

## HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, November 18, 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 Mrs. Anita Haynes-Alleyne, MP, Member for Tabaquite, who has requested leave of absence for the period November 18 to December 10, 2024, and from Dr. Rai Ragbir, MP, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, who has requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

### PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

#### Commission of Enquiry on 1990 Attempted Coup

#### (Update on Government's Response)

**Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*): Given that this House was advised on April 26, 2024, that the Attorney General is preparing the Government's response to the Report of the Commission of Enquiry on the attempted 1990 Coup, will the Prime Minister provide an update on the status of said response?

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Madam Speaker, this matter is receiving the attention of the Attorney General. The Attorney General is seeking legal advice with respect to the report and will, in the normal scheme of things, advise the Cabinet once this exercise has been completed.

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

**Strategic Services Agency (SSA)****(Final Report)**

**Dr. Roodal Moonilal** (*Oropouche East*): Will the Prime Minister indicate whether a final report of an audit of personnel, equipment and processes at the Strategic Services Agency (SSA) has been completed and submitted to the Government by acting Head of the SSA Brigadier General Anthony Phillips Spencer?

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley)**: Madam Speaker, the answer is no. However, at many stages along the way, the Government has received interim reports on different aspects of that operation and one of the documents that the Government would have received, arising out of the work that is being done and the various reports that we have had, is a new organizational chart, which is currently before the National Security Council for consideration. But the work continues and we expect that, to put it as the Member has put it, a final report would be available sometime in the not too distant future.

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

**Dr. Moonilal**: Thank you very much. To the Hon. Prime Minister, Prime Minister, since this matter originated in or around the beginning of March 2024, is there any particular reason or are there reasons why at this time, by mid-November 2024, the Government cannot have in its possession a final report on this matter as opposed to several interim reports that are interim yet determine policy?

**Madam Speaker**: Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley**: Madam Speaker, it should be obvious to anyone that if there is an ongoing arrangement in an investigation, where new

information or new situations are developing, you cannot have a final report while the matter you are investigating is in fact continuing to unfold and that is where we are, Madam Speaker. We will not try to have a final report by a particular date if, in fact, we do not have the complete picture of the situation and we are in fact continuing to investigate the matter.

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

**Dr. Moonilal:** Could the Prime Minister indicate whether the Prime Minister believes it is prudent, therefore, to undertake fundamental change in policy and personnel without the benefit of a final report, as the Prime Minister admitted, where matters are still unfolding, yet the Government is making fundamental change without a final report. Is this prudent?

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, the Member is giving himself information on authorities for which he has no basis. It is quite possible, as it has been done, to review an organization and come up with an organizational chart, which is an improvement on the existing one, and if you have had certain information where there were certain shortcomings and failings from your interim report, you use that, Madam Speaker, to guide you towards dealing with the new organizational chart. It is ongoing work and that is precisely what I have just said. The work is ongoing, so I do not know why the Member is taking the position that we are doing policy without the information. That is just not so at all, Madam Speaker.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Can the Prime Minister indicate whether or not there is any date for the completion of a full and comprehensive report on this sordid matter?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I believe that question was answered. Member

for Couva South.

**Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Vetted Unit**  
**(Details of Establishment)**

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Given the recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Government and the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to establish a vetted unit for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), will the Prime Minister inform this House on the proposed composition of the said unit and whether stakeholder consultations have taken place?

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley)**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the proposed composition of the vetted unit would include members of law enforcement entities from Trinidad and Tobago with the lawful authority to investigate major transnational organized crime. They would be supported by the United States Drug Enforcement Agency during their investigations. Extensive stakeholder consultations were held over the past year from the initiation of this proposal, Madam Speaker.

**Mr. Indarsingh**: Prime Minister, could you inform this House, based on the fact that you said the composition will involve officers from law enforcement agencies, what will be the reporting relationship of these officers from the respective law enforcement agencies?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley**: Madam Speaker, reporting relationships remain the same. The vetted unit would be under the control of the Commissioner of Police and reporting arrangements remain the same.

**Mr. Indarsingh**: Prime Minister, are you in a position to inform this House of the compensation packages of the officers who will be in this particular

unit, and will it be different from the officers within the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I would not venture to interfere with the compensation package of officers, whether they come from the coast guard, the defence force, or the police, as they do their work under the existing arrangements.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And in keeping with the commitment of consultation, Prime Minister, could you inform this House if discussions did take place with the executive of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Welfare Association?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I have indicated that appropriate stakeholder consultations have taken place.

### *Tugboat , Solo Creed*

#### **(Details of)**

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Given that the Minister of Finance celebrated a court order issued in relation to the “arrest” of the tugboat *Solo Creed* in Angola, will the Prime Minister inform this House whether the

Government has been able to ascertain the owners and or persons associated with the vessel?

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Madam Speaker, I think the Minister of Finance, in his exuberance, was trying to encourage his colleagues that at some times there is something that we can celebrate about Trinidad and Tobago. So, Madam Speaker, the Government continues to seek the identification of the owner or owners of the *Solo Creed*. Unfortunately, to date, the true owner or owners of this vessel have not been located. The Government continues to seek the assistance of various

governments and international bodies in ascertaining this information. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, the vessel and those associated with it were operating illegally and took many steps to hide their identities, including, it appears, the falsifying of relevant documents.

The Minister of Energy, two weeks ago, discussed various options with the International Oil Pollution Compensation (IOPC) Funds in London for further assistance in identifying those who are responsible for the oil spill in Tobago.

But, Madam Speaker, let it be known as a fact that the people who were involved set about to hide their identity and acted illegally. So it is not an easy trace, but the Government is on the job, and if they are to be found, we will find them. And, Madam Speaker, this is something that goes on all the time in international maritime trade, but at least we have the vessel and we know what happened with respect to the situation and the IOPC is working with us to finalize the compensation.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, taking into consideration what the Prime Minister has just divulged to this House, could the Prime Minister inform this House what is the benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in relation to having this vessel arrested in Angola?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, if we are to make—

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

**Madam Speaker:** Could I have your silence?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** If we are to make a successful claim at the IOPC, we have to show that we have taken all reasonable steps to identify the perpetrators of this illegal action against us. So, to say that the action that

we have taken is useless, is to not understand what we are doing at all. Madam Speaker, we have done what is required to be done, which is to find out who was responsible for the cargo and who was responsible to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, I do not know what the problem is. It seems as if having identified the vessel is offensive to our colleagues on the other side. At one time, we did not know the vessel. We did not know what was involved. We went halfway around the world in our investigation and we have found that. So, instead of congratulating those who made the effort, we are now being assailed in a way that I myself have difficulty to understand, except that I know that my colleagues on the other side, most of them, have a difficulty associating themselves with any success of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, is the Prime Minister in a position to inform this House of the cost to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago in relation to the arrest of this vessel?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, having regard to the question and also the responses, this is out of order in accordance with the Standing Orders.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, am I still allowed a supplemental on this particular issue?

**Madam Speaker:** I think you only asked two.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Prime Minister, given the information that is at your disposal and the Government, could you advise this House if the vessel was insured?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I do not have that information.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Prime Minister, could you inform this House if the vessel was not insured, are you aware that this could have implications as it relates to Trinidad and Tobago's claim, which is currently before the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund?

**Madam Speaker:** But Member, surely I rule that question out of order, having regard to the response and the question that preceded, which leads to this.

**1.45 p.m.**

**Failure to Provide Access to Documentation**

**(Investigation into Minister of Finance)**

**Mr. Davendranath Tancoo** (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister: Given the query by British Law Lord, Lady Simler, will the Prime Minister advise whether the Minister of Finance will be investigated for his role in the failure to provide relevant access to documentation preventing the Auditor General from conducting the required audit of the national accounts of Trinidad and Tobago?

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

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Madam Speaker, I am not aware of any query by any British or other Law Lord, and I am not aware of any role of the Minister of Finance in failing to provide information to the Auditor General.

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

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

**Restrictions on Access to Foreign Currency**

**(Urgent Measures to Address)**

**Mr. Ravi Ratiram** (*Couva North*): To the hon. Prime Minister: Given the



ongoing foreign exchange shortage in Trinidad and Tobago, which has been affecting micro, small and medium sized businesses, will the Prime Minister indicate what urgent measures the Government plans to implement to address the severe restrictions on access to foreign currency?

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Madam Speaker, I am aware that the Member is being affected by the situation but I am not sure that one is allowed to use the House to advance their own business. The amount of foreign exchange available in the banking system, Madam Speaker, in 2023 to 2024, is about the same available in 2014. That is approximately US \$7 billion. So there has been no reduction in the marketplace of the Government's support for foreign exchange. Of this total, the Government directly injects \$2.5 billion per year—that is the system that we operate—with the remaining \$4.5 billion acquired by the banks directly from the United States dollar-earning clients.

However, in 2024, there is clearly an increased demand for foreign exchange due to the growth in the economy, and an increase over the years in a taste for foreign goods, and for the use of online purchasing. The Minister of Finance is currently meeting with stakeholders to determine the reasons for the increase in demand, with a view to arriving at consensus on the management way forward, which may involve more regulation of the method and manner of distribution by the banks of the Government's foreign exchange that is injected into the commercial banking system by the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago on a monthly basis. The Minister of Finance has already met with the four largest commercial banks to discuss this matter, and will be meeting with business organizations over the next month.

Madam Speaker, as I answer this question, I simply want to add that there is a misalignment between the appetite to spend foreign exchange and the ability to earn foreign exchange. We do not create foreign exchange in this country except by earning it, and we can generate an infinite appetite to spend it, and that is where the management system comes in. The Government has certain arrangements in place to ensure that certain basics are funded, like medicine, food, manufacturing support and so on. That is the Government's role in managing it. And, Madam Speaker, we have noticed a deliberate attempt in recent times to put pressure on the Government to devalue the currency. Let me save them from wasting their time today. There will be no devaluation of the currency—

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—because, Madam Speaker, the pressure on the Government to devalue the currency is coming from people who have foreign exchange largely, using their attempt in the country to make this an issue, ignoring the fact that any devaluation could only result in increased cost across the board. Of course, it will make those with foreign exchange wealthier because they will get more Trinidad and Tobago dollars. So to try to pressure the Government to devalue the currency, we must be the only country in the world where people are demanding to devalue the currency and decrease their wealth from those who have to pay it. This is special interest pressure and the Government will not bow to it.

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

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

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Taken into consideration the Prime Minister's inability to provide any plans to

address—

**Madam Speaker:** No, no, no—

**Mr. Ratiram:**—the severe restrictions of access to foreign currency—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, Member, Member, one minute, please. Remember this is not statements, okay? Please ask the question.

**Mr. Ratiram:** Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. I am following up on the response given by the hon. Prime Minister. Could the Prime Minister provide some sort of timeline that the Government can give to members of the business community, so that they can expect some kind of improved access to foreign currency?

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I said that the Minister of Finance has met with, is meeting with the relevant people in the country, whose job it is to manage and to advise on this matter. That is ongoing, and the Member's business is not a foreign exchange earner and therefore, he is not to come in this House and try to pressure us on that.

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

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Prime Minister, given your response to both questions raised by my colleague, you indicated that the Minister of Finance was engaged in meeting with stakeholders. However, in 2023—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, the question—

**Mr. Tancoo:** Is the Prime Minister aware—

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Is the Prime Minister aware that this is the very same

statement made by the Minister of Finance in 2023, during his budget response, in which—his budget presentation, in which he said that he was, in fact, engaged at that time in 2023, in meeting with the very same stakeholders?

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** If the Member for Oropouche West has a problem with the Minister of Finance speaking the truth, I am stating the facts, I am afraid I cannot accompany him down that road.

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

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

**Mr. Tancoo:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Prime Minister, given that there is no response and one year has passed since the Minister initiated these conversations, is there any expectation—should the public have any expectation that there would be some level of timeline within which the Minister of Finance, and the hon. Prime Minister and his Government would be able to give some level of assurance to members of the public and businesses who are suffering during this foreign exchange crisis?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, the country's position is located in, what I have started by saying, there is a certain amount of foreign exchange in our economy relating to the size and growth of our economy. The Government supports the exchange rate by injecting two and a half billion dollars, and we will manage the situation between appetite to spending and the ability to earn. That is the role of the Government. If you have been invited to give a date and a time when everybody could get all the foreign exchange that they want to use, Madam Speaker, I am afraid I cannot do

that. It is one of the shortcomings of being a small economy, where you have to earn foreign exchange, service your debts, buy your basics and, of course, not rundown your reserves to end up getting in a worse situation. So it is a management situation, Madam Speaker, and the Government is fully engaged and is managing it to the best of the country's interest.

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

### **URGENT QUESTIONS**

#### **Continuous Flooding on the Southern Main Road**

##### **(Measures to Alleviate)**

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: Given the rainfall, yellow level warnings from the Meteorological Office and consequential continuous flooding on the Southern Main Road from Issac Junction to Savonetta Junction, which has negatively impacted business operations in the said area, will the Minister inform this House of the measures being pursued to alleviate this problem?

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

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):** Thank Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, periodically, the Ministry undertakes both manual cleaning and mechanical cleaning of the drains along the Southern Main Road.

#### **2.55 p.m.**

Due to the commercial development, the roadside drains are largely covered box drains. The phase of contracted work was completed from Isaac Junction to the Couva business district. This work is earmarked to be continued in the current financial year, pending the availability of funding.

It is to be noted that the area is being assessed since drainage upgrade work may be required in addition to routine cleaning due to the increased development in the area, which has increased the volume of surface runoff. This would be part of a long-term development work. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Minister, we have noted your comments. Are you aware on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2023, in this very House, you stated that other critical areas in need of desilting within the proximity of Couva, California and Savonetta were scheduled for desilting in the second quarter of 2023 and nothing has happened. When will the mamaguy end?

