

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, September 09, 2024

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**CONDOLENCES**

(MR. MOHAMMED HANIFF)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as you are all aware, Mr. Mohammed Haniff, former Member of Princes Town, passed away on May 25th, 2024. Mr. Mohammed Haniff was elected to the House of Representatives in the Fourth Republican Parliament and proudly represented the constituency of Princes Town.

I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes to Mr. Haniff. Member for Diego Martin Central.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister–Communications (Hon. Symon de Nobriga): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Government to pay a short tribute to the late Mohammed Haniff, who passed away, as you said, Madam Speaker, on May 25th, 2024 of this year. Mr. Haniff served the people of Princes Town from 1992 to 1995. Before entering Parliament, he was a dump truck operator for the Ministry of Works and Transport, and it is from these somewhat humble beginnings that he then forged his path in service to the nation.

As a Member of the Opposition, Mr. Haniff advocated on behalf of the maxi-taxi drivers of his constituency during his contribution to the Maxi-Taxi (Amdt) Bill in September 1994, and for the staff of the PTSC in November of the same year. Today, we on this side honour his legacy and extend our deepest condolences to

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his family, his friends, and the people of Princes Town. May he rest in peace.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition, I wish to extend sincere condolences to the family of Mr. Mohammed Haniff. Mr. Mohammed Haniff served both at a local government level and also at a parliamentary level. He had the distinction of also serving as the Chairman of the Princes Town Regional Corporation, and having had the experience first at the local government level, he had an affable and very colourful relationship with both burgesses and constituents in Princess Town.

The name Mohammed Haniff remains one of those that has an enduring legacy in the constituency of Princes Town for the relationship that he was able to establish, particularly at a time when representatives had difficulty in terms of traversing these very rural constituencies. Mohammed Haniff made it very easy, in that, he had a relationship across the length and breadth, spanning from Rio Claro/Mayaro, to bordering the constituency now of Moruga/Tableland, and Naparima.

Madam Speaker, while we mourn the loss of the great son of the soil of Princes Town, we also celebrate that his son today serves as the Deputy Chairman, Mr. Rafi Mohammed, an Alderman, in the Princes Town constituency and the Princes Town Regional Corporation, and therefore we know that the great work that was established by Mr. Mohammed Haniff, both at a local government level, and at a parliamentary level, continues today by the example that he led in terms of fighting for the rights of workers, particularly those who were always at the lower rung of the ladder. He is often remembered for his philanthropic work, but also his

contribution to the Islamic community in the constituencies of Princes Town, Naparima, Moruga/Tableland, and, may I say, all of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, once more, on behalf of the Opposition, we extend condolences to his family, and we thank them for sharing him with us for the service that he provided, not only to the people of Princes Town but to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I too would like to pay tribute to Mr. Mohammed Haniff. Prior to his political career, Mr. Haniff held a working-class position as a sanitation worker, serving as a dump truck operator for the Ministry of Works and Transport. This experience most likely provided him with a unique perspective on the challenges faced by ordinary citizens and the infrastructural issues prevailing in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Haniff's political journey began in 1992, when he was elected to the House of Representatives as a Member of the United National Congress. Representing the constituency of Princes Town, he served as an opposition figure, advocating for the needs of his constituents and the broader population. One notable contribution during his time in office was to the Maxi-Taxi (Amdt) Bill. Mr. Haniff raised concerns about the management of maxi-taxi stands, emphasizing the need for improved oversight and regulation. His intervention highlighted the importance of a coordinated approach to address the challenges faced by the maxi-taxi system. In addition, Mr. Haniff expressed concerns about the proposed reduction of staff at the Public Transport Service Corporation. He argued that such a move would have negative consequences for both workers and the young population, potentially leading to unemployment and further socioeconomic problems. The *Hansards* also reflects a passion for seeking the

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betterment of people and his constituency, as he advocated for the refurbishment of the Tableland Health Centre. Though having limited educational achievements, Mr. Mohammed Haniff was serious about the transformative work of a Member of Parliament.

I take this opportunity to express my deep condolences to the family of Mr. Haniff, and I pray that the Almighty grants them peace. 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, I have directed the Clerk of the House to convey our condolences in writing to the family of the late Mr. Mohammed Haniff.

