody had finance—

**Madam Speaker:** Member—

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—nobody had nothing.

**Madam Speaker:**—please.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** [*Inaudible*] Yes. Madam Speaker, this matter is a critical matter. All the country has learnt today, all the country has learnt today is that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was in Venezuela yesterday; that is the only thing we have learnt. Today, this reminds me of a famous line in one of the old *Pink Panther* movies, two detectives are talking and one said, “We want to bring you up to speed. We know nothing, you are now up to speed.” They have told the country that we want to update you, the country. We know nothing. We do not know where the vessel came from. We do not know where it was going. We do not know what is the nationality of the crew.

They have 350 Gulfstream, we do not know which one it is. They have—10 days later they do not even know what is this substance that they can confirm. Yet

**UNREVISED**

in a Ministry of National Security release, Madam Speaker, they confirmed it is an oil spill. So National Security said it is an oil spill, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries says, no we cannot confirm it is oil, we do not know what substance that is. So that they cannot confirm 10 days later what exactly is the substance.

There is economic damage, yet. This thing has now started. The economic damage is incalculable at this stage and it will remain so for some time to come because you are dealing with fisheries, you are dealing with vegetation, you are dealing with environmental damage, you are dealing with livelihoods, you are dealing with employment, but apart from that, which we will calculate by next year or the year after, you are dealing with an international crime, and when the Chief Secretary says something—I just want to come back to the statements made from the Government—when the Chief Secretary says there is a cover-up, there is one piece of evidence that is there.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago knew on February 4<sup>th</sup> that this vessel went missing. They have confirmed that in a statement from National Security, I cannot display it. But the Government confirms on February 4<sup>th</sup> a vessel went missing, lost track of it, and did not inform the THA, did not inform the THA that this vessel may be in the vicinity of Trinidad and Tobago waters; they know nothing. Now they say, the THA is in charge, read the law. They do not even know what is the schematics of the vessel., They do not even know at this time. We hear divers are here, but we do not know where these divers came from, where they are, so that they cannot cap it.

Now during this entire debate, all of this talk we hear from the Government and so on, how much hundreds of barrels of oil already leaking in the sea while you talking? Today was a day, Madam Speaker, all we got to understand today is

Definite Urgent Matter  
Dr. Moonilal (cont'd)

2024.02.16

the vessel is continuing to leak oil and the Government is continuing to leak lies. That is all we have discovered today, and they can—

**Madam Speaker:** Continue to leak? Continue to leak? Please, you withdraw that word.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** The Government continues to leak inaccuracies and misinformation and they are continuing—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you have one minute left.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—this plot of not informing. And, I will ask the Government today, whether there is any veracity to a suggestion also on social media that that vessel is the Trafigura vessel that has links to Venezuela, that has been missing and run aground on a reef off of Tobago. They must now confirm that. And they are boasting they went on the scene, Minister Sinanan, Minister Young on the scene. Mr. Sinanan cannot fix a crack in Mosquito Creek there for two years, he will fix oil leak? That is just “pappy showing.” And today the Minister tells us, we do not go, this is a technical job requiring technical people. “But when dey touring the whole world, dey touring the whole world on energy it have no technical people. Is two politicians does go, a golfer and a caddy. They do not carry nobody else, no technical people go.”

So, this today is a bunch of hypocrisy, nothing is happening, nothing is happening quick enough, I should say that. Nothing is happening quick enough because there is no leadership with the Government no leadership on this.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

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

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am amazed at the conduct of my friends on the other side in this House in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, a vessel came into our space, was identified on Wednesday the 7<sup>th</sup> I think it was, we have made it quite clear in a prime ministerial statement and the Minister in response to this Motion, that action has been and is being taken to properly assess what the problems and the risks that affront us might be. We have found ourselves as a nation with this unplanned, unanticipated development. Here we are in this Parliament and our colleagues on the other side are quarrelling with us, what is the quarrel over? They are spoiling for a fight.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** There is no need for us to be quarrelling and fighting. We have a problem as a nation here, one that we did not plan, and rather than make suggestions, and offer words of support and any semblance of that, they are here quarrelling with the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, quarrelling with the Prime Minister—

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:**—quarrelling with the coast guard, quarrelling with everybody.