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

**Madam Speaker:** No, no. So, Member for Couva South, I would ask you to withdraw that second part. You have asked two questions. Okay. You asked, are you aware—or something, and then—so I would ask you to withdraw the latter question and pose—the first question is what I would ask the Minister to answer.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I withdraw, but I will restate to the Minister—

**Madam Speaker:** Well, you already have a question on the Floor, so you withdraw. So Minister, answer the question that is on the Floor.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Member is really true to form. Madam Speaker, I did indicate that work was done as promised and the work will continue based on the availability of funding. I just want to remind the Member that we are in the peak of the rainy season and flooding in low-lying areas, like the area mentioned, would have been expected and it was stated by the meteorological advisory that

low-lying areas will experience flash flooding during the yellow level alert. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, could you confirm if you have had requests from the Couva/Point Lisas Chamber of Commerce to address this very critical issue of flooding, which continues to impact on all of the Member's business within the said jurisdiction?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, at the Ministry of Works and Transport, we receive requests from several chambers, several MPs, several NGO groups for work to be done. The Ministry will attend to basically all the requests we get based on the availability of funding. Thank you.

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

**Flooding in El Socorro and Barataria  
(Steps taken to Mitigate)**

**Mr. Saddam Hosein** (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: Having regard to yesterday's extensive flooding in El Socorro and Barataria, will the Minister indicate what immediate steps are being taken to mitigate the flooding?

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

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):** Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Drainage Division completed annual maintenance work in addition to clearing Drain 5 and 10 in the El Socorro area. Additionally, regular maintenance work continues on the Malick River, but there is also a scheduled project which has been awarded to clean the downstream of the Malick River to the outfall of the Caroni River. It is noteworthy that the pumps located in Sadhoo Trace is

functional to pump when needed. These measures are in place and will continue to mitigate flooding in the El Socorro district. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you. Minister, are you aware that after these extensive rehabilitation work that you indicated were completed, that the area floods even more?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, I do not know if the—well, I should advise the Member that again, that we are in the rainy season. We are being challenged with something called “climate change”, where you have—

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:**—a significant amount of rainfall being accumulated in a very short space of time. So with every step that we are taking, there will be challenges at this time. However, I did indicate that we have just awarded a contract to clean the downstream of the Malick River into the Caroni River. What this will do, it will allow a faster runoff in the Malick River, which will again help to alleviate the flooding in the El Socorro, San Juan, Barataria area. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, can the Minister indicate whether or not an assessment was done where Courts is situated on the highway, where most of the water floods are there and is unable to run under the highway to get to the El Socorro South area into the Caroni River?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.



**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, studies are done around the country, that is why we engage the Andean Development Bank and we do have a programme. However, the Member for Barataria/San Juan should understand that the Barataria area is virtually an area where most of the water from the hills and so on come down to enter the Malick River, which takes the water out of the Caroni River, which takes the water into the ocean. Once the Caroni River is filled, you will get challenges from all the tributaries, but I think I will have to familiarize the Member with that area. Thank you.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

### ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are four questions on notice, we will be answering two. We are asking for deferral of question 14 and question 22.

*The following questions stood on the Order Paper:*

#### **Flooding at the HDC Developments**

##### **(Immediate Measures taken)**

- 14.** Will the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development indicate what immediate measures are being taken at the HDC Developments in Mora Heights and El Guanapo, Rio Claro, to address the following issues:
- a) flooding; and
  - b) the inadequate drainage system? [*Mr. R. Charles*]

**22.** With regard to the Government's commitment to the CARICOM Agri-Food Systems Strategy to meet the regional goal of a 25% reduction in food imports by 2025, will the Minister provide the following:

- a) details of the specific actions taken, as at September 30, 2024, by the Government to meet this goal;
- b) whether Trinidad and Tobago has met the required deadline/s to submit the requisite reports to the CARICOM Secretariat detailing the progress made towards achieving this target;
- c) if the answer to b) is in the negative:
  - i. when will the required reports be submitted to the CARICOM Secretariat; and
  - ii. what steps will be taken by the Government to ensure timely compliance with future reporting obligations?

[*Mr. R. Indarsingh*]

*Questions, by leave, deferred.*

## **ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

### **Seville Junction to the Captain Watson Lights**

#### **(Update on Paving Works)**

**17. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Will the Minister inform this House when the Camden Roadway from Seville Junction to the Captain Watson lights, will be paved?

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

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Camden Road is under the

purview of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation. However, notwithstanding this fact, a section of the road was paved by the PURE Unit prior to the last local government election. Currently, no work for this segment of the Camden Road from Seville Junction to Captain Watson light are scheduled under the current program of works of the PURE Unit. However, as usual, the Ministry is willing to provide the corporation with any technical assistance that may be required. The PURE Unit is in the process of putting together a new programme of work based on request. Once funding is available, the Ministry will collaborate with the regional corporation to facilitate work in areas such as this. Thank you.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, taking into consideration that the entire Cabinet used that roadway to attend the opening of the Nutrimix Hatchery, and that roadway is an important roadway as it relates to the Port of Point Lisas, the—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, the question?

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—Phoenix Park Industrial Estate and so on, could the Minister give a commitment that the necessary financial allocation and technical support will be found to rehabilitate the other portion of the road?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, I did indicate that based on the availability of funding, all roads in Trinidad and Tobago will be addressed, but all cannot be done at the same time. It will be done on a phased basis. We did part of the road already and my hope is to continue once the funding is available. Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mora Heights and El Guanapo Developments****(Details of)**

**21. Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With respect to the Mora Heights and El Guanapo Developments in Rio Claro, will the Minister state the improvements made by the HDC in addressing issues regarding the finalizing of deeds/leases to residents, including issues of boundary demarcations and infrastructure maintenance and the actions identified to be taken to prevent their recurrence in its future developments?

**Madam Speaker:** The Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to bring to the attention of the Member for Mayaro that there is no HDC development named “El Guanapo”. I am sorry that he does not know his constituency. The housing development that exists is the El Guayanapo Housing Development and it is on a parcel of land which has been constructed on 8.67 hectares, 122 residential units.

The land falls under the old common law system governed by the Conveyancing and Law of Property Act, Chap. 56:01 and is vested in the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation. Homeowners in this development who have completed payment for their properties are thus able to obtain titles or deeds to their properties. Of the 122 residential units, 57 homeowners have applied for and received their deeds.

With respect to the Mora Heights development, the HDC expects, barring unforeseen circumstances, that homeowners can obtain title documents to their properties and have boundary demarcations carried out

for the individual lots within the next 12 months. This is because some issues still need to be resolved with the Town and Country Planning Division to obtain final planning approval, but these issues are being actively addressed.

Regarding the conveyance of title, the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation Facilities Estate Management Company Limited, FEMCOL, one of the subsidiaries of the HDC is engaging residents in outreach and community visits.

Regarding site maintenance, Madam Speaker, the HDC has and will continue to undertake work on infrastructure and drain maintenance until this responsibility is transferred to the regional corporation's remit. In 2024, the HDC launched its Rent Café App, which allows customers to have real-time access to the HDC, which includes making online payments and maintenance requests. The HDC uses this app also to post notices and to distribute information on what is taking place in the area.

For persons in mortgaged units, the HDC has created an online form for homeowners to make maintenance requests. Persons can track the status of these issues online. The corporation cannot address requests for boundary demarcations at the Mora Heights Housing Development until the HDC obtains the duplicate general and portion plans for the development approved by the Director of Surveys. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, Question 14 and Question 22 have been deferred for two weeks. The Minister of Finance.

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

**FINANCE BILL, 2024**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I beg to move:

That a Bill entitled An Act to Make Provision of a Financial Nature and other related matters be now read a second time.

Madam Speaker, the Bill before the House is very straightforward. It is not something that we have not done before. Just by way of record and for the information of hon. Members and the wider public, I want to give some details of previous amnesties. The first amnesty that I am looking at because I have taken the period 2009 to present, the original period for that tax amnesty was from September 08, 2010 to June 30, 2011. That was extended for one month. The amount collected as of June 2010 was \$1.6 billion. The second amnesty, July 01, 2016 to August 31, 2016, there was within that period an extension of one month and the total collected in 2016, \$766 million.

In 2019, we had the most successful amnesty within the review period from June 2019 to September 2019, and there was a two-week extension within that period from September 15, 2019 to September 30, 2019. The amount collected in 2019 from a tax amnesty was \$2.38 billion. The BIR was quite successful during that year in getting payments from large taxpayers, companies in the energy sector and so on.

The fourth amnesty was in 2021 from January 01, 2021 to May 31, 2021, and in that amnesty, we collected \$1.1 billion.

**UNREVISED**

**2.10 p.m.**

The fifth tax amnesty I would like to look at was in 2022 spanning over into 2023. In that amnesty from November 2022 to February 2023, we collected \$1.59 billion. There also was an NIS amnesty in the period of 2023 to 2024, and we collected \$82 million. Well, not we, the National Insurance Board, collected \$82 million during that national insurance amnesty, so I thought it was necessary to give some history.

Now before you is the Finance Bill, 2024, and it is designed to address the tax and national insurance amnesties that were announced in the recent budget statement. At that time in September, I announced that the amnesties were to take effect from October 01, 2024 and although that date has already passed, I want to make it abundantly clear that the legislation before you is effective from October 01, 2024, and consistent with the announcement. The reason being, it provides a benefit. You can do retrospective or retroactive legislation if you are providing a benefit. If however, you are taking something away from someone, that is when you get into the realm of a special majority, but once it is a benefit, as this is, we can do retrospective legislation. So the amnesty is effective from October 01, 2024.

I also want to announce that we will have a second finance Bill in this year, 2024, next month, and that will deal with the other fiscal measures that were announced in the budget, but I thought it appropriate to get this amnesty matter out of the way. Reason being that under the Income Tax Act, the Cabinet is permitted to waive—the actual word used is “remit” taxes and duties. The Cabinet has an authority under the Income Tax Act to

remit or waive taxes, but the Cabinet has no authority to waive penalties, and I am not sure that any Cabinet should have that authority.

I think it should always be done by legislative amendment. This is the view at this point in time. So that every time we have an amnesty, there is an introduction of a Bill and there is specific special purpose legislation dealing with the waiver of penalties and interest that are due on unpaid taxes. I also want to make it clear that the amnesty does not in any way create a situation where the tax liability is waived. So the taxes are still owed but what is being waived is the penalties and interest on overdue taxes.

As in all previous tax amnesties, if the individual or the corporation fails to take advantage of the amnesty period, and fails to make the tax payments that are due, owed, and payable, the associated interest and penalties are restored upon expiry of the amnesty period. Now, the underlying rationale of imposing interest and penalties is to encourage taxpayers to pay their taxes on time, but there will be cases where taxpayers do not intentionally set out to avoid paying taxes on time. The most recent example of this was the problems that were created during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies, I dare say almost all, were without income and found it very, very difficult to meet their statutory obligations, not just in terms of paying their taxes but also in paying their national insurance contributions and so on.

COVID had a devastating impact on many businesses and individuals. It created cash flow problems for them and even though, by and large, most sectors have rebounded to pre-COVID levels of revenue, there are still some sectors that require assistance, in particular, small and medium enterprises.



This is why at this time, we have a Small and Medium Enterprise Stimulus Loan Programme where the Government is guaranteeing 80 per cent of loans to these particular small and medium enterprises, ensuring an attractive interest rate, providing a moratorium of two years before payments begin, and that Small and Medium Enterprise Stimulus Loan Programme is going very well based on the regular reports that we get.

This amnesty is intended to assist taxpayers that have fallen into an unfortunate situation as I said, primarily because of the continuing effects, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Amnesties have also proven to be a very valuable source of revenue to various governments. As I indicated—I have read it out for you, just let me read it out again—in 2011, the amnesty yielded \$1.6 billion; 2016, \$766 million; 2019, \$2.3 billion; 2021, \$1.1 billion and so on. During the last tax amnesty, a total, as I indicated, of \$1.59 billion was collected, but it was collected from 18,873 taxpayers who took advantage of the amnesty period. We expect this particular tax amnesty to be accessed by approximately 20,000 taxpayers and we expect to collect approximately \$1.5 billion from this particular amnesty. So amnesties, while they should not be encouraged, have been mutually beneficial to both taxpayers and to the State.

You would also be aware, Madam Speaker, that based on the successful outcome of the challenge to the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority, that we are moving full speed ahead to operationalize that revenue authority, and therefore, it is not this Government's intention to make amnesties a permanent fixture in the national budget because we know what that can cause. It can create an expectation and a dependency that

taxpayers will just be complacent and wait for the next amnesty.

Let me say a few things about property tax. There has been some inconvenience caused to persons with respect to the payment of property tax. There were long lines at both the district revenue offices and the headquarters of the Inland Revenue Division associated with the payment of property tax because when it began, we did not have the facilities for online payments in place. Reason being that property tax is revenue, and unlike other online payments such as your online payment for your electricity bill or your water bill, the commercial banks are not authorized to deduct anything from an online payment of tax, so that whereas, when you pay your electricity bill and so on, the commercial bank will charge T&TEC a small percentage or a flat fee for each transaction and that is deducted from the overall total. Because when the person is paying, they pay the actual amount. When you pay your electricity bill online, for example, let us say your bill is \$1000, you pay \$1000. You do not pay \$1020 or \$1025. The service charge for that transaction is deducted from the amount and the balance is remitted to T&TEC or WASA, as the case may be, or TSTT, Digicel, and so on.