(DR. EMANUEL HOSEIN)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as you are also aware, one of our prominent sons of the soil, Dr. Emanuel Hosein, a former Member of Parliament, passed away on Monday, August 5th, 2024. Dr. Hosein served as the Member of Parliament for Naparima during the Second Republican Parliament from November 1981 to October 1986, and as the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna during the Third Republican Parliament from January 1987 to November 1991.

I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes to Dr. Hosein. Member for Tunapuna.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Esmond Forde (Deputy Speaker): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to be selected by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to extend tribute to Dr. Emanuel Hosein. Madam Speaker, hon. Members of Parliament, today we stand in solemn remembrance to honour the life and legacy of a great servant of this nation, Dr. Emanuel Christi Hosein, a former Member of Parliament

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and Minister of Health who recently passed away on August 5th, 2024. His contributions to public life, and particularly to the health and well-being of our citizens, will forever be etched in the annals of our history.

Dr. Hosein served as Member for Naparima from 1981 to 1986 under the United Labour Front, the Minister of Health, Welfare and Status of Women under the National Alliance for Reconstruction, as the Member for Tunapuna from January 1987 to November 1987, and then continued as the Minister of Health under the National Alliance for Reconstruction as the Member for Tunapuna from 1987 to 1991. He was not just a public servant. He was a champion advocate for progress for persons with disabilities, which earned him the Chaconia Medal, Gold in 2022. He understood that access to quality health care was not a privilege, but a fundamental right of every citizen.

Throughout his time in the House, and especially during the 1990 coup, where he was held hostage and lauded during that time for his courage for using his medical training to save the lives of many. He not only took care of the wounded hostages but also attended to the injuries of the insurgents. His dedication to his constituents, his respect for this Parliament, and his underlying belief in the power of public service defined his career.

Whether working in the committees, heading debates, or meeting with people in their homes and communities, Dr. Hosein always exemplified the qualities of a representative who was both principled and compassionate. But beyond his professional achievements, we remember him today as a husband, a father, and a friend. His warmth and selfless service brought light to this Chamber, even in the most challenging times. His presence here was a reminder of what public service should be, dedicated, selfless, and driven by a desire to make life better for others. As we mourn his loss, we also celebrate his life. Well-lived in

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service to our nation, let his service inspire future generations of leaders, particularly in the field of health.

To his family, wife, and children, we extend our deepest condolences. May you find comfort in knowing that his work and dedication will continue to benefit many long into the future. May his soul rest in eternal peace, and may we continue to honour his memory by upholding the values he held so dear. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Khadijah Ameen (*St. Augustine*): Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today, being given this opportunity to reflect on the life of Dr. Emanuel Christi Hosein, is somewhat of a privilege to me, because I grew up as a councillor, a young councillor, having the opportunity to have many talks with Dr. Hosein, and, those who knew him knew he could talk. He, of course, served in the Second and Third Republican Parliaments of Trinidad and Tobago, being part of the Opposition, ULF, as well as the NAR, and being a key part of forming those parties.

He served as the Minister of Health, Welfare and Status of Women, and then the Minister of Health. He was the Minister of Health and the Minister of gender and women's affairs, and Dr. Hosein really took up the challenges of the public health and the gender equity part with an unparalleled determination. During his tenure, he strived to improve the health care services, and he truly championed the rights of vulnerable communities.

1.45 p.m.

He had a legacy—I think he just ended up with a legacy in those three Ministries that it was not about policies only. It was about people and truly caring about

people. Dr. Emanuel Hosein had an unwavering type of empathy that was very evident in his personal attention to the disadvantaged. And I think that was a reflection of his own belief in the dignity of every single citizen. And one of the more noteworthy and very courageous actions of Dr. Hosein of course, came during the 1990 attempted coup in this very Red House, in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago where the sitting MPs at that time were held hostage and Dr. Hosein with his medical training not only treated his wounded colleagues, but it was noteworthy—in his wounded colleagues including the Prime Minister at that time, the hon. Dr. A.N.R. Robinson and MP Leo Des Vignes who subsequently died.

But interestingly at his funeral, his daughter in the eulogy recalled that he also treated the insurgents. He also treated his captors, and you know, he would tell the story after, that while attending and ducking from bullets, he recognized one of his captors as somebody he went to school with, and he said, “Aye boy, that is you”? And so, he started to talk to the person, and he was asked to treat the captors and he did so because of his ethics, because of his own beliefs, and his medical training. But that allowed him of course to negotiate, to allow those who were captured to get simple things like water and other medical aid and so on. So in that moment of great fear and uncertainty, Dr. Hosein upheld his oath as a doctor and put the lives of others above his own safety. And for his brave conduct, he was really hailed as a hero by his peers and the wider public, and he continued to live his life his normal self.