**Mr. Young:** Offering nothing.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** And offering absolutely nothing trying to make “janjat” and “bacchanal” and “kuchur” and to use another word, to make UNC.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, I just heard one or two of my friends on the other side talking about capping. How do you cap a vessel? “Is ah well?” The first thing you have to do is dive and look and determine what the problems are.

Definite Urgent Matter  
Hon. F. Hinds (cont'd)

As Minister with the responsibility for the coast guard, I am intimately aware of some of the issues and the challenges—

**Mr. Young:** And the dangers.

**Hon. F. Hinds:**—and the dangers that this scenario creates for us—

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** No other vessel in the world “get capped”.

**Hon. F. Hinds:**—and they talking about capping vessel, they should cap their parliamentary tongues.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member. Member, I consider that unparliamentary.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I should withdraw that, Madam Speaker. In other words, they should just—I withdraw that. Madam Speaker, the scenario is, as the Prime Minister, as the Minister has truthfully and professionally on the basis of expert advice and assessment to date, they have explained ad nauseam that where we are now is trying to determine the nature, the exact nature of the risk along with other things. Whose vessel, where it came from, how did it get here? All of these things.

**Hon. Young:** Whilst containing the spill.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Whilst, at the same time, putting out the boons and trying to contain the issue to determine the extent of the problem, and with international help, if necessary, and regional and local effort, contain it if the worst comes to the worst, or prevent the worst from coming to the worst. But the first thing is an assessment and that we have explained is ongoing.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you have one minute left of speaking.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I do not need any more except to advise my friends to be patriotic—

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:**—and to respect the fact that we have a national challenge on our hands and we should be working together to try to resolve it. Thank you.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva North.

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

**Mr. Ravi Ratiram** (*Couva North*): Thank you. Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to join in this debate on this Definite Matter of Urgent Public Importance moved by my colleague, the MP for Couva South, on the national emergency due to the disastrous oil spill along the coastline of Tobago. Madam Speaker, I just want to start off by telling my colleague, the hon. Member for Laventille West, that this matter and responding to this matter is not about shouting loud, and it is not about quarrelling, but it is about acting, Madam Speaker. It is about action.

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

**Mr. R. Ratiram:** And failing to act is something that this country will always remember this Government just like all the families of those divers inside that pipe will remember this Government failing to act, Madam Speaker. And what we see happening here in this situation that is affecting Tobago, it is clearly a matter of where this current administration has failed to do what was required of them.

Today, Madam Speaker, I stand before you deeply troubled by the failure of this Government to effectively respond to this recent oil spill off the coast of Tobago, and more so, Madam Speaker, after sitting here and listening to the hon. Prime Minister deliver a statement earlier in this House and failing to address the real and serious issues surrounding this oil spill, Madam Speaker, it demonstrates why the people of Tobago has rejected this Government and has lost all confidence in them, Madam Speaker.



Definite Urgent Matter  
Mr. Ratiram (cont'd)

2024.02.16

Madam Speaker, earlier the Prime Minister made reference to our National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, which was developed in 2013, and we have to thank the hon. Member for Siparia, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC and her administration for piloting and delivering this National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, Madam Speaker. Page 6 of this National Oil Spill Contingency Plan clearly identifies the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs as the lead agency, that is the lead agency when this National Oil Spill Contingency Plan is activated. However, hearing the Prime Minister state earlier that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries stands ready to provide assistance with technical support, it is really sad and disappointing. The lack of swift and decisive action by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in activating the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, containing the spill, and cleaning up this spill is nothing short than a severe dereliction of duty—

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

**Mr. R. Ratiram:**—on the part of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, Madam Speaker, nothing short of that.

**6.55 p.m.**

This disaster holds profound implications for the future of our precious fishing industry, Madam Speaker, and the livelihoods of those who depend on our ocean for sustenance, and I want to use a little time just to touch on that. The recent oil spill off Tobago's pristine coast has not only caused immediate environmental devastation, but it has also threatened the very existence of our fishing community. The impact of this catastrophe on our fishing industry, it cannot be overstated, Madam Speaker. The marine ecosystem, which is the lifeblood of our fishermen, is rapidly deteriorating. Our once thriving fishing grounds now pose great risks, not only to the health of our marine life, but also to

**UNREVISED**

Definite Urgent Matter  
Mr. Ratiram (cont'd)

the health of those who rely on the sea for their livelihood, Madam Speaker.