In the case of tax, you cannot do that. It is unlawful to deduct anything from the revenue, from the payment of tax, so what we have decided to do as a Government—it took quite a while to make the arrangements—is to pay the service charge for the first six months in terms of property tax. Thereafter, there may be an arrangement where taxpayers may be asked to pay the service charge, but we are paying the service charge at this point in time. We also had to ensure that the taxes were brought to

account and properly recorded at the Treasury and at the Board of Inland Revenue. So you would be aware by now that taxpayers now have the ability to make payments online with First Citizens Bank and with Republic Bank from their homes. We have also extended LINX payment facilities in all district revenue offices for the payment of taxes. Previously, LINX payments or the debit card arrangement was only available in certain revenue offices, the head offices in particular.

Now let me move to the Bill itself because this is a very, very straightforward Bill, and this particular Bill follows the pattern of all previous Bills in terms of the waiver of penalties and interest. Just one second—let me deal with it under particular headings. If we go to clause 7 of the Bill, Madam Speaker, clause 7 of the Bill deals with property tax and it may become a little confusing as to what the legal effect of the various sections relating to property tax mean and the amnesty.

The Government has extended the deadline for the payment of property tax on several occasions. The latest extension is to the 20th of December. However, persons who have not paid their property tax by the 20th of December would still have an opportunity up to the 31st of December to pay their property tax without the imposition of penalties and interest, so that what we have been doing with respect to the extension of time to pay property tax, runs in parallel with this particular amnesty. This amnesty extends to all forms of taxes; to income taxes, corporation tax, stamp duty, et cetera, value added tax, and so on. So that even though there is an extension to the 20<sup>th</sup> of December for taxpayers to pay their property tax without the imposition of penalties and interest, in effect, it is now

December 31<sup>st</sup>, is the deadline for the payment of property tax without the imposition of penalties and interest.

Speaking now to national insurance, again, this is influenced by the recovery from COVID-19. Companies not only fell behind in terms of payment of their taxes, but they also fell behind in terms of payment of their national insurance. The National Insurance Board, as I am sure some people know, is quite aggressive in terms of trying to recover national insurance payments, and quite aggressive in terms of trying to recover penalties and interest even from state entities.

During the last national insurance amnesty in 2022—and that went on to 2023—a total of 4,739 employers took advantage of that amnesty to deal with their arrears of payments to the National Insurance Board. That is in 2022, and the NIB benefited from the receipt of \$124 million. In the most recent national insurance amnesty, approximately 1,552 employers remitted around \$82 million in arrears to the National Insurance Board.

With respect to the registration of clubs, the Government intends in the very near future to fully proclaim the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act. In fact, the deadline we have set for ourselves is the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 2024. This will eventually repeal the gaming tax currently payable under the Registration of Clubs Act and introduce another system of collection of revenue from the gambling sector.

**2.25 p.m.**

This amnesty therefore, presents a much-needed last opportunity for those operating under the Registration of Clubs Act, to regularize their situation, pay their taxes, on all of their various gambling devices before

transitioning into the Provision of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Act. Because after that, there will be no opportunity to address a waiver of penalties and interest on taxes payable for gaming devices under the Registration of Clubs of Act and those who have not paid would find themselves facing accumulated penalties and interest going forward.

So, I would like to take this opportunity to let all of the gambling clubs know outside there, this is the last chance they would get to pay up their taxes under the Registration of Clubs Act. That particular entity because of COVID-19, because of the restrictions for public gathering and so on, was deeply affected. We gave relief to the gambling sector through the reduction or refund of 42 per cent of the gaming taxes payable for the year ending December 2020. It was one of the industries that was most severely affected by COVID because they were closed and they simply could not generate any revenue but they had to pay their taxes. So we reduce taxes for gaming establishments by 42 per cent for the year of income ending December 2020 but people still did not pay, so I still want to point out this is the last chance for persons operating clubs where gambling takes place to pay their taxes.

With respect to the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control legislation itself, just as an aside, the Commission invited public comments from members of the public on the various licensing regulations, the Amusement Machine Control Regulations, Electronic Betting Regulations and so on. In October, the Commission also held dialogue with stakeholders in the gaming and betting sector on the regulations to get further input and

therefore, this is why we have established December 31<sup>st</sup>, as our deadline for the proclamation of the gambling and gaming Act.

With respect to public procurement, another important issue that is driving these particular amnesties is the legal requirement under section 29(1)(d) of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act. Under that section of the public procurement Act, public bodies are required to ensure that suppliers and contractors have fulfilled their obligations to pay all required taxes and contributions in Trinidad and Tobago, and this has created a lot of problems for small businesses in particular. Many small businesses are behind in terms of payment of their taxes and their NIS contributions, and it is now a requirement of law that you get a tax clearance and you get a national insurance clearance before you are allowed to tender for the provision of public goods and services to a public authority.

So again, to those particular entities who may wish to provide goods and services to the Government by way of procurement through public bodies, again, I urge all entities who are interested in providing goods and services to statutory authorities, state enterprises or government departments, take advantage of this opportunity, because this may very well be the last opportunity for them to get a tax clearance or a national insurance clearance and thereby qualify to tender for the provision of goods and services to public bodies. So, that is another benefit that is going to flow from this amnesty.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Looking at the Finance Bill, itself the clauses are very straightforward. It touches and concerns 11 pieces of legislation, namely:

the Income Tax Act, the Value Added Tax Act, the Stamp Duty Act, the Corporation Tax Act, the Unemployment Levy Act, the Health Surcharge Act, Petroleum Taxes Act, Tourism Development Act, Miscellaneous Taxes Act, Property Tax Act and Registration of Clubs Act.

Despite the absence of explicit amendments to these various Acts, the amnesty is applicable to all of these laws pursuant to either the respective incorporation of section 103A of the Income Tax Act, or the Income Tax Act itself. And I may explain 103A, it is an omnibus section that applies across the board to a number of other revenue laws. Turning into the clauses themselves, clause 1 is the usual short title, clause 2 deals with the registration of clubs, and it seeks to waive applicable interest and penalties in respect of outstanding taxes due and owing for the years up to and including the year ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023, in relation to the Registration of Clubs Act.

I want to emphasize, Madam Speaker, I have had many questions about this amnesty, some of which I found a little surprising, because they were coming from accounting professionals, as to what year these taxes—this waiver would be applicable to. It is for all years, taxes owed for all years up to the year ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023. So, if someone owes taxes for the year of income, 2022, the amnesty covers it; 2021, the amnesty covers it; 2020, 2019, 2018, going all the way back; it is for all years up to and including the year of income ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

So, the second clause deals with the registration of clubs, and it only applies to taxpayers who pay their outstanding taxes and interest prior to October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, or during the prescribed period that is from October 1<sup>st</sup>,

2024, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024. As I indicated previously, if persons do not pay the taxes that they owe, excluding penalties and interests, the penalties and interests will be revived and become payable.

Clause 3 deals with national insurance, and similar to the last national insurance amnesty, the proposed amnesty will be applicable to both contributions paid prior to and during the amnesty period. Let me make this clear. Let me repeat this. The amnesty applies to taxpayers who paid their outstanding taxes prior to October '24, and during the amnesty period October to December 2024. So, in terms of national insurance, all those who pay or have paid their national insurance contributions prior to October of '24 and pay these contributions between October '24 and December '24, they would be relieved of their obligation to pay penalties and interest.

Now, the waiver from national insurance is only applicable to employers who are registered with the National Insurance Board prior to October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. Penalties and interest again will be revived if they do not pay by December 2024.

Clause 4 deals with the Income Tax Act. It repeals and replaces section 103A of the Income Tax Act, and puts into effect a waiver on penalties, interest and outstanding interest due and payable, for the years up to and including the year of income ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023, once the tax is paid prior to October 1<sup>st</sup> 2024, or during the prescribed period of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

Now, you may wonder why I am using this form of words, but in a previous amnesty, if persons had paid the taxes prior to the amnesty, the waiver was not applicable. So this amnesty now applies to payment of taxes



before, where there were outstanding penalties and interest not paid, and payment of taxes during the period of the amnesty. Again, I want to make it clear that the taxes themselves are not waived.

Clause 5 deals with value added tax, it repeals and replaces section 54A of the Value Added Tax Act. It provides again for waiver on penalties, interests and outstanding interest in exactly the same way as the waiver on income tax. Clause 6 deals with the Stamp Duty Act, again, repeals and replaces section 3A of the Stamp Duty Act. It mirrors the previous provisions. It provides for a waiver on penalties, interest and outstanding interest due and owing under the Stamp Duty Act for all years, including the year up to and ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023, once the tax was paid before October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 or during the prescribed period of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

Clause 7 deals with property tax, gives an amnesty which I just explained, in effect, will extend the waiver for the payment of property tax, waiver of penalties and interest up to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

I want to make it crystal clear, I need to repeat this, the amnesty does not remove the liability to pay the taxes themselves, and clause 8 deals with the commencement and it establishes October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024, as the date on which the Bill and by extension, the date upon which the tax and national insurance amnesties become effective.

Just to go back to some of the points I made, when the gambling and gaming Act is proclaimed, as we indicated, we are targeting December 31<sup>st</sup>, we hope we can meet that date, but it will certainly be somewhere around there, the Registration of Clubs Act will go out of existence, and there will

be no opportunity to waive penalties and interest on taxes that are owed and due and payable by operators of these clubs. I want to repeat that: there will be no opportunity once that law is repealed, when we proclaim the gambling and gaming Act for persons who have been gambling, operating gambling houses in private clubs, to get a waiver of penalties and interest in the future.

With respect to small business owners in particular and medium enterprise owners, I want to urge them take advantage of this amnesty, get your national insurance payments in order, get your income tax payments in order, because if you do not, you will not be able to tender for public goods and services. I have sought to keep this Bill as simple as possible, Madam Speaker, I have sought to keep this debate as simple as possible, Madam Speaker, and with those words I beg to move.

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

*Question proposed.*

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

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

**Mr. Davendranath Tancoo** (*Oropouche West*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Madam Speaker, as the Minister of Finance indicated, this is a relatively short Bill, seven clauses and nine pages, excluding the explanatory notes. Clause 1, as he said, it is just a line identifying that the Act will be cited as the Finance Act, 2024, but the six other clauses are extremely important as together, they account for untold millions, hundreds of millions, and maybe even more, of money that this Government has now taken a conscious decision not to collect, and with the exception of clause 7, Madam Speaker, represents a

tremendous loss to the Treasury and to tax-paying citizens of this country in favour of persons and companies who have deliberately chosen to break the law.

The Minister of Finance in his presentation, again cautioned entities of the need to take advantage of again, this last opportunity. This was reflective of the same comments that the hon. Minister has made on several previous occasions when there were tax amnesties in which he said, “This is your last occasion, this is your last occasion, this is your last location”, ad nauseam. Again, he is here back to talk about the last, another last opportunity.

**2.50 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, we have on the opposite side a Minister who is very famous for construction-oriented businesses, Madam Speaker. I do not know if he will indicate whether he is benefiting—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, you know, that is imputing improper motive. I think you should refrain from going that way, please.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I query, Madam Speaker, whether or not there are beneficiaries on—let me phrase that differently, Madam Speaker. I want to ask, Madam Speaker, whether or not—and the Minister in his wind-up could make it very clear—which entities would have written to the Minister or approached the Minister in seeking this sort of waiver, and whether the Minister or anybody to his knowledge is personally benefiting from this sort of amendment, Madam Speaker. It is a question to the Minister.

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** So in all of these instances, Madam Speaker, businesses engage in breaking the law. In all of these instances, in the six clauses, Madam Speaker, businesses engaged in breaking the law for years are being forgiven for their transgressions and for breach of law by the Minister of Finance and his Government.

Persons are engaged in illegality, breaking the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, and in some cases, the relevant debt recovery sections of the various bodies would have taken substantial time, energy and resources—spent energy and resources in doing research, in taking measures hopefully to prosecute and persecute these offenders. The Minister just referred to that when he was referencing how hard certain entities were—

**Madam Speaker:** So, Member, you know, the words, prosecute and persecute, I have no problem with “prosecute”. I think you should withdraw the word “persecute”. They are different words and they mean different things.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I hereby withdraw.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance would have indicated that he was very happy with the processes being utilized by the various individuals and entities in prosecuting and in following up the debts. So they would have spent a substantially amount of time, resources and effort—these various entities and staffing involved in these entities—to try to recover the moneys owed, only to find out now that they have wasted their time, spent good taxpayers’ dollars, Madam Speaker, wasted their time because the Government has now come to say, “Take a bligh folks. Take a bligh”.

Madam Speaker, what has been the value of this forgiveness? What is the value, dollar value? Because there is a dollar value, you know. This has costed taxpayers not just the opportunity cost where all of these resources would have been spent prosecuting and pursuing offenders of the law, not just that where the Government then said, “Don’t worry, you wasted your time”, Madam Speaker. Now, there is an additional cost because persons and entities are not getting the resources because the Government is saying, “Take a waiver”. Madam Speaker, what is the value of this Government’s free-handedness in forgiving these white-collar criminals, Madam Speaker? How much money are we talking about?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I would ask you to withdraw that word that you used after “white-collar”. Please withdraw that word. Find another word, please.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Thank you very much, Madam. I hereby withdraw. Madam Speaker, the Government has facilitated, deliberately and by policy, offenders who have broken the law of this country and it has costed taxpayers a substantial amount of moneys. The question is, “How much money?”

In a sworn affidavit to the court, sworn and filed on June 03, 2024, the hon. Minister of Finance told the court, at paragraph 25, and I quote, Madam Speaker:

The annual tax gap, that is to say the difference between actual tax revenues collected by the Government and potential tax revenues, is estimated to be in excess of TT \$5 billion, and it could be as high as \$10 billion.