He was committed to service that extended beyond the political arena. He was a lifelong advocate for the rights of disabled persons having battled polio himself, and as a child, never expected to have use of his limbs. He served as the Chairman of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Council on Disability and as

the Head of Trinidad and Tobago's Chapter for Disabled People's International on two separate occasions. He fought tirelessly for the inclusion and equal treatment of people with disabilities, shaping policies and attitudes that have benefited numerous individuals in this country. In recognition of his decades of service, he was awarded the Chaconia gold in 2022 for long and meritorious service.

Madam Speaker, Dr. Hosein was really a man of remarkable integrity, humility and vision. He was not just a politician, he was a healer in every sense of the word. He healed not only bodies but communities, working tirelessly to bridge divides and foster a sense of unity and compassion. He was a long-standing member of the Rotary Club who also has a reputation of working with polio—the fight against polio. His passing is a significant loss for Trinidad and Tobago, but we in the areas of Tunapuna and St. Augustine who were particularly influenced and touched by him, want to say special condolences to his family; to his wife Claudette and his children, his grandchildren and all of his loved ones.

I think Dr. Emanuel Hosein's life was an example to all of us who are Parliamentarians, and I trust that we could be able to honour his memory by continuing the work that he dedicated his life to; fighting for equality, for justice, for dignity for every citizen of this nation. May his soul rest in peace. I also want to end on a personal note, his medical office for many years was on the Eastern Main Road in St. Augustine in Tunapuna, on the southern side, so it is in St. Augustine constituency but he had a very open door policy, and even though he was a Member of Parliament, he was the district medical officer. You did not see him having security or moving with any special protection. He would walk down the street, he would interact with people, anybody could go into his office, and I think for quite a number of years as a young councillor, that ability to reach to somebody who I looked up to so much, who had such a good reputation, it left a

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good impression on not only me, but many people within our community, and for him I say may his soul travel in peace and may his name live on. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I too would like to pay tribute to the late Dr. Emanuel Hosein, hailed a hero for his courageous acts of bravery in saving the lives of hostages during the attempted coup in 1990. Dr. Hosein was an outstanding citizen, a humanitarian, and a medical practitioner who served Trinidad and Tobago with distinction. He played a pivotal role in helping draft and in the piloting of our domestic violence legislation. He served as Chairman of the Trinidad and Tobago Chapter of Disabled People's International, as a commissioner on the Trinidad and Tobago Equal Opportunity Commission and as Chairman of the United Nations Secretary-General's Council on Disability. Dr. Hosein received the Chaconia Medal gold for long and meritorious service, and for tending to promote national welfare and strengthening community spirit, for his tireless dedication in championing the rights of persons with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago.

As a medical practitioner, Dr. Hosein sought to improve the lives of others, particularly those who were unable to afford medical care. He was a true man of the people dedicated to helping the less fortunate in society. As we remember Dr. Emanuel Hosein, let us remember him as a statesman and a son of the soil, but also as a husband, father, colleague, friend and mentor who will be missed by many in the national community. I am certainly humbled to be afforded this opportunity to bring these few words to celebrate the life of a man who dedicated his life to the people and nation of Trinidad and Tobago. I take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the family of Dr. Emanuel Hosein, and I pray that the almighty grants them the comfort and strength needed in this time of bereavement.

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I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

[The House of Representatives stood]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have directed the Clerk of the House to convey our condolences in writing to the family of the late Dr. Emanuel Hosein.