Beyond this, Madam Speaker, and beyond the immediate environmental impact, the economic repercussion is dire. You see, Madam Speaker, the livelihood of countless families who rely on fishing for their income are now in peril and the Government's failure to respond effectively to this crisis has not only endangered our natural resources, but it has also jeopardized the economic security of our fishermen and their families. In the face of such crisis, Madam Speaker, we are demanding accountability from this Government. We cannot allow such negligence to go unchecked, Madam Speaker, so it is imperative that the Government take swift and comprehensive—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your five minutes are now spent. Member for Tobago East.

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

**The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for recognizing me. Madam Speaker, one of the things that I have learnt from this oil spill was the importance of following protocol. When the initial impact happened, we saw the Tobago House of Assembly taking lead. We saw TEMA taking lead, TEMA as the lead emergency response agency in Tobago. And as a Tobagonian, I felt extremely proud to see Tobagonians—

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

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:**—and a Tobago-based agency taking the lead. However, Madam Speaker, based on the fact that there is a national response, we saw where the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries lent support when required—

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

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:**—immediately responding and lending support. There was

Definite Urgent Matter  
 Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

a call, Madam Speaker, for 1,000 volunteers to come forward, but it was not just the average citizen, Tobago has over 1,000 community emergency response teams trained by TEMA to respond in times of natural disaster. For the first time, in a long time, we saw the coming together, a beautiful marriage of the central government and the Tobago House of Assembly working in unity.

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

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** How dare the Opposition come and politicize this issue—

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

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** —when for the first time, in a long time, you saw Tobagonians working along Trinidadians—

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

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** —the Tobago government working with the central government to address an issue affecting Tobagonians? Madam Speaker, I commend the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

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

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** I commend the Minister of Works and Transport. I commend the honourable Chief Secretary and TEMA because—and I commend the Prime Minister, because they demonstrated—

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

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:**—quality leadership in addressing this issue. Yes, we know the impact it will have on the environment. Yes, we are aware of the impact it would have on Tobagonians who survive—who base their income on the sea. However, Madam Speaker, I am confident that the level collaboration and partnership will ensure that Tobagonians do not suffer in the long run. I thank you.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tobago West.

**The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe-Lewis):** Thank you. Madam Speaker, I want to join this debate because I think it is critical.

**Hon. Member:** That is right.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:** Madam Speaker, we developed TEMA in 1998, with the intention of being the emergency management entity for Tobago and we have lived to see TEMA become number one in the Caribbean and a template for others in the region.

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

**Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:** And that is based on the support, not only of different divisions of the Tobago House of Assembly, but of the central government. What could be swifter than being notified of this oil spill at 9.00 a.m., and to call a meeting at 2.00 p.m., and to disburse all your technical resources and so on to provide support to the Tobago House of Assembly?

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

**Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:** We know well and good that THA and the Tobago House of Assembly did not have the necessary technical resources and the other resources, the trucks and so on to go in, and it is the central government that mobilized stakeholders here in Trinidad and even—

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

**Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:**—reached out to neighbouring countries to support. So to Tobagonians far and wide and the Trinidadians and those who have jumped on board to support, I want to thank them. This is not a political matter.

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

**Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:** This is a national issue, Madam Speaker, and we are always stronger together. We talk about autonomy in Tobago, but we are always

Definite Urgent Matter  
Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis (cont'd)

stronger together—

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

**Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:**—and we are thankful for the support. And for the Prime Minister even coming and saying, this is a national emergency and whatever Tobago needs to resolve this matter, Tobago would get—

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

**Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:** —we stand by that position, Madam Speaker, and up to last night, I saw trucks and resources being poured in. That is a central government decision to step in—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tobago West—

**Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:**—and we stand by Tobago.

**Madam Speaker:**—your time is now spent.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, the first day of March 2024, at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, on that day we will have Private Members' Day and I await word from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre as to what we will be debating.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and to my colleague Arouca/Maloney, we will be debating on March 1<sup>st</sup>, Private Members' Day, Motion No. 3 on the Order Paper, on today's Order Paper. Motion No. 3.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.01 p.m.*