Madam Speaker, and I will continue with the quotation by the hon. Member: In light of present oil and gas prices on the international market, and the likelihood that they would not increase significantly in the near future, the reduction of the tax gap through increased collection of taxes is likely to be the only way of reducing the budget deficit and achieving fiscal consolidation, while at the same time maintaining present levels of Government expenditure.

So two things there, Madam Speaker. In the first instance, the tax gap is between \$5 billion and \$10 billion, according to the Minister of Finance in his submission, between \$5 billion and \$10 billion. That is the kind of value we are losing out on, Madam Speaker. But there is another part where the Government is saying that:

It is therefore critical to enforce the legislation to ensure that we do not have this tax gap continuing.

—and this is \$5 billion to \$10 billion on an annual basis, Madam Speaker. The Minister himself indicated that there was need to ensure that they close that gap by enforcing the legislation, and then two or three months down the road, he comes with an amnesty forgiving those who have created that tax gap by failing to pay their taxes, Madam Speaker.

Mind you, Madam Speaker, in June of this year—this is when Minister spoke, in June this year, after multiple tax amnesties over the last nine into—this is now year 10, multiple tax amnesties have been provided by the very said Minister to the very said businesses to try to close this tax gap. And these businesses, these business houses, still owe billions of dollars in taxes, Madam Speaker, despite the fact that the Minister—the

Minister himself said it earlier today in his presentation, that this is to cover taxes going all the way back.

**Mr. Imbert:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** He went back into 2019. According to the Minister, 2018. There was no COVID then, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, I just rise to advise you, you have two more minutes left of ordinary speaking time. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to wind up your contribution, if you wish.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Minister, Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** So you are going to exercise the—

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Yes. Yes. Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much.

**Madam Speaker:** Please proceed.

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** So the Minister is saying \$5 billion to \$10 billion, but Nigel Edwards, who is the Government's head of the TTRA, stated in a May *Guardian* report by Radhica Sookraj, and I quote:

“There are studies that articulate that there is a tax collection gap as high as \$15 billion. Our objective is to close that gap within the first three years by increasing tax collection by \$10 billion, and that is an achievable objective.”

This is the gentleman who now heads the TTRA. What the Minister needs to tell the country today, as he has told the court, is what the estimated loss is, that he has come to the Parliament today to tell the country that he is

going to write off, because that is what this is. It is a write off of liability. A write-off that benefits the few at the cost of the many, 1.4 million people, Madam Speaker.

There is also significant costs given that the projected deficit, according to the Minister of Finance a few weeks ago, will be \$5.6 billion. But here, you are projecting a \$5.6 billion deficit between your revenue and your expenditure in your budget but you are willing to write off revenue, Madam Speaker. What madness is that? How illogical is that? At a point in time where we should be ensuring we enforce the law so that there is compliance with the law and that the Government could retrieve funding, Madam Speaker, where it is due and when it is due, the Government turns a blind eye to it. Madam Speaker, who is this Government working for? Who is this Government working for, Madam Speaker.

The country is told that we do not have money to pay proper wages to public servants, to port workers, to members of the protective services. We do not have enough money to do that. They do not have money to pay suppliers for medicines in the hospitals or to buy parts for critical equipment so that people do not have to wait months and years for CAT scan and MRI, et cetera, with others having to wait years for emergency heart surgery. Government tells us that they do not have enough money to repair and fuel coast guard vessels, that is why the country's coasts remain open, facilitating free entry and exit to criminals involved in human trafficking, illegal drugs, and importation of illegal firearms, Madam Speaker.

They tell you that they have no money, Madam Speaker, to increase old age pensions and social grants. So pensioners and those on social



support have to choose between eating a meal and paying for medicine or electricity. No money, so that they cut GATE, effectively cutting out the educational mobility of thousands out of poverty in this country, Madam Speaker. No money, so the Government tells average citizens to, “Tighten your belt”, but the Minister and his colleagues on that side are telling tax evaders, businesses who break the law to, “Take a bligh”.

I challenge the Minister of Finance today, Madam Speaker, to tell us who are these companies that are being targeted with this waiver. Tell us how much each of them is owing the taxpayers of this country. Tell us so that we will be able to see if amongst these companies that are declaring hundreds of millions of dollars in profit are those very same companies that are refusing to pay the taxes.

Ironically, in the same *Guardian* article I just cited, Madam Speaker, the TTRA head told the country that:

“...he was not aware of any special drive to go after large corporations.”

Instead, he adopted—that is the TTRA head—a more suppliant, pleading approach, calling for more persons:

“...to be willing to share the burden.”

Even as he—“...stressed that errant...”—tax—“...owners...”—have—“...had enough...”

“...errant...”—tax business and tax owners have—“...had enough time to pay their taxes.

‘Having issued a number of amnesties in the past, there is now very little excuse for businesses or individuals to not pay their fair share of

taxes, '...'"

But is that not what the purpose was for issuing the tax liability waivers in the first instance, Madam Speaker?

Sadly, Mr. Edwards was not able to:

"...specify how many business...were evading taxes but noted..."—ironically—"...that the TTRA's strategic plan includes collaboration to identify errant business owners."

After nine and a half years, going into 10 years, they are now seeking to identify errant business owners. Madam Speaker, between the head of the TTRA and the hon. Minister of Finance, they do not have a clue about what is going on in this country with regard to tax collection.

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** They are "vooping" with the numbers, Madam Speaker, and while they are "vooping" with the numbers—and, Madam Speaker, this is not accidental. I mean to cast no aspersions, Madam Speaker, but after 10 years, if today you know that there is a huge tax gap in billions of dollars, where taxpayers are being robbed of funding, you have taken no—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, would you be kind to withdraw that word and find another word. Okay?

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and withdrawn.

Madam Speaker, if after 10 years this Government has been unable or unwilling to take the relevant measures to do the relevant investigations to find out who the errant taxpayers are, then they are as liable and as guilty for the errors that we have now, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Bringing tax waivers as a way of “bligh”, as a way of covering it up, Madam Speaker, is only a penalty to taxpaying citizens. This is a direct discrimination against persons and companies, who would have abided by the law. There cannot be a law for some, Madam Speaker, and another law for others.

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** This is not *Animal Farm* where some are more equal than others, Madam Speaker. This is not *Animal Farm*. This is Trinidad and Tobago where our Constitution guarantees us equal treatment under the law, but that does not happen under the PNM. These write-offs are a slap in the face to law-abiding citizens and businesses who have dutifully followed the law and made their payments on time.

Some perhaps even borrowing or drawing down on their savings to ensure that they stay within the provisions of the law, and only now have to stand by and watch while those colleagues, those businesses that have broken the law get away scot-free without even a slap on their wrist, Madam Speaker. That is completely unacceptable, and no matter how the Minister spins it, Madam Speaker, no matter how he treats with it, what it is doing, it is penalizing those who have abided by the law in favour of those who have not.

Madam Speaker, there is another piece of this legislation that seems to have snuck into the legislation. There is another very interesting matter. You see, according to several of these clauses, Madam Speaker, the Minister is seeking the approval of the Parliament to extend the waivers by himself, without having to come to the Parliament. The Minister is seeking the

approval of the Parliament to—well, it is an additional power—give him an additional power, but he wants to seek the Parliament’s permission to extend amnesties as and when he sees fit without having to come to Parliament.

**3.05 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, when you give this Minister this power you are effectively removing the responsibility requiring the Minister to come to Parliament and explain why he wants these extensions and who he wants to facilitate. But it is worse than that, Madam Speaker. In his presentation in the 2025 Budget, Madam Speaker, the Minister says:

“We do not expect to give any further tax amnesties after the TTRA is fully up and running, as we expect much better compliance from all taxpayers once the new arrangements for tax collection are in place. Taxpayers are therefore urged to take advantage of these amnesties as they may not see them again”

So the Minister on the one hand is saying, “We do not expect any more amnesties. We do not expect any more extensions”. So then why? Why is he asking for permission from the Parliament? Why is this amendment there where he will now extend without coming to Parliament, if he expects that the law will take place, Madam Speaker? What the Minister is doing is creating the very same problem that he claims he is willing to stop. He is cautioning his colleagues, Madam Speaker, “Pay up now, you know because no other chance is going to come. But just in case, I will have the permission to extend the deadlines”. Madam Speaker, what this does is create an even further weakening of the taxation system of this country.

Madam Speaker, since 2020—I will only go back to 2020 because it

is a quick snapshot shot—this Minister has come from 2020 to today, 48 times there have been amendments to the amnesties, Madam Speaker, 48 times there have been tax waivers, Madam Speaker, 48 times from 2020 to now. Madam Speaker, if that does not scare you, nothing should because what that does is tell taxpayers not to bother, have confidence, because at some point in time the Government will come and give you a tax waiver so that those persons who are filling—it is a bad example that they are set setting, Madam Speaker, especially to those persons who are willing to abide by the law, you know. They are telling them not to abide.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn quickly to the amendment to the National Insurance Act. Madam Speaker, again, this is a waiver of penalties and interest on penalties for companies who did not pay their NIS contributions on time. NIS contributions, Madam Speaker. Two days ago, Madam Speaker, on a Saturday in my constituency office, I met with an individual who found out—15 years he had worked for this company Madam Speaker, 15 years, only to go now to make a claim at the NIB, to find out that the company was not paying their NIS.

For 15 years, Madam Speaker. What that does is it puts the taxpayer, it puts the person who should be receiving a benefit in serious cost, in serious liability, and instead of treating with those lawbreakers, the Minister is saying “Take ah bligh. Go ahead”. But, Madam Speaker, it is worse than even that. The NIB is in a financial crisis. The reason that the NIB is in financial crisis, Madam Speaker, could largely be attributed to the fact that they have less contribution income coming in and more benefit expenditure going out. One of the reasons we have less contribution income coming in

is because hundreds of millions of dollars are not being paid to the NIS as they should have been paid, Madam Speaker—

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:**—to the National Insurance Board. As history has proven, a lot of those come from the Government.

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** It is the Government's failure. State boards and bodies managed by the People's National Movement's Ministers, Madam Speaker, on that side, have abandoned the NIB and allowed it to fall into crisis. Now, when the Minister of Finance has the opportunity to ensure that businesses stick to the law, they are sacrificing the NIB, Madam Speaker, that is a frightening thing.

Today, Madam Speaker, the most recent document from the NIB—the NIB “Annual Report 2022-2023” says that there was a shortfall of \$1.3 billion between expenditure benefit expenditure and contribution income. If this Government had persecuted—prosecuted—sorry I withdraw—followed up—you could laugh as much as you want Sir—if the Government had only—and this is no laughing matter, you know.

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** If the Government had only—

**Hon. Members:** [*Continuous interruption*]

**Mr. D. Tancoo:**—Madam Speaker—done what it was supposed to do, NIB may very well not have found itself—

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:**—in the crisis that it is in now, where they have sell off

assets. Mind you, this is the very same Minister who, recognizing that there was a crisis went and asked the NIB to invest billions of dollars into his own fund.

Madam Speaker, I want to refer you to the—I do not want to use the “hypocrisy”, that may be unparliamentary but I want to look at the duplicity of comments coming from the other side. I refer to a newspaper article, 10/06/2021. The headline of that newspaper article and it is a *Guardian* business article:

“Imbert worries about sustainability of National Insurance Fund”

**Madam Speaker:** Now, remember even though you are quoting, you have to comply with what the Standing Orders are, okay. So, you are in breach because you have to refer to the Member either by portfolio or by constituency. So find a way to say it, please.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance, is worried about the sustainability of National Insurance Fund. The Minister said then, that:

“...the root cause of the fund...”—“...being depleted is life expectancy in...”—Trinidad and Tobago much—“like...other countries, has increased steadily over last 50 years while birth rates have decreased.”

The Minister is saying that because people are living longer, the National Insurance Fund is in crisis; not at all. It is because of the failure of the Minister of Finance to collect the contributions of NIS—

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

**Mr. D. Tancoo:**—from businesses that are breaking the law Madam

Speaker. Every year too, Madam Speaker, at the Standing Finance Committee, we have been raising—and this year was no exception—we saw Ministers speak about the NIS contributions that they have outstanding and every year we ask the Ministers the same thing, “Would this ensure that all your contributions are up to date?” and every year the Ministers say the same thing. Today Minister, I challenge you to advise the country, how many government agencies still have moneys outstanding for the NIB? How many and how much? But you know, Madam Speaker, I could expect none of that.

Madam Speaker in the last few seconds that I have, I want to touch on clause 5 on property tax if I have the opportunity. Clause 5 is for the VAT, the value added tax, where the Minister is giving a “bligh” again, to businesses that have not paid their value added tax. Madam Speaker. What is that message, Madam Speaker? The message quite frankly is that businesses, whether they pay or do not pay, it is not important to the Minister because at some point in time, they will get “ah” release, they will get “ah” ease up, Madam Speaker; wrong precedence, wrong direction. There should never be a time in this country when a Government facilitates wrongdoing.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, again, I find that that is imputing improper motives. Withdraw that, find another way to say it, please.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Withdrawn, Madam Speaker. There should never be a time in this country, Madam Speaker, when breaking the law will result in a benefit—

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



**Mr. D. Tancoo:**—to those who have broken the law at the cost and expense of taxpaying citizens. There should never be such a time, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Minister—clause 7—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, your time is now spent.

**Mr. D. Tancoo:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker

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

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Finance.

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

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was wondering who would be against an amnesty and upon reflection, in my opinion, only a hateful person would be against an amnesty.

**Hon. Members:** Ahhh, no.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I am not speaking about anybody in this House, Madam.

**Madam Speaker:** While you may not have referred to any particular Member, someone has just spoken, so there is an innuendo. Please withdraw that and find another way to say what you would wish to say. Please.