PAPERS LAID

1. First Annual Report of the Office of Procurement Regulation of Trinidad and Tobago (“the Office”) for the period April 26, 2023 to April 25, 2024. *[The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)]*
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Regulated Industries Commission for the year ended December 31, 2019. *[Hon. C. Imbert]*
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Regulated Industries Commission for the year ended December 31, 2020. *[Hon. C. Imbert]*
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Point Fortin Civic Centre for the year ended September 30, 2015. *[Hon. C. Imbert]*
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Point Fortin Civic Centre for the year ended September 30, 2016. *[Hon. C. Imbert]*
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Point Fortin Civic Centre for the year ended September 30, 2017. *[Hon. C. Imbert]*
7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Point Fortin Civic Centre for the year ended September 30, 2018. *[Hon. C. Imbert]*

8. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Point Fortin Civic Centre for the year ended September 30, 2019. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Point Fortin Civic Centre for the year ended September 30, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
10. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Point Fortin Civic Centre for the year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
11. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
12. Special Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts for the financial year 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 2 to 12 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee
13. Annual Audited Financial Statements of National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
14. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards and its Subsidiary for the year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
15. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards and its Subsidiary for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
16. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards and its Subsidiary for the year ended September 30,

2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
17. Audited Financial Statements of the National Commission for Self Help Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 18. Audited Financial Statements of the National Commission for Self Help Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2018. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 19. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre Management Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 20. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of First Citizens Holdings Limited and its Subsidiary for the financial year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 21. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of First Citizens Holdings Limited and its Subsidiary for the financial year ended September 30, 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 22. Audited Financial Statements of National Investment Fund Holding Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 23. Audited Financial Statements of Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited for the financial year 2019. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 24. Audited Financial Statements of Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year March 31, 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 25. Audited Financial Statements of the Betting Levy Board for the year ended June 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 26. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of ExporTT Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2019. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

27. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of ExporTT Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
28. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and its Subsidiaries for the financial year ended March 31, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
29. Audited Financial Statements of the University of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2019. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
30. Audited Financial Statements of the University of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
31. Audited Financial Statements of the University of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
32. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2019. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
33. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
34. Audited Financial Statements of Caroni (1975) Limited for the financial year ended June 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
35. Audited Financial Statements of National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited (iGovTT) for the financial year ended September 30, 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
36. Audited Financial Statements of the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

37. Audited Financial Statements of MIC Institute of Technology Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
38. Audited Financial Statements of MIC Institute of Technology Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
39. Audited Financial Statements of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
40. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Creative Industries Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
41. Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Creative Industries Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
42. Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Creative Industries Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
43. Audited Financial Statements of Development Finance Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2023. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
44. Audited Financial Statements of National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited for the year ended September 30, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
45. Audited Financial Statements of National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
46. Audited Financial Statements of National Training Agency for the year ended September 30, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
47. Audited Financial Statements of National Training Agency for the year ended September 30, 2014. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 13 to 47 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises)

Committee

48. The Administrative Report of the Export-Import Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year 2021 [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
49. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for fiscal year 2016. [*The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh)*]
50. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for fiscal year 2017. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
51. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for fiscal year 2018. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
52. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for fiscal year 2019. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
53. Annual Report on the Exercise of the Functions and Powers of the Ministry of Health for fiscal year 2020. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
54. Administrative Report of the National Institute of Higher Education, (Research, Science and Technology) for the fiscal year 2017/2018. [*The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly)*]
55. Administrative Report of the National Training Agency for the fiscal year 2019/2020. [*Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly*]
56. Administrative Report of the Land Settlement Agency for the fiscal year 2019/2020. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
57. Administrative Report of the Land Settlement Agency for the fiscal year 2020/2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
58. Administrative Report of the Land Settlement Agency for the fiscal year 2021/2022. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

59. Administrative Report of the San Fernando City Corporation for the fiscal year October 01, 2018 to September 30, 2019. [*The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi SC)*]
60. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts for the fiscal year 2022. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
61. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Trade and Industry for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]
62. Annual Administrative Report of the InvesTT Limited for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]
63. Administrative Report of the National Flour Mills Limited for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2022. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]
64. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Fourteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2022. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]
65. Response of the Service Commissions Department to the Fourteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2022. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]
66. Ministerial Response of the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs to the Fifteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the Police Complaints Authority for fiscal years 2015 to 2021. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]

67. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Reports of the Auditor General on the Financial Statements of the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Years ended December 31, 2013 to 2019, and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Eighteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee from the Eleventh Parliament. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]
68. Response of the Tobago House of Assembly to the Twenty-Fifth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Developmental Programme for fiscal year 2018/2019 and follow-up on the Ministerial Response to the Sixth Report on the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), Eleventh Parliament. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]
69. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Digital Transformation to the Eighth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs on an Inquiry into the State's Strategy for Implementing Unproclaimed Legislation passed by Parliament during the last 20 years (Part II) with specific focus on the Electronic Transactions Act, Chapter 22:05. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]
70. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Eleventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities on a follow-up Examination into the Recommendations contained in the Ninth Report of the Committee (presented in the 11th Parliament-2015-2020) on an Inquiry into certain aspects of the operations of the Chaguaramas Development Authority. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]
71. The Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the Ninth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Finance

and Legal Affairs on an inquiry into the State's strategy for implementing un-proclaimed legislation passed by Parliament during the last 20 years (Part II) with specific focus on the Dog Control Act, Chapter 67:56. [*Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis*]