**Madam Speaker:** Madam Speaker, I was not speaking about any Member of this House.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Finance, you may understand that but I have ruled and I would ask you to please withdraw. Find a way.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Oh, certainly. I was not objecting to the withdrawal, Madam Speaker. I withdraw.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** It is curious that the hon. Member for Oropouche West spent the last, however many minutes, ranting and raving about the provision of an amnesty, which I am certain every single UNC supporter is in favour of. Who would be against that? We went through the COVID-19 pandemic, it was real it was not imaginary. It actually happened and we had a situation where businesses were locked down. We had a situation where the borders were closed. We had a situation where people could not earn income and as a result of that real-life situation, especially for small, micro and medium-enterprises, people at the—Madam Speaker, I am being continuously interrupted by the Member for Siparia and the Member for St. Augustine. I would ask you, Madam Speaker, to exercise your authority and stop them from muttering at me.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so, to all Members, alright, I think we have been doing very well so far, so let us try and abide by Standing Order 53. Member for Siparia, apparently you are not recognizing me. Whatever pull there is with the Minister of Finance today, please—

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

**Madam Speaker:** I like when we, you know, are in a jovial mood and so on, but let us get down to the business and let us abide by Standing Order 53, no continuous talking. To all Members, if one has to speak in hushed tones, if one really needs to speak long, one is invited to go outside and come back. Minister of Finance, I am sure you will be okay now.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wonder how long that will last. So when I piloted this legislation, I indicated that there

were a number of previous amnesties for tax and also for national insurance, some of which were implemented by Members opposite. Was it wrong then? Was it villainous? Was it criminal? Was it supporting the criminal element? I dare say it was not. So how is it that the previous UNC Administration implemented both tax and national insurance amnesties but when they did it was not support for white-collar criminals? Nonsense, absolute nonsense.

As I indicated, there was a real global pandemic. It was called COVID-19. It started in 2020 and the public health restrictions continued well into 2021 and it severely affected businesses, especially micro-businesses, small businesses and medium-sized enterprises, severely. Anybody who was here during the COVID-19 pandemic knows that and all of them on that side know that. As I said, there is not a single supporter of the UNC who is against this particular tax amnesty and this national insurance amnesty. So it is political hypocrisy of the highest.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Hypocrisy. I dare them to vote against it. Vote against it “nah”? And go and report to your supporters that you voted against a tax amnesty that is designed to help them and designed to help everybody else who is struggling in this country.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Go and vote against it. It is just a bluff and “ah ol’ talk” and a torrent of political hypocrisy. There is absolutely no doubt that persons at the lowest end of the spectrum are still trying to recover from the hardship imposed upon them by public health restrictions and travel

restrictions. People had to make choices. So when you have a small or micro business, you have to make a choice, whether you pay salaries, whether you pay your rent, whether you pay your suppliers, whether you pay your electricity bill and so on. You have to make a choice and quite a lot of small, micro and medium-sized enterprises, regrettably, were unable to fulfil their statutory obligations.

**3.20 p.m.**

This is the truth, this is reality not the fantasy that I have just heard from the Member for Oropouche West. Fantasy, absolute fantasy and it is also factual that with the proclamation of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, a new regime came into being a couple of years ago. Factual, that now in order to qualify to tender to provide goods and services to a statutory authority, a state enterprise, or a government department you must get a tax clearance, and you must get a national insurance clearance.

And therefore that is an extra obligation that has been imposed, especially on small and micro businesses, and because they had to recover from COVID they cannot get the tax clearance, they cannot get the national insurance clearance. And by the way, Madam Speaker, the Members opposite also know that when one has a tax liability, quite often the penalties and interest are more than the actual principal tax liability itself. It is very onerous and quite often you cannot collect. The businesses will go out of existence, they will go bankrupt, they will close down and you are not going to get a lot of these penalties and interest, you are not going to get it.

So, Madam Speaker, we on this side believe in helping people. We on

this side—

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** We on this side—

**Hon. Member:** Understand small businesses.

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—understand small business.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** We on this side, understand the pressure people are under.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** We on this side, have an empathy for small people. We empathize with people at the lowest end of the spectrum, and therefore we are promoting this tax amnesty and this insurance amnesty and I dare every one of them on that side to vote against it. I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** No concern for people.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** That was the Minister of Finance over there, eh.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so one minute.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Well—

**Madam Speaker:** I am having difficulty—

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—consult the Minister of Finance.

**Madam Speaker:**—in hearing to follow the proceedings. So I am asking Members to please control your volumes. Minister of Finance.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, in accordance

with Standing Order 68(1), I beg to move that the Finance Bill, 2024 be committed to the committee of the whole to consider the Bill clause by clause.

*Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.*

*House in committee.*

*Clauses 1 to 8.*

*Question proposed:* That clauses 1 to 8 stand part of the Bill.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I would like for the hon. Minister to kindly reconsider the power that he is giving onto himself to at any future point by order, extend the deadline dates. So this will stay on the books, that means at any point in time for the next, ad nauseam, Ministers of Finance will have that power to extend that power for all these various pieces of legislation. Can we ask that you reconsider that for all eight clauses, it is at the end of each clause—all seven clauses, sorry.

**Mr. Imbert:** This only applies to this particular amnesty.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sorry?

**Mr. Imbert:** The power to extend is only applicable to this particular amnesty.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** This particular what, Sir?

**Mr. Imbert:** The power to extend the time for the waiver of penalties and interest is applicable only to this particular amnesty, not to future amnesties.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What in it restricts or limits it in that regard?

**Mr. Imbert:** Because the period is prescribed, it ends on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Minister, I have seen with other amnesties in

the past, I have a list of them here.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Where there have been repeated extensions of deadlines. We can take the first one here, clause 3.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, that is a fact. But it is an extension of the deadline for that specific amnesty, for that specific prescribed period. To follow on the question you are asking, because I think I understand what you are driving at, a Minister of Finance three years from now, cannot extend this period of time for this particular amnesty, for this prescribed period once the extension comes to an end that is it.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So then why are you including a power unto the Minister of Finance to, by order extend?

**Mr. Imbert:** Because as always happens with all amnesties within the last week or two you always get an avalanche of requests for an extension. Because we are a last minute society, let us face facts. Every single amnesty so far has required an extension, some have been extended for a week some for a month, some for two months and so on. When your Government was in power, your Minister of Finance, in fact, extended the amnesty for several months but it is only that particular amnesty. You always want to give yourself the flexibility when people come at you and say they were not able to put together the necessary documentation to pay their taxes, to consider whether you want give an extension or not. It is simply to give the Minister the flexibility.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am not convinced, hon. Minister, but I thank you. Can you consider an alternative, to put the power of the Parliament either by affirmative or negative resolution for the order?

**Mr. Imbert:** Well, the practice—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** You are extending the order, you will do it by order.

**Mr. Imbert:** The practice for the—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And you put a check and balance—

**Mr. Imbert:** Sure, I hear you.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—for parliamentary approval.

**Mr. Imbert:** The practice for the last 20 years has been to give the Minister the power to extend. Now, in terms of these types of instruments, it all depends on the degree of difficulty and the degree of complexity. This is not something that you want to have a debate every time you want to extend an amnesty by a week or two. It is not something that should consume the Parliament's time, it is standard practice. For example, the amnesty or the waiver of the penalties for the filing of annual returns, that again is by ministerial order, this is standard. You do not want to come and convene the Parliament simply to have a two-week extension of an amnesty. And furthermore, this has to go to both houses of Parliament, so if I were to agree with what you are saying, by the time I finish in the other place, the extension period might be ended.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Well, this period will soon come to an end. I am not convinced, but you have the majority, Sir.

**Mr. Imbert:** No problem.

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

**Mr. Imbert:** Good.

*Clauses 1 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be reported to the House.*



*House resumed.*

*Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.*

### **ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS**

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

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

**Mr. Hinds:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1. standing in the name of the Prime Minister. Madam Speaker—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** If I may, we had an agreement. If I understand it, that we will deal with all the Motions at the same time.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** If I could respond. According to the procedure, the Minister is going to move the Motion of that nature.

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

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, that is exactly—that is what he—

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

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** You are most welcome.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister, may I guide you to page 5 of the updated procedure with respect to the Motion.

### **RELATED MOTIONS**

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Okay. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1 standing in the name of the Prime Minister. Madam Speaker, in moving this Motion, I seek the leave of the House in accordance with Standing Order 50(1) to debate along with this matter, Motion Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5 on the Order Paper which relate to the same subject.

**Madam Speaker:** Is this the wish of the House?

*Assent indicated.*

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, I just want to seek clarification. So is the Government not debating Motion No. 1? Because I got the impression that we are debating all five Motions.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I just said alongside this.

**Madam Speaker:** So, Leader of the House.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, my friends are not listening. The Minister said, "I beg to move Motion No. 1 standing in the name of the Prime Minister". "Madam Speaker, in moving this Motion, I seek the leave of the House in accordance with Standing Order 50(1) to debate along with, Motion No. 1, Motions 2, 3, 4, 5", he said it.

**Hon. Members:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** What you wanted to make sure? You were not listening.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, leave has been granted for Motions 1 to 5 on the Order Paper to be debated interrelated. Minister of National Security.

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

## **POLICE SERVICE COMMISSION**

### **(NOMINATION OF DR. WENDELL C. WALLACE)**

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Madam Speaker:

*Whereas* section 122(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Chap. 1:01 ('the Act') provides that the President shall, after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader

of the Opposition nominate persons, who are qualified and experienced in the disciplines of law, finance, sociology or management, to be appointed as members of the Police Service Commission;

*And whereas* section 122(4) of the Act provides that the President shall issue a notification in respect of each person nominated for appointment under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

*And whereas* the President has issued a notification in respect of Dr. Wendell C. Wallace for appointment as a member of the Police Service Commission;

And whereas the President has on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of November, 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 for the nomination of Dr. Wendell C. Wallace as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

**3.35 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, I begin by thanking the outgoing Commission for its tremendous national service, for its work. In particular, I thank the Chairman of that Commission, Madam Justice of Appeal Judith Jones, who demonstrated, along the way, total dedication to the responsibility that she would have undertaken, along with other members of the Commission as it then was.

It has been my observation that the former chairman and members

took the time to understand the police organization, its role, its responsibility, and what it was designed to achieve in accordance with the law and the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Justice of Appeals Jones did not merely serve, but prepared an exit report, quite normal, but dealing with several matters of critical importance, and the difference on this occasion was that she took the opportunity to express her own concerns and that of the Commission as chairman.

I also take the opportunity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to thank the nominees before us for our consideration today for accepting the invitation by Her Excellency on behalf of all of us to serve, and for allowing themselves to be presented to us in the House of Representatives as nominees. There are five such nominees, Mr. Deputy Speaker, two possessed of the discipline of law, two possessed of the discipline of management and one, the discipline of sociology, bearing in mind that these are the disciplines that the Constitution or the Act provided for and anticipates from the members of the Police Service Commission, given that which is in front of them. One of the five before us today served on the last Commission and is before us, of course, for consideration on the new Commission going forward.

For the benefit of the public, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and more poignantly for the benefit of the Members of this House, it is my intention to highlight some of the aspects of the profiles, the CVs of the nominees before us here today, of course, beginning with Dr. Wendell C. Wallace. Dr.

Wallace is deeply affiliated with the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, and now holds the post of senior lecturer. He would have achieved a BA in History and Human Resource Management from the said University of the West Indies at the St. Augustine Campus in 2002 and an MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice with distinction, again, from the University of the West Indies in 2006.

In 2006, he earned himself the qualification of Bachelor of Laws; in 2009, a certificate in alternative dispute resolution; in 2013, a certificate in Caribbean defence and security from the National Defense University, Washington, D.C. Dr. Wallace was called to the Bar of England and Wales, the Honourable Society of Gray's Inn, London, in 2013. He obtained a certificate in governance, governability and security in the Americas from the National Defense University, Washington, D.C., and that was acquired in 2014.

Dr. Wallace was then called to the Bar of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and admitted to practice thereby in 2014. It is in 2014 as well that he achieved his Doctor of Philosophy status in Criminology and Criminal Justice, again, from the University of the West Indies, and since then, in 2016, he would have acquired a certificate in mediation, a train the trainers certificate, and a certificate in practical mediation skills, both from the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine. As I indicated, at present, Dr. Wallace is the senior lecturer at the University of the West Indies. He is the visiting professor and lectures in policing, innovation, enterprise—oh, sorry. He is a visiting professor at the Police Innovation, Enterprise Learning Centre at the University of East London. He has been

in that position since 2022, and he is expected to continue up until 2025. I did indicate that Dr. Wallace, by way of experience, is a well-qualified mediator and certified so with the Mediation Board of Trinidad and Tobago. Dr. Wallace served as a human resource manager and, of course, interestingly, he was a police officer between the years 1998 and 2008 in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Dr. Wallace has a list of publications to be proud about, several chapters written in distinguished publications. For example, he would written under the heading: “Why, When, Where, and How? : Introduction to the Palgrave Handbook of Caribbean Criminology”, as well as he wrote in “The State of Criminology in the Anglophone Caribbean” and many other such writings.