2.05 p.m.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, there are four questions for oral response and we will be answering all. We are not yet ready to answer the question for written response, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To Members of the House, good to be back here.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Ministry of Health's Administrative Building

Ruptured Waterline

(Details of Damage)

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

With regard to the ruptured waterline at the Ministry of Health's Administration Building, located at Queen's Park East, POS on June 18, 2024 will the Minister advise:

- a) whether any equipment, furniture, furnishing, fittings and/or documents were damaged by water; and
- b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, will the Minister state specifics as to the items that were damaged?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The only item that was damaged by the ruptured line at the Ministry of Health's new Administrative Building at Queen's Park East on June 18, 2024, was one Ethernet switch.

Madam Speaker: The Member for Oropouche East, Question No. 90.

Ministry of Health's Administrative Building

Ruptured Waterline

(Cost of Repairs and Refurbishment Works)

90. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Will the Minister provide the cost of repairs and refurbishment works at the new headquarters of the Ministry of Health due to the ruptured waterline and flooding on June 18, 2024?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much. The Ministry of Health has been advised by UDeCOTT that in keeping with the contractual terms of the build-own-lease-transfer, or BOLT agreement, for the construction of the new headquarters building for the Ministry of Health at Queen's Park East, the cost incurred to remedy and repair, and refurbishment works to its new headquarters, arising from the ruptured waterline, was borne by the contractor under the defects liability period and not by the State.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro, Question No. 93.

Rice Mill Facility at Carlsen Field

(Details of Divestment)

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

- a) With regard to the National Flour Mills rice mill facility at Carlsen Field, will the Minister indicate the following: whether a decision has been made to divest the facility;
- b) if the answer to a) is in the affirmative, are there ongoing discussions with a prospective purchaser;
- c) if the answer to b) is in the affirmative, what criteria was used to select the prospective purchaser;
- d) the proposed terms and conditions of the transaction;
- e) how does the Government intend to ensure transparency and fairness in the divestment process;
- f) the measures that will be taken to protect the interests of employees and stakeholders;
- g) how does the Government intend to use the proceeds from the divestment; and
- h) the expected timeline for the completion of the divestment process?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Trade and Industry.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In 2016, Cabinet agreed that the rice mill at Carlsen Field be divested with the guidance of the Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with National Enterprises Limited, NEL, and the National Flour Mills Limited.

Pursuant to this decision in 2017 via public advertisement, NFM issued a tender, inviting suitable applicants to submit proposals for the divestment of the mill. Bids were submitted by four local investors. However, after a thorough evaluation, none of these were accepted by the Government at that time. Given the importance of the mill in facilitating Trinidad and Tobago's food security, the Ministry of

Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, with the involvement of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, through NFM, are exploring the possibility of revitalizing and modernizing the rice industry in Trinidad and Tobago, involving rice milling and packaging, and they welcome any interest by potential investors.

It is to be noted that following the visit of the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, to India in May 2024, an Indian investment delegation visited Trinidad and Tobago over the period 23rd to 30th of June, 2024, to explore investment opportunities in areas for collaboration.

Subsequently, another delegation, which included senior representatives of HAFED also visited Trinidad and Tobago. HAFED is the largest apex cooperative federation of Haryana State in India. It was established on November 01, 1996, with the formation of Haryana as a separate state in India. Since then, it has been playing a leading role in serving the farmers—that is HAFED—serving the farmers of the Haryana State, as well as customers in India and overseas by providing a range of consumer products. HAFED has 17 district offices and 19 processing mills for items, such as rice, sugar, oils, turmeric, seeds, et cetera, in the Haryana State. It processes over 2.3 million metric tonnes of commodities annually and has an annual turnover of approximately US \$1.6 billion.

During the mission, the NFM hosted a meeting and site visit with representatives from HAFED, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Ministry of Agricultural, Land and Fisheries to discuss rice milling and other opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago.