Dr. Wallace has a very long and impressive CV, so I will venture just another few aspects of it where he would have written: *Creating a Safety Plan for Victims of Domestic Violence in the Caribbean*; then again, wrote on *The Movement of Venezuelans to the Americas and the Caribbean in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*; *Policing the Global South: Colonial Legacies, Pluralities, Partnerships, and Reform*, yet another of them; “Policing and Technology in the contemporary Caribbean”, yet another. And the long list of his research and writings proudly continues, at least, six or seven pages deep.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Act provides that one be schooled in the discipline of law, and from the record that I have read here, brief as it would have been, Dr. Wallace is suitably qualified for the position as nominated by Her Excellency as a member of the Police Service Commission.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I proceed, therefore, to the second nominee, Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne, who is qualified and experienced as well in the

discipline of law. Ms. Fritz-Browne would have earned her Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of the West Indies, with honours, the Cave Hill Campus. She would have acquired the Legal Education Certificate from the Hugh Wooding Law School at St. Augustine. She would have gone on to a Postgraduate Diploma in Mediation Studies, again, from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. As well, Ms. Fritz-Browne is a certified mediator in civil and non-family matters, and so certified by the Mediation Board of Trinidad and Tobago.

She is possessed of international certification in legislative drafting from the Tulane Law School, Tulane University, New Orleans, United States of America; a diploma in treaty and legislative drafting. She has acquired as well a Master of Science Degree, planning and development, with distinction from the University of the West Indies and, of course, a Master of Laws degree in Legislative Drafting from the University of the West Indies. We are advised, and it is here recorded, that Madam Fritz-Browne is a PhD candidate treating with international and treaty law from the Euclid University.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, insofar as professional experience is concerned, Ms. Fritz-Browne has tremendous drafting experience, legislative drafting that is, and would have served the State in this regard. She also has experience as a practitioner in the field of law. She was the head of the department and a senior legal officer in this very Parliament between the years 2012 and 2013. Madam Fritz-Browne is a full-time law school—or was a full-time law school lecturer with the Council of Legal Education at the Hugh Wooding Law School between 2013 and 2019, and between 2013

and 2016 was part-time UWI lecturer in the Department of Geomatics Engineering and Land Management.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, those are just a few highlights of the very impressive résumé as offered by Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne in her nomination for membership of the Police Service Commission before us today.

**3. 50 p.m.**

I now move, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the nominee, Mrs. Ethel Hector-Berkeley, a person who is qualified and experienced in the discipline of management, to be appointed as a member of Police Service Commission. Ethel Hector-Berkeley would have in 1987, acquired a certificate in industrial relations from the Cipriani College of Labour & Co-Operative Studies. In the 1994, acquired a Bachelor of Science Degree in Management from the Rutgers School of Management and Labour Relations, New Jersey in USA. And of course, going on in 1997, to have acquired a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the said Rutgers University.

Insofar as working experience is concerned, between 2007 and 2013, Madam Hector-Berkeley was Administrator with the Tobago House of Assembly, no doubt gathering tremendous public service experience there at. In 2014, Madam Hector-Berkeley was a member of a two-person government-appointed team tasked to provide expert guidance, and to make recommendations to address human management situation in a particular government Ministry, and presented a comprehensive report in terms. Between 2015 and 2016, served as a Consultant in the Office of the Chief Personnel Officer, in the Personnel Department. Again, for those reasons



and surely more, a nominee for the consideration of this House.

*[Device goes off]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, please, just one second. Members, please remember the decorum of the House, all cell phones on silent, or, again, switched off, please. Proceed, Member.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I move to the other nominee, Mr. Roger Babooram, a person who is qualified and experienced in the discipline of management and before us for our consideration in this House. Mr. Roger Babooram would have served as Regional Director of the People Business Partner, from January 2019 to the present time. A trusted People Advisor to over 1,500 employees located in the Caribbean, Latin America, and Miami. His resume suggests that he led the development and implementation of a comprehensive talent acquisition stagey for the B2B sector, resulting in a 30 per cent increase in quality hires, and a number of other achievements in that capacity.

Between June 2017 to December 2018, served with Cable and Wireless Communications, at their subsidiary of Liberty Latin America, as Director of People of the Southern Cluster. Between March of 2016 and May 2017, served as Director, Shared Services with the Barbados Light & Power Company, and of course, a Senior HR Executive responsible for the formulation and implementation of strategy, and oversight for human resources. He served as Human Resource Manager from June 2012 to 2016, skilled in the business of Human Resource Management, and before us today, as a nominee for the consideration of this House.

The final nominee, Deputy Speaker, Mr. Ian Kevin Ramnarine—

Ramdhanie, sorry.

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

**Mr. Indarsingh:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** A person who is qualified and experienced [*Laughs*]—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am being disturbed by the Member for Couva South.

**Ms. Ameen:** What.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, Members, please, a lot of Members are on their legs so proceed, proceed, I will protect you.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Let me repeat. Mr. Ian Kevin Ramdhanie, a person who is qualified and experienced in the discipline of sociology to be appointed as member of the Police Service Commission. Mr. Ramdhanie would have served on the last Commission, and is now before us for further consideration in the upcoming Commission. Mr. Ramdhanie, between 1993 and 1996, acquired a Bachelor of Science Degree in Sociology and Management Studies with a double major earned second-class honours from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus. Between the years 1996 and 1999, acquired a Master of Science Degree in Sociology specializing in criminology, white colour crimes, and non-banking financial institutions, again, from the University of the West Indies, and the record in front of me demonstrate the earning of very, very high grades in those programmes.

From 2021 to the current time, as we speak, Mr. Ramdhanie is a Testing Administrator with PSI international. Again, as well a Testing Administrator for Pearson Vue International, and between October and November 2026, served as an Assessor in Training at the National Training

Agency, Ministry of Education here in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Ramdhanie, from April of 2018 to the present, is the Academic Head of the Caribbean Institute for Security and Public Safety, served as Principal of that agency or that institution from April 2013 to March 2018.

He served as a research associate with Professor Ramesh Deosaran in 2007, and between February 2007 and April of that year, he was a tutor in criminology in the Department of Behavioural Sciences at the Faculty of Social Sciences, at the University of the West Indies. He was a Junior Research Fellow at the centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice in the Faculty of Social Sciences as well. And of course, at some point was a part-time lecture in Criminology the Department of Behavioural Sciences at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

Mr. Ramdhanie has membership—well, he served, as I indicated earlier, in the last Police Service Commission, which had its birth in November of 2021, and he served as one of members of that Commission up until of course November 15<sup>th</sup> 2024. And of course, he was a researcher to the very important cabinet appointed committee to conduct a manpower audit into the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, a document that I would have had the opportunity to study myself, and to look at on several occasions, in the course of my own work and I can easily consider that Mr. Ramdhanie in that capacity as researcher to that committee would have gather a tremendous amount of knowledge, about the innards and the operations of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. And for those reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I consider that he his adequately suited for continued membership and therefore, his nomination is, as well, before this

House for our consideration.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have highlighted some from the profiles, from the CVs of the nominees, only snippets of their tremendous achievements. But most of all, demonstrating that as the law requires, they are schooled in the business of law, the business of management, and certainly the business of sociology, and I offer these nominees for the consideration of this House. I beg to move.

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

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Chairman:** I recognize the Member for—my apologies, Members. Hon. Members, you are reminded that leave has been granted for the Motions 1 to 5 to be debated together. I will now recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

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

**Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East):** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. This afternoon I rise to speak on the Motions before us, piloted by the Member for Laventille West. Motions in the name of the Prime Minister, but not for the first time, not piloted by the Prime Minister, but indeed by the Minister of National Security. Motions on our Order Paper 1, 2, 3, 4 and indeed 5. At a time like this, when this is country experiencing unparalleled, unsurpassed level of criminal activity with a murder rate, which we lose count every three hours or so. It was I believe 567 a few hours ago, and counting it could be more by the time the debate is finished.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at a time like this, the appointment to offices in

the Police Service Commission becomes extremely critical, and of paramount importance. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has raised five Motions in the House today asking for approval, for five citizens qualified as they maybe, for appoint to the Police Service Commission. May I make the point again, which we always do when we debate these matters, that the Members of the Opposition, the Leader of the Opposition and her Members on this side of the House, we have absolutely nothing personal against any of the five and all of the five members, citizens before us today.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** In fact, a few of those persons, some of us including myself are not even familiar with personally. We do not know these persons, we have never had any interaction with those persons most, if not all of us.

But having said that we have been asked to debate this matter before us. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the first point I wish to raise, is a matter that involves process and timeliness and due diligence. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a matter of record that this process will involve consultation with the parliamentary Opposition and the Leader of the Opposition, on the behalf of Members on this same of the House.

**4.05 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to put on the record that Her Excellency the President indeed would have communicated with the Leader of the Opposition on this matter pursuant to her constitutional responsibility. Before I get into the individuals before us, I want to note that the Leader of the Opposition, in her correspondence which is outlined and is now a matter

of public record, did indicate that, notwithstanding that the outgoing members of the Police Service Commission ceased to exist, their term of office would come to an end on November 15, which has gone. It was, I believe, last Friday, it was only 30 October, 2024, when the Leader of the Opposition received correspondence from the office of Her Excellency The President speaking to these appointments and asking for the appropriate consultation—

**Mr. Hosein:** And 06 November.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And 06 November. So it was 30 October, 2024 and the 06 November, which is really 6<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, we are dealing with nine days or so, before the term expired of the former members.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a letter dated 30 October, another dated 06 November informing the Leader of the Opposition of these persons for appointments. But, the Leader of the Opposition replied quickly, by the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, 2024, the Leader of the Opposition replied to the President indicating the strained timeline and placing on the record that it was not possible and it cannot be possible in all circumstances for the office of the Leader of the Opposition to undertake the due diligence necessary.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** I just want to read into the record the words of the Leader of the Opposition in responding.

12 November, 2024.

Her Excellency Christine C. Kangaloo ORTT.

President of the Republic.

Your Excellency.

Re: Section 122(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and  
Tobago.

I write in response to your letter of November 06, indicating that the term of office of all members of the Police Service Commission expires on November 15, and your proposed nomination—

In this case one, but there were several letters giving nominations of other persons.

—for a period of three years.

I am constrained to note with concern the short notice given to me of these proposed appointees and its potential impact on the proper and timely conduct of the necessary due diligence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the Leader of the Opposition the hon. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, Member of Parliament. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the former members, their term of office expired November 15. You would have known that three years ago.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** You would have known that expiration date. You come on 06 November, 30 October/06 November, to propose on the eve of the expiration of their term new potential members for appointment, and you would give nine days, including weekends and so on, for the Opposition to conduct due diligence on persons so that we can come to Parliament and properly debate, and properly advise on these potential appointees. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to put on the record is, ill-advised, it is tardy, it is really—It is strange in a sense that they would come so late in the day as if they do not want us to conduct the proper due diligence on the appointees.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** So that you can come and you can bring names and quickly appoint without due diligence, without proper inspection, without proper investigation, and persons would be appointed. So this is unheard of.

**Mr. Hosein:** Just like Jindal.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Three years ago, you knew it.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Hey. Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a Jindal dimension to these proposals—

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—that you would come like a thief in the night and propose persons, give us six days as the case may be, put a debate—this debate was initially carded for last Friday, the 15<sup>th</sup>, we would come with our eyes close and we would say yes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it will not happen. It will not happen. It will not happen at all.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I place on record—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(7), please.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** All right, so again hon. Member according to the Standing Order, again, we need to be conscious of bringing the Office of the President into the debate. I think you would have made your preamble already and I believe you are now going to go into your discourse, so we will end it there. All right? Okay. Proceed.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move on.



**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** The matter now I want to move to is the matters involving the particular names of persons. The name really that—

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Yes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, in considering these matters, is now on record as expressing objection to not one but three persons before us for appointments. The first one the Leader of the Opposition and Members of this Opposition would like to express our objection to the appointment of one Dr. Wendell C. Wallace as a member of the Commission for a period of three years.

I want to ask, as we do when we debate matters like this, is it the intention of the Government to surreptitiously place Dr. Wallace as Chairman of the Police Service Commission? Is Dr. Wendell Wallace known to the leader of the Government? To Members in the Cabinet? If so, in what capacity? You see by letter dated 12 November, 2024, the Leader of the Opposition indicated that in the limited time we have been able to peruse the curriculum vitae of Dr. Wallace she made the observation that Dr. Wallace appears to hold suitable qualifications and experience, of course in criminology, and the Member for Laventille West went through the CV and so on, and I am always eager to look at CVs, because earlier in my academic life I actually did some type of study on constructing CVs, and one technique is to read from the last come to the front, and when you see people who on the last page of their CV indicate they were in interviews on CNC3, TV6, IETV, Toco News and so on, you also raise some suspicion.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Dr. Wallace appears to have qualifications

and experience in the field of criminology and so on, but the Opposition Leader noted with concern Dr. Wallace's public comments, opinions on crime and matters of criminology in Trinidad and Tobago as published in various newspaper articles over the past four years—and the links were, of course, given to Her Excellency—and the Leader of the Opposition noted that the Leader of the Opposition confirmed that we have reviewed the contents of these articles and determined that while Dr. Wallace might be speaking in his professional capacity on matters involving crime and laying blame and so on, we have copies of those newspaper articles. The *Guardian*, "Criminologist—T&T on path to historic murder toll"—2024. It was the 23 August, 2024. We have the next article, "Criminologist: Mass shootings 'here to stay' in T&T". Now, it is not reassuring that the next Chairman of the Police Service Commission would be telling the country that mass shootings are here to stay.