With respect to the other parts of this question, discussions with interested parties are purely exploratory at this time. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has not selected any prospective purchaser for the NFM rice

mill and therefore, the other parts of this question do not arise and are not applicable.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, based on your response, right, I know that several rice farmers would have raised several matters of concern in the media, concerning issues around loans and so on to help the industry.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Has there been any conversation with the Ministry of Trade and Industry in terms of opening the space for business with the rice farmers, concurrent to those conversations that may be coming with potential investors out of Trinidad and Tobago, more so India, with regard to this opportunity? Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Trade and Industry.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah. With regard to our local farmers, discussions are really very much only with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Oropouche East, Question No. 91 to the Prime Minister, and I would like to congratulate, at this point in time, the Acting Prime Minister for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Sale/Lease of Petrotrin Refinery

(Details of)

91. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Prime Minister:

Will the Prime Minister indicate whether the Government or any of its Agencies has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding or other statement of intent with the Indian based Jindal Steel and Power Limited in relation to the sale or lease of the former Petrotrin Refinery?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call on the hon. Acting Prime Minister.

The Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young SC): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as was announced by the substantive Prime Minister some weeks ago, neither the Government nor any of its agencies has entered into a memorandum of understanding with Jindal Steel and Power Limited in relation to the sales or lease of the Petrotrin refinery.

In fact, the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West, took the opportunity to read into the public record on that occasion the letter that came from Mr. Jindal that expressed disappointment in the strongest possible diplomatic terms—him being an elected Member of Parliament in India—in the behaviour of those on the other side and the Opposition, equating it to a party that did not want foreign investment. For that, we are saddened, but that is the behaviour, unfortunately, that this country is saddled with by those on the other side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. As a follow up, Prime Minister, could you state, based on what your response was, if Mr. Jindal had actually put in an offer for the Petrotrin refinery?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, Acting.

Hon. S. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, to the population, the population that was following on and casts its mind back would recall, in the clearest possible terms, Mr. Jindal made it

abundantly clear before the expiry of the date for the RFPs to come in, that he would not be participating in due to the behaviour of those on the other side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Could the Prime Minister state as a follow up, why Mr. Jindal was brought into Trinidad if it was not to make an offer for the Petrotrin refinery?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, Acting.

Hon. S. Young SC: Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Jindal was not brought into Trinidad. In fact, the substantive Prime Minister made it clear on many occasions that Mr. Jindal, being one of the leading businessmen in India, when he heard of the Prime Minister's visit a few months ago to India, and the Prime Minister's opening of Trinidad and Tobago up to any Indian businessman's willingness to invest in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Jindal upon hearing that expressed an interest in the refinery that is available in Trinidad and Tobago and it is as a result of that, that he made his way to Trinidad and Tobago to expressly engage with the Government and to indicate his interest in looking at the refinery.

However, due to the behaviour of those on the other side, as is now well documented in a dark day in our history, Mr. Jindal declined the opportunity to invest in Trinidad and Tobago, and his letter accurately documents the behaviour that drove him away.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, supplemental.

Mr. Lee: As a follow up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the Prime Minister stating to this country that Mr. Jindal did not put in an offer because he is fearful of the Opposition?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will give you the opportunity, Member.

Hon. S. Young SC: It is not that which he said. Mr. Jindal, being an experienced businessman and also a politician and a Member of Parliament, said that the

behaviour of those who put themselves forward as a government in waiting is not one that would attract any business investment, certainly his business investment in Trinidad and Tobago at this time, solely due to the behaviour of those on the other side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance. Minister of Finance, one second. Leader of the House.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker—“oh”, sorry, Madam Speaker. “Ah doh know who to say”—or do both? “Both ah dem”? Sorry, Ma’am.

Madam Speaker: So, I have been advised that there is agreement that the Minister of Finance will speak to the completion of his statement. Yes?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: That is accurate, Ma’am.

Madam Speaker: Yes. The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Special Report of the Auditor General

(Public Accounts for the Financial Year 2023)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am authorized by Cabinet to make the following statement on the Special Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts for the Financial Year 2023.

Following the public statements made by the Auditor General with respect to her original report on the 2023 accounts, her baseless assertion that the Ministry of

Finance sought to unethically backdate the original 2023 accounts has been completely refuted. This Special Report does not assist in any way in clearing up the main issue in contention, which resulted from an overstatement of tax refunds and a subsequent underreporting of net revenue, leading to a \$2.6 billion discrepancy in the revenue figures for 2023.