**Mr. Hosein:** 09 May, 2024.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** 09 May, 2024. These are recent articles, and this is the Trinidad *Guardian* again, so we have both 23 August, 2024 and 09 May, 2024 where this analyst of some sort is telling the country mass shooting is here to stay. Now this is a very serious matter and the Leader of the Opposition indicated in her submission to the President that these articles—and reading and studying these articles suggest that given the factual matrix of these articles as it relates to the analyst it is whether or not we highlight this, it was highlighted and it was seen as due diligence, we asked the President to reconsider this proposed appointment in light of those facts as a matter of urgency in the best interest of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

While these may be the views and personal views of the criminologist Dr. Wallace, one wonders whether Dr. Wallace is going into a position where his mind is already made up on certain issues relating to the nature of crime in this society. And when you have to adjudicate—and we will get to that—the role of the Police Service Commission in supervising, monitoring—

**Mr. Hosein:** Disciplining.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—disciplining those executive officers under the purview of the Police Service Commission, whether this person is already tainted by his public expression of views on the nature of crime and the incidence of crime in Trinidad and Tobago, and what can be done and what cannot be done. Suppose he is interviewing a candidate for police commissioner and the police commissioner candidate says mass shootings can be dealt with, it is not here to stay, what happens now? He already has a view expressed. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those are matters we raise, but there is also another—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** More serious matter.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—troubling matter which I—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** More serious.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—wish to raise. You see, and I want to be so careful because I had raised a matter in the public before and I had this matter of names. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the curriculum vitae speaks of Dr. Wendell C. Wallace, but I have in my hand the Trinidad and Tobago *Gazette*—extraordinary—No. 119, Caroni Trinidad, Wednesday 11 August, 2021, price \$1. Mr. Deputy Speaker, on paragraph 754 Appointment of a Member

to the Elections and Boundaries Commission, I read this and then I ask my question:

“It is hereby notified for general information that Her Excellency The President in exercise of the powers vested in her by section 71(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, after consultation with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, has appointed Dr. Wendell Wallace as a member of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, for a period of five (5) years, with effect from 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2021.”

This appointment ends 05 August, 2026.

**Mr. Hosein:** Same man?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** After a general election which is due. That is important. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this Wendell C. Wallace, Dr., of the Police Service Commission, the same as Wendell Wallace, Dr., on the Elections and Boundaries Commission?

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Same person.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** This has, assuming that to be so, there are serious implications of that. And first is that on the CV that we received from Her Excellency, unless I am mistaken—we had a small team working on this—there was no mention on the CV of this appointment.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Why?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Now why? If it is the same Wendell Wallace, why—I mean, that is a prestigious appointment, I imagine, why on the CV there is no mention that the person is a member of the Elections and Boundaries

Commission? Are there two Dr. Wendell Wallace operating on the compound? This is a very serious allegation. I will come to the implications just now, but I first want to ask, are there two Dr. Wendell Wallace in Trinidad and Tobago?

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And one carries a middle name "C". I am not sure what the "C" is for and I do not want to guess.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The "C" fall out.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** One carries a middle name "C", but the one on the EBC has no "C".

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** There is an EBC report that he signed.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** There is an EBC report signed by Dr. Wendell C. Wallace. I put it to you it is the same person. Why is it on the CV sent to the Leader of the Opposition with this quick, quick, November 15 deadline coming up there is no mention of that? Why? Was that the objective? And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, lets us look at a few of those implications I spoke about.

**4.20 p.m.**

The Elections and Boundaries Commission is meant to be insulated, to be independent, to be neutral, to be apart from other institutions of the State, conduct elections, they say, the sanctity of the elections, the pillar of your democracy and the men and women who participate in that ought not to be in other arms of the State.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** You ought not to hear the EBC Commissioner is also at the WASA, the T&TEC, the Police Service Commission, the Civil Service Commission and so on, because there are serious issues of conflict. So, I can give you the examples now. You have a gentleman who would be on the Police Service Commission, could be chairman. And then he is participating in the appointment of a commissioner and deputy commissioner of police. You have the conduct of an election to which he now is a central architect of the conduct of general elections—

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—local elections, eh, where there may be matters involving allegations of electoral fraud, electoral irregularities—

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—against the EBC, not against anybody, against the EBC. It has happened before when the conduct of the EBC, their decision-making, has gone to the courts and the courts ruled that they were wrong.

**Mr. Padarath:** That they acted illegally.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** They acted illegally. But what happens when you have allegations against the EBC for the conduct of elections in a marginal seat, the police are asked to investigate and the same person appointed by the EBC Commissioner is—the same person appointed by the Police Service Commissioner, is the same person they are investigating and making reports to in the EBC. So you appoint the hierarchy of the police service that will then investigate election irregularities and fraud that you are also entrusted with to prevent as a Commissioner of Elections and Boundaries Commission. You see what has happened here? This is—use a bad word,

incestuous, I mean it is—this is bad, bad news. I mean, I “doh” want to say any more bad words, but bad news. You cannot have this, and that is just one clear and potent example of this apparent conflict, apparent prejudice.

The EBC works on election day and during election season, with several arms of the State and the conduct. It could be schools, the education Ministry will support the EBC and so on, with all their logistics and so on, the education sector, the security sector and so on, is critical in the conduct of elections and you have a gentleman who is already in the Elections and Boundaries Commission and he is being proposed as chairman of the Police Service Commission. This is unheard of. And why did the Government, first to begin, why did the Government not point out that in their debate?

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Because they know, they know. The Government is aware it is the same gentleman on the Elections and Boundaries Commission. Why did they fail to tell us in the Parliament and tell the House and disclose to the House today? That by itself could be a breach of the Parliament, you know, could take them to the Privileges Committee, you know, for failure to do that, to mislead the House on a critical matter like this.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Now, there are other serious implications of that appointment, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really have to move on—

**Hon. Member:** Full time, eh.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Full time? Yeah. I have to move on to some other matters, but that EBC matter is a very, very, important matter and it is not

something that the Government could take lightly and sweep under the carpet, because that constitutes serious conflict between persons who will be on a Police Service Commission and then on an Elections and Boundaries Commission in charge of the conduct of the general elections. So that that is a matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I would leave there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also considered in the Opposition the appointment of, one, Mr. Ian Kevin Ramdhanie. Mr. Deputy Speaker, again I make the point, we have nothing personal against anyone including Mr. Ramdhanie. In fact, many of us have never met the gentleman in life. But it is not the first time we are raising the issue on this person since, he is I believe the only person to be given this positive appraisal and invited to continue on the Police Service Commission, Mr. Ramdhanie.

On the last occasion I want to indicate that we did raise serious concerns and on this occasion by letter dated 12 November, 2024, the Leader of the Opposition indicated in a note of concern the following information:

That Mr. Ramdhanie is currently employed as an academic head—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Excuse me, Member. And that letter is to whom?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** The letter is to Her Excellency, the President, dated 12 November, 2024.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay. Now, again I need you to tread very carefully, right, in terms of things. So, I will give you the opportunity to just make a general statement and then we will take it from there.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** I am speaking on the words of the Leader of the Opposition, not the President.



**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Right, no problem, no problem.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Yeah, and on record, yes. It is a matter on public record.

In this letter the Leader of the Opposition states and I quote:

In the conduct of our due diligence, I note with concern the following information: Mr. Ramdhanie currently is employed as academic head of the Caribbean Institute for Security and Public Safety, a company owned by Amalgamated Security Services. The annual return of the Caribbean Institute of Security and Public Safety submitted to the Companies Registry on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, 2021, stated the shareholders of this company as several citizens of Trinidad and Tobago: Mr. John Aboud, Mr. Michael Aboud, directors, Brian Ramsey, Maurice Aboud, James Philbert, former Commissioner of Police, and others.

The point here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that it is well known, it is well known, it is a matter of really public knowledge that this particular private sector company conducts significant business with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. That is a matter that is well known and it is a matter that has been so for some time. Absolutely, we are not casting any aspersions on the conduct of the company or the gentleman.

What we are indicating is that when you put a representative on the Police Service Commission that is working with and for an entity that does significant business with the police service, and that person is in charge of assessing, of appointing, of recruiting, of disciplining the hierarchy of the police service, it leads to a clear, clear allegation of conflict, of prejudice, of bias. Since again, it could be that looking at it from the outside, that

persons will be prone to select, to appoint, to recruit individuals to positions that may well favour a particular business or another.

Now, if this person was associated with another company, completely outside the security sector we would have no difficulty with that, none. But today we must raise this and the Leader of the Opposition raised this matter as a matter in which the Leader indicated that we therefore object to this proposed amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a further involvement, a further objection to Mr. Ramdhanie's involvement—we also object to this proposed nominee once more because he was a sitting member of the Police Service Commission for the past three years under which several matters regarding the questionable conduct of the Police Commissioner and other deputy commissioners would have arisen. It means therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he was one of the members who oversaw the appointments of these deputy commissioners in question. Most notoriously, the DCP, Deputy Commissioner of Police, who was responsible for breaking the law in the now infamous Brent Thomas fiasco.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** And again Member, that is the same letter or that is a different letter?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** No, no, this is my notes, my private notes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Oh, that is your private notes.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** It has nothing to do with the President.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay, all right, let us—

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want the quote from an *Express* article published March 20, 2024, headlined:

“Suzette Martin, new deputy CoP after House votes”

And I quote:

“...Oropouche...MP Dr Roodal Moonilal...also expressed concerned over the fact that...”—Ms.—“Martin had been charged last year with dangerous driving as a result of a vehicular accident involving a 14-year-old boy on April 18, 2023, along the Priority Bus Route...”  
—Ms.—“Martin was charged in October by ACP Wayne Myster...”—who I believe is now an assistant Commissioner of Police—

“She has since appeared before the court via summons, pleaded not guilty and has been granted bail.

He also raised several issues involving the TTPS and operations...

One such matter was the arrest in Barbados of businessman Brent Thomas, who was brought back to Trinidad in 2022.”

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am quoting now from the Member for Oropouche East. I quote an *Express* article published July 25, 2024, headlined:

“Police ‘acted wrong’ in making arrest”

And in another article:

“The state has accepted...”—in another article, Mr. Deputy, Speaker, in Trinidad *Express* this time:

“The State has accepted that members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service...acted unlawfully when they went to Barbados in October 2022 and arrested firearms dealer Brent Thomas before bringing him back to this country...”

Making the concession...”

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Now, Member, please. Again, tie it in quickly with regard to the member that you are referring to in terms of what you are saying, please.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I make this quick tie, that this person, Mr. Ramdhanie, was on the last Police Service Commission for three years, fact one. Fact two, they appointed through a process of whatever, they appointed a deputy commissioner of police. That deputy commissioner police was named, tagged in several matters involving an accident on the Priority Bus Route for which she had been charged and also in a matter involving the unlawful detention, arrest, kidnapping of Mr. Brent Thomas. That particular Commissioner who is before us, is before us again, having been part of a police service commission that made those appointments and therefore he cannot, he is not fit to return.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** I think that could make it clear, that makes it clear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition by letter of 12 November, 20—a lot of letters went by on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, 2024—made another objection to one, Mr. Roger Babooram, another nominee before us today. And in this matter the Leader of the Opposition stated that Mr. Babooram appears to hold suitable management qualifications and experience to assume and undertake the requisite roles and responsibility, et cetera. However, pursuant to our conducting the requisite due diligence and research on this proposed candidate—

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Thank you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** All right, proceed.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, pursuant to our conducting the requisite due diligence, the words of the Leader of the Opposition, and research on this proposed candidate, I note with concern the following information unearthed. And this matter involves, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was sent to Her Excellency, I am not quoting from Her Excellency, I am quoting from the Leader of the Opposition, a particular case that was before, I believe, the Industrial Court involving Mr. Babooram. And in those matters Mr. Babooram gave evidence and there were some issues regarding that in the matter before the court.

We have reviewed the contents of this matter and determined that Mr. Babooram, while he may have been acting as a senior human resource analyst with the company in that legal matter, the subject matter and factual matrix of those articles, and articles relating to a particular industrial relations matter, the Oil Field Workers Trade Union—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again Member, again Member, in terms of sub judice, that matter has been closed off?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** The matter has been determined. It is not a matter before the court.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—*Oil Field Workers Trade Union v Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago*. So from the time you say Petroleum Company we know it is long gone. The Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago, we confirmed that those matters and the factual matrix and the accusations made

in the court in that matter, raised concern concerning Mr. Babooram as well.

Therefore, in the judgment there were concerns raised in terms of the conduct and the testimony and evidence from Mr. Babooram. And in those circumstances, the Leader of the Opposition suggested to Her Excellency that you kindly reconsider this proposed appointment in light of those facts as a matter of urgency. This is Mr. Babooram.

So we are placing on record our objection to Mr. Babooram; our objection to the member of the Elections and Boundaries Commission, Dr. Wendell Wallace; our objection to Mr. Ian Kevin Ramdhanie; and therefore Mr. Deputy Speaker, we place on record, which in fairness we must, our non-objection to the appointment of Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne as a member of the Commission, notwithstanding the limited, extremely limited time to conduct due diligence. It was felt by the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition that Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne is qualified and without having any further information on her, it was not our view that we should object and therefore a letter of non-objection was also sent to Her Excellency the President.

**4.35 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the final person, I believe, on our nomination list is one, Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne, is it?

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Yes. Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne, a principal attorney with 19 years of experience in public and private law practice, skilled in legislative drafting, policy development. The Minister alerted us to these qualifications. And again, with the limited time available and capacity in

that time to undertake a due diligence exercise, we can find no objection and the Leader of the Opposition has so expressed non-objection by letters to Her Excellency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is also no objection to Ms. Ethel Hector-Berkeley, who is also qualified. And again, in the limited time, one could not undertake exhaustive investigations and vetting and so on of candidates, but there are no grounds to object to her appointment, and the Leader of the Opposition has, therefore, expressed non-objection to the appointment of Ms. Ethel Hector-Berkeley, who we will be happy to support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are just two matters remaining that I would just raise, and one concerns a very critical and related annual report of the Police Service Commission, and this report was laid just a few days ago in this House. In that report—because we are now speaking to persons and to the national community, persons who may well be appointed, given their majority, to be members of the Public Service Commission. The former chairman of the Police Service Commission made some very serious observations in the report of the Public Service Commission Annual Report 2023—Retired Justice Judith Jones, in fact.

“She urged reform...”—in the Public Service Commission, PSC.

“...Annual Report...laid in the House...on November 15.”

Justice Judith—“Jones used the chairman’s remarks to lament the limitations and inconsistencies of the...”—Public Service Commission’s—“...powers in its role of oversight of the Commissioner of Police...and Deputy Commissioners of Police...”

These are issues that have been in the public domain, in newspaper reports.

Justice—“Jones also shared data suggesting a low public confidence in the police in various areas of performance.”

It is unbelievable in this country today, where 82 per cent of persons surveyed by the Police Service Commission in 2023—professional surveys—82 per cent felt threatened, scared of criminal activity. Now, the big question is: Where is that next 18 per cent or so? That might be PNM Ministers with their bodyguards and special branch and so on, and have all their bodyguards and so on. Mr. Deputy Speaker—

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am being disturbed, of course.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please. Let us maintain the decorum, Members. Proceed.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is also noteworthy is that 72 per cent of the population expressed no trust in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and this falls squarely at the feet of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** You cannot blame the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service alone. It is the Prime Minister who often beats his chest as Chairman of the National Security Council. He has made that an executive office, you know. Very interesting. That is a Cabinet sub-committee he has made almost an executive office—and boasting about the National Security Council. The Minister of National Security will come time and time again and speak about the National Security Council. It is government policy and programmes that must be implemented to build public trust in the Trinidad



and Tobago Police Service.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And we commit ourselves—the Leader of the Opposition commits us, that on returning to power in a very few weeks and months, we will take steps, introduce programmes and policy to rebuild faith and confidence in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Today, the population has no faith, no trust in the police service—other law enforcement agencies, but we are dealing with police. Absolutely none, and this has to be the responsibility of the Government. The Ministry of the National Security that spends billions of dollars—and today, they cannot work with the TTPS. They have appointed a second Minister from Port of Spain South. His claim to fame so far—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, again, be careful on the road that you want to go down now in coming to the end of your debate. Again, keep it with regard to the PSC and the nominations. And again, yes, I would have given you some leeway with regard to, you know, including it, but please, thread carefully, please.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Let us get back to this Public Service Commission urgently. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what struck me in this report—and it is a Public Service Commission report I have in my hand here, not a report from anybody else, not the Member for Siparia's report. This is the Public Service Commission. You know what the Public Service Commission's outgoing chairman says here? Lamenting the lack of resources, the lack of equipment, the lack of funding to the Public Service Commission, a critical

Commission like this, the former chairman is saying:

“The existing”—I am at page viii—“Organizational Chart shown below”—and there is a chart—“represents the structure of the Commission established pursuant to Cabinet decision. At the same time Cabinet agreed to undertake a review of the operations and staffing of the Secretariat after one year’s working experience. A review was eventually done in 2015.”

It could not be by them.

“Despite the ongoing efforts of the Director of Personnel Administration almost 10 years later the Commission is still awaiting action on the proposals for restructuring.”

Imagine, a review on the organizational chart that identifies the important functions of appointment a senior human resource advisor, secretarial support, two state counsels and so on, they have that in their structure. They have, for example, the recruitment and selection of monitoring and evaluation staff, evaluation units and so on. After saying all of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the outgoing chairman says:

“A review was...”—conducted—“...in 2015.

...10 years later the Commission is...awaiting action on the proposals for restructuring”.

And this is the crisis we face.

So we cannot just blame the outgoing chairman, Retired Justice Jones. We cannot just blame her alone, or we cannot just blame her at all, but we must indicate—and look at her words. This suggest that the Police Service Commission, in 10 years, has received absolutely no support from the

incumbent Government that beats their chest about the National Security Council, and how much boats they buy, and how much planes, and how much—all kind of things—

**Mr. Hosein:** Ladders for the fire service.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—and how much ladders they bought for the fire service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the report indicates, of course, the build-up to this crisis. The report also indicates, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at several points, the former chairman calling for a review—at least a review of the existing legal framework to ensure that the Police Service Commission has greater legal authority, in terms of appointing, not just the Deputy Commissioners of Police, but the Assistant Commissions of Police because they are saying that the law is so structured that there is inbuilt favour towards police officers and therefore, the pool for Deputy Commissioner of Police and Commissioner, it comes from lower ranks and they should also have some authority—supervisory authority over the lower ranks as well. That was a key takeaway from her statement as well.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it would augur well for us to be reminded of her statement. It is unlikely that the Members opposite—I call them the Opposition in waiting.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** The Opposition in waiting, it is unlikely that they will do anything and they will change anything. If in 10 years, you could not do it, in 10 weeks, you will not do it. So I am calling on this Government—

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, you have just under two minutes.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Okay. Thank you. So calling on this Government to operate this way is really foolhardy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also wanted, in this two minutes, to just indicate that notwithstanding our concern with the former Commission, we did take note due to an important freedom of information request by one, Ms. Samantha Singh-Poona, in a letter received from the Service Commissions Department concerning the Police Service Commission. Ms. Samantha Singh-Poona, attorney-at-law at Saddam Hosein & Company, Attorneys-at-Law, in Cunupia, received information. In a nutshell, they asked on the conduct of a performance appraisal for the Commissioner of Police. I thought it was interesting to put on record that this Commission indicated that they had a—how much pages?—

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Hosein:** One and a half.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—one and a half page assessment of the Commissioner of Police, Erla Christopher, and said, Ms. Christopher did a good job. And that was the beginning and end of what was supposed to be a serious undertaking, an assessment—performance appraisal looking at key performance indicators, et cetera, for a Commissioner of Police, for an extension. When you should be checking everything from minor crime to major crime, you had a one and a half page submission from a freedom of information request stating, in response to Ms. Samantha Singh-Poona, that the current Commissioner did a good job, but you cannot explain what a good job is. I am hoping that the incoming Police Service Commission would take matters much more seriously. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

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

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

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Madam Speaker, a former Member of this House, the Member as he then was for San Fernando East, a former Prime Minister, one day stood in this House and it resonated in my spirit when he said, “If members of the citizenry of the Trinidad and Tobago hold no respect for politicians in this country, it had to be the fault of our own.” That is what he said. And I saw a perfect demonstration of that here today, representing the United National Congress, representing the Opposition, coming from the Member for Oropouche East.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** This is why the public has trouble. The Member was speaking about trust and confidence in the police service. I am ashamed to tell him that the same existed in respect of some of us as politicians, based on our conduct when we held office in this country.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Let me say, we have been extremely careful as a Government, always in the history of the PNM, particularly in the last 10 years, to do whatever we could to protect the integrity of our institutions and citizens who reside outside of this House, when their names come in this House for consideration.

A very, very important thing was pointed out to us by the Member for Diego Martin West, the Prime Minister. Because we are all too aware that there are many people in Trinidad and Tobago, who are willing to serve, who have the capacity and wherewithal to serve this country, but the conduct

of some Members of this House discourages them because at the first opportunity, they malign people's names quite unjustifiably and we lose—he was talking about the pool for Commissioner—a pool of Trinidadians and Tobagonians who could contribute to the well-being of this country because of conduct as we saw here today.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, yes, the term for the members expired on November the 15<sup>th</sup>; yes, five persons are nominated by Her Excellency to be here today. Let me repeat that, by Her Excellency. So when the Member for Oropouche East began to talk about timelines and accused the Government, I simply want to say, without bringing the very distinguished President and Office of the President into things, that this was not conducted by the Cabinet. This is all a matter from the Office of the President. That is it. It is disingenuous to say anything, and I am sure that the President and the communications can explain all that would have happened and why. I have no business further with that.

The Opposition Leader is on record, according to the Member for Oropouche East, of protesting, suggesting to Her Excellency that they had objection—the Opposition Leader—with three of the nominees who were in front of us today. I consider that to be typical sourness and complaining, because when I listened—

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Oh, I withdraw that.

**5.05 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** 48(4), I overrule 48(4). 48(6), I overrule 48(6), and if

there is any other 48 that you did not mention.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Madam Speaker:** Is there any other 48 that you would like to mention?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, 48(1) as well as and you can overrule that too.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Madam Speaker:** And I overrule 48(1). Minister of National Security.

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

**Dr. Moonilal:** “I never bounce down any dog. Dias the main thing.”

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I wish I get to bounce down one now.

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

**Madam Speaker:** One minute, please. I am happy that we are in a very light mood but I want us to be careful. When we get in a light mood, we tend to cross the line. Minister of National Security, even though I have overruled 48(2) and (9), I just want you to be careful as you go forward. You have not crossed the line as yet but I want you to be careful as you go forward. Okay, yes.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, I never cross the line but I noticed that when the Member for Oropouche East was gasping for breath, the Member for Siparia was asleep, paid no attention to him, silk cotton or senior counsel did not matter.

Madam Speaker, all I was saying and I thank you for your protection. All I was saying is that if for the reason stated by the Member for Oropouche East, DCP Martin should not be there, by the same logic, the Member for

Oropouche East should not be here.

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

**Dr. Moonilal:** You should not be here.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, as I approach my close, I remember a calypso—now, the Police Service Commission is to administer the affairs as the Constitution allows it for the police service in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago so I just remembered a calypsonian who had a song and one of the lines in the chorus is “the jail is waiting”. Yes.

**Hon. Member:** For you.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** So, Madam Speaker, I, on behalf of the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago who we represent and all else who do not have a voice to be here with the privilege of being in this Chamber and taking part in this debate on this Motion, we propose the nominees as offered by Her Excellency. We are confident based on the submissions from Her Excellency and our own perusal of the profiles, the background and our general knowledge of those who have been offered to serve, particularly in the case of Mr. Ramdhanie who has served for the last three years, we are confident that they are suitably qualified and deserving of the opportunity to serve Trinidad and Tobago in the way that we present.

We thank them again for their service, recognizing that to do so in Trinidad and Tobago today with my friends on the other side is risky business, and we saw demonstrations of it here today. To the extent that they might have felt offended, I, Fitzgerald Hinds, as an individual and Member of Parliament, wish on behalf of the UNC to apologize to them.

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



**Hon. F. Hinds:** And, Madam Speaker, with those things said, I thank you profusely for the opportunity and I do beg to move.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Notification of the President for the nomination of Dr. Wendell C. Wallace as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

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

### **Police Service Commission**

#### **(Nomination of Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne)**

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Madam Speaker—yes, sorry about that, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Yeah, that is all right, that is all right. Madam Speaker, be it resolved—sorry.

**Hon. Member:** “He still lost.”

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, thank you very much. I beg to move the following Motion standing in the name of the Prime Minister:

*Whereas* section 122(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Chap. 1:01 (‘the Act’) provides that the President shall, after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition nominate persons, who are qualified and experienced in the disciplines of law, finance, sociology or

management, to be appointed as members of the Police Service Commission;

*And whereas* section 122(4) of the Act provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated for appointment under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

*And whereas* the President has issued a notification in respect of Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne for appointment as a member of the Police Service Commission;

*And whereas* the President has on the 12th day of November, 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 for the nomination of Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Notification of the President for the nomination of Ms. Annika Fritz-Browne as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

### **Police Service Commission**

#### **(Nomination of Ms. Ethel Hector-Berkeley)**

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you yet again, Madam Speaker. Whereas section 122—

**Madam Speaker:** Page 10.

**Hon. Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in the name of the Prime Minister:

*Whereas* section 122(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Chap. 1:01 ('the Act') provides that the President shall, after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition nominate persons, who are qualified and experienced in the disciplines of law, finance, sociology or management, to be appointed as members of the Police Service Commission;

*And whereas* section 122(4) of the Act provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated for appointment under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

*And whereas* the President has issued a notification in respect of Ms. Ethel Hector-Berkeley for appointment as a member of the Police Service Commission;

*And whereas* the President has on the 12th day of November, 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 for the nomination of Ms. Ethel Hector-Berkeley as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Notification of the President for the nomination of Ms. Ethel Hector-Berkeley as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

### **Police Service Commission**

#### **(Nomination of Mr. Roger Babooram)**

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

*Whereas* section 122(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Chap. 1:01 ('the Act') provides that the President shall, after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition nominate persons, who are qualified and experienced in the disciplines of law, finance, sociology or management, to be appointed as members of the Police Service Commission;

*And whereas* section 122(4) of the Act provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated for appointment under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

*And whereas* the President has issued a notification in respect of Mr. Roger Babooram for appointment as a member of the Police Service Commission;

*And whereas* the President has on the 12th day of November, 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 for the nomination of Mr. Roger Babooram as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Notification of the President for the nomination of Mr. Roger Babooram as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

### **Police Service Commission**

#### **(Nomination of Mr. Ian Kevin Ramdhanie)**

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

*Whereas* section 122(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Chap. 1:01 ('the Act') provides that the President shall, after consultation with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition nominate persons, who are qualified and experienced in the disciplines of law, finance, sociology or management, to be appointed as members of the Police Service Commission;

*And whereas* section 122(4) of the Act provides that the President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated for appointment under subsection (3) and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives;

*And whereas* the President has issued a notification in respect of Mr. Ian Kevin Ramdhanie for appointment as a member of the Police Service Commission;

*And whereas* the President has on the 12th day of November, 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 for the nomination of Mr. Ian Kevin Ramdhanie as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

That the Notification of the President for the nomination of Mr. Ian Kevin Ramdhanie as a member of the Police Service Commission be approved.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, 22<sup>nd</sup> day of November, 2024. Madam Speaker, on that day is Private Member's Day and we will be grateful to know what we will be debating.

**Madam Speaker:** Whip.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Opposition will be doing on Private Member's Day Friday Motion No. 1 by the Member for Princes Town.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned 5.20 p.m.*