The main point of this Special Report, the expected scope of which was clearly outlined in a letter written by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance to the Auditor General on June 16, 2024, was to clear up that issue. However, instead of confirming that the \$2.6 billion discrepancy had been resolved and that there was, in fact, no missing money, the Auditor General has avoided making any definitive statement on that very important matter in this Special Report and instead has chosen to make caustic remarks about the staff and systems in the Ministry of Finance.

2.20 p.m.

What is particularly disturbing about the Auditor General's approach to this matter, is the fact that at the exit meeting held on July 22, 2024 to complete the process of meetings on the Special Report, the audit team from the Auditor General's Department which included some of the most senior auditors in that department, openly expressed its satisfaction to the staff at the Ministry of Finance that the adjustment of \$2.6 billion was appropriately accounted for. However, the Auditor General, in her audit opinion on page 25, did not state that she was satisfied that the error in the Public Accounts for the financial year 2023 was corrected. We viewed this omission on her part as a continuing campaign of non-cooperation and criticism of public officials in the Ministry of Finance, by the Auditor General.

On a related matter, I took note of the screaming headlines in the Sunday

Express of September 08, 2024, that is:

“Central Bank denied me access”...—regarding an—affidavit dated September 05, 2024, filed...”—by the Auditor General—“in the constitutional matter against the Attorney General...”

—over the payment of legal fees to her selected attorney, former UNC Attorney General, Anand Ramlogan. Reference in that affidavit was made to extracts from this special report. Although, on September 05, 2024, the Special Report had not yet been laid in Parliament, and the premature disclosure of its contents, is in our view, a breach of process. It is clear to us that the premature publication of that emotionally charged affidavit in the *Sunday Express*, was designed to evoke public sympathy.

In that *Sunday Express* article, the Auditor General claimed that the Central Bank denied her access to the Electronic Cheque Clearing System, which negatively impact to perform a proper audit and check of the system, which led to the understatement of some \$2.6 billion in revenue. We failed to see the connection between that alleged denial of access to the Central Bank's computer systems and the confirmation that the \$2.6 billion understatement had been resolved as stated by her audit team on July 22, 2024.

When I saw that *Sunday Express* article, I asked the Governor of the Central Bank for his comments. The Governor has informed me that following an email request made on June 24, 2024 by an official in the Auditor General's Department to examine the bank's Electronic Cheque Clearing System, and its Go Anywhere platform, it requested official correspondence from the Auditor General, with an outline of the scope of the potential engagement. The Central Bank also indicated that it was open and willing to meet with the Auditor General on the matter at any mutually convenient time.

I am advised that to date, while it has received an outline of the scope of the proposed examination from a subordinate from the Auditor General's Department, the bank had not yet received any correspondence from the Auditor General delegating authority to her staff to act on her behalf on this matter, nor has it received a proposed time or date for the earlier requested meeting between the Auditor General and the Government. As such, the bank was unable to accommodate the request.

However, in that regard, the bank has advised me given the historical relationship between the Auditor General and the bank, and the important role of the Auditor General in the conduct of national affairs. The Governor remains open to meeting with, and discussing any matter with the Auditor General. This meeting can form the basis for a precise and properly constituted engagement that while not in nature of an audit of the accounts of the Central Bank, which has already been completed, could be very informative as regards public sector financial transactions and processes. It is hoped that the Auditor General will follow the established procedures and meet with the Governor of the Central Bank on this matter, or alternatively delegate authority in writing to the Deputy Auditor General or another suitable staff member to act on her behalf.

In conclusion, it is the Government's view that the Special Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts for the financial year 2023, only adds fuel to the fire, creates more unnecessary public confusion and does not satisfactorily address the core issue that arose with the Auditor General's original report on the 2023 accounts, which is a \$2.6 billion discrepancy in revenue and which in our view, has been comprehensively cleared up. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

STANDING ORDER 79(3)**(Bill Restored and Resumption of)**

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 79(3), I beg to move that the following Bills be restored to the Order Paper for the resumption of proceedings in the Fifth Session of the Twelfth Parliament:

1. The Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020.and;
2. The Miscellaneous Provisions (Global Forum) Bill 2024.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House to now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 2.27p.m.